

**Blueprint for Building Business Success by Becoming a ‘Healthcare Business’  
WHITE PAPER**

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## **Blueprint for Building Business Success by Becoming a ‘Healthcare Business’**

*More than ever before, U.S. Businesses must prioritize creating healthy workplaces where people want to go to and do their best work. To do so comprehensively and holistically, U.S. businesses need to become a ‘healthcare’ business.*

### ***What’s Wrong***

Job stress, illness, injury, work-family conflict, disease, death—is there any wonder why the national average of employee engagement hovers around 30% (Harter, 2022), why job satisfaction is at an all-time low (Microsoft, 2021), and why employees report lower organizational commitment compared to pre-COVID surveys (Parker & Horowitz, 2022)?

When companies fail to address these issues, leaders find themselves continuously chasing people-related problems: employee recruitment and replacement, performance improvement plans, complaint resolution, absenteeism, workers compensation and vocational rehabilitation, internal theft (inventory shrink), and lawsuits. Downstream problems arise as a result: missed revenue targets, increased operating costs, customer service issues, inventory shrink, lost market share, and lawsuit settlements. And this is the short list.

The costs incurred because of people-related problems are not only unnecessary, they’re exacting a terrible human toll: 120,000 excess (and unnecessary) deaths per year and about \$180 billion in additional health-care expenditures (Pfeffer, 2018). In his book, *Dying for a Paycheck*, Pfeffer believes that all companies are in the healthcare business for two reasons: in the U.S. they pay for slightly more than half of all healthcare, and (2) everywhere, what they do in the workplace profoundly affects employee health. Building upon that idea, this paper goes a step further. I believe that all business *should become* a ‘healthcare business’ because when they embrace this perspective, employees will be safer, healthier, and thrive, and the business will enjoy all the benefits of a motivated, engaged, and effective workforce. A healthcare business can be characterized by organizational policies, practices, and working conditions that promote employee health and effectiveness through a system of actions and accountability across business functions a common goal shared across business functions by removing physical and

psychosocial factors that cause harm and promoting factors that promote employee health, well-being, and productivity. This paper aims to make this case.

Employees are expecting and demanding explicit demonstrations of trust that their health, safety, and well-being will be valued and supported in concrete and compelling ways. If they don't get it, many are heading for the doors. Voluntary turnover increased from 3.56 million in January 2020 (pre-COVID) to 4 million in 2020 and 4.17 million in November 2022 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Employees have changed the calculus of what they are willing to do: Only 70-80% of workers surveyed plan to go back to their workplaces full-time, and 20% will work only remotely (De Smet, Dowling, Mugayar-Baldocchio & Schaniger, 2021). Experts project that health, safety, and well-being challenges will continue in a post-pandemic world (McRae & Aykens, 2022).

What we have accepted for the last two decades as the normal course of business cannot continue. In fact, employees won't let it. With exposure through the pandemic to how their work lives could change, they are *demanding* healthier workplaces, or leaving. The Wall Street Journal reports that employees are exploring other forms of employment and self-employment where they have more control over their work and work hours (Mitchell & Dill, 2021). They are setting new terms for their employment by looking for better benefits, better work hours, flexible work hours, more access to resources, and more reasonable workloads.

This change is why Pfeffer and others are urging every business to think of themselves as a *healthcare business*—one that benefits from taking care of the health and well-being of their employees. “*All organizations are in the healthcare business—because they may be paying for health care, and because what they do in the workplace profoundly affects employee health*” (Pfeffer, 2022; Personal Communication).

Seeing organizations in this way changes the perspective regarding how operations, work environment, services, and benefits can positively impact not only employees, but also the organization's ability to grow profitably and avoid unnecessary expense and inefficiencies. This approach serves the best interests of both employees and employers: it is a win-win. Why?

Because when employees are healthy and focused on their work, good things happen for the business (e.g., productivity, commitment) and bad things can be avoided (e.g., workers compensation, lawsuits, job vacancies). A ‘healthcare’ business starts with a focus on employee health and well-being as the primary objective of each business function--working together--to establish and maintain a healthy workplace that supports employee motivation and the ability to do their best work.

