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“What Does the Future Hold for
Corporate Wellness in Asia – What Can
Industry Do Better to Ensure Companies
Commit More Time, Resource and
Investment into Wellness Services/
Solutions/Activities/Facilities?”

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David Osborne
CEO
Virgin Pulse

The challenge to improve and maintain employee health and wellbeing is not unique to Western countries. It's a global issue, and at Virgin Pulse, we're pleased to see an increase in the number of corporations in Asia making this a priority. Corporations recognize that employees are working longer hours and spending less time taking care of themselves. They're not practicing healthy daily routines, and as a result, they're tired, stressed, unwell and unproductive. The good news is that companies are now investing in wellness programs – many have between 50 to 100 programs in place. Unfortunately, companies are not seeing improvements from these programs because employees aren't using them and often don't know such programs are available. If they do know about them, they find them difficult to use or unengaging. For wellness programs to work and deliver improvements, it's important that they meet employees where they are in their life and in their career. Industry can support companies by moving them towards solutions that address the whole-person and their unique needs as an individual. Offering a personal, fun and relevant experience that supports employees across the full health and wellbeing continuum will help drive employee participation in wellness programs and improve employee health – mentally, physically, socially, emotionally and financially. It is encouraging to see corporations in Asia viewing employee wellbeing as a company responsibility that includes a focus on health, wellbeing, productivity, purpose and financial security. This will continue to push them to take a strategic approach to wellbeing and embrace technology to drive improvements.



Giang Pham
Founder and CEO
bePrana Wellness

Well-being as part of corporate culture has been an ongoing trend and challenge in recent years. Our industry needs to make significant impacts to make this a new 'norm'. No wellness programs can create sustainable differences alone if corporate culture isn't aligning nor supportive. We can directly influence many clients but there are many ways the industry can act together to make greater new practices as well. For one we can improve entry-level assessments holistically. These would help (1) put the right participants into the right programs which is one of the two key aspects to gauging the success of corporate wellness programs. By improving the holistic entry level assessments, including lifestyle choices, genetics and social determinants, putting the right participants into the right programs would be more efficient. These would also help (2) risk assessment. This needs to go beyond eating right or exercising, to truly understand participants' holistic wellbeing, including social and emotional aspects, from their strengths, traits and struggles. Are these people sleeping well? What is keeping them up at night? Are they in the right jobs based on who they are at that time? Is their personality a good fit for where they are? Are they struggling with their boss or co-workers? Are they happy at home? Understanding these will involve a shift for many corporations and they will need support in doing this. They'll also need help deciding what to do with this data, how to build the best health and well-being packages for each person or a group of similar entry-level individuals. What else can the industry do? Another key point is to offer a diverse range of wellness programs. Since participants will have different entry-levels, there are essential needs for better adaptable and flexible programs to help them holistically, such as off-site or retreat vs. onsite programs. Success measurement is still a challenge [1] we all need to work on to ensure further adoption and growth. The outcomes from wellness programs or tools are long-term, thus it's very hard to measure whether one specific program or a group of programs has been successful from a health and returns point of view. Companies want to know: 'is this program actually reducing my costs?' We might be able to measure engagement or satisfaction improvement, or stress and blood pressure reduction, but it is still difficult to directly tie that to claim cost avoidance.

[1] <https://www.aetnainternational.com/en/about-us/explore/future-health/corporate-wellness-trends-2019.html>



Jessie Pavelka

Author, TV Personality,
Corporate Health Ambassador
and Co-Founder
Pavelka

The future of corporate wellness lies in a conversation that promotes permission – it should not be about reducing sick leave or increasing performance. So how do we define the measurement for success? What happens when we start to go beyond the standard metrics, and we delve into the feeling a culture provides? For decades we have tried to attack the demands of work life balance and integration with step trackers, nutrition seminars, motivational speakers or team building experiences. These all serve a purpose, but little attention and ownership has been placed on the corporation's culture and the DNA embedded in the company's method of execution. When you have a company that is constantly at war, your 'soldiers' are going to have short life spans. But if you have an organization that is about people and human connection, you will have a place where people want to live and contribute. Passion for a company doesn't exist without the company's compassion for its people. So how does this happen? In my view it requires a top down, bottom up solution where leaders can lead but also be human beings and individuals in teams feel safe and understood. Now this may come across as Erewhonian culture for the future of business, but these changes are already happening. My company, Pavelka, is working with global tech giant Cisco Systems, bringing a more 'human to human' focused solution to the hyper-dynamic always-switched-on culture that currently exists. We do support the need for 'on your screen' solutions such as challenge technology and online communities, webinars and newsletters. However, where we see the most impact is when we sit down with leaders and teams and start talking about life; human to human. When leaders show strength in vulnerability and when teams come together to get to know one another simply because it's how they function, that is the change we seek. The future of corporate wellness relies on culture where people are aware of themselves and others around them. It's a conversation; a shift in thinking and doing; a place where everyone has permission, support and the resources to grow and develop as human beings. So, when asked if their company takes care of them, the reply is always, without a doubt, YES.



