



Corporate Wellness

How smart data can keep employees
and corporations healthy

Article by Cedric Hutchings

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How smart data can help keep employees and corporations healthy

The financial burden of unhealthy lifestyles in the workplace is all too familiar, as overweight or obese workers with chronic conditions miss an estimated 450 million additional workdays a year in America, the equivalent of a [\\$153 billion loss in productivity](#). Spending on all formats of [corporate wellness programming](#) is on the rise, but it's hard to tell with any certainty just how effective they are. How is performance measured? Do all job types and industries respond to them in the same way?

My company, Nokia, a health tech device provider, explored the relationship between the workplace and employee health with our first [Nokia Corporate Wellness](#) study. There is little public data on the occupational factors of unhealthy lifestyles amidst the vast workplace wellness literature. Lack of data is generally a sign of low awareness, and absence of proper remedial measures.

To shed some light on the issue, we put the wealth of data generated by a field of more than 10,000 of our smart device users to work, collecting their health metrics (i.e. number of steps, weight, body mass index, and sleep time) to get a picture of their overall health. Then, we took the added step of matching it to a voluntary survey about their occupations, work-life, stress and job satisfaction.

The study revealed some surprising trends the correlation between our health and our jobs, among all walks of life.

Your job has a huge impact on your health

The first interesting bit of data uncovered that most people gain weight when they start a new job. While most of us equate the college “freshman 15” with overeating and immaturity, our data show that taking on extra pounds is actually the most common response to a big life change at any age. Thinking about this further however, the reasoning is very clear – the feeling of displacement that comes with a new job makes us long for comfort foods and unhealthy choices, while the pressure to perform well may lead to neglecting the healthy habits we know we should follow. At the workplace, 70% of employees sit for extended periods, a third snack throughout the day and 56% prefer to eat at their work desk.

While educators never fail to include physical activities in curricula to balance body and mind, most employers fail to see the point of taking a similar approach at organizing employee time. But why shouldn't they, given the many benefits of healthy lifestyles on productivity? Spending at least 30 minutes a day of moderate-intensity activity (such as a brisk walk) has been proven to [decrease the risk of early mortality by 30%](#). In addition, Nokia data highlight a close link between higher body mass index (BMI), low activity levels, and higher stress at the workplace, a [trend confirmed by medical research](#).

Employees are not all equal in wellness

While two thirds of employees are simply inactive throughout the week, office jobs, usually seen as healthier jobs, actually take the highest toll (e.g., accountants, HR, IT, or finance professionals). On the contrary, customer-facing service industry employees are among the slimmest and most active in America. Are obese or overweight employees discriminated against in sales jobs?

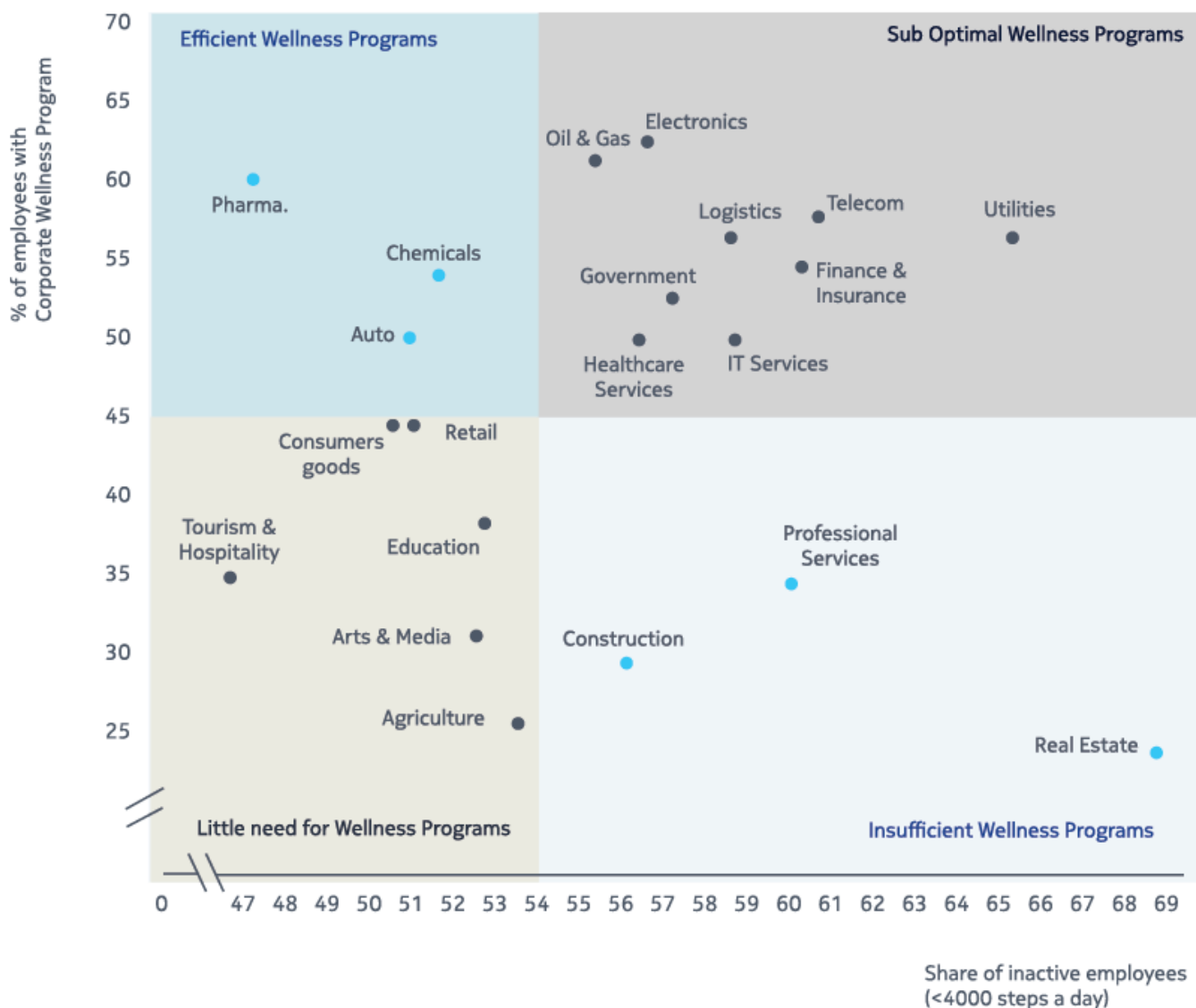
Interestingly, better paying and more educated jobs are not necessarily the happiest or the healthiest, with more than 70% of purchasers, HR professionals or teachers confessing to being stressed about their work. Government, utilities and telecommunications are among the sectors with the least active employees.

