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The rising cost of healthcare and decline in the overall workforce health and wellness is a serious concern for employers. A healthy workforce is critical to the overall mission of an organization and the individual employees' quality of life. One proven way to improve the overall health and wellness of employees is to implement a workplace wellness program. These programs can lead to improved employee retention, job satisfaction, productivity, presenteeism and overall reduced healthcare costs. Despite these benefits, low participation in workplace wellness programs is common. Research to understand why employees participate, or not, in their workplace wellness program is necessary to curb the rising cost of health care, increase health and wellness, and to develop recommendations to improve overall program participation.

The current study focused on a medium-sized municipality in central North Carolina, that employs approximately 1,400 employees across 24 departments. The employees have access to a workplace wellness program with a variety of amenities but yields less than 50% participation (ranging between 300-400 participants per calendar year). Municipality employees (n = 239) completed a survey that included questions examining familiarity with the workplace wellness program, reasons for participation or not, and suggestions to improve the workplace wellness program. Employees agreed the municipality had a strong wellness program. Personal health, enjoyment, and incentives were identified as specific motivating factors for participation. Specific barriers to engaging in their workplace wellness program included time/scheduling and location convenience. This research suggests that employees need to be aware of their workplace wellness program, incentives need to be provided, accommodating time/scheduling, and events at convenient locations to improve employee participation.

EMPLOYEE WELLNESS PROGRAMS: WHY EMPLOYEES
CHOOSE TO PARTICIPATE

by

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Approved by

Dr. Pam K. Brown
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DEDICATION

The journey was not easy and there were many detours along the way, but my community showed up and we crossed the finish line together. First, thank you to my husband (Kevin) who embarked on this journey with me before we were married. Not only did we marry along the way but also grew our family and changed professions. More importantly, we have been blessed with an amazing son, Kameron Gary, who was the best setback along the way. Thank you to my Good Vibe Tribe (Lisa, Marlee, Nancy, Thayle & Tracie) who were essential in keeping me on track and moving forward. The EdD program at UNCG allowed me to meet some truly inspirational colleagues and friends. Thank you to my Bitmoji crew (Chris, Katie & Trisha) who helped every step of the way. Also, thank you to the other amazing colleagues and friends that always showed up when needed (2018 Cohort). I would be remiss to not mention my late mother, Kim Hunter, who cheered me on at every moment and passed away on Kameron's first birthday. I know she is continuing to cheer us on as our family accomplishes this milestone together. Finally, thank you to my patient and supportive faculty committee (Dr. Brown, Dr. Gill & Dr. Weaver) who challenged me every step of the way.

I can do hard things.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I: PROJECT OVERVIEW

Over the past twenty-five years, workplace wellness programs have been growing into existence and more recently, in popularity (SHRM, 2020). Research has demonstrated that workplace wellness programs can increase employee retention, job satisfaction, productivity, presenteeism and potentially reduce healthcare costs (Isson, et al.; Sabharwal, 2019; Song, 2019). The CDC (Center for Disease Control) research shows that a workplace wellness program can lead to 25% savings on health care costs (Control Health Care Costs, 2015). Today's typical workplace wellness programs can include (but not limited to) health/wellness incentives, exercise programs/activities, fitness center memberships, health screenings, health risk assessments, nutrition education, stress reduction programs, vaccination clinics, weight loss programs, and tobacco cessation programs (Abraham, 2019; Isson, et al., 2016; SHRM, 2020).

Despite the known benefits of workplace wellness programs, there continues to be low participation rates. Therefore, determining why employees participate can help with developing strategies to increase participation. The implementation of recommendations to increase participation in workplace wellness programs will produce improved outcomes and contribute significantly to the field of kinesiology and workplace wellness.

Background Literature

Today people are spending more time in work environments that limit physical activity and impact overall wellness (physical, mental, emotional, etc.). One of those shifts includes moving from physically demanding jobs to jobs with minimal physical challenges and this has contributed to the increased need for workplace wellness (Owen, 2010). Employees can experience improved quality of life from participation in employer-initiated workplace wellness programs (Bhardwaj, 2019; Joslin, 2006). Organizations, and employers, that offer a workplace

wellness program for their employees focus on reducing overall health care costs, employee retention, job satisfaction, presenteeism and improving the well-being of their employees (Isson, et al.; Sabharwal, 2019). To achieve these outcomes, workplace wellness programs must be inclusive of a variety of job types, examine employee motivation to participate, and understand employee perceptions of the workplace wellness program.

Participation

The understanding of employees' motivation to participate, or not, in workplace wellness programs is critical and could help generate increased participation and outcomes (Oman & McAuley, 1993; Ott-Holland, 2019; Seifert, 2012). Employee participation in workplace wellness programs has been relatively low for decades (Linnan et al., 2001). Identifying the influential factors to employee participation in workplace wellness programs and other strategies that employers use to generate employee interest can assist in this dilemma.

The incentives that the employer offers their employees in exchange for their participation in workplace wellness programs are important to understand because they can be a significant factor of motivation to participate. For example, the medium-sized municipality in central North Carolina (will be referred to as municipality A moving forward) offers their employees discounts on their co-pays and prescriptions, money, and various tangible prizes (i.e., shoes, fresh produce, appliances, bicycles, exercise equipment). To generate the participation desired, the employer needs to earn the buy-in and trust from their employees. Strategies to generate the necessary employee buy-in include employee feed-back, ideas, communication, education, and their overall experience (Isson, et al., 2016; Person, et al., 2010).

Continued research in workplace wellness programs' participation is critical as it can reveal gaps in current employer practices. Current research and literature are scattered and

provides little guidance specific to participation in workplace wellness programs. Continued relevant research can assist in understanding the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ employees participate in workplace wellness programs. Specifically, the determination of employees’ current knowledge of the wellness program, reasons employees participate or not and solicitation of feedback to improve the program can help to improve the overall participation rate.

Job Roles, Responsibilities & Culture

The culture of an organization is an important consideration regarding overall employee engagement and participation. Organizations focus on culture just as much as they focus on the bottom line (Feltner, 2017). Historically, organizational culture was found to be a key role in assisting employees in adopting healthier lifestyles. Organizational culture, as it relates to employee wellness, can be assessed utilizing a variety of tools including the WELCOA Health Culture Survey (WELCOA, 2023). By examining the social expectation for behavior and creating cultural norms to support participation this information can be valuable to improve culture and increase participation in the workplace wellness program. Examples of cultural norms that can be modified, or influenced, include modeling behavior, incentives, confrontation, training, orientation, relations, resource allocation, and communication. Specifically, the changes can be facilitated through individual employee behavior change, team dynamics, leadership, and organization task forces (Allen, 1989). Today, organizational culture is key to employee wellness because the value of any program can be tailored to a culture to optimize participation in the workplace wellness program. The same cultural norms can be modified to reverse unsupported cultures which can be an impediment to the workplace wellness program success (Allen, 2019).

Important to today’s workplace culture is understanding the diversity that exists in employee populations. Diversity in the workplace has different elements. Those elements include

job responsibilities, job type, physical job locations, facility type, available resources, and demographics. Demographics include age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and experience. To effectively address overall workplace wellness participation, the employer needs to understand the demographic make-up of their employee population and diversity of their work setting, job role, and responsibilities. When the employer understands the job role and responsibilities of each employee, they can design a workplace wellness program that will meet their needs and accommodate all employees. As a result, the workplace wellness program will be more inclusive and improve the overall health and wellbeing of the employee (Howard, 2019). The combination of job roles, job responsibilities, and culture offers a clear understanding to help develop and implement a successful workplace wellness program that will yield higher participation.

Development, Implementation & Best Practices

Best practices for the implementation of a workplace wellness program are available through various organizations but lack uniformity and consistency. For example, according to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) a successful workplace wellness program should include a baseline survey, identification of a senior leader who will support/participate, bold decisions to implement change, incentives for employees, and frequent updates shared with both the employees and management (Isson, et al., 2016; Miller, 2019). These factors work together to generate a workplace wellness program that will work best for their employees and encourage participation. Continued examination of how these factors influence participation and results is an ongoing process that goes beyond implementation. Ideally, the implementation of best practices should yield the results sought after in a workplace wellness program but that is not always the case due to lack of funding, participation, or implementation strategies.

