

ECONOMY AND WELLNESS

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Abstract: *Wellness and its importance for health has been studied and discussed for many years. The impact of the life style, nutrition and lack of exercise and chronic diseases on economy is well known. The urging problem is troubling governments, health insurance companies, employers and many others. An unprecedented focus on wellness was an important part of the WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM 2014 in Davos (Switzerland) this year.*

Key words: *Wellness; Economy contexts; World economy forum; Global economy growth.*

1 Introduction

The WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM - WEF (incorporated in 1971 and based in Geneva) is an independent, not for profit and not tied to political, partisan or national interests. It is committed to improving the state of the world by engaging leaders in partnership to shape global, regional and industry agendas.

When over 25000 Nobel price laureates, academics, CEOs and heads of state gathered in Davos, preventative health approaches to the stress reduction, to mental health support. Power of meditation and wellness – for the first time – became a significant part of agenda.

This offers a powerful affirmation, that wellness industry is no longer perceived as side-lines business but as an important if not critical to solving the world's most difficult issues and key to global economic growth.

One of the WEF's managing directors said in press release: "For the past few years, the critical state of the financial system absorbed much of Davos attention. This year, there is a sense that global economy out of intensive care...and as we ask metaphorically to improve the economy health the POPULATION'S HEALTH is a good place to start. For the first time in history of the WEF meetings, large and extensive Health Summit took place and full 25 sessions were focused on health and wellness topics. Number of sessions doubled comparing to year 2008.

This historic focus on wellness and prevention at the recent WEF is a clear sign, that old "sick care" models have failed and are not working in the sense of health improvement of

global population. The world leaders are urgently seeking new, wellness – focused strategies to implement in government policy and in workplace.

There are selected titles of individual sessions of WEF Health Summit:

- Rethinking Health
- Our Medical Future
- The New Healthcare Context
- Rethinking Living
- Do It Yourself Health
- Life Enhancing Technologies
- Rewiring the Brain
- Meditation: Why the Hype?
- Transforming Healthcare
- The Importance of Being Happy
- Creating Healthier Outcomes
- The Mental Health Imperative
- Redefining Aging
- Health is Wealth

Chronic illnesses have a heavy toll on businesses. Number of industries studies document, that chronic disease accounts for major part of health care costs in developed markets and unfortunately and increasingly also on new, emerging markets (China, India) Less studied is the fact, that chronic disease has a significant impact on employee productivity through increased absenteeism and underperformance due to illness. (WEF 2010)

The aggregate costs are staggering. In the United States, the top seven chronic ailments are responsible for an estimated annual shortfall of US\$ 1 trillion in productivity. Globally, four risk factors are estimated to cost US\$ 2 trillion in lost productivity each year. To make matters worse, chronic illnesses are actually becoming more prevalent in almost all countries, both developed and developing. (WHO 2005, WHO 2009)

A significant part of the World Economic Forum program was dedicated to mental health issues. With mental ill-health being the leading cause of absenteeism in many sectors and industries, the cumulative costs on the global economy is estimated at US\$16 trillion over the next 20 years. With United Kingdom's G8 presidency the WEF drive the debate on how to face the challenges and stigma surrounding dementia and mental ill health. (WEF 2014).

Over the past 10-15 years, many companies have responded to the growing cost of chronic diseases by incorporating wellness initiatives in to their employee health programs. The absence of well – defined metric makes it hard to calculate ROI (Return on Investment).

2 Objectives

The main goal of the short study is a critical analyse of wellness initiatives in a context with the field of economy and employee productivity. We can propose that more that 75% of initiatives are based more on experimentation than on systematic approach.

3 Methodology (project characteristics)

While people, who study this issue have suggested that wellness programs can generate a significant returns few companies have been able to measure the impact of wellness program investments in standardized and systematic fashion. Addressing the chronic disease problem and fully realizing the value of wellness requires an integrated approach.

Three major methodological parts must take place in the integrated approach. In the same time the three major methodological parts present a professional tool for research in this area and branch.

Three major methodological parts in the integrated approach:

1. ANALYTICS

- major costs and their level
- cost and productivity implications
- business case for intervention

A wellness program may be able to predict the company – specific causes and extend of lost productivity and heath care costs as well as risk factors.

2. CORPORATE ENGAGEMENT

- vision and objectives
- incorporation of “people strategy “

As with any corporative initiative a wellness program needs a clear vision and set of objectives. It also needs the support of senior executives. Well design analytics will lay ground for such support but wellness should also emphasize how the program fits in to a broader agenda of workplace development.

3. PORTFOLIO OF ACTIVITIES

- targeting individual behaviours
- modifying environment to apply wellness

It is not easy to change behaviours, best way remain to be discover. The issue is inherently complex. Experts in behaviour modifications and risk factors suggest that success require two types of initiatives. One approach target high – risk individuals with incentives, education and counselling.

The other approach presents deals with the environment within and beyond the workplace. It encompasses everything that is supportive of employees' well-being and is conducive to healthy life style. It may include work team, sports clubs, social support group, on-line social networks and above all – family.

Providing to employees information can be useful and activities targeting individuals can include smoking – cessation programs, personalized diet coaching, fitness incentives, free gym membership, sponsoring company sports teams and more. Environmental activities often involve community networking as many individual activities are outsourced to vendors or business partners. WELLNESS BRANCH (2013)

4 Results and discussions

For everybody professionally involved in wellness industry, the concept focusing on preventative wellness, stress reduction, healthy eating, fitness and all other spa and wellness techniques is a good new.

By supporting lifestyle and behaviour changes the wellness industry historically offers, the fitness and wellness professionals seem to be on the frontline of this renewed global movement. Some of the wellness experts call this “second wave of wellness “which has full support of global decision makers.

The world's top economic thinker 's minds are changing fast about what constitutes intelligent health strategies and what measures of national success should matter most to world economic leaders. GDP or metrics that capture total human wellbeing?

5 Conclusions

It is not trendiness, the world's toughest, most money – minded leader are desperate for smarter solutions to global healthcare and chronic disease crises, which are bleeding money and productivity of their governments and businesses.

As noted during Health is Wealth session, not focusing on prevention and wellness will continue to cost world dearly.... The developed countries are seeing epidemic levels of stress, obesity and inactivity.

This globally and nationally respected situation presents unique and timely opportunity for wellness professionals to create business opportunity for themselves as well as life style and health improvement venues for those who ultimately need it.

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