Using participatory methods in a workplace weight loss program for low-wage and hourly healthcare workers

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Randomized controlled trial (RCT) to test a multi-level workplace intervention addressing both individual and workplace factors related to healthy weight.

Targets low-wage and hourly workers, an underserved population at high risk for obesity, diabetes, and other weight-related conditions and injuries.
Working for You

2-year RCT with 22 work groups from a large integrated health care system and university

- Target work groups with low-wage and hourly workers
- 11 groups randomized to the intervention condition

Multi-level nested intervention

- Workplace participatory program – *all workers*
- Interactive obesity treatment approach (iOTA) using SMS text messaging & health coach - *obese workers*
Workplace Intervention

**Goal:** Identify workplace barriers to healthy behaviors and generate effective solutions

**Based on:**
- Participatory Action Research (PAR)
- Healthy Workplace Participatory Program (HWPP)*
- Human-Centered Design (HCD)

**Create a “health team” in each work group**
- 4-6 workers per team
- Initially led by researchers, transferring ownership to teams

*CPH-NEW (Center for the Promotion of Health in the New England Workplace)
WFY Participatory Model

- **Health Team** = 4-6 front line workers
- **Facilitator** = research team member
- Management invited to attend meetings; approves concepts
- Weekly meetings for first quarter; bi-weekly after that
- Involve employer wellness personnel when possible
Evaluate the Workplace

- Worker surveys
- Worker & Manager interviews
- Deep dive with the health team – JOURNEY MAPPING
  - Empathize / understand culture
  - Identify barriers to health
  - Recognize ‘positives’ to leverage new ideas
Identify Problems

Team’s First Reactions:
• Conflicting priorities at work
• Stress
• Feeling mentally drained
• Limited time to prep/plan
• Sedentary work
• Limited time for self-care

How does this impact my health?
• Sitting & spreading
• Lower immune system
• Depressed mood
• Obesity
• Leg numbness/joint pain
• Impacts quality of life (e.g. time with family)
Generate Solutions

Portable headsets (better distance)
Organization of accounts
Small rec room
Stair Challenge
Weekly Emails
Delegation
Meal Prep or Group Lunch
Exercise or standing desks
Non-smokers get more off days or birthday off work

Walking committee team incentives
Ergonomics training (desk set up)
Support texts or Virtual nudges
Planning tools
Freezer meal prep
Stand up and do exercises
Low impact activity at desk
Group Site (Facebook)
## Generate Solutions – Concept

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept Name</th>
<th>Idea(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hack My Life</strong></td>
<td>Weekly email with life tips, &quot;Did you know&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heads Up, Stand Up, Time to work out</strong></td>
<td>Low impact activity at desk; small weights; virtual nudges; stand up &amp; do exercises</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reaching Higher Heights</strong></td>
<td>Stair Challenge</td>
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<td><strong>The Lunch Brigade</strong></td>
<td>Group lunch</td>
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<td><strong>Prep to Relieve Stress</strong></td>
<td>Freezer meal prep</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PBS Facebook Page</strong></td>
<td>Group Site, FB Page, recipes</td>
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</table>
CONCEPT NAME:
HACK MY LIFE

Write a 2-3 sentence description to explain this concept. What's new about this idea? What's exciting?

HACK MY LIFE IS A COMMUNICATION TOOL. A FUN, WITTY, ONCE A WEEK EMAIL WITH IDEAS FOR ORGANIZATION AND TIPS TO HELP WITH EVERYDAY STRUGGLES.

Weekly Email w/ Life Tips
"Did You Know?"

NEEDS WE ARE ADDRESSING
Who are we designing for? What needs does this concept address for these users?

THIS WOULD BE FOR EVERYONE ESPECIALLY BUSY PARENTS.

THIS CONCEPT IS A QUICK AND EASY COMMUNICATION TOOL FOR TIPS AND TRICKS

PLANNING
What can you do in a quick, low-risk, simple way to test this concept? (What could you do in a few hours?)

SEND OUT A TEST DROP EMAIL WITH A SURVEY AT THE END TO FIND OUT HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE INTERESTED.

What barriers to implementation might come up, and how can we address them?

SOME PEOPLE MAY WANT TO BE REMOVED OR COULD TAKE UP TOO MUCH TIME.

* TRY TO MAKE THEM SHORT AND TO THE POINT.
Gather Feedback, Modify Prototype

- What about this works for you?
- What doesn’t work for you?
- How would you make this better?
- What questions do you have about this?
Gather Feedback, Modify Prototype

- Non-intrusive; don’t have to participate
- New Ideas/Spins on old habits
- Gives you reminders, references
- Easy viewing

- Share my ideas or personal info
- Graphics
- Witty (things we really want to know... NOT boring)

- Complaints
- When to make time to view/load info
- Time-consuming (potentially)

What about this works for you? 🌟

What doesn’t work for you? 👎

How would you make this better?💡

What questions do you have about this?❓

- How will this affect productivity?
- Would newsletter be approved by mgmt. before distribution?
- Would email go to everybody or just those interested?
Implement Solution
CONCEPT NAME: Heads Up, Stand Up, Time to Work Out

What's new about this idea? What's exciting? Two times daily, 5 minute increments, focusing on upper or lower body low impact exercises. A virtual text or email blast will go out at time of exercise. New concept for P3S, will forge new relationships & friendship interdepartmental bonding.

Draw a sketch or attach a photo of the idea:

NEEDS WE ARE ADDRESSING
Who are we designing for? What needs does this concept address for these users?
Who: employees that want to participate, get healthy and work alongside other peers.
What: Addresses inactivity for long periods of time @ desk jobs.

PLANNING
What can you do in a quick, low-risk, simple way to test this concept? (What could you do in a few hours?)
Blast email - who would be interested for a "testing phase of the concept".

What barriers to implementation might come up, and how can we address them?
Management, people may complain of distractions, people may stress this could hinder quota goals.
Evaluation of the WFY program

- **Primary Study Outcome**: Change in weight at 12 & 24 months
- **Secondary Outcomes**: Change in physical activity, diet, and awareness of health programs at 12 & 24 months
- **Process measures**:
  - Meeting attendance
  - Action between meetings
  - Management engagement & support
  - Team dynamics
  - Number of concepts created/tested/implemented/sustained
Early process findings

Eight teams (mean duration = 6m; range 2m – 12m)

SUCCESSFUL TEAMS:
• Enthusiastic
• Have ACTIVE management support
• Have a team identity
• Create awareness
• Take initiative

UNSUCCESSFUL TEAMS:
• Apathetic
• Lack communication
• Lack of follow through
• Rigid, not open to new ideas
• No accountability
Best Practices

• Start with education
• Create awareness of the Team EARLY
• Team should create mission statement/elevator speech
• Don’t reinvent the wheel
• Be realistic about what the team can accomplish
Conclusion

Challenges:
Lack of management understanding & commitment
Workers’ limited skills & motivation

Successes to date:
Increased awareness of existing employer offerings
Increased communication about health
Partnerships with employer health committees

Future directions:
If successful, work with partners to implement this program into existing health and safety efforts
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