As a seminal researcher in business management, Frederic Herzberg famously argued that the things that motivate us are different from the things that dissatisfy us at work. Put another way, the opposite of the things that dissatisfy us are not the things that inspire us. Herzberg showed that things such as pay, work conditions, or supervisory support are hygiene factors in motivation. A workplace with deficits in these areas will have unhappy workers but get these things fixed won’t fuel higher productivity. What motivates, instead, are things such as meaningful work, recognition, advancement, and achievement.

In this issue of The Art of Health Promotion we explore a broader value proposition for worksite wellness and those factors that predispose and reinforce better employee performance. Jennifer Flynn and Nikki Hudsmith share results from a survey of more than 500 leaders and describe where health and well-being fit among a range of other variables that business leaders watch in the interest of improving business performance. Building on the premise that a broader value proposition necessitates a broader approach to workforce health and well-being, Sheryl Niebuhr and Grossmeier contribute an article on a “Broader Approach,” making the case for “a more systemic, integrated, and cross-functional effort serving a broader strategic vision,” where organizational readiness to change is as vital as individual readiness.

The health promotion field is showing a keen appetite for this call for a more robust framework that links health and wellness with employee engagement, peak performance, and organizational well-being. You will see that these contributors envision a bridge to new thinking and cross-functional collaboration. Jennifer Flynn and Grossmeier review three books that also call for new conceptual trusses upon which to build such bridges. The transformation they invite still awaits an evidence base showing what aspects of health and well-being are affected by changes in organization’s culture, or vice versa. Without such data, we would be constructing bridges before we know the flow or the weight of the traffic. Borrowing from Herzberg’s findings, I would posit that the factors that predict better performance are not merely the opposite of things that diminish productivity. We know that poor health reduces productivity and presenteeism, but what mechanisms increase well-being and, at the same time, improve performance for individuals and their organization? Moreover, how equipped is the health promotion profession to define, enable, and measure well-being? Business journals abound with cases of innovative cultures that foster greater organizational performance, but nearly all such examples are silent on the role of individual wellness or organizational well-being as it is defined so eloquently by contributors to this issue.

Wellness or Well-being?
I have heard practitioners and business leaders alike advocate for a movement from wellness to “well-being.” Absent a cogent definitional distinction, this sounds wonderfully retro to me. The World Health Organization defined health as a state of “complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease.” Moreover, Halbert Dunn, who coined the term wellness, was primarily focused on psychosocial qualities and the “fascinating and ever-changing panorama of life itself.” Perhaps some have come to view wellness as the absence of ill health, where well-being is the presence of different, more transcendental assets. While I’m not sure how we can surpass “complete social well-being,” Niebuhr and Grossmeier offer an inspiring and aspiration-worthy definition of well-being along with a brilliant commentary on how to move our field forward. In my closing commentary, I reflect on the ways in which industrial-strength quality-improvement tools for measuring the value stream between health, culture, wellness, and well-being could serve our field if we are to move from ideation about new paradigms to improving organizational and individual outcomes, whether they be health, performance, or a company’s well-being.

References

Paul E. Terry, PhD
Senior Vice President and Chief Science Officer, StayWell, and Editor, The Art of Health Promotion

Blog your ideas and reactions at: http://www.healthpromotionjournal.com/blog/
Follow me on Twitter at: https://twitter.com/pauleterry.