There is little research on how employers develop and implement a workplace wellness program that yields higher participation rates (Hughes et al., 2011). Organizations, such as SHRM and WELCOA (Wellness Council of America), offer guidelines and suggestions for best practices but with minimal uniformity and continuity from employer-to-employer. This lack of unity and continuity makes the current research difficult to generalize. For example, a study on university workplace wellness programs can be vastly different from a study on municipality workplace wellness programs because of employee duties, responsibilities, facilities, locations, and dynamics of the organization. Another difference is the scheduling of programming would need to be different in a setting of higher education versus a municipality as their hours of operation can vary significantly. Research performed on municipalities indicates that governmental organizations typically lag in workplace wellness programs as compared to the private sector because of lack of funding (Otenyo & Smith, 2017). Research also indicates that there are geographical implications of development and implementation of workplace wellness programs. For example, organizations are likely to develop and implement workplace wellness initiatives that best reflect the state of health and well-being of their employee base. As a result, some organizations may find it easier to implement the initiatives based on available resources due to their geographical location (Otenyo & Smith, 2017). For example, an organization that is in a climate that has extreme weather conditions could be confined to indoor programming and limited options as compared to an organization in another location with a different climate. Overall, there are many strategies that employers can use to implement a workplace wellness program. In addition to these strategies, employee participation is critical to understand to capitalize on the development and implementation of a workplace wellness program specific to municipality A.

Purpose Statement & Research Aims

The purpose of this study was to determine the reasons that municipality A's employees participate, or not participate, in their employee wellness program. In addition, the study explored the employees' current knowledge of their workplace wellness program and solicited feedback on how to improve the program to increase employee participation or sustain current employee participation level.

The specific aims were to determine municipality A's employees' current knowledge about the workplace wellness program; determine the reasons why the municipality A employees choose to participate, or not, in the workplace wellness program; and determine the municipality A employees' suggestions to improve the workplace wellness program.

Methods

The research design was an exploratory case study, which was selected due to the lack of detailed preliminary research and this type of research aims to answer how or why questions which reflect the aims of this study. In addition, the case study approach was also important because of the ability to evaluate and implement changes for municipality A. To address the research aims, this study employed a survey (see Appendix A for complete survey) approach to understand the motivation and perceptions of municipality A's employees (Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Participants & Setting

Municipality A's current workplace wellness program is designed to improve the health and well-being of employees. This is accomplished through educational seminars, virtual programs, onsite in-person programs, digital platforms, aggregate data, community partners, and one on one services. The program addresses physical, emotional, mental health, intellectual,

financial, nutritional, professional, and personal wellness to provide a holistic approach to health and wellness.

The target population for this study was municipality A's employees. When municipality A is at full capacity the workforce is approximately 1,400 employees, across 24 departments, 520 different job titles, and 24 different working shifts. The participation goal was approximately 280 (of 1400) participants or 20% of the population, based on participation goals used in prior workplace wellness studies (Creswell, 2016; Fink, 2020; Perrault et al., 2020). However, at the time of the study, the employee base was composed of 1,060 employees due to 340 unfilled vacancies. The study yielded 239 participants, which exceeded the goal of 20% considering the staffing shortage during the study.

This study used convenience sampling, in which the sample is drawn from a population that is easily accessible. The survey was administered online using Qualtrics, for participants to complete from their phone, laptop, computer, or tablet. Key sample demographics are described below and are based only on those who responded, with a full summary provided in Appendix B.

General Demographics

Of those who responded (n = 185), 110 (59.5%) identified as female, 71 (38.4%) identified as male, 1 (0.5%) identified as non-binary and 3 (1.6%) preferred to not disclose. The ages of the participants were spread across the ranges, 6 (3.2%) between 18 and 24, 34 (18.4%) between 25 and 34, 38 (20.5%) between 35 and 44, 50 (27.0%) between 45 and 54, 45 (24.3%) between 55 and 64, 8 (4.3%) 65 and over and 4 (2.2%) preferred to not disclose. The participants predominately identified as 135 (73.0%) White/Caucasian, with other racial/ethnic identities also represented including 34 (18.4%) Black/African American, 2 (1.1%) Hispanic/Latino and 2

(1.1%) Other. Additionally, 6 (3.2%) of participants selected two or more racial/ethnic identities and 6 (3.2%) preferred to not disclose (see Appendix B for complete demographics).

Employees who responded were from 24 departments of municipality A (n = 185). Representation from the departments included 2 (1.1%) from the City Attorney, 1 (0.5%) from the City Management, 1 (0.5%) from Communication & Public Engagement, 1 (0.5%) from Community Development & Housing, 3 (1.6%) from Customer Service, 4 (2.2%) from Economic Development, 1 (0.5%) from Electric, (4) 2.2% from Engineering, 3 (1.6%) from Facility Services, 4 (2.2%) from Finance, 6 (3.2%) from Fire, 1 (0.5%) from Fleet Services, 5 (2.7%) from High Point 911, 3 (1.6%) from Human Resources, 5 (2.7%) from Information Technology Services, 3 (1.6%) from Inspections Services, 33 (17.8%) from the Library, 11 (5.9%) from the Museum, 13 (17.0%) from Parks & Recreation, 5 (2.7%) from Planning & Development, 14 (7.6%) from Police, 40 (21.6%) from Public Service, 3 (1.1%) from Theatre, 4 (2.2%) from Transit, 10 (5.4%) from Transportation and 1 (0.5%) preferred to not disclose. The employment status of those who responded included 165 (89.2%) full-time, 10 (5.4%) part-time benefited, 9 (4.9%) part-time and 1 (0.5%) contract/temporary. Participants work across four shifts with 156 (84.3%) that work 1st shift, 6 (3.2%) work 2nd shift, 3 (1.6%) work 3rd shift and 17 (9.2%) work rotating shift. Most employees that participated do not work weekends (68, 36.8%), occasionally work weekends (51, 27.6%), sometimes work weekends (43, 23.2%) and regularly work weekends (23, 12.4%).

Survey Measures

The primary measure was a survey distributed to municipality A's employees to gather information on the employees' reasons to participate, or not participate; their knowledge of the workplace wellness program; and suggestions to improve the program.

Prior to data collection a pilot study was conducted to identify revisions needed prior to implementing the full survey. Two pilot groups were identified based on expertise pertaining to 1) municipality A and 2) the survey structure. The first pilot group of nine colleagues familiar with Qualtrics and survey research completed the survey to identify any potential issues with the wording of the questions, order of the questions, structure of the questions, and the collection process. The second pilot group was comprised of seven municipality A employees to identify potential issues as it pertains to content of the survey (i.e., subject matter). These seven employees were excluded from the final data collection. Suggestions for improvement led to changes in the background color of the Likert scale questions, ability to click multiple items on questions such as the types of programs (question three), expansion of the informed consent and benefits and risk of participation, addition of IRB approval statement and relevant contact information. The survey took approximately five minutes to complete.

First, demographic information was collected including gender, age, race/ethnicity, employment status, shift and educational background. Following the demographics, participants knowledge was assessed with one item that asked if they had ever participated in wellness program (Yes/No) and a Likert rating asking how familiar they were with the current workplace wellness program on a one to five scale (one being not at all familiar and five being extremely familiar).

The WELCOA Health/Wellness Culture Scale was used (WELOCA, 2023) to assess employees' perception of their employer's health culture, with 14 items such as "being healthy is important to me or in my company," and "a strong wellness program is in place for all employees." Items are rated on a scale from one to five (one being strongly disagree and five being strongly agree).

The main part of the survey asked why employees participate, or do not participate, in their current workplace wellness program. The first section asked participants how much each of the reasons influenced participation using a Likert scale from one to five (one being not at all and five being totally). Reasons included others' encouragement (friends, family, co-workers, etc.), convenient location, convenient time/schedule, enjoyment/interest, incentives, personal health benefits, and support company culture. These reasons were developed by the researcher based on previous research done on workplace wellness programs. The next section included a similar list of barriers to participation. Barriers included include work schedule ("work long hours", "does not work with my schedule", "times/locations/options", "time", "time restrictions"), lack of interest ("a topic I am not interested in", "not interested in topic", "some don't interest me"), and not permitted ("not all departments are given the time", "my direct department does not have a supportive culture", "having to use vacation or comp time").

The final component included open-ended questions to address the third aim: to collect municipality A's employees' preferences and suggestions to improve the workplace wellness program. These questions included what you like most about the workplace wellness program; what you like least about the workplace wellness program; if someone asked you about the workplace wellness program, what would you say to them; and how can we improve our workplace wellness program. See Appendix A for the full survey.

