
Abstract

Why Did It Fail? Surveying Employees to Improve a Tracker-Based Corporate Wellness Initiative

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Abstract

Background: In 2016, a medium-size, private company in the United States implemented a program to distribute activity trackers to its employees in order to enhance their physical activity; the company distributed 150 trackers in total. However, many employees stopped using the trackers shortly after they received them. This study explores reasons why the initiative failed, as well as ways that the company may improve future wellness initiatives.

Objective: A study was designed to gain insight into why corporate wellness programs may be unsuccessful, as well as investigate ways that they can be improved in the future. This is especially relevant as trackers in the workplace and corporate wellness programs have grown in popularity in recent years.

Methods: We used a mix of cross-sectional surveys and open-ended interviews to grasp both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of employee perceptions on trackers and tracker data. We sent an online survey to company employees via email, inquiring about the employee's current physical activity behaviors, attitudes, and expressed interests in activity trackers. In addition, we held structured interviews and follow-up phone meetings with administrative figures.

Results: Of 204 employees surveyed, 116 completed the survey and three administrators were interviewed. Employees were dissatisfied with the initiative largely due to lack of tracker choice and lack of other wellness activities offered with the trackers. While many participants reported positive feelings about tracking in general, 60.7% of respondents wanted options relating to brand and model, as 51.9% were dissatisfied with the model that they received (Jawbone). Some employees mentioned they wanted one that was waterproof, while others stated that they needed one with a longer lasting battery. Additionally, 62% of respondents expressed interest in wellness classes in the workplace, such as fitness classes or lecture-based nutrition and sleep classes, to go along with the trackers. Furthermore, 44% of respondents said that they would like to receive customized fitness advice from the program. We also gauged interest in the possibility of providing incentives to employees for reaching goals or completing challenges, as incentives may be a successful way to engage employees in a wellness initiative. However, more than half of respondents (58%) were not interested in any form of reward, incentive, or recognition. Consequently, we concluded that incentive was not among the major factors that affected employee adoption of the wellness initiative.

Conclusions: The corporate wellness program was unsuccessful largely due to the following: dissatisfaction with the specific tracker model that was selected for distribution to employees; lack of employee choice in tracker model and features; and because there were no programs implemented to support the use of the trackers to increase fitness. Based on study results, in order to increase employee participation and satisfaction, future initiatives should incorporate other workplace wellness activities (walking groups, nutrition classes) into tracker-based programs, and should provide a set of tracker options to employees, so that employees are able to select trackers that fit their individual needs.

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employee wellness; physical activity; wellness programs; workplace health promotion; tracker; activity tracker; wearable activity tracker

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