

Employee Wellness Programs: Acceptance and Use through Gamification

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Abstract: Companies must consider new healthcare applications that benefit both themselves and their employees. With technology rapidly evolving, innovative healthcare platforms are entering the market and awaiting implementation. These incentivized systems allow for improved employee health, and reduced program costs for the employer. These healthcare platforms offer employee convenience through personalized applications, while concurrently providing invaluable demographic data for companies to analyze. Encouraging employees to accept and use a wellness program can be challenging. Gamification offers one possible solution to create habit forming healthy wellness practices among employees.

INTRODUCTION

While the healthcare industry is in the midst of rapid expansion and growth, a major industry shift is imminent. As increases in medical and computer technologies continue to quickly evolve, their impact on the healthcare industry will inevitably affect all consumers. Currently, the healthcare industry carries the negative perception that it is a necessary and costly burden for employers and employees. What if these consumers could receive more “bang for their buck” for the healthcare costs that are incurred? Today, this concern has pushed the industry to rapidly revolutionize itself.

Companies are often looking for ways to reduce the cost of healthcare, without reducing its quality for their employees. Wellness programs offer one option for employers to pursue cost reductions. A typical employee wellness program consists of a health assessment that is offered by employers on an annual or semi-annual basis to gather employees’ biometric data. This data may include the employee’s weight, height, blood pressure, and cholesterol and sugar levels. Through this process, companies hope to help employees achieve a level of health and wellness that would reduce health insurance costs and also increase employee productivity.

Utilizing cutting-edge healthcare software is one way companies can achieve this goal. By implementing these new platforms with biometric data, the company provides interactive and rewarding healthcare tools to benefit the employees. These tools could increase an employee’s motivation for improved health, along with providing insightful medical results and feedback. In addition, this software could benefit employees by offering alternative suggestions based off of lab results, or providing more options for conveniently located doctor’s offices. These enhanced features from innovative healthcare firms and the amount of new data associated with these technologies is growing exponentially.

Using big data, companies are now able to make more effective decisions in many major industries. Healthcare firms are following suit. A recent study has estimated “that over 30% of all data stored in the world are medical data and this percentage is expected to increase rapidly” (Hoque, 2016). These new healthcare platforms are now utilizing vast amounts of data to mine for predictive medical conditions that would benefit its consumers. These metrics could potentially avert diseases or even ward off surgeries through preventative measures, thus saving thousands of dollars on hospital visits and medical procedures.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) there are four behaviors that reduce general health and increases chronic disease. They are inactivity, poor nutrition, tobacco use, and frequent alcohol consumption which can cause increases in diabetes, heart disease, and chronic pulmonary conditions. Companies need to leverage this data on behaviors and diseases into their benefit programs. By remaining at the forefront of the latest healthcare technologies, companies not only can attract top talent, but offer them the means to stay healthy and work for their company for years to come. The successful implementation and use of healthcare benefits programs will have a positive impact on all consumers.

Employee Wellness Programs

Companies are offering new platforms to help engage employees in better understanding their healthcare benefits. For instance, in 2013 the state of Colorado partnered with Welltok, a health optimization company, to provide an online platform to connect its diverse workforce. Welltok provides innovative healthcare solutions, was recently ranked as #74 on Deloitte’s Technology Fast 500 companies, and even more impressively has moved up to the #1 spot in the Colorado market (Welltok, 2016).

In the workplace, there are proven methods that will increase the implementation and the usage of these platforms. A 2013 study by Buck Consultants showed that using gamification promoted an increase in health engagement, and is extremely effective in improving the wellness of employees and disease management (A.D.A.M. Consumer Health, 2015). For example, engaging employees with short quizzes on their wellness has been shown to be more effective than having them read long, boring articles in regards to it. These gamification techniques have provided incentive systems that go beyond monetary rewards. Game-like participation in mechanisms, such as leaderboards, badges, progress bars, and team competitions, has proven to be effective. These psychological motivators push the employees to achieve intangible rewards, and “are some of the best ways to change health-related behavior” (A.D.A.M. Consumer Health, 2015). Having an engaging rewards system helps motivate employees to commit to long-term wellness changes that will in turn benefit companies and their own healthcare programs. Building an engaging wellness rewards system involves examining the factors that lead users to accept technology systems.

Technology Acceptance and Use

Past research suggests that there is a variety of factors that influence the acceptance and the use of technology applications from perceived usefulness, personal innovativeness to enjoyment (Venkatesh 2000). Gamification can provide enjoyment and perceived usefulness to a business application in a manner that would encourage the user to accept and use a new technology. In the context of an organization, gamification is the application of “the mechanics of gaming to nongame activities to change people’s behavior. Within employment benefits and wellness programs, the use of gamification can increase employee participation in such programs. It is well established that high physical fitness leads to greater individual employee productivity. Wellness programs with high employee participation rates result in lower absences at work compared to those who do not participate in wellness programs (Lechner and de Vries 1997). The technology acceptance model (David 1986), the most empirically tested model in information systems research, has been applied to the realm of employee benefits. Past studies suggest that the perceived ease of use helps determine the use of such benefits systems by employees (Li et al 2016). However, the researchers only looked at the direct antecedents of the intention to use within the original technology acceptance model.

Gamification presents a means to extend the basic technology acceptance model (TAM) model by including previously tested and validated antecedents; namely perceived enjoyment and computer playfulness. Incorporation of gaming elements into wellness programs can provide employees with a perceived level of enjoyment and

playfulness that in its self can outweigh the physical and mental health benefits the employees would gain. However, incorporation of such gaming elements can be challenging.

Dynamics 365 and Gamification

There are many vendor solutions at present that tout to be key players in the employee benefits management and healthcare space. Yet, not many solutions have comprehensive gaming elements well integrated with existing benefits systems. Microsoft Dynamics 365 is a solution that currently has gaming elements incorporated to it. In 2015, with the purchase of Incent Games LLC (Stutz 2015), Microsoft started integrating elements of FantasySales Team to Dynamics CRM. CRM involve three main elements which are information, people and processes.

Gamification makes parts of the CRM process a game and encourages competitive behavior. By doing so, Dynamics CRM is able to use motivational intrinsic psychological factors to create incentive based and fun based CRM features (Hosk 2015). With changing employee behavior as the ultimate goal, gamified tasks are created that promote wellness and create new habit forming routines. Dynamics 365 integrates the ERP and CRM elements into a comprehensive platform. Using gaming elements with existing human resource data on employees, Dynamics 365 can be used to develop interactive gamified wellness programs to manage employee health. The gamification elements presented in Dynamics 365 can develop and increase perceived enjoyment in using the wellness program as described in figure one. It can also increase the playfulness of the application which can increase a user's motivation to continue to use the wellness application.

De La Torre and Goetzel (2016) in Harvard Business Review indicate gamified wellness programs that are incentive and enjoyment based alone are insufficient to change employee behavior. They state that a healthy company culture must be built intentionally. Gamification must be support by the creation of “a way of life in the workplace that integrates a total health model into every aspect of business practice, from company policies to everyday work activities.”

CONCLUSION

Technology has changed the ways people interact and how companies conduct business. For a company to remain at the top of its industry, it must implement healthcare platforms to supplement their benefits package. These platforms can offer a new magnitude of value that will become increasingly apparent within the industry.

The latest healthcare platforms improve employee wellness and increase cost savings. By incorporating gamification in wellness programs, companies will be able to implement rewards systems to increase employee usage, and to eventually improve their overall health. Improving employee health will result in decreased healthcare costs for companies, and increased overall employee satisfaction.

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