Procedures for Data Collection

Approval was obtained from municipality A's management to distribute the survey to employees. This letter of approval was included with the IRB application (see Appendix C for letter of approval). Next IRB approval was received through the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Upon IRB approval, the survey was sent to all 1,060 current employees via email

(see Appendix D for recruitment email) in December of 2022. To meet the target participation goal of 20% (280 participants), the survey was resent via email after the holiday season (January 2023). The survey was open for six weeks prior to data analysis and yielded 239 participants (22.5%), which exceeded the goal considering the staffing shortage during the time of the study.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of data collection through Qualtrics, the data were downloaded into SPSS for data analysis. Survey responses were analyzed descriptively (mean, standard deviation and frequencies) using the SPSS software. An independent t-test and chi-square test were used to examine the relationship between familiarity with workplace wellness programs and participation. P-values were considered significant at the 0.05 level. In addition, another independent t-test was used to examine the relationship between participants and non-participants and their corresponding sum of the WELCOA culture assessment. The open-ended, exploratory questions were grouped by common responses into categories and frequencies were reported. First, the researcher reviewed the results of the open-ended questions. After reviewing, the researcher identified common themes and responses. The researcher went through the data again and categorized the responses based on the common themes and responses identified. Finally, the responses were analyzed with frequencies based on the coding described above.

Results

A total of 22.5% (n = 239) employees participated in the study. Most of the participants, 159 (85.9%), indicated that they have participated in municipality A's workplace wellness program and 26 (14.1%) indicated they did not participate. The survey assessed overall familiarity. Most respondents (76, 41.1%) indicate that they are very familiar with the program and overall, the respondents (177, 95.7%) indicate some sort of familiarity. The eight

respondents that indicated that they were not familiar at all with the wellness program also indicated they have not participated. A chi-square test of independence (Table 1) found a statistically significant relationship between participation and familiarity of municipality A’s employee workplace wellness program, $\chi^2(4, N = 185) = 81.8, p < .001$.

Table 1. Participation v Familiarity (n = 163)

Participation v Familiarity		Familiarity			
		Not familiar at all	Slightly familiar	Moderately familiar	Very familiar
Participation	No	8	13	3	1
	Yes	0	19	44	75
Total		8	32	47	76

The WELCOA cultural questionnaire was used to understand municipality A’s employees’ perceptions. Results indicate that employees believe their municipality cares about their health, has a strong wellness program in place, rewards them for healthy practices, promotes a smoke free environment and has a team that facilitates wellness programming, which can be found in Table 2. Employees disagree that the municipality leaders model healthy behaviors. Overall, the cultural scores (M=51.82, SD=8.78) from the employees reflect a high positive rate. As with the familiarity scores, the wellness culture scores of participants and non-participants were compared. A total score of the 14 items was calculated and a t-test was used to compare the groups. The participants had significantly, $t(174) = -2.85, p < .05$, higher scores (M=52.54) than the non-participants (M=47.04) although both groups gave positive ratings.

Table 2. WELCOA Cultural Questionnaire

Question	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	<i>n</i>	M	SD
Municipality cares about my health status	8	3	19	90	62	182	4.07	0.66
Encouraged by municipality to lead healthy life	6	8	31	80	58	183	3.96	0.74
Municipality has strong wellness program	5	7	25	66	76	179	4.12	0.62
Municipality leaders model healthy practices	18	48	88	22	5	181	2.71	1.62
Employees rewarded for healthy lifestyles	4	5	27	83	60	179	4.06	0.66
Employees recognized for healthy lifestyles	7	27	76	47	24	181	3.29	1.21
Employees supported for healthy lifestyles	4	7	37	85	48	181	3.92	0.76
Healthy food options available	17	36	101	24	44	222	3.19	1.28
Smoke-free environment is promoted	4	13	29	64	69	179	4.01	0.70
Team that oversees wellness	4	7	36	62	72	181	4.05	0.67
Exercise during day is normal	11	28	53	69	21	182	3.34	1.17
Eating healthy is normal	8	23	72	61	17	181	3.31	1.20
Using safety belt is normal	4	6	41	51	79	181	4.08	0.65
Not smoking is normal	3	18	72	60	29	182	3.52	1.05

Employees rated the reasons to participate (listed in the first column of Table 3) on how much they influenced their participation from not at all (1) to totally (5). Employees gave the highest ratings for personal health benefits (M = 4.27), incentives (M = 4.20), and enjoyment (M

= 4.06). Given that all reasons had high ratings it appears that employees have multiple motives or reasons to participate.

Table 3. Employee Reasons to Participate

Reason	Not at All	Slightly	Somewhat	Very Much	Totally	<i>n</i>	M	SD
Other's Encouragement	18	24	59	50	30	181	3.28	1.18
Convenient Location	7	13	36	79	45	180	3.79	1.03
Convenient Time	7	14	32	75	51	179	3.83	1.05
Enjoyment	2	11	22	85	60	180	4.06	0.89
Incentives	1	5	30	65	78	179	4.20	0.86
Personal Health Benefits	2	4	16	79	79	180	4.27	0.80
Company Culture	4	15	38	73	50	180	3.83	1.00

The barriers to employees' participation were measured using a similar Likert rating of how much each reason influenced their participation from not at all (1) to totally (5) (Table 4). These barriers were developed by the researcher based on previous research done on employee workplace wellness programs. The highest rated barriers were time (M = 3.04), schedule (M = 2.92) and location (M = 2.64). It appears that the biggest barriers to participation are factors that can be changed and will be included in the recommendations.

Table 4. Employee Barriers to Participation

Barriers	Not at All	Slightly	Somewhat	Very Much	Totally	<i>n</i>	M	SD
Location	48	31	39	28	20	166	2.64	1.37
Schedule	40	28	32	41	27	168	2.92	1.42
Incentives	89	26	30	15	8	168	1.97	1.23
Lack of Awareness	95	26	29	7	9	166	1.85	1.18
Lack of Others Encouragement	108	29	21	5	4	167	1.61	0.98
Lack of Interest	85	32	35	10	6	167	1.93	1.13
Personal Health Benefits	119	13	28	4	3	167	1.56	0.97
Time	33	17	46	48	21	165	3.04	1.31
Trust/Privacy Concerns	116	21	16	10	4	167	1.59	1.04
Unsupportive Company Culture	116	19	18	10	5	168	1.63	1.08

Open-Ended Responses

The open-ended responses yielded the results in Tables 5-9. The labels are listed in the tables in order from most to least frequent, with examples of participant responses included in last column of each table.

Table 5. Reasons for Participating in the Wellness Program (*n* = 185)

Reasons	Frequency	Example Responses
Personal Health Benefits	74	health benefits, healthy lifestyle, improve wellbeing
Incentives	52	money, incentives that are offered, HSA \$, Cigna points
Social Interaction	19	peers' encouragement, friendships, support
Accountability	12	a sense of accountability, accountability while at work, provides great encouragement and motivation
Enjoyment	11	Enjoy, it's fun, enjoyment
Convenience	10	workday hours, dates/times of events, convenient and relevant
Does Not Participate	7	haven't participated in years, I don't, n/a

Examining why employees participate in their workplace wellness program offers information that can help to promote and encourage other employees (that are not participating) to participate. The most frequent reasons were personal health benefits, enjoyment, and incentives. These three reasons are significant and will be included in the recommendations for improved employee participation in the workplace wellness program.

Table 6. Reasons Preventing Participation (n = 149)

Prevent Participation	Frequency	Example Responses
Work Schedule	79	work long hours, does not work, with my schedule, times/locations/options, time, time restrictions
Lack of Interest	23	a topic I am not interested in, not interested in topic, some don't interest me
Participates	23	none, nothing, I do participate
Not Permitted	15	not all departments are given the time, my direct department does not have a supportive culture, having to use vacation or comp time
Lack of Awareness	6	I did not know we had this, awareness, not knowing it exists
Lack of Incentives	3	Money, rewards

The work schedule clearly was the largest barrier to participation. In addition, lack of interest and not being permitted to participate were frequent in responses. Examples of the barriers are included in Table 6 in the last column. These barriers can be addressed to allow more accessibility for employees to participate in municipality A's workplace wellness program. Based on these findings, recommendations were made to accommodate the diverse work schedules of the employee population of municipality A.