Kerry Ball

Group Business Director
Everyone Wellness

Company wellness programs have largely failed, and I would know. From my activities in this space and months and months of research, it's clear why the hodgepodge industry of "corporate wellness" has detractors – particularly among the employees the programs are supposed to serve. Many of the programs are punitive, so they feel like something done to employees rather than for them. Even the most positive of these programs are often superficial – they don't elevate company culture, inspire commitment, and/or are not tied to business goals. Any program that alienates, annoys, and distracts those it means to serve will fail to deliver results in the long-term. There's no shortage of "wellness gone wrong" examples, starting with the programs that hold people accountable for achieving biometric values but never gave anyone a hint that the company understood or cared about their lives. And frankly, for every egregiously punitive approach, there were (and still are) 10 programs barely skimming the surface of their potential. They're feel-good distractions embraced by those already into the whole wellness genre and self-care. As corporate investments and priorities, they rank somewhere between the company party and bean bags in the conference rooms. Do they even matter? Most corporate wellness (now often called "well-being") programs have so far failed to deliver on their potential. But the good news is, with a more holistic well-being and engagement model, employers can achieve much bigger results than companies and employees have envisioned to date – results that go well beyond health and health costs to something richer: true work engagement. When real engagement commences, and the programs engage family members too then something magical can happen – we all "row the boat in the same direction".



Rosaline Chow Koo
Founder and CEO
CXA Group

With chronic diseases hitting people in Asia younger than in the West, at a lower BMI and with healthcare costs escalating, I was convinced the antiquated pen-and-paper, one-size-fits-all approach to managing employee health and health costs was systemically wrong. I set out, in 2013, to revolutionise the industry and started CXA. What was needed was a conscious shift in healthcare spend from treatment to prevention by both employers and employees. CXA has pioneered a one-stop platform that allows employers to give their employees access to a wide range of health, wealth and wellness offerings that are personally recommended based on AI machine learning combined with the use of the individual's health and life-stage data. For example, by drawing down on insurance policies provided by their employers which duplicate their own existing insurance and using funds that are released into the platform's eWallet, employees are empowered to purchase and make seamless, cashless payments for their own wellness choices. Through the aggregation, anonymisation and analysis of digitised health and life-stage data, CXA helps employers get to the root cause of their workforce's health issues and design specific interventions – such as corporate wellness and disease management initiatives – that will have the greatest impact on cost and health improvement. In an eight-week experiment on 200 employees, a total of 45 million steps were recorded from various fitness programs organised by the company. Employees lost a total of 360 cm around the waist and 60 kgs in weight. 43% reported feeling happier, 28% reported a reduction in stress levels and 66% reported increased physical activity both during and after the experiment. The program was a tremendous success and augurs well for the future of integrated corporate wellness programs. Through this approach, employees are not only happier as they get the benefits they want, they also become healthier too. CXA is today the leading health ecosystem platform that enables individuals across Asia to make better choices for healthier living, starting from the workplace. We also collaborate with corporations to design customised platform-led solutions for their B2B enterprise customers, and the employees of these enterprises.



Victoria Gilbert
Head of Wellness Consulting
(APAC)
Colliers International

Wellness is becoming a strategic priority for companies across the globe. Over the past few years there has been a significant uptake and rapid growth of wellness building projects in Asia Pacific – which looks set to continue. Business leaders have identified the 'war for talent' as their number one challenge in the region. Millennials – set to make up 75% of the workforce by 2025 – are more focused on their own well-being, changing expectations of the 'employee experience'. Furthermore, research shows that failing to take wellness into consideration has serious consequences for company productivity and your bottom line. It is therefore vital for companies to consider how they can embed wellness into the built environment, develop effective organisational policies, and positively influence employee behaviour. Industry needs to address the pain points of these companies – by developing services to improve well-being at scale, leveraging new technologies to facilitate the journey, and providing ways to measure the impacts. For many, the focus is shifting from 'what' wellness is and 'why' it's important, to asking 'how' to build effective wellness programmes and quantify the benefits to employee and corporate performance. If the wellness industry can provide tools to answer these questions, companies will be more willing to commit time and resources to implementing them. Efforts to enhance wellness will encounter multiple challenges, from budget limitations to lack of staff and/or management buy-in. It's crucial for corporates to create a wellness strategy that's core to its business and its employees, and not just an add-on. This will help practitioners narrow the gap between the growing understanding of the field of wellness and effectively engaging with industry experts to execute it.



