

Unilever – Lamplighter

Background

As an organization, Unilever recognizes that its brands can make a positive impact on people's health and well-being. Consequently, Unilever strives to create a positive organizational culture in which employees actively think about health and well-being.

A company of healthy employees is more likely to benefit from positive work behaviours, increased engagement levels, reduced absence rates and healthcare costs and increased performance and productivity.

As a result, Unilever has developed Lamplighter, a global organizational well-being programme designed to improve the health and well-being of Unilever employees over a 6 to 12 month period by focusing on exercise, nutrition and mental resilience. The ultimate aim is to have Lamplighter implemented in every country where Unilever hosts offices. Unilever's 2010 aim is to extend the rollout to a total of 40 countries.

Lamplighter was initially created in 2001 following a request from senior leaders the company to help them improve and manage their energy levels to allow them to get the most out of their personal time and find ways to better manage their heavy workloads.

It proved to be so successful that it was piloted in a number of categories and regions between 2003 and 2008. Following strong support from Unilever's CEO, Paul Polman, Lamplighter's remit went global in 2009. Lamplighter is currently being implemented in 30 countries reaching 35,000 employees.

Through a combination of physiological and nutritional assessments as well as mental resilience tools, employees are offered a bespoke diet and exercise programme as well as free use of on-line support materials to help them reach their goals.

Types of activities

Unilever was one of the first businesses to develop a programme with such a broad scope. What distinguishes Lamplighter from many other corporate health and wellbeing projects is that it is individual and bespoke. Lamplighter is a specially-tailored and confidential programme which addresses not only many aspects of physical health, but mental health issues as well.

The format of the programme differs slightly in each country where it is implemented, in order to account for cultural and other differences. Regardless of the various methods used to implement Lamplighter, the programme will always include the following fundamental elements:

A nutrition component: Following a nutritional assessment (often involving a blood chemistry test) employees are offered tailored nutritional advice to reduce lifestyle risk factors such as blood pressure, cholesterol, poor diet etc.

An exercise component: A personal exercise plan is developed for the individual based on health requirements and the employee's personal goals.

A mental resilience component: Usually in the form of an online tool which employees can use to monitor and improve their individual pressure levels as well as identify the sources of pressure in their lives.

A reassessment: After an initial six months in the Lamplighter programme, individuals are reassessed to track progress.

For example, the employee working in Unilever's Corporate Centre in London undergo the following experience [see textbox]:

Highlights

Through Lamplighter, Unilever has become one of the first organizations to be able to prove the relationship between health, engagement and performance.

Lamplighter has also received international recognition:

- The Institute for Health and Productivity Management (IHPM) awarded Unilever the 2010 Level II and the International Corporate Health and Productivity Management Awards in 2008.

Level II is the highest international level of recognition the IHPM has to offer in the field of health and productivity and recognizes Unilever's excellence in demonstrating globally how it integrates its health programme with corporate productivity.

In November 2009, Lamplighter profiled as an example of best practice at India's Innovation in Workplace Wellness conference hosted by the World Economic Forum and World Health Organisation. In addition Unilever has been recognised as an example of industry best practice by the American Psychiatric Foundation

Results

Benefits to employee health

An initial health screening involving a health risk assessment (HRA) and blood chemistry test. Once blood results are in this is followed up with a



Debrief with a health professional during which the employee undergoes physiological and nutritional assessments which lead to a



Personalized improvement programme (nutrition and exercise) which is monitored over an initial six month period.



An online mental resilience tool is also available to the employee to help address all aspects of health and performance. This is managed by an external provider to ensure confidentiality



Reassessment after 6 months

An initial pilot study evaluated by a third party (Lancaster University – study submitted for publication) has shown significant improvements to the overall health of employees engaged in the Lamplighter programme over a six month period. The most significant improvements have been observed in the areas of workplace health, fitness, lifestyle risk factors and nutritional habits.

The Lancaster study showed that employees who participated in Lamplighter:

- Felt significantly more engaged with their work
- Were less likely to take time off work due to health problems
- Were able to perform better in their job
- Were less likely to be adversely affected by pressure at work
- Were more likely to practice healthy behaviours at work

Anecdotal evidence also supports these findings reporting increased motivation, energy and performance as well as better overall health and sleeping patterns.

Health benefits from a category pilot rollout revealed:

- Upon reassessment there was:
 - An 18% increase in the number of employees who exercised
 - A 5% drop in the number of employees with high BMI
 - A 13% drop in the number of employees with high blood pressure... (down from 21% to just 8%)
 - An 8% drop in the number of employees with high cholesterol
 - A 5% decrease in the number of employees classed as having poor nutrition
- An 8% decrease in the number of smokers. Overall the number of employees classed as 'high health risk' dropped by 5%
- Overall the number of employees classed as 'low health risk' increased by 23%

Benefits to the business

The consequential business benefits of Lamplighter are also being noticed with reduced healthcare costs and increased productivity.

Increasing the number of employees in our low risk population ultimately means cost savings for the business, as 'low risk' employees cost the company less money in health care costs and absenteeism.

Lamplighter plays a vital role in helping Unilever achieve important objectives outlined in its business strategy. Through Lamplighter, Unilever helps employees to renew their wellbeing and energy. This in turn contributes to a high performance culture in the company with improved productivity and performance for both the individual, on a personal and professional level, and Unilever as a business.

For example, Unilever first measured the impacts of Lamplighter in 2003 on a small group of employees across three of the UK sites. As part of this pilot, not only did Unilever see impressive improvements to the health and energy levels of the employees, the business also benefitted from a financial return on investment of £3.73: 1. So for every £1 Unilever invested in its employees, it got back almost £4 through reduced health care costs, and increased productivity.

Rollouts since this pilot have produced similar findings.