Table 7. What Would Encourage Participation (n = 162)

Reasons	Frequency	Example Responses
Incentives	28	\$ incentives, better incentives, more gifts, earn PTO
Participates Regardless	27	I'm pretty active in the programs, n/a, none
Schedule Options	27	schedule flexibility, time, work schedule time during the work day to stop and focus on health and wellness, participate on duty, programs that work within the hours I'm at work
Permission to Participate During Work Hours	22	more opportunities at facilities, more options, more programs
More Variety/Options	20	gym in my building, onsite gym, equipment onsite
Fitness Facility	15	more knowledge, if I knew about it, step by step instruction
More Awareness	12	location, better location, being able to participate in my building that I work in
Location	11	support from supervisors, support from boss, stronger company culture that pushes or always more people to participate
Lack of Leadership Support	10	

When employees were asked what would encourage them to either sustain their participation or begin to participate it is evident that more incentives, scheduling options, permission to participate during work hours, and more variety and options would be most desired. It is also noted that a large majority indicated they would participate regardless.

Table 8. Characteristics Most Liked/Least Likes About the Wellness Program

Most Liked Characteristics			Least Liked Characteristics		
Label	#	Example Responses	Label	#	Examples Responses
Incentives	55	financial incentives, free, great incentives	None	48	hard to say, have nothing bad to say, I like everything about the program, n/a
Social/Motivation	33	encourages team play, wellness analyst, motivation provided by others	Scheduling	26	meetings during the times, hard to get to events, not always convenient time
Innovation & Variety	31	variety of options, variety, very holistic	Other	14	opportunity, only once a month, scale, not enough incentives
Inclusive	16	inclusive, options for all, easy	Location	10	inconvenient location, leaving my workspace
Overall Program	15	everything, program, it's a good program	Lack of Innovation/Variety	9	repetitive topics, need more challenges
Improved Wellness	14	impact on my health and well-being, meet your goals, become a healthier version of myself	Lack of Social/Motivation	8	overall lack of participation of other employees, that more people don't take advantage of it
Other	7	facility, equipment, gym	Lack of Awareness	7	short notice for many of programs

Employees enjoy the extrinsic motivators the most in their wellness program. Lead factors include incentives, social interaction/motivation, innovation and variety. Considering these factors can help improve the overall participation and are included in the recommendations.

Most of the employees indicated that there was not an aspect they liked least, however other most frequent responses included scheduling and location. These considerations are included in the recommendations to solicit increased participation and align with the barriers to participation.

Table 9. Suggested Improvements of the Wellness Program (n = 134)

Suggestions	#	Examples
Nothing	36	nothing
More Variety	28	offer more options, opportunities targeted toward mental health, more lunch and learns
Leadership Support	15	allow their employees to participate, higher level management needs to fully care about employee health and wellness, those that supervise know about it and allow their employees to participate
Permission to Participate During Work Hours	13	allow employee programs to count as work time, allow incentives to be done on duty
Incentives	11	more incentives, money, earned PTO
Accessibility	11	better access to online content, workout room onsite
Awareness	10	advertise the winners and participants more, continued reminders, full functioning website
More Scheduling Options	10	lunch hours or after 4 pm

Employees indicate that opportunity to improve their wellness program predominantly includes adding more variety. The variety suggested includes mental health programming, physical activity programming, nutrition programming and more overall programming. Leadership support and permission to participate during work hours are also suggestions that employees offered. Each of these suggestions are included in the recommendations and will serve as potential factors to improve overall participation for municipality A.

Discussion

The study revealed employees' awareness of their workplace wellness program, reasons they do or do not participate, and suggested improvements to municipality A's current workplace wellness program. In general, respondents of municipality A indicate overall satisfaction with the current workplace wellness program. Strategies to generate the necessary employee buy-in include employee feed-back, ideas, communication, education, and their overall experience

(Isson, et al, 2016). Recommendations, based on the results of this study, include addressing the employees' knowledge of the workplace wellness program, participation in their workplace wellness program and suggestions to improve the workplace wellness program.

Municipality A's employees' current knowledge about the workplace wellness program was associated with their participation. Participants that were more familiar with the workplace wellness program was more likely to participate. This supports research that that it is critical to generate the necessary employee communication and education to solicit improved buy-in and participation (Isson, et al, 2016). When employees were asked what they would say to others about their workplace wellness program most indicated they would encourage them to participate. In addition to participating in general, the employees indicated they would share information regarding innovation and variety, results, and incentives. With such a large number of employees (123) that would encourage participation, this could be an opportunity to impact overall participation and demonstrates the current knowledge of employees addressed in this study. Recommendations would include that these employees serve as wellness champions to help get more employees involved (WELCOA, 2023).

In addition to municipality A's employees' familiarity impacting their participation, their participation impacted their perception of culture as it pertains to wellness. As with the familiarity scores, the wellness culture scores of participants and non-participants were compared. The participants had significantly higher scores than the non-participants although both groups gave positive ratings. This suggests that employees that participate in their workplace wellness program have a more positive outlook on culture as it pertains to wellness.

The reasons why municipality A employees choose to participate, or not, in the workplace wellness program are important to understand and include in the recommendations to

improve overall participation because they can guide strategies to increase participation. Respondents that indicate participation in the employee wellness program was 159 (85.9%) and the remaining 26 respondents (14.1%) indicate they do not participate. Questions were generated to capture information based on their participation to address the reason they participate, or not. It is important to note that the sample is very skewed to participants, so the results of this study really emphasize what participants think of the program. Better understanding the primary reasons an employee population engages in the workplace wellness program can boost participation overall (Ott-Holland, 2019).

When asked why employees participate in their workplace wellness programs, several common themes emerged. The top reported reasons employees participate include personal health benefits (“health benefits”, “healthy lifestyle”, “improve wellbeing”), enjoyment (“enjoy, “it’s fun”) and incentives (“money”, “incentives that are offered”, “HSA \$”, “Cigna points”). The most common sources of motivation mentioned by employees were personal benefits such as personal health benefits and enjoyment. Incentives were a common response among the questions that were asked in the survey. Incentives such as fitness center reimbursements, discounts on insurance, shoes and equipment were used to help motivate employees to participate. Incentives served as a motivator for employees to participate and a suggestion for participation (sustained or those that do not). This type of motivation can be included in the recommendations to improve overall participation (Ott-Holland, 2019). Recommendations include increased value of incentives (i.e., higher dollar amount attached to each incentive), increased variety of incentives availability (i.e., in addition to what is already offered) and addition of paid time off.

When asked what specific challenges hinder participation, several barriers were mentioned. The top reported barriers include work schedule, lack of interest, and not permitted. This information was shared by employees that indicated barriers of work schedule, interest and not permitted to participate. Specific to lack of permission, responses indicate that supervisors do not permit them to participate in the workplace wellness program. The lack of interest included responses that employees did not have any interest in participating specific to them or the type of program types that are offered. Employees claimed specific scheduling issues such as times they are offered were reasons for not participating in the workplace wellness program. Location of events was another barrier that was frequently mentioned in the study. Some of these issues were that the location is not conducive to their work site, or they do not want to participate at that location (i.e., City Hall). Employees did mention a lack of permission to participate by their supervisor as another barrier to participation. This aligns with previous research that indicates top barriers include work schedules, locations, and time (Hill-Mey, 2013; Kruger, 2007). When the employer understands the job role and responsibilities of each employee, they can design a workplace wellness program that will meet their needs and accommodate their schedule. As a result, the workplace wellness program will be more inclusive and improve the overall wellbeing of the employee (Howard, 2019). Recommendations include that municipality A understands the diversity of their employees' job roles and responsibilities to better accommodate their schedules, interest, and ability to participate in the workplace wellness program. For example, to accommodate the Public Services Department of municipality A, the wellness analyst can review employee work schedules and locations to meet them where they are and offer appropriate programming at an accommodating time and location.

Results suggest that personal health benefits, trust/privacy concerns, and unsupportive company culture were not seen as barriers. These barrier types are more challenging to change and adapt, so it is better they are ranked lower by employees. Still important to mention is the larger population of employees who tend not to participate did not complete the survey and can indicate selection bias. The barriers that had higher frequencies of responses are included in the recommendations to increase overall workplace wellness participation.

