UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT TO WORKPLACE WELLNESS: A PILOT STUDY
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ABSTRACT

Workplace wellness is a risk factor of the health and the quality of work performance of employees. The purpose of this study was to assess the extent of the university administrative support to workplace wellness in Saint Louis University, Baguio City, Philippines through the triangulation method. The data gathering tool was a five point likert scale researcher-constructed questionnaire with a reliability of 0.75. The sample size of the participants in the study were composed of thirty (30) university administrators, one hundred seventy-four (174) faculty members, and ninety (90) non-teaching staff. Results of the study revealed that except for emotional wellness, which was generally rated “fairly extensive” by the respondents, the extent of the university administrative support given to workplace wellness were in general “moderately extensive”. The findings imply that workplace wellness is practiced in higher educational institutions. In conclusion, the university administrators give credit to the development of the total well-being of the employees.

Field of Research: University, administrative support, workplace wellness practices

1. Introduction

The quality of work expected from employees in academic institutions like universities are not far different from those in the product companies. Universities need to cope with the demands of time in order to stay competitive. These challenges to universities create overwhelming tasks to the faculty and staff members. Furthermore, the vast range of tasks of the faculty and staff members in universities is likely to cause poor quality work life (Davies, Davies, & Heacock, 2003) and greater health risk factors. According to Blair, Tritsch, & Kutsch (1987), the teachers and other school staff members have similar health problems to the rest of the population. Consequently, these health problems cause escalating health care costs which continue to remain a great concern to the administrators (Kaplan, 1993).

Much of the employees’ time is spent in the workplace. Thus, many agree that the workplace is an important setting to promote the culture of health. As a matter of fact, workplace wellness has become a buzzword in many workplaces. Today, workplace wellness promotion programs have emerged as an important corporate strategy aimed at improving employee health and productivity (Ozminkowski et al, 2002).

It has been observed that promotion of workplace wellness result to healthier employees, saving the institution thousands of pesos. These savings can be attributed to lower rates of increase in the number of hospital days and in the number of admissions among employees.
(Bertera, 1990). This is confirmed by Pelletier (1996) who posits that today; health promotion play a vital role in providing quality services that may decrease inappropriate or excessive use of medical care. In addition, workplace wellness programs reduced problems on employee presenteeism, a phenomenon occurring when employees are at work but do not feel as productive as usual due to stress, depression, injury or illness (Bonner, 1990; Proper et al., 2002; Musich et al., 2004 & Chapman, 2005). Furthermore, while it is not as easily measured as the increase in health care costs, workplace wellness promotes employee morale and productivity which plays a big role in the success of a company or business (Ozminkowski et al, 2002; & Thogersen-Ntoumani & Fox, 2005). The company sponsored workplace wellness programs send a clear message to employees that management values their well-being; therefore, making employee wellness programs an added benefit that encourages employee retention.

The employers play a vital role in the initiation and sustenance of workplace wellness in an organization. Although there is vast literature on the types of wellness programs offered in companies, management support and on the benefits of workplace wellness both to employees and employers, there is limited number of studies that measured the support of the administrators to workplace wellness most especially in the universities. Hence, it is the aim of this study to know the extent of support of the university administrators to workplace wellness along the six dimensional wellness model developed by Hettler.

2. Administrative Support

The employees are the internal costumers of an organization (Chen et al, 2006) and are considered as the greatest assets of the company (Nebeker et al, 2001 as cited by Chen et al., 2006). Hence, the administrators are in the best position to take care of these assets.

Administrative support refers to the reinforcements provided by the administrators for the attainment of the organization’s goals (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). In this study, the administrative support to workplace wellness can be seen in terms of the school policies, activities, and programs designed to promote culture of health.

3. Workplace Wellness

Workplace wellness is designed to engage and support employees in adopting and sustaining practices that reduce health risks, improve quality of life, enhance personal effectiveness, and develop job competencies (Kaplan, 1993). Workplace wellness is multifaceted and considers the whole being of an individual in the worksite. Workplace wellness encompasses the physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, and occupational wellness conditions of the employees in an organization.