By contrast, manual jobs such as construction workers, hairdressers or fitness coaches or sectors with independent workers such as arts & media are considerably more active, happy and relaxed.

Additionally, people-facing industries such as education, arts, media or tourism & hospitality are among the most active.

Industry inactivity rates and likeliness of having a wellness program

— 2015 Withings Corporate Wellness Survey on 10,000 users



Targeting Corporate Wellness to make it work

Corporate wellness programs face many challenges, from keeping employees engaged to proving that they can generate returns on investments. They must cope with a changing technological landscape and different levels of awareness across industries. But most importantly, they need to understand the specific needs of their employees to tailor solutions. Introducing flexible hours for exercise or healthy food programs may work in some cases, but not in others. The holy grail of corporate wellness is a one-size-fits-all approach, but also one that is rarely found.

Companies and industries need to understand where they stand to see if their efforts are sufficient. The Nokia Corporate Wellness study set out to benchmark prevalence of wellness programs across sectors and compare this against actual physical activity levels. Data showed that wellness initiatives are not tailored to actual needs. While they may work in pharmaceutical companies, wellness initiatives are clearly a failure in utilities, where more than two thirds of employees live sedentary lifestyles. In sectors like real estate, where employees do not benefit from the support of large organizations, there is simply no support.

Taking smart actions with smart data

In corporate wellness, as with many things, if you can't measure it, you can't improve it. By using data to better understand both the needs of employees as well as the support people need to improve habits, companies can make the right targeted decisions to offer the programs and initiatives needed to help employees reach and maintain their health goals.

For example, adopting a healthy lifestyle is easier as a community engagement, rather than a single person decision. As survey results show, employees exercise more when they have an opportunity to be active with coworkers. Those who

commute to work by taking public transportation and even carpooling, tend to be significantly more active and in better shape than when driving by themselves.

There is not a single approach to tackling a complex issue like corporate wellness. HR executives and wellness executives simply need to have the tools and resources needed to assess their employees' overall health and create granular approaches that complement the industry they work in and their employees' activity and stress levels.

Doing so, employers face a new set of challenges. They need to adopt more data-driven management style approaches through technology while preserving humane values, introduce more care at work while avoiding paternalism. They must create personal incentives for people to be more responsible while strengthening healthy communities. This starts with an honest assessment of how unhealthy we have allowed our work to make us. Awareness is not enough. Workplace organization now needs to be disrupted.

Nokia Corporate Wellness

Nokia Corporate Wellness is a new service for HR and Corporate Wellness Managers designed to leverage the power of smart sensors in helping employees track their health in a corporate setting. Thanks to fun, engaging award-winning devices and enhanced community-building and activity challenge functionalities, Corporate Wellness lets a company take a data-driven approach to corporate wellness. Advanced analytics simply make it possible to easily manage participation-based and outcome-based incentives.

The Nokia Study was conducted with the Nokia Health Institute, which develops public health studies from anonymous aggregated data to advance knowledge on connected health. These studies investigate the impact of objects connected on health. Nokia guarantees the confidentiality of personal individual data and protects the privacy of all users in accordance with the Data Protection Act.



Cedric Hutchings

I'm the Vice President of Digital Health at Nokia. Driven by a passion for innovation and understanding of consumers' needs, my vision is to radicalize people's relationships with their personal health, taking away any confusion or uncertainty associated with it by giving them the tools needed to get back into the driver's seat. I have an engineering degree from Ecole Centrale and a Masters from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).