Most of the respondents indicate they would participate regardless and suggest nothing to improve the program. This could be due to the majority of study participants already participating in the workplace wellness program. Leading suggestions include more variety, leadership support, and permission to participate while working. Incentives (“money”, “earned PTO”), accessibility (“better access to online content”, “workout room onsite”), awareness (“advertise the winners and participants more”, “continued reminders”, “full functioning website”), and more scheduling options were also suggested by several respondents. Specifically, recommendations include adding additional options that offer more variety in program type and discussing opportunities for employees to participate during their work hours with the management. Examples include surveying employees about what employees would like included in their workplace wellness program and implementing them accordingly. Discussing the opportunity for employees to participate during their work hours would need to happen with management to obtain permission for implementation. Other recommendations for municipality A include new ways to inform and educate employees to build awareness, more incentives to entice participation, and better accommodating more employees’ schedules. These recommendations will align with municipality A’s understanding of their employee diversity in job roles and responsibilities. The more the wellness analyst can understand about job roles and

responsibilities the more accommodating the workplace wellness program can be. The connection between these will assist in accommodating the recommendations for change.

The first set of recommendations address aim one of the study regarding employees' awareness and familiarity with the workplace wellness program. This is important because the study showed that the more familiar employees were with their workplace wellness program, the more likely they were to participate. To increase participation, an increased dissemination of information and education can assist in this goal based on the study findings and previous research. Recommendations for the municipality are to increase information and education on platforms that reach employees. Departments operate differently based on their job roles and responsibilities. Based on their primary functions, the awareness and promotion to each department must be unique and meet their needs to increase the employee's familiarity with the workplace wellness program. For example, the Public Service Department, the largest department in the municipality, works at various locations and some do not have one dedicated workspace. Recommendations for this particular department include inviting the wellness analyst to specific worksites to speak to employees at a time most convenient for their team in order to increase awareness and promotion of the employee wellness program. City wide dissemination is important to evaluate and make necessary changes to increase awareness and promotion overall. For example, soliciting feedback from employees as to how they receive information can assist in more efficient dissemination of wellness program awareness and promotion. Dissemination to and from leadership staff can aid in increasing overall awareness and promotion because this particular employee group has direct contact with employees and is able to communicate with them on a regular basis. Recommendations would be a regular communication tool to educate all leadership staff of workplace wellness programs so they can disseminate to their employees.

It is evident, based on the results of this survey, that employees are most motivated by what they receive by participating in the workplace wellness program. The second set of recommendations, pertaining to aim two, is to implement more incentive-based programming in the workplace wellness program. This is important because this was the leading factor for those that participate and those that do not participate. Again, to increase participation, more incentives will continue to keep employees engaged and solicit new participants. It is recommended that an evaluation of the current incentive structure take place, feedback is collected from employees as to what other incentives would be most desired, and then the wellness analyst propose a new incentive structure to be approved with a plan for implementation. Although expanding incentives comes with a cost, the benefits of increase participation will be presented in a monetary fashion to align with increased cost as compared to the potential savings long term.

The third recommendation is to add more variety to the workplace wellness program regarding location and scheduling. This is important because it was the leading barrier to participation for those employees of municipality A that completed the survey. The effort to increase participation should begin to work towards accommodating all municipality A's employees' schedules and workplaces. Like the evaluation of the incentives offered, the wellness analyst will be recommended to evaluate the current schedule used for programming. Then, it will be recommended to solicit feedback from employees and department leaders to determine best times and locations for participation in workplace wellness programs. The recommendation, overtime, is for the wellness analyst to fold in additional programming to accommodate these scheduling needs.

Despite limitations, particularly that most respondents were employees who already use the workplace wellness program, several recommendations can be implemented to help increase

employee participation. Additional work to gain more information from those who do not participate will be helpful in finding ways to get these individuals to participate. The smaller sample in non-participants could mean the results are not fully representative of municipality A's employee population. The varying response rates of each question is important to acknowledge as it could be an indicator of privacy or trust issues that employees have when they responded. Undoubtedly, future research would require more strategic recruitment methods to increase participation, and specifically of those who do not participate in the wellness program.

Conclusion

Workplace wellness programs should be reflective of what the employees of the organization need. This study showed that improved awareness of the current employee workplace wellness program, increased incentives, and added scheduling options are an opportunity for improvement in municipality A's workplace wellness program. The researcher will use these recommendations to make modifications in the current workplace wellness and potentially increase participation.

CHAPTER II: DISSEMINATION

The research findings will be disseminated to the leadership of the municipality A and each department (inclusive of all employees and study participants). The presentation will be offered in person for each department. In addition, the presentation will be recorded and available on the intranet for later viewing. It is the goal of the researcher to share the findings and suggest recommendations to improve the overall participation in the municipality's employee wellness program. The presentation will highlight the significant findings in a concise fashion for the employees, management and anyone that finds this information pertinent. The presentation will be approximately 15-20 minutes with 10-15 minutes available for questions. The full presentation can be found in Appendix D.

Recommendations for the municipality are to increase information and education on platforms that reach employees. Departments operate differently based on their job roles and responsibilities. Based on their primary functions, the awareness and promotion to each department must be unique and meet their needs to increase the employee's familiarity with the wellness program. For example, the public service department, the largest department in the municipality, works in various locations and some do not have one dedicated workspace. Recommendations for this department include inviting the wellness analyst to specific sites to speak to employees at a time most convenient for their team to increase awareness and promotion of the employee wellness program. City wide dissemination is important to evaluate and make necessary changes to increase awareness and promotion. For example, soliciting feedback from employees as to how they receive information can assist in more efficient dissemination of wellness program awareness and promotion.

Dissemination to and from leadership staff can aid in increasing overall awareness and promotion because this particular employee group has direct contact with employees and is able to communicate with them on a regular basis. Recommendations would be a regular communication tool to educate all leadership staff of wellness programs so they can disseminate to their employees.

It is evident, based on the results of this survey, that employees are most motivated by what they receive by participating in the wellness program. It is recommended that an evaluation of the current incentive structure take place, feedback is collected from employees as to what other incentives would be most desired and then the wellness analyst propose a new incentive structure to be approved with a plan for implementation. This recommendation does come with a cost, but the benefits of increased participation will be presented in a monetary fashion to align with increased cost as compared to the potential savings long term.

Finally, the schedule accommodations. Like the evaluation of the incentives offered, the wellness analyst will be recommended to evaluate the current schedule used for programming. Then, it will be recommended to solicit feedback from employees and department leaders to determine the best times and locations for participation in wellness programs. The recommendation, overtime, is for the wellness analyst to fold in additional programming to accommodate these scheduling needs.

The researcher has already implemented changes based on the findings of the study. These changes include post-program survey questions to solicit feedback from employees, accommodating employee schedules and locations, adding additional incentives and variety to the overall workplace wellness program. The variety of programming includes additional challenges, mental health programming, and ergonomics. The implementation of these changes

has already increased employee participation in municipality A's workplace wellness program by gaining participants that have historically not participated before.

Power Point Presentation Script

Slide 1: Participation in Employee Wellness Program: Municipality A

Hello, my name is Kristi Wallace. I currently serve as the Wellness Analyst for Municipality A and am a doctoral candidate of the Department of Kinesiology at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. My research looked at employee wellness participation at our municipality.

Slide 2: Wellness Program Background

Workplace wellness programs have been developed because employers take an interest in the health and wellbeing of their employees. Although this might seem like a more recent development, many companies have long known that a healthy worker is a more productive worker. What has changed over the past century is the shift from a singular focus on occupational injuries and illnesses to a holistic approach to wellness. Today, wellness programs can include vaccination clinics, nutrition education, exercise/physical activity programs, fitness center membership, health screenings, health risk assessments, weight loss programs, chronic disease prevention or management, tobacco cessation programs, stress reduction programs, health coaching and health/wellness incentives to help employees engage. Employers that have an employee wellness program have seen improved employee retention, productivity, and reduced health care costs.

Slide 3: Purpose

The rising cost of healthcare and decline in the overall workforce health and wellness is a serious concern for employers. A healthy workforce is critical to the overall mission of an

organization and the individual employees' quality of life. One proven way to improve the overall health and wellness of employees is to implement an employee wellness program. The determination of the 'hows' and 'whys' of employees' participation in workplace wellness programs can help to decrease the cost of healthcare and improve the overall health and wellness of employees. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to determine the reasons municipality A's employees decide to participate, or not, in their employee wellness program.