Laura Ranin
Founder and CEO
Healthzilla

Workplace research states that employees are looking beyond compensation when it comes to corporate loyalty. Workplace wellness programs and perks are powerful assets to keep the team motivated and ensure their performance and well-being. The challenge for HR is how to prioritize and evaluate the effectiveness of any workplace wellness initiative offered to employees. With the recent advancements in wearable technology, HR can be more data-driven in corporate wellness programs. We see three key areas to work upon – (1) Collect, combine, analyze and action real data from your employees: Machine learning tools allow us to combine complex biometric and behavioural data from trackers, and events and performance data from company databases to estimate which corporate wellness actions & initiatives are the most efficient when it comes to wellbeing and performance of the employees. (2) Understand, create and cultivate a wellness ecosystem: Collaboration is required to help companies offer (and commit to) relevant workplace wellness actions and solutions. Wearables manufacturers, health tech companies, occupational health care specialists, workplace wellness providers and HR departments need to work together and share best practices and data to ensure the best outcomes for the employees. (3) Measure the ROI of your wellness activities: Tracked, real-time data is key to assess the impact and efficacy of each corporate wellness initiative. Right data, right ecosystem and right tools allow us to measure the ROI of all workplace wellness initiatives and assess what works and what doesn't. After all, would you rather throw money into initiatives based on gut feeling or make informed decisions based on actual, measured data?



Amanda Mercep
Head of Wellbeing Solutions,
North Asia
Aon

While 95% of employers globally see a correlation between employee health and performance, only 5% of employers in Asia offer some form of wellbeing initiatives, according to the Global Wellness Institute. We see this as a signal that Asia is a ripe landscape for employers to adopt wellbeing practices into their workplaces, which will drive the market to provide more comprehensive and innovative solutions to support delivery. Whilst medical inflation across APAC continues to be high, employers are rightfully focusing their efforts not just on controlling costs but also on employee engagement. This is demonstrated in Aon's 2019 Asia Pacific Employee Wellbeing Survey [1], where the top three objectives for implementing wellbeing programs are related to engagement, increasing productivity, and brand enhancement (talent attraction). That managing medical spend was cited as a lower priority is suspected to be due to the realization by employers that proving a positive return on investment can take time and is often hard to quantify. There is more of an appreciation now, from HR and wellbeing managers up to the C-suite, that wellbeing programs can be an effective means to boost productivity and engagement as well as serve as a tool for brand enhancement and talent attraction. To best engage employees, employers need to understand the current health of their employee population, develop tailored solutions that focus both on prevention and treatment, partner with the right vendors for execution, and track outcomes to prove efficacy. To accomplish all this, it's not surprising that many employers are looking to technology solutions such as wearable tracking, medical health apps, and telemedicine as a means to reach their employees. With multi-generational, geographically spread, and culturally diverse workforces (that are common across Asia), we anticipate a growing interest and reliance on health technology in forming an effective wellbeing strategy.

[1] <https://www.aon.com/apac/2019wellbeingstudy>



Daniel Remon
CEO
Fitcorp Group

Firstly, we need to redefine wellness. Let's establish engagement and performance as critically essential elements to team and organizational success. It has been suggested that the corporate wellness market will be worth USD\$7.4Bn by 2024, up from USD\$3.4Bn in 2015. That's massive growth and opportunity – when done 'well'. Success of the corporate market will come down to the 4 key areas. (1) Data driven, behavioural based programs. Results are in the data. Habits change when we understand human behaviour. The more we can show early return on investment, that programs work, that generate returns, the more companies will invest. (2) Listen more. Don't assume. Assess, survey, evaluate. Understanding the needs and interests of companies and individuals is critical. This extends to then developing inclusive programs that offer 'something for everyone'. (3) Focus more on 'corporate culture'. We are talking performance and profitability. Programs need be part of the entire corporate strategy and not simply wellness or fitness. (4) Education. Effective doesn't mean expensive. Companies need to engage with experts to consult, and develop long-term strategies that are cost effective, have impact in the entire organization and generation financial returns. Bottom line is, improve the bottom line. The faster and more effectively programs show a short ROI, through tracking the financial cost and return on engagement, talent attraction and retention, talent development, productivity, insurance premiums and medical claim trends, the faster the industry will grow. We need to combine technology with effective and powerful programs that influence people, performance and the corporate culture.



