

The Science behind Employee Engagement – Part I

Technology is making it easier than ever to harness information, crunch numbers in meaningful ways, and apply the insights to solve business challenges and uncover new opportunities.

Have you as an EA professional considered applying science to employee communications? If not, it might be time to start thinking about it, states Keith Kitani for *Employee Benefit News*. Numbers can determine if internal communications are effectively engaging employees, and resulting in a stronger culture, higher benefit participation rates, and other goals that your EAP (and HR) works hard to achieve.

Test your employee communication assumptions and see what you can learn from using the scientific process. Ask a question, make observations, and form a hypothesis about a communications strategy. Experiment and analyze your results, and apply your insights to your next project.

Then, question again and again until your practice is optimized. Just like scientists, internal com-

municators have a vision for what needs to be achieved. You have creative resources, technology for delivering content, and expectations to meet. It's time to get scientific about ensuring success.

401(k) example

Let's walk through a simple example of how this might work. Perhaps a corporate client's 401(k) matching program isn't performing the way they want it to, especially among younger employees. You surmise that the under-30 crowd is not as concerned about retirement as their more seasoned colleagues. Or perhaps they lack the investment sophistication (or cash flow) to maximize their contributions? You wonder if they have unanswered questions about the retirement plans that you shared when they were hired or during open enrollment. Will more employees participate in the matching program if the client changes how they're communicating details about their 401(k).

Start by observing. Even a small, informal survey or employee focus group can help you grasp their pref-



erences: Where and when do they want to learn about their benefits programs? What do they want to know about their retirement plan?

You may find that the younger employees are generally not reading through the printed brochures in their employee welcome package or that the annual open enrollment presentation may be too generic or focused on employees in a different life stage. If only one message is being shared with employees—the correspondence might not be truly connecting with any of them. ■

NEXT MONTH: More important points are presented.

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The complete version of this report is available at: http://chestnutglobalpartners.org/Portals/cgp/Publications/Trends Report2015_2015-03-10.pdf.

Leading Trends...cont'd from Page 3

Additional examples of technological advancements benefitting EAP and their clients include:

- ❖ The collection and analysis of measureable outcomes and benchmarks through national data warehousing will influence EAPs in the development of evidence-based best practices and in demonstrating

greater ROI. (CGP is particularly involved in this effort.)

- ❖ Integration of clinical screening tools into access portals and subsequent clinical follow-up will enhance quality of care, while direct connectivity and data sharing will facilitate better coordination of services between EAP and its service partners. ■

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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The Leading Trends in EAP – Part II

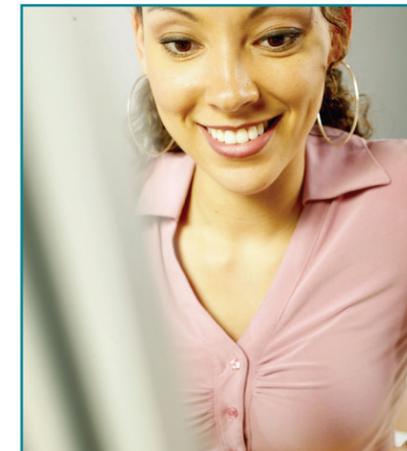
By Todd Donalson

Chestnut Global Partners (CGP) surveyed industry experts and analyzed recently published research to understand how a number of emerging trends are impacting workplace well-being, behavioral health, and employee assistance services. We highlighted six key trends, and provided key takeaways and practical tips designed to help organizational leaders capitalize on these trends. We examined three of these trends in part one of this series, with the remainder presented in the conclusion of this article.

Trend #4: Impact of the Affordable Care Act

Last year, a Final Rule was issued in favor of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) that "limited excepted benefits" under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) will include EAPs. All of the following criteria must be met for an EAP to be exempt from Affordable Care Act (ACA) requirements:

1. The EAP does not provide significant benefits in the nature of medical care. Although a specific definition is not provided, the Final Rule issued in 2014 states that the amount, scope, and duration of covered services are considered when determining whether



an EAP is considered to provide significant benefits in the nature of medical care. The Final Rule indicates that additional clarification may be provided in the future and offers the following examples:

- ❖ An EAP that provides only limited, short-term outpatient counseling for substance use services (without covering inpatient, residential, partial residential or intensive outpatient care) without requiring prior authorization or medical necessity review does not provide significant medical benefits and would therefore, be considered an excepted benefit and not subject to ACA requirements.

