



# Vitality

An EFAP Article for Human Resource and Occupational Health Professionals, Program Administrators, Supervisors, and Key Personnel



## Nurturing Well-Being for Peak Performance: Enhancing Workplace Productivity

Productivity is essential to the success of any business; however, the methods organizations use to increase productivity must be well thought out and realistic because how we work continues to evolve. Simply attempting to improve performance by pushing employees to work harder at the expense of their well-being will ultimately fall flat. Savvy employers recognize that they must create an environment where employees can thrive. That means being genuinely empathetic and caring towards their employees. Leaders need more options to keep their teams engaged and working efficiently. One of the most significant ways organizations can affect productivity is by understanding the connection between work and health. When employees are healthy and feel supported, their overall well-being and, consequently, their productivity increases. We'll explore the critical connection between health and productivity and offer practical approaches for creating a supportive workplace culture to help keep productivity high and have employees succeed.

**Productivity has always been and continues to be paramount for both employers and employees.**

Maintaining high productivity in the workforce has always been a critical concern. Still, with the evolution happening in today's workplaces, more evaluation and strategizing are required for employers to determine and define their approaches. With the rise of hybrid and remote work, sustaining productivity has grown more complex: leaders can no longer glance at the proverbial shop floor to ensure everyone is busy working. Certainly, technology and resources make it possible for organizations to understand when employees are connected and available, but that does require some investment to support effective remote work. Some interesting economic shifts have arisen from hybrid and remote work for both employees and employers. While some people have benefited from increased productivity by being able to cut back on or skip commutes entirely, a ripple effect with the reduction in the number

workers coming into offices each day has seen reduced revenues for other businesses and cities that rely on these employees who no longer stop to grab a coffee, get lunch, or pay for parking.<sup>1</sup> However, employees value productivity holistically – at work and off the clock. They also expect flexibility “not only where they work, but when.”<sup>2</sup> Flexibility is a marker of job satisfaction that employers cannot ignore, and it has direct ties to productivity. One report found that “nearly 1 in 2 people (48%) said that if they were no longer able to work remotely, they would start looking for another job that offered more flexibility.”<sup>3</sup>

### Recognizing the connection between work, health, and productivity is crucial.

A healthy, supportive work environment encourages employees to perform at their best, regardless of whether they are onsite, hybrid, or remote. The approach an employer takes to facilitate a positive work environment is directly reflected in employee well-being and, in turn, productivity. When employees feel they have agency over their work and can make valued contributions, it creates mutual benefits such as enhanced creativity, improved loyalty, and increased productivity. Many organizations have reported that remote work “improved focus and concentration among their employees” since they could “stay on task and avoid distractions while working from home.”<sup>4</sup> However, remote work is just one way employers can help employees thrive. Research shows that “positive opportunit[ies]...[can] arise when employers address the inherent interconnectedness between work and health,” and “employers can improve employee health through six modifiable drivers.”<sup>5</sup>

1. Social Interaction – The feeling of connectedness at work drives innovation, engagement and the quality of work. It also helps those “with smaller social networks outside of their jobs” reduce loneliness.<sup>6</sup> Positive social interactions included encouraging psychologically safe dialogue that improved trust. They helped create a more authentic sense of belonging through establishing and holding regular meetings, both as a workgroup and individually with leaders.
2. Mindset and beliefs – Believing in the possibilities and that support is available through teammates helps eliminate workplace stress. It all starts with a well-defined organizational mission and the storytelling that trickles down from it.<sup>7</sup> When employees understand why they are doing something, they become more motivated to contribute to achieving goals. They also feel more satisfied that their contributions are purposeful and feel responsible for delivering the products and services consumers trust.
3. Productive activity – Recognizes that not everything beneficial happens at the office. For employees to feel a sense of gratification, they need to invest in activities that help them feel more well-rounded as people. Encouraging time away for leisure, whether it’s for volunteering in the community, exercise, hobbies, or travelling, allows employees to recharge so that they can “cope

with difficult or changing situations” and enjoy the benefits of better physical and mental health.<sup>8</sup>