Slide 4: Aims

Aim one was to collect the municipality A employees' current knowledge about the employee wellness program. This allowed the researcher the ability to discover the current baseline of what the employees know about the program. Acquiring this information was critical to determine any gaps that could potentially improve participation.

Aim two was to determine the reasons why the municipality A employees choose to participate, or not, in the employee wellness program. This allowed the researcher to determine the 'hows' and 'whys' employees choose to participate in the employee wellness program.

Aim three was to collect the municipality employees' preferences and suggestions to improve the employee wellness program. The solicitation of feedback from the employees allowed the researcher to make recommendations for change to improve the program and participation.

Slide 5: Settings & Participants

Our municipality employed 1,060 employees at the time of the study. The municipality has 24 different departments, 520 different job titles, and 24 different working shifts. In addition, job location and sites span across the entire city and include additional locations in adjacent towns. The study yielded 239 participants, approximately 22.5% of the population.

Of those who responded (n = 185), 100 (59.5%) identified as female, 71 (38.4%) identified as male, 1 (0.5%) identified as non-binary and 3 (1.6%) preferred to not disclose. The ages of the participants were evenly spread across the ranges, 6 (3.2%) between 18 and 24, 34 (18.4%) between 25 and 34, 38 (20.5%) between 35 and 44, 50 (27.0%) between 45 and 54, 45 (24.3%) between 55 and 64, 8 (4.3%) 65 and over and 4 (2.2%) preferred to not disclose. The participants predominately identified as 135 (73.0%) White/Caucasian, with other racial/ethnic identities also represented including 34 (18.4%) Black/African American, 2 (1.1%) Hispanic/Latino and 2 (1.1%) Other. Additionally, 6 (3.2%) of participants selected two or more racial/ethnic identities and 6 (3.2%) preferred to not disclose.

Employees who responded were from 24 departments of municipality A (n = 185). Representation from the departments included 2 (1.1%) from the City Attorney, 1 (0.5%) from the City Management, 1 (0.5%) from Communication & Public Engagement, 1 (0.5%) from Community Development & Housing, 3 (1.6%) from Customer Service, 4 (2.2%) from Economic Development, 1 (0.5%) from Electric, (4) 2.2% from Engineering, 3 (1.6%) from Facility Services, 4 (2.2%) from Finance, 6 (3.2%) from Fire, 1 (0.5%) from Fleet Services, 5 (2.7%) from High Point 911, 3 (1.6%) from Human Resources, 5 (2.7%) from Information Technology Services, 3 (1.6%) from Inspections Services, 33 (17.8%) from the Library, 11 (5.9%) from the Museum, 13 (17.0%) from Parks & Recreation, 5 (2.7%) from Planning & Development, 14 (7.6%) from Police, 40 (21.6%) from Public Service, 3 (1.1%) from Theatre, 4 (2.2%) from Transit, 10 (5.4%) from Transportation and 1 (0.5%) preferred to not disclose. The employment status of those who responded included 165 (89.2%) full-time, 10 (5.4%) part-time benefited, 9 (4.9%) part-time and 1 (0.5%) contract/temporary. Participants work across four shifts with 156 (84.3%) that work 1st shift, 6 (3.2%) work 2nd shift, 3 (1.6%) work 3rd shift and

17 (9.2%) work rotating shift. Most employees that participated do not work weekends (68, 36.8%), occasionally work weekends (51, 27.6%), sometimes work weekends (43, 23.2%) and regularly work weekends (23, 12.4%).

Slide 6: Methods

This study used convenience sampling; a type of sampling that involves the sample being drawn from a population that is easily accessible (municipality A). The research design is an exploratory case study, which was selected due to the lack of detailed preliminary research and this type of research aims to answer how or why questions which reflected the aims of this study. The research tool, or data source, was a survey administered by Qualtrics.

Slide 7: Results

Employee participation in their wellness program is motivated by a mix of factors. The factors that influence employee participation the most include personal health benefits, enjoyment, incentives, and convenience (location, schedule). Barriers have been identified and can be used to improve overall participation.

Slide 8: What's Next

Based on the results of the study it is important to reflect and determine a strategy to implement change. Recommendations include increasing the education and information dissemination around the wellness program to create more awareness and aid in more employee participation. In addition, incentive-based programming is critical as it serves as a motivating factor as to why employees participate and a barrier to those that do not participate. Finally, the additional locations and schedule options are critical to be more inclusive of all employees' schedules and workplaces. The researcher has already implemented changes based on the findings of the study. These changes include post-program survey questions to solicit feedback

from employees, accommodating employee schedules and locations, and adding additional variety to the overall workplace wellness program. The variety of programming includes additional challenges, mental health programming, and ergonomics. The implementation of these changes has already increased employee participation in municipality A's workplace wellness program by gaining participants that have historically not participated before.

Slide 9: What's Next – Information & Education

To better inform and educate employees it is recommended that the workplace wellness program is dispersed based on departmental needs. Each department operates very differently therefore offering departmental informational and educational seminars, partnering with department supervisors and individual department surveys are critical to ensure all employees are aware of the wellness opportunities available to them.

Slide 10: What's Next – Incentive Based Programming

They want more! Employees have indicated that they are most motivated by incentives. Current incentives need to be evaluated and discussed. The discussion needs to include what is outdated, what needs to be added and how will these changes/additions be phased in. After evaluation of the current incentives, the next discussion is what employees want. These include higher value of what is currently offered, paid time off and recognition. The recommendation is to add these to the current incentives, propose the funds that are needed, an implementation plan and seek approval. Incentives that have already been added to the municipality's workplace wellness program because of the findings include paid time off.

Slide 11: What's Next – Schedule Accommodations

They want more options! The where is important. Current evaluation of scheduled programs, based on time and location will be completed. After review of current schedules,

departmental schedule evaluation is critical to ensure the proposed schedules/locations accommodate as many departments, shifts and locations as possible. The implementation will be based on availability, resources and phased based on proposal. For example, some employees do not have a specific worksite and require accommodation to include different locations based on their work assignments for that day.

Slide 12: Let's Discuss

Thank you for your time and attention to this presentation. At this time, I would like to open for discussion. Specifically, what are your thoughts on the recommendations? What are some ideas or suggestions regarding creating more awareness, incentives, and locations or times for the worksite wellness programs?

Slide 13: References

CHAPTER III: ACTION PLAN

The dissemination of this data and the recommendations is critical to keep the momentum shifting in a positive direction regarding wellness program employee participation. The plan for dissemination is to facilitate a presentation of findings and recommendations to employees and leaders of municipality A. Individual meetings with these stakeholders after the presentation will be the follow-up necessary to get their buy-in and get further toward implementation. Later dissemination includes presenting this information to municipality partners and other municipalities.

My first task will be to disseminate the findings to all municipality employees and management. I hope to encourage them to implement the recommendations to increase overall participation in the municipality's employee wellness program. In addition to implementing the recommendations will be the presentation changes that have already taken place because of the findings of the study and how they positively impacted participation and outcomes. I plan to offer presentations to all departments, record and have recording available for those that cannot attend in-person. Providing this information and recommendations can help encourage increased participation, improving the overall quality of life for employees.

Next, I will provide the data and presentation to municipality partners (financial wellness educators, nutritional wellness educators, benefits broker, health insurance company) and other municipalities (surrounding area with similar demographic breakdown and size) that have an employee wellness program. My goal is to provide ways to help increase overall participation in employee wellness programs in other municipalities and organizations. In addition to the presentation of the findings will be to meet with municipality partners to develop ways they can assist with implementing change. The data will list recommendations to increase participation

that these other municipalities and/or organizations can implement. Each of these partners, like the medium-sized municipality in North Carolina, can benefit from the results and potentially use the recommendations to make change that can increase employee participation.

The researcher intends to present relevant information at an employee wellness related conference. Opportunities include the Wellness Council of America (WELCOA), International Consortium for Health & Wellness Coaching (ICHWC) and National Wellness Institute (NWI). Other organizations that the medium-sized municipality in North Carolina affiliates with that could benefit from relevant research include their health care provider and benefits broker. Each of these partners facilitate employee benefit conferences for their clients, like the medium-sized municipality in North Carolina examined in this study. The dissemination of information at this level can assist in further research and immediate application of findings in this study.