- ❖ An EAP that provides disease management services (such as laboratory testing, counseling and

prescription drugs) for individuals with chronic conditions does provide significant medical benefits and would not be considered an excepted benefit.

2. Benefits under the EAP are not coordinated with benefits under another group health plan. This means that:

- ❖ Participants in the other group health plan must not be

continued on Page 2

FEATURED INSIDE

- ▶ New Tool for Detecting Mental Illness
- ▶ Resources
- ▶ Firms Still Unclear about Best Wellness Approach
- ▶ Study: EAPs Rated as 'High Impact, Low Cost'
- ▶ Consulting Program Available
- ▶ Leading Etiquette No-no's
- ▶ Signs a Boss is a Weak Leader
- ▶ Brown Bagger Recap
- ▶ The Science behind Employee Engagement – Part I

INSERTS

- ▶ Brown Bagger: Many Millennials Lack Real-World Knowledge
- ▶ Payroll Stuffers
- ▶ LifestyleTIPS®

required to use and exhaust benefits under the EAP (i.e., the EAP cannot serve as a “gatekeeper”) before an individual is eligible for benefits under the other group health plan; and

❖ Eligibility for benefits under the EAP must not be dependent on participation in another group health plan.

What Does this Mean?

Prior to the Final Rule, many EAPs were considered group health plans subject to various requirements under the ACA. Many of these ACA mandates now do *not* apply to EAPs that meet the foregoing criteria. Inapplicable mandates include:

- Compliance with Summary of Benefits and Coverage (SBC) and form 5500 disclosure rules;
- Compliance with out-of-pocket limitations;
- No annual or lifetime dollar limits on essential health benefits; and
- No pre-existing condition exclusions.

The Final Rule went into effect Jan. 1, 2015 and does not apply to health insurance issuers offering individual health insurance.

Trend #5: Impact of European EAPs

Following the 2008 economic crisis, EAPs were often called on to provide support to organizations with workforces experiencing difficulties handling increased workloads, adjusting to differing management styles, maintaining positive co-worker relationship, coping with employment insecurity, or burnout and poor work-life balance.

These pressures, combined with European legislation mandating workplace mental health requirements, are

creating many new opportunities for EAPs — not just expanding the number of lives needing coverage, but in new and more positive roles they can play.

In addition to making mental health and well-being a policy priority within its member states, the European Union (EU) also developed a legal context for well-being at work, which essentially set forth directives a European employer must adhere to in order to reduce and prevent work-related stress. Within the EU, member states are obliged to take these general principles and adapt them to national legislation and binding regional agreements.

These laws have not only resulted in the creation of specific roles or positions within organizations known as “prevention advisors for psychosocial aspects at work”, but they have also required increased dialogue between employers and employees within works councils to develop stress prevention strategies.

Because EAPs have expertise in developing prevention strategies, and as an “external” consultant can bring objective perspective and discretion, they can be an important and complementary resource to help facilitate and mediate this dialogue. Thus, EAPs can evolve from being “a good practice for mental health at the workplace” to helping corporate customers attain company objectives.

Best Practice Recommendations

Partner with counterparts such as Health Safety Environment/ Occupational Health and Safety, HR, etc., to create a multi-disciplinary “well-being at work” team. Next steps include:

❖ Define what “well-being at work” means to the company and how it relates to an organization’s values and objectives.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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❖ Conduct an organizational stress assessment to identify the needs of employees, as well as the strengths and opportunities for improvement.

❖ Discuss how the EAP could partner with the organization to provide consultation support such as setting up a survey, analyzing responses, reporting results, translating them into an action plan, and offering preventive services to employees.

continued on Page 3

Signs a Boss is a Weak Leader

❖ **Weak managers already know the answer** – If you make a sensible suggestion to a poor manager, he or she is likely to ignore it or find a way to put you down. Weak managers don’t want their authority to be questioned, so when you offer a new idea, a weak manager may say “I already thought of that” or “You don’t know how the system works.” They are inflexible – it’s their way or the highway! *However, a strong manager will listen and ask you more questions so that they understand what you’re proposing and how it might help the team.*

❖ **Weak managers tell you what you’re doing wrong, instead of what you’re doing right** – Weak managers point out mistakes. You could do 99% of your job perfectly, but a weak manager will

find the 1% that could have been better, and shove your face in it. If you go to work afraid to make a mistake instead of being excited about the possibilities of accomplishing great things, you are working for a weak manager. *Strong managers reinforce the great things their teammates do.*

