The Role of Communication in Workplace Health and Well-Being

Communication plays a key role in the success of any workplace program or policy and serves as the foundation for all five types of psychologically healthy workplace practices. This article reviews the role of communication and provides a series of questions to consider when developing a health promotion communication strategy for your organization.

Communication about workplace practices helps achieve the desired outcomes for the employee and the organization in a variety of ways:

- Bottom-up communication (from employees to management) provides information about employee needs, values, perceptions and opinions. This helps organizations select and tailor their programs and policies to meet the specific needs of their employees.
- Top-down communication (from management to employees) can increase utilization of specific workplace programs by making employees aware of their availability, clearly explaining how to access and use the services, and demonstrating that management supports and values the programs.

Examples of communication strategies that can help make your workplace programs successful include:

- Providing regular, on-going opportunities for employees to provide feedback to management. Communication vehicles may include employee surveys, suggestion boxes, town hall meetings, individual or small group meeting with managers, and an organizational culture that supports open, two-way communication.
- Making the goals and actions of the organization and senior leadership clear to workers by communicating key activities, issues and developments to employees and developing policies that facilitate transparency and openness.
- Assessing the needs of employees and involving them in the development and implementation of psychologically healthy workplace practices.
- Using multiple channels (for example, print and electronic communications, orientation and trainings, staff meetings and public addresses) to communicate the importance of a psychologically healthy workplace to employees.
- Leading by example, by encouraging key organizational leaders to regularly participate in psychologically healthy workplace activities in ways that are visible to employees.
- Communicating information about the outcomes and success of specific psychologically healthy workplace practices to all members of the organization.

Crafting a Health Promotion Communication Strategy

When an organization decides to invest in a new program, such as a workplace health promotion initiative, it must develop a strategy to effectively communicate with its employees. This does not mean simply designing and developing the program and then informing employees. Instead, it requires a steady flow of two-way communication across all levels of the organization.

The questions below highlight some of the issues to consider when developing a communication strategy that promotes health and well-being in your organization.

Assessment (Important for Custom Tailoring)

1. Does the organization understand the actual needs of employees?

2. What methods of assessing employee needs does the organization use?

- Employee performance data (e.g., turnover, absenteeism, productivity)
- Employee suggestion forums (e.g., monthly meetings, suggestion boxes)
- Quantitative health data (e.g., injury and illness rates, health risk assessment data)
- Quality of life surveys (e.g., stress, wellness)
- Usage data from your organization's health and wellness Web site (e.g., page visits, topics searched)
- Utilization, outcomes and cross-referral data from your health and wellness vendors
- Cost data (e.g., healthcare costs, worker's compensation claims,STD, LTD)
- Other

Does the organization use subjective assessment methods to complement objective measures?

Obtaining Employee Input (Important for Custom Tailoring)

4. Is the organization obtaining employee input regarding the new program?

5. What aspects of program development can employees most effectively contribute to?

- Objectives
- Content
- Format
- Logistics
- Incentives
- Other

6. How can you obtain input in a way that makes sense for the organization?

- Employee surveys
- Meetings that are open to all employees
- Small group meetings with managers who will then provide a summary of input
- One-on-one sessions between employees and managers to obtain individual input
- Program task force(s) consisting of employees and managers
- Other:

Informational Communication (Important for Increasing Participation)

7. Has the organization crafted a positive message about the program to communicate to employees?

8. Have you clearly described the benefits of the program (or participation in the program) in terms of the value to employees?

9. Has the organization clearly defined requirements for employee participation in the program?

10. How can you communicate with employees about the program in a way that makes sense for the organization?

- Emails sent to all employees
- Targeted emails sent to specific employees
- Organizational newsletters
- Materials sent through the mail
- Materials posted in high traffic or appropriate areas of the worksite
- Program information packets provided to all employees
- Program information packets available upon request
- Topic covered during new employee orientation
- Informational session held about the new program
- Postings on the organization's Web site or intranet
- Other:

Inspirational Communication (Important for Increasing Participation)

11. Do managers and supervisors at all levels of the organization support the new program?

12. Are they excited about the program? If not, what can you do to engage them?

13. Have you worked with them to create a communication plan regarding the new program and do they have access to the information and communication channels necessary?

14. Will they be participating in the program?

15. Will they be communicating that participation to their employees both verbally and through their actions?

Evaluation and Inquiry (Important for Refinement)

16. What types of data is the organization collecting?

Objective Data
- Performance data (e.g., productivity, supervisor ratings)
- Turnover, absenteeism and presenteeism rates
- Healthcare expenditures
- Objective health and well-being data
- Participation rates

Subjective Data
- Employee ratings of the program and/or its effectiveness
- Employee reflections on the program (including ways to improve it)
- Employee ratings of well-being (including general health, stress or other outcomes)
- Employee ratings of their intentions to continue to participate in the program

17. Does the data include quantitative data for evaluation purposes and qualitative data for inquiry and improvement purposes?

Feedback (Important for Refinement)

18. What mechanisms for reporting feedback about the program make the most sense for the organization?

- A report sent to all employees
- A report posted to the organization's intranet
- An executive summary of the results sent to all employees
- Small group sessions to discuss results with employees

- Results/progress reported during a staff meeting
- Updates posted in high traffic or appropriate areas of the worksite
- Other:

19. Has the organization promptly communicated program refinements to all employees?

20. Have these communications emphasized that program refinements were made based on employee feedback?

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