### ***A New Blueprint for Business***

Typical metrics for business success consists of three main components: Cash flow, economic growth, and increased earnings. Problems that undermine goal achievement are often addressed through operational modifications, personnel changes, workload and time pressure increases, addition of financial incentives, and layoffs. True, bottom line improvements can be achieved through these actions, but they are often short-lived and come at a great personal cost for employees who are directly affected by these actions. This approach ignores an underlying layer of causes and potential mitigating actions. That is, how performance-related issues arise in the first place. Work and work-related problems such as job strain, harassment, burnout, toxic work environments, work overload, poor or absent training, harmful working conditions, and inadequate resources are well-documented causes of performance and productivity losses, yet the *linkages* between work- related problems and performance issues, production gaps and deficiencies, unplanned operational costs, and business shortfalls remain under-recognized. A fundamental understanding of business is missing—*it is all interconnected*. Moreover, *employees’ work (at all levels) IS the business*.

It is well-known in the social science and management literatures but not universally adopted as a truth that the pathway to business success is through employee health and well-being (Pfeffer, 2019). Additionally, employee health and well-being are still thought of as an “extra” expense to the business as opposed to a necessary building block—like bricks and mortar--of a *healthy and profitable business*. However, it is easily demonstrated that having healthy and engaged employees inoculates business from many threats to business success as the list below illustrates:

- Job vacancies and voluntary quits where the vacancy means lost productivity

- Poor decision-making due to flawed policies, processes, practices, or human errors
- Untrained or unskilled workers due to ineffective selection processes or failed training programs
- Accidents due to ineffective safety controls, poor safety awareness climate, or inattention
- Lack of psychological safety from poor leadership training and neglectful or abusive management styles
- Lack of accountability for business mistakes and poor management practices
- Absenteeism where employees take sick days or don't show
- Presenteeism where employees show up with low productivity due to illness or personal concerns
- Illegal activity due to poor supervision, lack of accountability, flawed incentives
- Weak culture and low morale where motivation and sense of contribution is degraded
- Complaints and lawsuits filed by employees as a function of noncompliance with organizational policies and rules, and regulatory noncompliance

*The new blueprint for business success must recast the focus of every business function toward the support of employees' intrinsic work motivation and ability to do their best work, and the removal of barriers to employees' own success, thus enabling employees to deliver desired outcomes. And the key to this is looking at business challenges through the lens of health.*

### ***How Business Functions Contribute to a New Blueprint for Business Success***

If business functions use the 'healthcare business' mindset to re-think their strategies and priorities, they could positively impact productivity and profitability collectively. Each function plays a role in improving employee capabilities by taking actions and coordinating with other business functions to support employee health and well-being. Their collaboration, driven by a common goal of creating and sustaining a 'healthcare business,' can ensure that business function strategies and operations are aligned and integrated and do not create internal conflicts that undermine business success. Figure 1 below depicts what this approach would look like.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

The following are brief examples of worker-related business functions that can work together as a ‘healthcare business’ to contribute to employee and ultimately business success. If your organization does not have *all* these functions, the model still applies for the functions that exist.

- Human Resource Management (HR). As the owners of strategies to effectively and efficiently manage people and maximize an organization’s competitive advantage, HR has taken ownership of programs that support employee health such as wellness programs, healthy food options, social clubs, access to physical exercise, competitive compensation and reward practices, training and professional development programs, and employee involvement and participation opportunities.

HR can contribute directly to a healthcare business by implementing processes and practices based on scientifically-sound talent and performance management strategies which would result in highly qualified hires, diverse and inclusive decision processes, highly satisfied and engaged employees, greater equity and inclusion, and less stress and low risk of work-related harms. HR could use its HRIS system and business processes to understand where barriers to employee success and points of dissatisfaction exist within the organization and then work with management to develop and implement remedies and interventions.

- Organizational Development (OD). As experts in the study and implementation practices, systems, and techniques that drive organizational change and culture, OD can analyze the messages it sends regarding organizational values, work overload, dedication to the business, time pressure, work/family balance, employee work hours, employee responsiveness to company emails, and performance monitoring—all of which can cause harmful job stress and performance issues. OD also could use its expertise in organizational change methodologies in collaboration with leadership and management to redirect messaging, change organizational practices, and provide needed resources to support employees’ work motivation and ability to perform at their best.