Based on Hettler’s (1980) description of the six wellness dimensions, physical wellness focuses on concerns regarding physical self-care, nutritional needs, and use of medical services. Intellectual wellness incorporates activities and programs that allow the person to engage in creative and critical thinking and to enhance one’s knowledge and skills. Emotional wellness is
described as the awareness and acceptance of the wide range of feelings in one’s self and others and the ability to manage one’s emotions. Social wellness is geared towards living in harmony with others. It involves making others feel they belong and are respected. On one hand, spiritual wellness is focused on the search for meaning and purpose of existence. Spiritual wellness also includes respect to one’s beliefs and values. Finally, occupational wellness includes the enhancement of one’s skills and knowledge through one’s work and having work life balance which allows a person to fulfil personal and job commitments.

4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study (Figure 1) was grounded on the assumption that the administrative support to workplace wellness practices influences the workplace wellness culture in the university. The instrument used was a self-constructed questionnaire based from various literatures on wellness practices.

5. Methodology

5.1 Sample and data collection method

This study employed the triangulation method to assess the implementation of the physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, and occupational wellness practices in the university. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was administered to thirty (30) school administrators, one hundred seventy-four (174) faculty members, and ninety (90) non-teaching staff. The respondents of the study were selected through lot and stratified random sampling. Informal interviews to the respondents were also conducted to support the information gathered through the survey questionnaire.

5.2 Instrumentation

Table 1 shows the dimensions of wellness assessed in this study. The six dimensional wellness model developed by Hettler (1984) served as the foundation of the assessment; however, the lists of wellness practices in each dimension were products of readings from several wellness
literatures (Hettler, 1980; Kaplan, 1993; Purdy & Dupey, 2005; Blundell, Dearden, Meghir, & Sianesi, 1999; & Ozminkowski et al., 2002).

Table 1: Instrumentation of the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wellness Dimensions</th>
<th>No. of items</th>
<th>Type of scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical wellness</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5-point Likert scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual wellness</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5-point Likert scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional wellness</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5-point Likert scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social wellness</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5-point Likert scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual wellness</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5-point Likert scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational wellness</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5-point Likert scale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Finding & Discussion

6.1 Reliability analysis

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was subjected for critique and refinement from the researcher's adviser, reading committee, and workplace wellness consultants. The reliability of the researcher-made questionnaire on the assessment of the administrative support to workplace wellness which is 0.75 was computed through the Spearman-Brown formula.

6.2 Descriptive statistics & analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wellness Dimensions</th>
<th>Factor average</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical wellness</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>Moderately Extensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual wellness</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>Moderately Extensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional wellness</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>Fairly Extensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social wellness</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>Moderately Extensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual wellness</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>Moderately Extensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational wellness</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>Moderately Extensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Average</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>Moderately Extensive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many recognize that the employees are the organization's key resource. Thus, it is imperative that administrators care for the welfare of the organization's human resources (Hillier, Fewell, Cann, & Shephard, 2005). As emphasized by Jinks et al. (2003), managers need to be actively involved in creating healthy workplaces. With employees spending most of their time in the workplace, the worksite is a strategic setting to promote health culture. Wellness and health promotion programs in the workplace have become popular as a means of decreasing employee health care costs. Consequently, the benefits of workplace wellness to the employees and the organization cannot be discounted. In the higher educational institutions, the university administrators are in the key position to initiate and sustain workplace wellness for the faculty and other staff members. Wynne (1997) confirms this contention in his suggestion that one of the basic requirements of workplace health promotion is having administrators who are driven to instigate workplace health activities and programs.
In Saint Louis University, although the administrative support to the emotional wellness of the faculty and other staff members is perceived to be low, the findings in this study show that the university administrators in general provide the necessary reinforcements to the wellness dimensions proposed by Hettler. The administrators created organizational policies and initiated programs that promote wellness of the university employees along the six dimensions of wellness.

The findings in this study indicate that the prevalent physical wellness policies implemented in the university include the conduct of annual medical and dental check-up. There are also university programs that promote safety, hygiene, fitness and recreation, and good nutrition of employees.

