

## Innovation in Programming Award Nomination Statement

Mental Health America of Franklin County (MHAFC, Ohio) has been providing advanced mental health education, awareness, and advocacy programming since 1956, including innovative Pro Bono Counseling, Ombudsman, and Get Connected programs, and award-winning programming such as POEM (Perinatal Outreach and Encouragement for Moms), 2017 *Innovative Programs in Care Award* winner bestowed by 2020 Mom and the National Perinatal Mental Health Society.

### *State-of-the-art thinking and research in the mental health field*

So it is no surprise that MHAFC has recently developed Occumetrics, a uniquely innovative, data driven process to scientifically measure the workplace wellbeing of an organization in any industry. Occumetrics is able to predict causative factors for turnover, job satisfaction, and any other measurable workplace issue and then make practical recommendations for organizational change that will move the needle. Occumetrics is based in extensive academic research of employee psychological wellbeing—research that has identified ten valid dimensions<sup>1</sup> of workplace wellbeing that have been proven to reliably and consistently predict job satisfaction and turnover intention. The academic foundation for Occumetrics is based in research over the last 50 years that takes into account several theories (social exchange theory, leader-member exchange theory, role theory, motivation-hygiene theory) and models (job-demand control model, job characteristics model, job demands-resource model, effort reward imbalance model). In addition, Occumetrics has been developed after reviewing case studies and other workplace mental health initiatives, including major projects in Australia, Canada, and Great Britain.

The psychological wellbeing of employees in any industry is very important in reducing employee turnover and increasing engagement, morale, and productivity. The World Health Organization defines mental health as “a state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to her or his community”<sup>2</sup>. While a recent Gallup study found that only 32 percent of U.S. employees are considered to be engaged in their workplaces<sup>3</sup> and other research studies have found that only one in five workers is highly engaged<sup>4</sup>, a report prepared for the U.S. National Mental Health Commission and the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance says that “workplaces play an important and active role in maintaining the mental health and wellbeing of their workers. A well-designed workplace should support individual mental health and lead to reduced absenteeism, increased employee engagement and improved productivity”<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> **Emotional Exhaustion**—the extent to which employees’ mental and emotional reserves are depleted; **Work Engagement**—the extent to which employees are involved, committed, enthusiastic and focused; **Supervisor Support** and **Colleague Support**—the extent to which colleagues and managers support and encourage; **Work Demands**—the extent of requirements on staff concerning hours, deadlines, quantity of work, taking breaks, and time pressures; **Control/Autonomy**—the extent of independence in how to do the job; **Interpersonal Relationships**—the nature of workplace relationships, such as friction, harassment, and bullying; **Job Role**—the extent to which employees understand their duties and responsibilities and fit into the bigger organizational framework; **Organizational Change**—the extent of employee involvement with organizational change and how they perceive fairness in organizational decision-making; **Distributive Justice**—the extent to which employees perceive fairness in their pay, praise, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Groth, Harvey, Johnson, Joyce, Modini, Nguyen, & Leona Tan, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Mann & Harter, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Awa et al., 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Groth et al., 2014.

## *Reflecting the vision, mission, and values of MHA*

Healthy workplaces also advance the concept of B4Stage4 by preventing more serious employee psychological issues. Mental Health America's website recognizes the extent to which loving or hating a job can cause more or less stress in life and the extent to which Americans are unhappy with their work, which takes its toll on health, relationships, and even lifespan. Indeed, a healthy work environment is key to job satisfaction. On the other hand, MHA also recognizes that unhealthy work environments can lead to weight gain, more health care appointments, and higher rates of absenteeism.

## *Process and measurable outcomes*

With these dynamics in mind, Occumetrics involves first a 65-item survey that measures the ten dimensions of workplace wellbeing and gathers additional information about job satisfaction, satisfaction with pay and benefits, and demographic information relevant to the workplace by which responses may be cross tabbed for further analysis. To date, 20 Occumetrics assessments of nearly 3,800 employees have produced an average survey response rate of 65%, indicating employees' keen interest in providing this important feedback to their employers. In addition to benchmarked means on all workplace wellbeing dimensions and their corresponding 58 variables, the data analysis involves correlation and multivariate regression analyses, resulting in specific reporting on statistically significant factors and the extent of their impact on job satisfaction and turnover intention (and any other measurable workplace issues an employer wishes to include in the study). Occumetrics also collects HR data regarding actual turnover rates, exit interviews, and absenteeism if available.

