

March 18th 2021

Ontario Workplace Health Coalition | Focus Group Session - Recap
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“It was the evening of March 18th, 2021, when virtually over Zoom, dialogue began, and critical thinking was present. The guests shared their time with care, in hopes to provide insight, and the OWHC was delighted with joy.”

For the OWHC focus group session on March 18th, the guests were: Mandi Buckner, Meagan Regis, and Gavin Mosley.

The session was moderated by Nathan Kolar, OWHC Board Member.

As an icebreaker for the session, the OWHC asked: If you were to share a message on a billboard, to inspire others to stay motivated during the COVID-19 pandemic, what would your billboard say?

What we heard was delightful, and began the session with perspective, and smiles.

The session itself was divided into three sections: SWOT Analysis, Stakeholder Review, and Assumption Log.

The first section, SWOT Analysis, was designed to provide insight for an element of the OWHC Comprehensive Workplace Health (CWH) Model, Health & Lifestyle Practices. The ask to the guests for this first section was positioned in regards obtaining insight from an individual or organizational level, for what may be working, but also, what may be more difficult than one might think, when it comes to Health & Lifestyle Practices. For example, for the Health & Lifestyle Practices examples of physical activity, stress management, and adequate sleep, what makes behaviour change difficult at certain times? The features of a SWOT Analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) provided a guide to help structure the dialogue.

Meagan began this first section by sharing how individuals can be at different levels of readiness to change. She then continued to share how incremental habits over time, can accumulate! Meagan concluded her first line of thought in this first section by sharing the insight that because of the COVID-19 pandemic, ALL employees can be at-risk for adverse health, when we think about health holistically. Workplaces need to ensure that their programs are based on all levels of readiness to change and not just the “early adopters.” It requires a balance to understand how to empower and support the employees who are managing multiple health risks as well. All of us are adapting to the current stressors in our unique circumstances, adjusting to a potentially new way of working, and a heightened focus on the health/safety of our loved ones in our life. These elements can have an impact on our own mental and physical health. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it isn't just the traditional high risk individuals, characteristic of traditional biometric markers, such as high blood pressure, that require our support, it's all individuals!

Gavin's statements in this first section for Health & Lifestyle Practices reflected how it's a different story when work stress comes into the picture, such as managing an email inbox with countless emails, which can be overwhelming. A powerful term Gavin shared in his statements was 'burnout'.

In terms of work stress, the guests collectively acknowledged there are pros and cons when it comes to a flexible work environment. Both pros and cons then influence the work stress someone may feel, leading to their lack of, or absent interest for, Health & Lifestyle Practices, the guests then remarked on.

Wayne Clancy, OWHC Board Member, added to the dialogue with reflecting on how with a flexible work environment and individuals using a home office, for those who have an occupation that allows for a home office, feelings of isolation are not to be taken lightly.

The guests collectively acknowledged the need for organizations to identify causal factors for stress, and how important these factors are to individuals, their employees. An organization may not accurately know that something very important for a respective individual is not being fulfilled, perhaps an unmet need, and how this can influence an individual's wellbeing, classified as Health & Lifestyle Practices within the OWHC Comprehensive Workplace Health (CWH) Model.

Mandi then shared insight to the dialogue about Health & Lifestyle Practices, emphasizing how communication and conversation are paramount. Mandi mentioned the awareness and knowledge of how to have a conversation with a manager is a important consideration. "It can commonly come down to....conversation. How empowered do your workers feel?", Mandi explained. Communication and conversation, in the context of Health & Lifestyle Practices, go hand-in-hand.

The second section of the session with Mandi, Meagan, and Gavin, turned to Stakeholder Review. The positioning of this second section centred around the following questions. When we try to create change in an organization, through the lens of workplace health, who are the key stakeholders of influence and impact? Could there be stakeholders who are overlooked?

Gavin began this second section by mentioning the importance of internal Champions, and also employees themselves as stakeholders. Gavin highlighted the importance of organizations to hear input from their employees, and to gather feedback over time. Further, Gavin emphasized the difference in the process of creating change within organizations. There can be a diverse quantity of stakeholders in large organizations, but not necessarily for small-to-medium organizations, who may be more limited with the quantity of stakeholders to put solutions and programming into action.

Nivith Balasupramaniam, OWHC Board Member, echoed Gavin's mention of large organizations versus small-to-medium organizations in terms of stakeholders. Nivith noted the differences in how a constructs like workflows and timelines can vary between organizations of different sizes.

It is these non-workplace health factors, which can determine success of workplace health solutions and programming, and building a culture of health.

Mandi entered the dialogue of this second section with her insight about how implementation of a standard could be intimidating for a smaller organization.

Meagan then detailed the notion of leadership support. Meagan stated how in addition to leadership support itself, crafting goals and objectives is a critical exercise that is often overlooked. It requires time to formulate, yet it will help inform key performance indicators (KPI's) so employers can track their progress over time and measure the impact they want to have. Meagan also noted how Senior Leaders themselves, can find value in a mental health focused training, as it is one of the most critical skill sets to have to navigate supporting employees and performance at work. C-suite Leaders can also kick-off/participate in People Leader sessions to demonstrate their commitment from an organizational standpoint. As a concluding thought, Meagan shared the significance of Leaders leveraging experts and strategic partners, who can be there to help along the way to shape the employee experience including navigating resources available for support.

Mandi and Meagan jointly agreed, consulting with stakeholders in general is a vital program planning step, as programming which does not take into account various stakeholders, especially employees themselves as stakeholders, can miss the mark for coming across as authentic and genuine.

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Lastly, the third section of the session focused on assumptions, positioned to the guests as: in your respective work, which assumptions do you not make, and at the same time, are there assumptions you do make? The thinking behind this third section crafted by the OWHC was to take what may be an implicit concept, like assumptions, and make it explicit, in order to extract learning lessons.

Mandi shared her thoughts on an assumption she is happy to make, which is, “everyone is trying their best”. Mandi shared with the guests, the concept of having a “beginner’s mind”.

Meagan’s thoughts on an assumption she does not make is, “I always have the answer.” Meagan than shared how in workplace health, there is not just one answer, either.

Gavin’s comments for this third section of the session came from a personal level, as he is trying to look outside of his direct work, for fresh thinking of novel solutions. Gavin reflected on taking a step back for a moment, to not make assumptions, and see things from a different perspective. For an assumption Gavin mentions he does not make, is declaring that the evident data will always translate into the desired change for the other party. He shared how decisions at times can be emotional, and we cannot assume organizations will automatically take action towards the next step.

The OWHC is grateful for Mandi, Meagan, and Gavin to share their insight, and time, for this focus group session. We hope readers find value in this insight, and will join the OWHC for future focus group sessions and other initiatives.

The Guests



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