❖ **Weak managers don’t want to change anything.** Once they set a policy or make a pronouncement, in their opinion it’s cast in stone. If you have a better idea for how to do things, you’d better keep it to yourself or, if you’re good at framing ideas, tell your weak manager that your good idea is really *his* or *her* idea. *Strong managers, however, say “What can we do better? What do we need to change around here?”*

❖ **Weak managers don’t want to hear what you think.** Weak managers don’t want to give their teammates any say over the work they’re performing. Doing that might threaten their sense of authority. The last thing a weak manager wants to do is to look in the mirror. The second-to-last thing a weak manager wants to do is to get better at leading. That might be scary. The weak manager chooses fear over trust because when people are afraid of the manager, they’ll keep quiet. *Strong managers, on the other hand, understand that every person on their teams has millions of brain cells, every one of which could help solve the latest issues and obstacles at work.* ■

Sources: “Forbes” magazine; and Liz Ryan, writer for the Huffington Post, Denver Post, Harvard Business Review, LinkedIn, and Forbes, among others.

Time Management

Brown Bagger Recap

The following is a list of *Brown Bagger* inserts that have appeared so far in 2015. (Watch for a more extensive list later this year.) ■

Month	Topic	Title
January 2015	Workplace communication	...It’s all about Respect
February 2015	Management consulting	Helping Leaders Regain their Edge
March 2015	Workplace generation gap	.. Generational Divide
April 2015	Online health services	... Services that are Legitimate
May 2015	Workplace bullying	Putting a Stop to ...
June 2015	Positive workplace culture	Making Work Fun
July 2015	Workplace communication	Connecting Conversations
August 2015	Workplace generation gap	Many Millennials Lack...

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Consulting Program Available

One goal of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) National Center for PTSD is to improve the care available to all veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) regardless of *where* they access services.

To that end, the department is now offering a PTSD Consultation Program for *any* provider treating veterans with PTSD. The consultants are experts at the National

Center for PTSD and include psychologists, social workers, physicians, and pharmacists.

It's easy to make a request for consultation and responses are prompt. Questions can be answered by email (PTSDconsult@va.gov) or phone (866-948-7880) and calls are scheduled at your convenience.

Topics for consultation include evidence-based treatment, refer-

rals, medication, clinical management, educational opportunities, resources, assessment, and transitioning veterans to VA care.

There is no charge for services. Video clips about the program are also available: <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/consult/faq.asp>. Learn more at <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/consult/index.asp>. ■

Workplace Survey

Leading Etiquette No-no's

Many of us are moving at a faster pace at work than ever before, which can make us more susceptible to slip-ups when it comes to manners.

But according to a recent Accountemps survey, these changes in the workplace haven't led to shifts in the code of manners at most offices. Both executives and employees still notice breaches of the basic etiquette rules we learned in preschool: Pay attention when someone's speaking to you, and if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all.

When asked which rules were broken most often in their office, chief financial officers (CFOs) ranked being distracted during meetings at No. 1 (27%). Workers asked the same question put gossiping about others in the office at the top of their lists (28%).

Accountemps addresses common questions about office etiquette:

❖ **How much do manners really matter?** A lot. People may

not be as formal in the workplace as they used to be, but managers and workers still expect their colleagues to be respectful and courteous. What's more, employees with good manners project an image of professionalism, strengthening their reputation and improving their chances for career growth. In a previous Accountemps survey, 85% of workers said that being courteous has an effect on a person's career path.

❖ **What rules are the most important?** As the survey shows, paying attention in meetings and declining to participate in the office gossip mill are important. But CFOs and workers cited other common office etiquette breaches as well, including the failure to respond to emails or calls in a timely manner, running late to or missing meetings, not crediting others when appropriate, and criticizing others publicly. So make sure to get back to your co-workers as

soon as possible, try to arrive at meetings a few minutes early, acknowledge your colleagues when they help you, and keep any discussion of sensitive issues to one-on-one, face-to-face conversations.

❖ **What if I make a faux pas?** Everyone makes mistakes now and then, so don't beat yourself up if you have a minor slip-up at work. Simply acknowledge your faux pas and apologize to anyone you might have offended as quickly as possible. Think about what might have led to the mistake: Were you stressed, overwhelmed or handling a problem outside of work? Try to deal with the root of the issue, and consider how you might deal with the situation in the future so that you don't repeat the slip-up. ■

Source: Accountemps, a Robert Half company (www.roberthalf.com). **Editor's note:** This general topic is addressed in greater detail in this month's "Brown Bagger" insert.