While such quantitative data are meaningful and powerful, they still don't tell the entire story necessary for understanding a workplace's unique wellbeing dynamics and then being able to recommend related workplace changes. The second step of the Occumetrics assessment involves qualitative data gathering through one-hour-long focus groups of 8-12 employees each that take a deep dive into significant survey results and provide opportunity for employees to express ideas and issues not captured through the survey. Occumetrics' expert facilitators make each focus group a constructive conversation about what really matters to employees and a place to explore and test ideas for improving the workplace environment. The focus groups are divided into front line and managerial staff, and additional individual interviews are conducted with upper management staff, including the CEO.

With all of these data in hand, Occumetrics analyzes the many contributing factors in order to be able to describe—in detail and uniquely for each workplace—its strengths and challenges, high- and low-scoring dimensions of workplace wellbeing, the most critical factors in reducing turnover and increasing job satisfaction, and recommendations for improvement. In so doing, Occumetrics is able to support the overall mental health of employees across all industries by providing their employers with data driven ideas for improving workplace and employee psychological wellbeing.

The critical contribution of Occumetrics is a scientifically proven paradigm that can measure, describe, explain, and predict the unique critical factors for workplace health. In fact, a 2017 capstone study conducted by a cohort of MPA students at The Ohio State University analyzing the Occumetrics process concluded that the Occumetrics survey is an appropriate measurement tool for assessing turnover intention, thereby offering employers benefit from an assessment tool that promotes mental health.

Furthermore, through a grant from the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OMHAS), MHAFC currently offers Occumetrics to 13 OMHAS-licensed behavioral health providers annually, in addition to any other organizations on a fee for service basis. By June 2018 Occumetrics will have completed 27 assessments since its inception with about 5,000 behavioral health employees throughout Ohio. Assessments

have been able to predict typically 50-75% of the causative factors for both turnover and job satisfaction. Each employer has its own unique mix of statistically significant factors. While 2019 will begin the process of re-assessments once employers have had time to implement recommended changes, early results after instituting many of the Occumetrics recommendations at the project's pilot behavioral health provider indicated a one-year staff turnover reduction from 51% to 39%, saving the large Central Ohio provider an estimated \$266,000 in employee replacement costs.

Findings across the board indicate that, while satisfaction with pay is a significant factor for many frontline employees who struggle to be paid a living wage, for employees not struggling with pay the workplace wellbeing dimensions of work engagement, work demands, interpersonal relationships, supervisor support, and organizational change are most influential. Occumetrics works closely with an organization's leadership on practical and specific changes as well as on organizational culture. Recommendations are designed and targeted to increase Positive Sentiment Override (PSO), a concept first proposed by University of Oregon psychologist Robert Weiss. PSO means that positive thoughts about each other in a relationship are so pervasive that they tend to supersede negative feelings. PSO acts "like an insurance policy—it dramatically increases the odds that repair attempts will regularly work and defuse tension"<sup>6</sup>.

### *Consumer involvement and empowerment*

The central tenet of Occumetrics is empowering employers to change work environments in ways that will increase their employees' psychological wellbeing. Employees are involved directly in this process first through their feedback and then through their collective voice which Occumetrics represents, holding leadership accountable for any needed change. Leadership usually responds directly to employees or provides a summary report to the staff prepared by Occumetrics staff (sample attached) because transparency and good faith are prominent factors in developing the kind of employer/employee relationships that create PSO. One organization, for example, followed up by creating Continuous Quality Improvement work groups for staff members to provide input for consideration in agency decision-making and organizational change.

### *Replicable in other settings or agencies*

Occumetrics is replicable in all industries—for profit, not for profit, and government, in any region across the country. MHAFC will be presenting Occumetrics in a breakout session at the June national conference and will offer a structure by which any MHA affiliate may offer Occumetrics in its service area. The structure will involve, for instance, the affiliate recruiting employers to undertake the Occumetrics assessment and managing all communications and logistics for implementation. MHAFC will design and conduct the customized Occumetrics survey, manage the survey's sophisticated data analysis, and then provide any needed training for the affiliate to conduct the focus groups. MHAFC will provide a report template and assist as needed in writing the final report and its associated recommendations according to Occumetrics reporting guidelines. The affiliate will then meet with the employer's leadership for the final report presentation and any needed follow-up. Payment for the Occumetrics service will be shared proportionately between MHAFC and the affiliate.

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<sup>6</sup> Gottman, 2000.