Tifenn Durieux
Senior Associate
Mercer Marsh Benefits,
Mercer (Hong Kong)

Health needs have considerably evolved over the past decades [1]. Chronic diseases, such as cancer and diabetes, are responsible for the majority of global health spend and we know they are mainly caused by four modifiable risk behaviours (tobacco, diet, activity, alcohol). Workers with chronic diseases are 6 times more absent than healthy workers and have higher utilization of the health plans, affecting claims. Employers in Asia have shown an increasing interest in offering services to address these changing needs. But if they are not part of a broader strategy, these services fail with low utilization levels and limited impact on employees' risk behaviours. So, what's the recipe to create meaningful wellbeing strategies? It starts by adopting a holistic lens, considering the four wellbeing pillars (physical, emotional, social, and financial), that are all interconnected. For instance, an employee facing cancer will need counselling, financial support and will inevitably need to share their experience with their colleagues. Services offered to employees also need to cover the entire health risk spectrum, targeting the "well" through education and prevention and the "ill" via more personalized support, such as return to work programs. To push Employee Value Propositions to the next level, we support employers in: (1) Adopting a more data driven approach, to encourage companies to take action and better understand their employees' health profile; (2) Partnering with the right vendors, to co-design the services that meet employees' specific needs, such as education programs (health talks, trainings, etc.), prevention services (stress checks, screenings, etc.) and quality care delivery (onsite clinics, network of providers); (3) Boosting employees' engagement in using the services, through an effective and dynamic communication (digital ads, guidebook, infographies, etc); and (4) Regularly measuring and monitoring the impacts of the wellbeing strategy, with a view to continuously improve services offered.

[1] World Health Organization; Effect of Chronic Diseases on Work Productivity: A Propensity Score Analysis, J Occup Environ Med, 2017)



Jeames Gillett
COO
WellteQ

If you had asked me that question five years ago the answer would have been very different to what it is today. Until very recently, corporate wellness was next to non-existent in Asia, and whilst it still has a considerable journey ahead when compared to more mature markets like US, UK and Australia, the openness to learn more about new technology innovations has seen the wellness industry come online in a big way. In my opinion, this is primarily being led by the insurance industry and their adoption of health tech solutions. We're starting to see global insurance players with experience in these more mature markets bundle wellness services into their product offering as a value-added service or as part of their benefit plans. With regards to corporations, many senior leaders are still undergoing a process of education into why wellbeing is vital to a successful business. Wellbeing is a difficult end destination as is demonstrated by the state of today's population health, but the implementation of preventative wellness programs now will support a business to get ahead of risk, ultimately impacting on insurance premium increases year on year, in the future. It's a common concern from C-suite executives that they feel the risk is redirecting company budget onto these programs, but new technology innovations have catapulted the wellness industry in a big way. The sheer amount of data-driven insights that can be derived from fitness trackers, smart phones and smart watches has changed the utilization cases for businesses, and it's down to the wellness industry to take the time to explain this. Every year there are numerous CEO surveys carried out that attempt to look into the minds of those at the forefront of global commerce, and frequently the number one concern is talent. While it seems like everyone knows healthy and happy employees are good for productivity, many fail to link the true return on investment into corporate wellness being an integral part of their engagement, retention and talent attraction strategy, not to mention the effect it can have on operational efficiency, service and product innovation and customer brand loyalty. Executives who are implementing wellness programs often treat it perfunctorily and without any thought into how this can really map to the delivery of key business outcomes. Those in the wellness industry need to demonstrate how wellbeing can directly impact top and bottom lines, growth and shareholder returns using ROI modelling, profitability calculators and risk-reduction methodologies. The future is very promising for corporate wellness in Asia, but not without assistance from those that work across the wellness industry. The rise in health care costs and chronic health diseases is impacting organisations across the region, and this falls on the shoulders of everyone to look into their own lifestyles and daily habits. Technology continues to play its part in automating all industries which means now is the time for businesses to invest into its people. With commitment from company boardrooms to ensure there is the necessary budget for wellbeing initiatives, wellness professionals can underpin an integrated long-term business strategy towards human capital optimisation.

A big thank you to this month's contributors



To be involved in future question's of the month please contact:

Ross Campbell

Founder and CEO

ross@thefitsummit.com

+65 8268 9834

Daylin Limonte

Head, Marketing &
Communications

day@thefitsummit.com

+65 8132 7534

www.thefitsummit.com