Leading Trends...cont'd from Page 2

❖ Encourage employee participation in the program by educating them on the principle of shared responsibility and the company's values and objectives.

❖ Develop an action plan based upon a limited number of themes that can be addressed during the next two years.

❖ Establish a plan to monitor and evaluate the impact or outcome of your actions during the next two to three years.

Trend #6: Impact of Technology on EAP

Sophisticated smart phones, live video chats, mobile applications, Big Data, and business intelligence are all affecting how we live our lives, especially in the area of health care. These advances in technology are likely to alter not only how EAPs will provide services in the next few years, but ultimately how the field of workplace behavioral health is advanced.

Consumers are driving much of the demand for mobile health applications today, with thousands of options available to support employees' physical and emotional well-being. Some EAPs are beginning to incorporate evidenced-based mobile apps into their product offerings. According to Bess Day, Senior Account Manager with the Oregon-based health technology firm ORCAS, Inc., EAPs can best make use of these apps in three ways:

❖ *As a self-management tool* to help employees track and manage chronic health conditions such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and/or diabetes (including co-morbidities where several conditions are present);

❖ *As an adjunct or added support* to the care provided by a



Editor's Notebook

This month's cover story picks up where last month's left off in examining how a number of

emerging trends are affecting workplace well-being, behavioral health, and *employee assistance services*.

I found it inspirational that in today's doom-and-gloom society, the trends described this month could all have a very positive impact on EAP. Consider that with all of the uncertainty surrounding the Affordable Care Act (e.g. Obamacare) as it turns out it would appear the majority of ACA mandates do *not* apply to EAPs – so long as they meet the criteria outlined in this issue's cover story.

Second, the impact of technology, as also explained in detail in our three-part series in EAR earlier this year, presents scores of opportunities for the EAP field. "Advances in technology are ... expected to create new opportuni-

ties for employees, family ... and supervisors to easily access or refer troubled employees for EAP services," the article states.

Finally, a lesser-known trend, but impactful nonetheless, involves how "European legislation mandating workplace mental health requirements are creating many new opportunities for EAPs," not just overseas but in the States as well. Since mental health also plays a key role in ACA and parity laws in the U.S., the author presents recommendations how EAP can partner with occupational health, HR, and others "to create a multi-disciplinary 'well-being at work' team."

I hope your summer is sailing along swimmingly.

Mike Jacquart

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counselor or doctor to help build the skills and confidence needed to sustain healthy habits; and

❖ *As an early intervention* for employees not yet meeting the criteria for a health diagnosis, but who can benefit from education on risk factors and appropriate prevention strategies.

(Editor's note: Additional information on this topic is presented in the April 2015 EAR article, "Project Unveils Top Ten Behavioral Apps" by Kathleen Greer.)

Advances in technology are also expected to create new opportunities for employees, family members, and supervisors to easily access or refer troubled employees for EAP services.

Dr. Tom Amaral, President and CEO of EAP Technology Systems, Inc., states that:

"Online intake portals are expected to significantly increase utilization rates and engagement in EAP services, especially among both younger employees and those with more serious behavioral health issues such as substance abuse, depression, and anxiety disorders. In addition, the implementation of services through secure chatting and video counseling will alter the preferred method for how employees wish to receive services, specifically the Generations Y and Z."

continued on Page 8

New Tool for Detecting Mental Illness

What if doctors could check a patient's brain vitals just as easily as taking their pulse or blood pressure? Recently, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved several new technologies to help assess brain health and detect emotional and cognitive changes earlier when treatment can be most effective.

During routine medical check-ups, physicians measure various physical vital signs such as blood pressure, temperature, pulse and respiratory rate. Any abnormalities in these screening tests would prompt the doctor to conduct or refer the patient for further testing.

However, brain vitals – a simple set of tests easily administered on a smartphone or tablet that measure mood, cognition, reaction time, spatial discrimination and memory – have yet to be well integrated into routine medical check-ups. Rear Admiral Susan

Blumenthal, M.D., told *The Huffington Post* that such tests could augment health care professionals' diagnostic powers by allowing them to evaluate and track changes in standardized measurements over time.