In addition to the presentation to national and local professional organizations is the potential submissions to pertinent journals that relate to employee wellness. These potential journals include *American Journal of Health Promotion*, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *Public Personnel Management*, *Journal of Health Education and Health Promotion Practice*. The opportunity to submit to journals can bring awareness of this topic to other researchers, organizations, and programs.

Future research can address the identified limitation of the study. The smaller sample size could mean the results are not fully representative of the municipality's employee populations. Undoubtedly, future research would require a more strategic recruitment method to gain more participation and specifically, participation of those that do not participate in the employee workplace wellness program. Learning more from those who do not participate can be

used in conjunction with the information from those who participate to potentially make changes to raise awareness and get more employees to participate in workplace wellness programs.

The most important part of this study is the immediate application of findings. Fortunately, the researcher is in a professional position to suggest recommendations for application to make an immediate impact and make changes based on findings. Some changes have already been made to the municipality's workplace wellness program based on the findings. These changes include adding questions to post-program surveys, additional locations, and times to accommodate more employees' schedules. Another opportunity is future research. Long term, the researcher may conduct additional research. When they do, they will have to carefully consider other recruitment strategies to increase total numbers, and more specifically, the number of non-participants. Adding focus groups could be another option to help gain additional information from the participants of the study that goes beyond the open-ended survey responses and may provide new insight on ways to increase participation.

The dissemination of this data and the recommendations is critical to keep the momentum shifting in a positive direction regarding wellness program employee participation.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY

Approved Consent Information:

What is this survey about?

- The purpose of this study is to identify current employee participation and needs regarding the City of High Point's Employee Wellness program. This survey seeks to understand current participation practices in the wellness program as well as to address the individual needs of city employees to improve access and programming to the City's Wellness programing.

How will this survey impact me?

- Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may choose not to participate at any time. If you decide not to participate in this survey or if you withdraw from participating in the survey, you will not be penalized in any way. The results of this survey will be used for scholarly purposes as well as to make improvements in the City of High Point's Employee Wellness program. There are no known risks, discomforts, or inconveniences anticipated from your participation in this survey. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes. Your responses will be confidential, and we will not collect or record any identifying information such as your name, email address, etc. You receive no direct benefits from participating in this survey; however, your responses will help to identify current participation levels, experiences, perspectives, and potential needs toward the use of the City of High Point's Employee Wellness program.

Is this confidential?

- The survey does not collect your name or any identifying information about you, such as your name, employee identification number or email address. No information will be collected that can link you back to your responses. This means that we will be unable to identify your answers or return them to you.

What if I do not want to participate?

- Participation is not required. The survey is voluntary, and it is to your discretion if you participate. If you agree to participate, you may withdraw at any time.

What if I have questions?

- If you have questions about this study, you can contact the researcher by email at kristi.wallace@highpointnc.gov or her dissertation chair, Dr. Pam Brown, at plkocher@uncg.edu. In addition, If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or concerns or complaints about

the study, please email the UNCG Office of Research Integrity at ori@uncg.edu.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

- Clicking “yes” indicates that you have read the above information, voluntarily agree to participate and are at least 19 years of age.
- If you do not consent and/or do not want to participate in the survey, please click “no”.

Demographic Questions:

How would you describe your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other (with a blank entry field for participant to self-identify)
- Prefer not to answer

What is your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 or Over
- Prefer not to answer

What is your ethnic background?

- Asian/Asian-American
- Black/African-American
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native-American/Alaskan-Native
- Native-Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- White/Caucasion
- Other (with a blank entry field for participant to self-identify)
- Prefer not to answer

What department do you work in?

- Budget & Evaluation
- City Attorney
- City Clerk
- City Management
- Communications & Public Engagement
- Community Development & Housing
- Customer Service
- Economic Development\

- Electric Utilities
- Engineering Services
- Facility Services
- Financial Services
- Fire Department
- Fleet Services
- Geographic Information Services (GIS)
- High Point 911
- Human Resources
- Information Technology Services
- Inspections Services
- Public Library
- Museum
- Parks & Recreation
- Planning & Development
- Police Department
- Public Services
- Theatre
- Transportation
- Transit
- Not Listed (include below)

What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

- Master's Degree or Above
- Bachelor's Degree
- Associate's Degree
- High School Degree (or equivalent)
- Other (with a blank entry field for the participant to include)
- Prefer not to answer

How many years have you been employed with the City of High Point?

- Less than 1 Year
- 1-5 Years
- 6-10 Years
- 11-15 Years
- 16-20 Years
- 21-25 Years
- 26-30 Years
- 31 Years or More

What is your employment status?

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Part-time Benefited

- Contract/Temporary

What shift do you work most regularly?

- 1st Shift
- 2nd Shift
- 3rd Shift
- Rotating Shift

Do you work weekends?

- Yes, Regularly
- Yes, Sometimes
- Yes, Occasionally
- No

Aim #1 - Current Wellness Program

Q1

How familiar are you with the City of High Point Employee Wellness Program?

- Not at All Familiar
- Somewhat Familiar
- Very Familiar

Q2

Have you ever participated in the employee wellness program?

- Yes
- No

Q3

Which of the following Employee Wellness programs have you participated in? (Check all that apply)

- None. I do not participate.
- Financial Wellness
- Intellectual Wellness
- Motivate Me Incentives
- Nutritional Wellness
- Physical Activity Wellness
- Quarterly Challenges
- Waist:Height Ratio
- Other (Text Box For Entry)

Q4

On Average, how often have you participated in wellness programs?

- Not at All
- 1 Time/Month (or less)
- 2-3 Times/Month

- 1 Time/Week
- More than 1 Time/Week

Q5

Where do you usually get your information about the Employee Wellness Program? (Check all that apply)

- Co-Worker
- Email
- Flyers
- Intranet
- Microsoft Teams
- Supervisor
- Text
- Other (Text Box For Entry)

Welcoa Health/Wellness Culture

The following questions are about your perception of your organization's health culture. Using the scale below, please indicate the response which best characterizes your feelings.

(ALL)

1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral—neither agree or disagree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

I believe that my company cares about my health status.

- 1 2 3 4 5

Being healthy is important to me.

- 1 2 3 4 5

In my company, I am encouraged to lead a healthier lifestyle.

- 1 2 3 4 5

In my company, a strong wellness program is in place for all employees.

- 1 2 3 4 5

In my company, leaders model good health practices.

- 1 2 3 4 5

In my company, people who lead healthy lifestyles are rewarded with incentives.

- 1 2 3 4 5

In my company, people who lead healthy lifestyles are publicly recognized.

- 1 2 3 4 5

In my company, people support others who are attempting to lead healthy lifestyles.

- 1 2 3 4 5

In my company, there are low-fat/healthy food options available.

- 1 2 3 4 5

In my company, a smoke-free environment is promoted.

- 1 2 3 4 5

In my company, there is a team that oversees all company wellness activities.

- 1 2 3 4 5

In my company, it is normal for people to exercise during the workday.

- 1 2 3 4 5

In my company, it is normal for people to eat healthy foods during the workday.

- 1 2 3 4 5

In my company, it is normal for people to use safety belts.

- 1 2 3 4 5

In my company, it is normal for people not to smoke.

- 1 2 3 4 5

Aim #2 - Reasons Employee Participate in Wellness Program

Q1

The following questions are about why you participate or what would encourage you to participate in the City of High Point Employee Wellness Program.

Using the scale below, please indicate the response that best reflects how much each factor influences your participation:

1 = Not at all 2 = Slightly 3 = Somewhat 4 = Very Much 5 = Totally

- Others' Encouragement (Friends, Family, Co-Workers, etc...)
- Convenient Location
- Convenient Time/Schedule
- Enjoyment/Interest
- Incentives
- Personal Health Benefits
- Supportive Company Culture

Q2

What is the primary reason that you participate in the City of High Point Employee Wellness Program? If you do not participate, skip to the next question.

- Open-Ended

Q3

If you do not participate, what would be a reason you would participate?

- Open-Ended

Q4

The following questions are about what prevents you from participating in the City of High Point Employee Wellness Program. Using the scale below, please indicate the response that best reflects how much each factor prevents your participation: 1 = Not at all 2 = Slightly 3 = Somewhat 4 = Very Much 5 = Totally

- Inconvenient Location
- Inconvenient Time/Schedule
- Insufficient Incentive
- Lack of Awareness
- Lack of Others' Encouragement (Friends, Family, Co-Workers, etc...)