- Risk Management (RM) Although the focus of RM is the risk assessment and mitigation of financial losses, there is a direct relationship between employee actions such as absenteeism, presenteeism, and turnover, and resulting financial loss due to lost productivity, lost revenue, and added costs to replace voluntary quits. RM's assessment of risks associated with underqualified management, poor working conditions, and demotivating or harmful organizational policies and practices could be included within their purview as these factors also affect the organization's bottom line. RMs working with HR and management could monitor employee productivity issues to assess potential financial threats attributable to organizational and management practices, working conditions, and various physical and psychological harms, and take pre-emptive action to reduce threats to employee health and productivity.
- Legal Counsel (GC). The General Counsel's office (GC) focuses on the assessment compliance with and mitigation of violations of federal and locally-mandated regulations. The GC can contribute to a 'healthcare business' by monitoring operations and organizational programs and practices to ensure that the organization functions in alignment with federal, state, and local laws. The GC can also evaluate complaints of operational problems such as payroll issues, overtime policies and requirements, health and safety violations, and harassment, discrimination, and retaliation incidents to identify systemic problems within the business that could lead to employee losses, lawsuits, and destructive employee behavior. The GC collaboration with other internal watchdog units (e.g., OSHA, EEO, Compensation & Benefits) can evaluate such potential business threats and employee harms and take remedial action in coordination with HR, FIN and OPS.
- Real Estate and Facilities Management (RE/FM). RE/FMs are key players in creating a 'healthcare business' by identifying employees' health and productivity needs and the necessary support systems to enable employees to be healthy and productive. RE/FMs are responsible for providing work spaces and amenities that create healthy workplaces to promote employee health and well-being to the extent possible given resources available. This includes the indoor environmental quality (e.g., ventilation, lighting,

toxic-free building materials, temperature, humidity, and noise), well-fitting and ergonomic furniture, access to food and beverages, and spaces for flexible working requirements. RE/FM can build/engineer the physical built environment and supply that environment for employee and business success with particular focus on high leverage physical environment features which provide dividends across the entire organization. They can also identify threats to employee success by monitoring employee satisfaction and productivity barriers through surveys, interviews, and observation. Collaboration with HR and management enables RE/FM to design workplaces and non-work spaces that “work for employees” and support their efforts to perform at their best.

- Occupational Safety and Health (OSH). OSH can create a ‘healthcare business’ by serving as a key watchdog for work hazards and harms present in the workplace as part of the physical and psychological work environment and then mitigate or eliminate those harms. Work activity naturally presents safety and health risks despite engineers’ and industrial hygienists’ best efforts to eliminate potential harms. Safety programs and occupational health interventions such as ergonomic furniture and tools, safety and equipment use training, and employee observations reduce the potential amount and degree of harm present. These efforts are designed to reduce employee illness, injuries, disabilities, mental health problems, and deaths. Proactive actions to identify potential harms and mitigate existing ones can lower absenteeism, presenteeism, workers compensation, healthcare costs, turnover, and litigation. OSH can work with RM, HR, management, and RE/FM to monitor potential risk conditions and eliminate risks before they result in employee harm and financial loss.
- Operations (OPS). OPS can contribute to a ‘healthcare’ business by ensuring that job designs, work processes, quality assurance, job aids, and staffing models support efficient work production *and* enable employees to be most effective in their jobs. In other words, operations should ensure that the components of work production “works” for people. Efficiency is differentiated from effectiveness here for a reason: efficiency is engineered to minimize resources to gain the most in a unit of production whereas effectiveness is determined by employees’ use of the resources they need when they need



it, and guidance or cooperation from necessary parties to execute tasks in a time-efficient manner. Effectiveness hinges on employees' ability to do the work and their motivation to perform the work well. Efficiency does not equal effectiveness.

Industrial engineering algorithms ignore work motivational and consequently assume that employee performance is elastic—employees will meet work demand regardless of physical or psychosocial factors and working conditions. It is well-known, however, that contextual factors are important for employee motivation and thus, OPS plays a critical role in understanding performance issues where the design of work and work processes, staffing, training, and cross-functional coordination cause reductions in both efficiency and effectiveness—the product of both employee ability and motivation. OPS can coordinate with HR, OSH, RM and Finance to learn where in operations work and process designs and resources are not matching employee requirements and are resulting in excess costs, employee health issues, and negative business results. Indeed, OPS has the opportunity to examine the business as a system to determine which parts are working well and which ones are not—this time from a holistic perspective which includes not only production efficiency but also the health, safety, well-being, and effectiveness of employees. Our experience today with the human and financial costs of employee mental and physical health problems and burnout demands a holistic and systems view of business operations.

- Finance (FIN). FIN can play a part in a 'healthcare business' by ensuring that investments are made in the creation of work environments, furniture and equipment, amenities, programs and training, compensation and paid leave policies, and other required resources to create and sustain a healthy workplace. Acquiring the right talent in sufficient numbers when needed and investing in the development of that talent to build retention and commitment are vital steps toward an effective workforce. Understaffing, lack of training, lack of career development, and lack of a variety of other resources such as reliable technology, ergonomic furniture and tools, and meeting spaces essential to teamwork and collaboration undermine business success because they hold back the performance of the people who create that success. Comprehensive accounting

of all costs associated with employee-related issues would generate a picture that FIN needs in order to see clearly how well the business is operating (or not) and can identify opportunities to make “repairs” so that the business works like a “well-oiled machine”—understanding that *employees are in fact “the machine.”* FIN can work with HR, RM, OSH, OPS, and GC to determine where investments are needed to resolve employee issues and to build greater capacity.

