BCC

Optimizing Worker Wellbeing and Achievement:

Insights From Performance Psychology

PART IV: Holistic Wellness Integration

Abstract

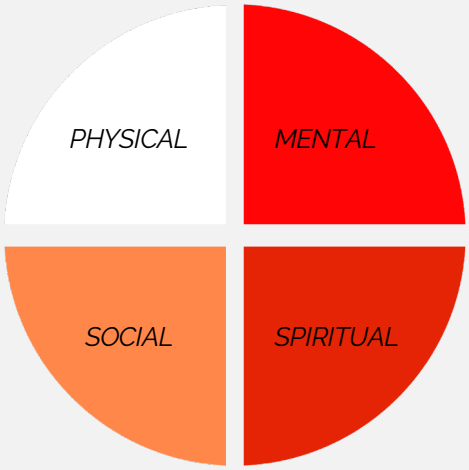
The purpose of this section is to briefly provide an explanation for how remote, autonomous physiologic monitoring can enhance the cognitive and physical abilities of the typical business workforce. Key influences of one's state will be discussed (sleep, diet, physical activity, and mental disposition).

As mentioned in previous reviews, acute and chronic stress have been at the forefront of the organizational collective as of late. Inflation, economic uncertainty, and revitalized health and wellness concerns brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have placed new demands on leaders, perhaps working toward the detriment of their own wellbeing. Conceptualizations of stress are not new to academia, as some point toward it being largely a cognitive phenomena that impacts physiology, whereas others break it into positive and negative etymology. We will be focusing on fluctuations in HRV as the primary objective measure of stress. Thanks to advances in physiologic monitoring this can now be reliably and validly tracked remotely.

Individual, tailored initiatives impacting the wellness of executive staff have the potential to impact organizational performance byway increased decision making, creativity, discipline, etc.

Increasingly high levels of acute stress have been associated with degradation in physical, cognitive, social and emotional performance[1]. We are not at our best when we are overtly stressed, much in the same way high levels of fatigue have a tendency to decrease performance. Professionals from different backgrounds have been employed to strategically target excitation and depletion within demographics where human performance is pivotal. Strength and conditioning specialists, performance psychology consultants, and dietitians are primary positions, oh which sleep, diet, movement, and mental disposition are traditionally emphasized. We will discuss how the aforementioned four types of interventions can influence stress and fatigue.

WELLNESS IS…



Academics posit that wellness can be conceptualized to include multiple constructs. With typical models having anywhere from 4 components to several. No matter the model, academics agree that wellness is not solely a health-related construct, as it has physical, mental, social and spiritual factors. When working with individuals that specialize in physical activity, performance psychology experts and dietitians, 3 of the components are directly covered with tertiary effects on spirituality.

SLEEP

Though older adults may get less sleep from a statistical standpoint, a need for eight hours is still apparent[2]

Lack of sleep has long been known to be in relation with increased irritability, frustration and emotional dysregulation, however when it comes to the relationship between sleep and HRV, more delicate nuance. Not only does sleep adversely impact HRV, heightened stress

A focus on behaviors geared toward proper sleep hygiene must first take precedent over pharmaceutical, medical intervention. As the potential long term negative consequences of sleep hygiene-related behavioral change are non-existent.

also adversely impacts sleep. Therefore, it is plausible that a chronic, long-term relationship exists between stress and sleep, where the lack of sleep perpetuates stress, and this stress in-turn harms sleep.

Perhaps most relevant for the purpose of this section, HRV assessed before bed correlates with quality of sleep experienced that night, as well as HRV assessed the next morning[3]. Recent meta-analyses have demonstrated that interventions to increase quality of sleep amongst healthy/non-clinical populations are effective[4]. Further supporting the claim that efforts to raise pre-bedtime HRV will have short- and long-term benefits for stress and fatigue.

DIET

Facets of diet have been shown to impact HRV acutely as well as long-term. While more study would be advantageous to solidify the correlation, it is clear that we can increase (Mediterranean diet, omega-3 fatty acids, B-vitamins, probiotics, polyphenols and weight loss) as well as decrease (intakes of saturated or trans-fat and high glycaemic carbohydrates) HRV by the types of food we ingest[6]. While these are meaningful correlations to consider in relation to stress and fatigue, the performance benefits are implied as well, especially when hydration is considered. Water intake has been shown to be essential to the maintenance of cardiac rhythm and a means to increase cardiac vagal control[7]. Ultimately this correlational research is supportive of the notion that HRV can be widely used as a biomarker to consider the influence of diet on mental and physical health.

EXERCISE

Exercise and physical activity play a critical role in the longevity of humans, as sedentary individuals are at greater risk or all cause-mortality alongside various cancer and diseases. Not only does longevity play a role, but we are physiologically more equipped and ready to handle daily stressors when our systems are in a capacity to do so. Increased physical activity may result in an initial decrease in HRV, as our systems become taxed, however, depending on the type of exercise, a rebound of HRV is typically apparent. Further strengthening our ability to manage future stress.

Physical activity interventions have been utilized within general demographics to increase general health and importantly as a means to decrease workplace stress (as measured by HRV) [8].

MENTAL DISPOSITION

Long periods of intense concentration and focus can be a considerable drain of bodily resources. In a study performed by Sapolsky, elite chess players were found to burn an extraordinary amount of calories per day during tournaments[9]. The workload of a CEO or business executive is primarily mental, and the demands can drain them of the necessary energy to make high quality decisions, control emotional responses and interact effectively with peers/subordinates.

The fact that mental exertion has physiological consequences can be quite difficult for individuals to grasp. This awareness has led to realizations that by changing one's mental state, levels of stress can fluctuate. By finding times throughout the day to engage in diaphragmatic breathing, short meditation, or repetitive prayer we can energize ourselves to sustain longer periods of high caliber work.

CONCLUSION

Workplace wellness initiatives are not a novel concept. The success of each program remains largely variable, and could perhaps benefit from individually tailored solutions. Sleep, dietetics, physical activity and mental disposition provide 4 lenses in which we can center our focus to increase the control of stress and fatigue, thereby creating high performance.

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