- Lack of Enjoyment/Interest
- Personal Health Beliefs
- Time Restrictions
- Trust and privacy concerns
- Unsupportive Company culture

Q4

What is the primary reason that prevents you from participating in the City of High Point Employee Wellness Program?

- Open-Ended

Q5

How do your co-workers affect your participation in wellness programs?

- Positively
- Negatively
- Not at All

Q6

What would encourage you to participate or participate more often in the City of High Point Wellness Program?

- Open Ended

Aim #3 - Feedback and Suggestions from Employees

Q1

What do you like most about the employee wellness program?

- Open Ended

Q2

What do you like least about the employee wellness programs?

- Open Ended

Q3

If someone asked you about our employee wellness program, what would you say to them?

- Open Ended

Q4

How can we improve our employee wellness program?

- Open Ended

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Female		Male		Non-Binary		Preferred to Not Disclose
110		71		1		3
18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and over	Preferred to Not Disclose
6	34	38	50	45	8	4
White/Caucasian		Black/African-American	Hispanic/Latino	Other	2 or More	Preferred to Not Disclose
135		34	2	2	6	6
1st Shift		2nd shift		3rd shift		Rotating Shift
156		6		3		17

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF APPROVAL



City of High Point
Human Resources
211 South Hamilton Street
High Point, NC 27260

August 31, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter serves as approval that Kristi Wallace, the Wellness Analyst at the City of High Point, can administer a survey to the City of High Point Employees in regard to the wellness program and completion of her dissertation with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scherrie Lowery".

SCHERRIE LOWERY
CITY OF HIGH POINT
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES
211 S Hamilton, PO Box 230 | High Point, NC 27261
336.883.3629 | cell: 336.473-9476

APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Greetings City of High Point Employees,

Kristi Wallace, the City of High Point's Wellness Analyst, is conducting a survey through the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and would like to invite you to participate. The purpose of this study is to determine the reasons why employees participate, or not participate, in their employee wellness program. This survey will only take about 10 minutes and will involve completing an online survey. Your participation is voluntary and there is no compensation or reimbursement. All employees are invited to participate.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Kristi Wallace (kristi.wallace@highpointnc.gov) or Pam Brown (plkocher@uncg.edu).

Thank you,

Kristi Wallace

APPENDIX E: POWERPOINT SLIDES



Find your way here



Participation in Employee Wellness Programs: Why Employees Choose to Participate

Presenter: Kristi L. Wallace



Find your way here

Wellness Program Background



- Today people are spending more time in environments that limit physical activity. The shift from physically demanding jobs to ones with minimal physical challenges has created an increased need for workplace wellness (Owen, 2010).
- Wellness programs can include vaccination clinics, nutrition education, exercise programs/activities, fitness center memberships, health screenings, health risk assessments, weight loss programs, tobacco cessation programs, stress reduction programs and health/wellness incentives (Abraham, 2019; Isson, et al., 2016; SHRM, 2020).
- Organizations, and employers, that offer a wellness program for their employees focus on reducing overall health care costs, employee retention, job satisfaction, presenteeism and improving the well being of their employees (Bhardwaj, 2019; Joslin, 2006).
- Research has demonstrated that worksite wellness programs can increase employee retention, job satisfaction, productivity, presenteeism and potentially reduce healthcare costs (Isson, et al., 2016; Sabharwal, 2019; Song, 2019).
- According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) a successful wellness program should include a baseline survey, identification of a senior leader who will support/participate, bold decisions to implement change, incentives for employees and frequent updates shared with both the employees and management (Isson, et al., 2016; Miller, 2019).

Purpose

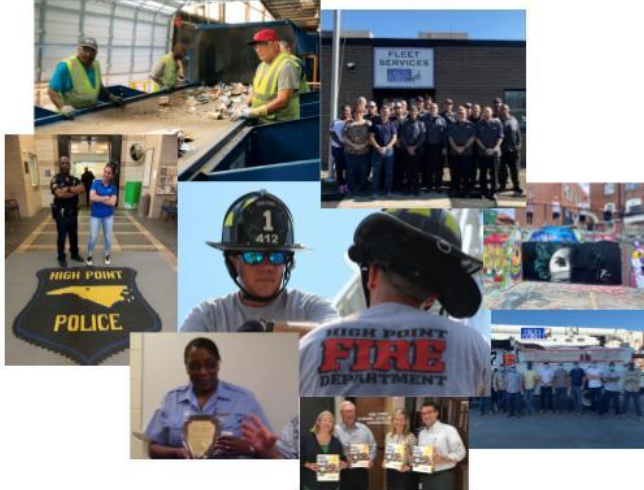
- The purpose of this study was to determine the reasons that municipality employees decide to participate, or not participate, in their employee wellness program.



Aims

- 1** → Determine municipality A's employees' current knowledge about the employee wellness program.
→ Discover how familiar the employees are with the current employee wellness program.
- 2** → Determine the reasons why municipality A's employees choose to participate, or not, in the employee wellness program.
→ Determination of the reasons why employees participate in the current wellness programs can potentially lead to changes and improve the overall participation rate.
- 3** → Determine municipality A's employees' suggestions to improve the employee wellness program.
→ Information gathered from surveys will be used to make changes that will potentially positively impact the employee wellness program participation rate.

Settings & Participants



→ Employee Demographics

- 1,060 Employees
- n=239
- 24 Departments
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity

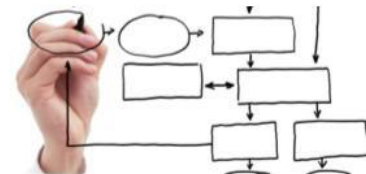
Methods

Data Collection

- **Population**
Municipality A Employees
- **Sampling Method**
Convenience Sampling
- **Research Design**
Exploratory Case Study
- **Research Tool**
Survey

Data Analysis

- **Descriptive Statistics**
Analysis of the Data Collected
- **Thematic Analysis**
Analysis of Open-Ended Questions



Results

Addressing the Aims

- **Research Aim 1**
 - ◆ The less familiar with the wellness program an employee is, the less likely they are to participate.
- **Research Aim 2**
 - ◆ The top two reported reasons employees participate include intrinsic motivation and incentives.
- **Research Aim 3**
 - ◆ Most of the respondents indicate they would participate regardless and suggest nothing to improve the program. Leading suggestions include more variety, permission to participate while working and leadership support.

OUTCOMES



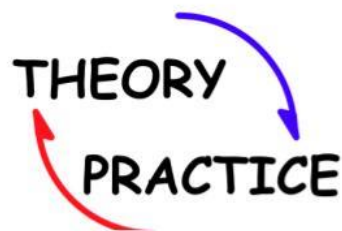
What's Next?

Application

- Information and education (on wellness program) dissemination to employees in order to increase the knowledge of the program.
- Incentive based programming to increase the participation in the wellness program.
- Additional locations and times to accommodate more employees and their schedules.

Future Research

- Participant recruitment strategies.
- Focus groups to discuss themes and labels.



What's Next?

Information & Education

- Departmental Dissemination
 - ◆ Department Worksite Seminars
 - ◆ Partner with Department Supervisors
 - ◆ Survey Departments Independently
- City Wide Dissemination
 - ◆ Information & Education Seminars
 - ◆ Marketing & Communication Tools
 - ◆ Consistency



What's Next?

Incentive Based Programming

- Current Incentives Available
 - ◆ HSA/HRA
 - ◆ Vouchers/Prizes
 - ◆ Reimbursements
- Requested Incentives
 - ◆ Higher Value of Current Incentives
 - ◆ PTO
 - ◆ Recognition
- Incorporation of Requested Incentives
 - ◆ Proposal of Funds Needed
 - ◆ Implementation Plan
 - ◆ Request Approval





What's Next?

Schedule Accommodations

- Evaluation of Current Scheduled Programs
 - ◆ Locations
 - ◆ Times
- Departmental Schedule Evaluation
 - ◆ Survey Individual Departments
 - ◆ Review Needs/Requests
- Incorporation of More Options
 - ◆ Proposal of New Locations
 - ◆ Proposal of New Times
 - ◆ Implementation & Request Approval



Let's Discuss



Thank you for your attention & time!

Contact Information:

- Kristi L. Wallace
 - klhunter@uncg.edu
 - 336.944.4498



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