Called a "brain thermometer" by the US Army's Combat Care Research Program, a new FDA-cleared app is proving helpful in military settings to help identify traumatic brain disorders (TBI), concussions, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and depression in members of the Armed Services.

"The tech expert behind this new software suggests that this tool could also be used in general health care settings as well," Blumenthal writes. "In the near future, it may be possible for doctors to take brain vitals on all of their patients, helping them catch worrying symptoms of emotional distress and neurocognitive changes that signal the

presence of a TBI, concussion, or mental illness."

Improving early detection of these conditions can help prevent needless suffering – an important step in reducing the impact of mental illness and cognitive impairment in America and worldwide.

"The software might also be used during rehabilitation to evaluate progress or decline after a neurological event such as a concussion or stroke," Blumenthal adds. "This innovative app approach provides a portable, user-friendly method to evaluate multiple components of vital information related to brain health."

Other new mobile technologies may also help reduce the high costs and needless suffering associated with these disorders by detecting these conditions earlier when treatment can be most effective. ■

Firms Still Unclear about Best Wellness Approach

The wellness climate has changed in the last year, with a flurry of lawsuits questioning the legality of financial incentives (or penalties) for employees who take part – or fail – to meet standards set out in corporate wellness offerings.

According to a recent survey conducted by *Employee Benefits News*, benefits decision-makers at companies of various sizes continue to struggle with the notion of financially justifying their wellness dollars, as wellness ROI remains elusive, with the exception of reductions in insurance premiums.

"It's unclear to me that [wellness-driven] consumer-driven health plans and other types of high-deductible health plans sustain better engagement, ownership and

improvement in the health status of their enrolled members," noted one respondent. "It's simply a mechanism for shifting costs from the employer to the employee. What are the best-in-class employers doing to positively influence their employees' engagement and sustainment of improved health outcomes?"

Others suggest that the most controversial notions of wellness incentives – both positive and negative, and largely centered on premiums paid by employees, or financial or other rewards offered for successful compliance and participation in wellness programs – tend to create the most soul-searching when it comes to deciding how to go down the wellness path.

According to those survey participants who have maintained their

wellness offerings, a series of consistent offerings have emerged. Some 80% of existing wellness programs feature biometric screenings or flu shots as core wellness features, followed by access to health risk assessments (77%). Other popular options include behavioral and lifestyle services and smoking cessation (both 64%), physical fitness classes (58%) and mental health and substance abuse treatment (56%).

Among respondents who do not have a wellness plan in place, their rationale usually comes down to a lack of management support (20%), a lack of resources or information on best wellness practices (23%) – or, more simply, that wellness is just not a company priority right now (39%). ■

On the Job

Study: EAPs Rated as 'High Impact, Low Cost'

Employee assistance professionals are always on the lookout for studies that verifies the usefulness and effectiveness of EAPs. A leading study conducted by XpertHR and published in *Personnel Today* does just that.

Employee assistance programs are effective in supporting staff overcome challenges at work and home in a cost-effective way, the new survey of 156 organizations finds.

Two employers in three (66%) provide access to an EAP and a further 17% are considering doing so. The vast majority (96%) engage a third party to supply the service.

Face-to-face counseling can be the most expensive aspect of a program, but 82% of employers provide it and it is rated as the most effective aspect of an EAP. Nine-tenths (90%) provide telephone counseling and 89% have an advice or information helpline. At three-fifths (60%) of organizations, the EAP acts as a gateway for employees to access specialist help on health, legal or financial issues.

The biggest change since XpertHR's previous EAP research in 2009 was an increased use of online resources – a feature of 79% of EAPs in 2014, compared with 51% in 2009.

Asked to rate the cost-effectiveness of their EAP, two-thirds (66%) of employers said that it completely or partially justified its cost. Not a single employer stated that it did "not justify its cost at all".

One employer's verdict on employee assistance programs was: "High impact, low cost. It would be remiss of organizations not to consider their use."

The complete article can be found at: <http://www.personneltoday.com/hr/employee-assistance-programmes-rated-high-impact-low-cost/>. ■

Resources

☞ **CORE Net**, a mental health outcomes program developed in the UK, recently added the **Workplace Outcome Suite (WOS)**, a tool that scientifically measures the effects of employee assistance and health coaching programs on absenteeism, presenteeism, work engagement, life satisfaction and workplace distress. For more information, visit: http://www.coreims.co.uk/Buy_Net_Software.html or www.chestnutglobalpartners.org. ■

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