4. Stress – Ensuring that stress levels are manageable and not trending towards overwhelm or burnout is part of what employers need to be mindful and observant of in their workplaces. Unaddressed, chronic stress is destructive and harmful. It’s recognized as a catalyst for people’s increased risk of “cardiovascular disease, neurodegenerative disease, and metabolic disease.”<sup>9</sup> Even if organizations have cycles of high-stress, they must account for supportive measures to help employees “regain their energy after high-demand periods.”<sup>10</sup>
5. Economic Security – This means that people feel they are “paid sufficiently to cover their basic needs,” and while that is relative to everyone, employers directly influence whether compensation meets that goal.<sup>11</sup> Employees who feel vulnerable about their personal economies are more likely to experience poor mental health and physical well-being, directly affecting their ability to be productive, deliver value to the organization, and develop a sense of accomplishment.
6. Sleep – Untreated insomnia and sleep disorders driven by worry about work and home have a significant effect on an employee’s ability to complete tasks and demands of their roles effectively and safely. Encouraging and educating people about the necessity of good sleep hygiene is something employers can do, in addition to helping create environments conducive to having set times for work and rest. For example, “limiting or disabling employees from being online after hours, creating incentives for employees who prioritize sleep, and encouraging and rewarding leaders who model the prioritization of sleep over work” can help.<sup>12</sup>

### Practical strategies can boost productivity in any work setting.

Promoting well-being through work-life balance is a great place to start. Offering flexible working hours, hybrid and remote telecommuting options, and encouraging regular breaks during the day help employees stay refreshed and focused. Incorporating movement or exercise into these breaks is also beneficial for overall well-being.

Another key strategy is providing mental health support. It means offering access to mental health services and training leaders to recognize and support employees’ unique mental health needs.

Creating a positive work culture is vital. Listening to employees can uncover toxic behaviours to address, while setting realistic expectations for leaders and offering them professional development opportunities can help shape a healthier, inclusive environment.

A company's ability to thrive is directly related to the actions and attitudes of its leaders (at all levels of the organization). The goal is to create a work environment that is physically, virtually and psychologically safe for everyone by ensuring open communication, transparency and authenticity infused in every interaction.

Finally, redesigning jobs to fit remote work models, using the right tools, and setting clear goals can make a significant difference. Regularly measuring the success of these strategies through surveys and open communication helps ensure continuous improvement in both productivity and employee well-being.

### Perspectives on productivity.

Here are some final considerations about health and well-being as a long-term investment that will improve productivity.<sup>13</sup>

1. Performance is more important than hours worked.
2. Having the right tools and technology to support project management and communication is critical.
3. Model expectations of what dedicated workspaces at home look like (secure file storage, ergonomics, distraction-free, well-organized, boundaries with others in the space, workplace-appropriate attire).
4. Support wellness by encouraging disconnecting from screens, daily movement and activity, and virtual events.
5. Ensure all meetings are high-value and have an agenda. But also support focused time for employees to dedicate time to their work.
6. Communicate to share knowledge and resources, build relationships, and promote collaboration.
7. Establish reasonable goals and clear expectations. Involve employees in setting them. Follow through on measuring and assessing achievements toward goals.
8. Don't forego professional development time.
9. Evaluate your performance and share all insights, not just the positive ones. Annual or more frequent surveys allow for opportunities to collect data and track improvements in productivity, employee well-being, engagement, and quality. Committees and forums generate discussion and ideas. You'll promote openness and demonstrate a commitment to improving workplace culture.

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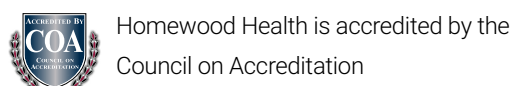
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