Meanwhile, although the output of university employees can hardly be quantified because it deals with the academic performance of students, the findings in this study can be an indication of similar observations of university administrators with the experience of other companies on the adverse effects of poor health conditions of employees to the health care costs of the institution. Altchiler & Motta (1994) supports this rationale by stating that that illness-related absenteeism costs millions to the company.

The tremendous expenditure of the companies has caused the employers to resort to workplace wellness programs. Among the programs commonly initiated by companies and other organizations to promote fitness of employees are aerobic exercise work-outs (Gebhardt & Crump, 1990). Researchers have repeatedly found that regular engagement in physical activity accompanied with good diet promotes and maintain health. This healthy practice is beneficial to the employee and so with the company because physically fit and healthy employees have lower risk of contracting diseases and work absenteeism that cuts the health care and medical budget of companies (Dishman et al., 1998).

The finding discloses that on intellectual wellness, the university administrators give emphasis to professional development of the employees like attainment of post graduate degree; attendance to seminars, workshops and trainings for enhancement of one's skills, creative and critical thinking, and the development of tacit knowledge; and engagement in research.

With the fast-changing evolution of technology and information, universities are facing an ongoing need for employee learning and development. Accordingly, many researchers agree that developing the skills of one’s human resources is creating an edge to other organizations. Lee & Bruvold (2003) further noted that the acquisition of an expertise and the necessary skills and knowledge of a job by the employees is important to the individual and the organization.

The inability to manage one’s negative feelings may lead to other serious problems. Hence, aside from the guidance center, there are also support groups available for the employees in the university. The provision of support groups may help prevent depression which is detrimental to the employee’s health. The administrators also make the employees feel important by conducting consultations before making decisions especially to things that affect the employees’ job and work life balance.

Sauter et al. (1990) posits that poor interpersonal relations in the workplace are consistently identified as a source of stress. Hence, in the university, the administrators organize regular socialization activities for employees to be together as a family (e.g. family welfare, salo-salo etc.) and to build stronger camaraderie among the employees.

On one hand, to show support to the spiritual wellness, the employees are free to integrate their beliefs and values in the work they do. Through this practice, the employees are able to feel
inner peace. While it is widely recognized that spirituality is different from religiosity, the administrators sponsor recollection activities for the employees as this is considered to be an instrument in having harmony with others. Furthermore, the administrators also encourage the employees to participate in outreach and extension activities. Through these activities, it is hoped that the employees will find meaning to their existence.

The university employees, particularly the faculty members have to accomplish a trifold task. The faculty members are expected to teach, conduct research, and engage in extension activities. The pressure to the faculty members to perform all the tasks is definitely stressful and may lead to other serious problems. As noted by Glowinkowski and Cooper (1986), work overload or under load can lower self-esteem and increase physical and psychological problems.

Meanwhile, to promote occupational wellness in the university, the administrators initiated the following: advancement opportunity to qualified employees; realistic and achievable job demands and deadlines; provision of enough resources to get jobs done. The university administrators also give freedom to employees to make decision about the task assigned to them. Most importantly, the employees are paid commensurate to their performance and the administrators give emphasis to the importance of worklife balance of the employees. These policies and programs are deemed important to help employees attain job satisfaction despite the felt pressure caused by the job demands. In addition, studies (Jacobson, 1995; Murphy, 1996; Pelletier, 1999) clearly show that the provision of quality work life to employees result to higher productivity.

7. Conclusion and Future Recommendation

Findings from this study indicate that the administrators of organizations play a vital role in the initiation of the development of the culture of health. Findings from this study further show that the administrators of Saint Louis University are making effort to implement workplace wellness for the benefit of the employees and of the university. Although most of the dimensions of wellness proposed by Hettler are rated “moderately extensive”, the results of the study show that the administrators care for the development of the total well being of the faculty and other university staff members.

This study has provided some insights on the extent of support of university administrators to workplace wellness; however, the researcher considers it to be inconclusive as it was only conducted in one university. It would be beneficial to conduct a survey involving larger population to come up with data that is more conclusive. Future researchers may also employ other methods of research to come up with a better understanding of the problem. The study may be of help in enhancing the performance of the faculty and other staff members in the university which in return may improve the quality of education in higher educational institutions.

Acknowledgement

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References