### ***How Collaboration Across Business Functions Builds a ‘Healthcare’ Business***

An effective workforce is achieved through a culture that adheres to strong values, behavioral norms, and performance expectations, recruits qualified job applicants, and then trains and manages around these expectations. When done well, employees commit to the success of the business because they receive the benefits of employment, are treated fairly, are free from harms and injurious working conditions, and are supported in their pursuit of performance effectiveness. A critical part of sustaining an effective workforce is having an organizational infrastructure consisting of interconnected business functions that work collaboratively toward a common goal: having an engaged, motivated, and high performing workforce by creating a healthy workplace free from hazards and harms, and is built to promote all employees’ health, well-being, and productivity. There are several implications of such an organizational infrastructure which supports and sustains a healthy workplace:

1. Business functions have overlapping goals and interests and thus, reduce opportunities for conflicting and competing interests. This, in turn, opens the way to solving complex organizational problems that take multiple parties to solve together such as working conditions that produce unhealthy job stress and destructive behaviors that follow (e.g., overeating, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, and suicide), understaffing that lead to excessive workloads and working hours, untrained or unfit managers who fail to manage and develop employees, and interpersonal conflicts and dysfunction on the job, which result in absenteeism, presenteeism, and involuntary turnover of prized talent.
2. Interconnections make explicit that business functions share the same fate—they rise and fall together. Interconnections also make explicit that actions taken by one function

affect the actions of other functions and sometimes inflicting negative consequences on recipients of those actions. For example, let's say management creates an overtime policy to control overtime expense that requires pre-approval by an employee's manager, but managers ignore the policy and require employees to take care of customers even if it takes staying over their shift without pre-approval. Chronic understaffing can lead to necessary overtime, but without pre-approval, employees will not be paid for their overtime. Non-payment of overtime is a violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act (1938); because of the disconnect between OPS and HR in the formulation and roll-out of this policy, a costly lawsuit results and takes valuable time away from both managers and employees to litigate. When business functions work in concert, the organization can avoid costly inconsistencies across functions which can negatively impact both employees and the business as a whole.

To make this view more concrete, the following table shows worker-related barriers to business success and the business functions that can play a role in addressing these barriers. The takeaway is the overwhelming overlap across business functions in the contributions they can make in addressing these barriers. This does not mean contributions are duplicative; rather, each function has a unique role in addressing a barrier. Collectively, they form a formidable force of change in the way the business operates toward greater effectiveness.

[Insert Table 1 here]

3. Most important, employees have the experience of predictability, consistency, and fairness when business functions work together to support their health, well-being, and productivity. This is because strategies are formulated and decisions are made to achieve the primary goal of the organization—supporting and maintaining the health, well-being, and productivity of the workforce. When interconnected and working in concert, business functions can perform their work more synergistically and therefore, identify inconsistencies and resolve problems early before they have a significant effect on the organization. They can also act in ways that can make other business functions more effective by offering assistance or resources when needed. In sum, such an organizational

infrastructure provides employees the assurance that the organization is serious about their welfare and will make decisions which affect them that do the least harm and more importantly, promote their effectiveness.

The examples below provide guidance for what cross-functional collaboration might look like under a cross-functional management structure for managing threats to the business:

- **Job Vacancies** could be the result of any number of workplace factors, and understanding can be addressed through the collaboration of HR, RM, the General Counsel's office, Real Estate/Facilities Management, Occupational Health and Safety, Operations, and Finance. They would collaborate to address vacancies by understanding contributing factors (e.g., turnover from illness or injury, poor response to employee complaints, safety concerns) and devise solutions across the organization to reduce or eliminate those factors, thus reducing the risk of lost productivity.
- **Weak Culture** could be addressed through the collaboration of Organizational Development, Risk Management, the GC's office, Real Estate/Facilities Management, and Operations. The underlying causes of weak culture could come from a number of aspects of the organization such as poor leadership and management, a physical work environment that prevents social cohesion, poor hiring and selection systems, or business processes low accountability. Weak culture could result in a number of negative behaviors such as turnover, violations of organizational and regulatory rules, and internal theft. By recognizing that a weak culture exists, interventions could be devised to strengthen culture and build in supports for increasing social cohesion and accountability.
- **Decision Mistakes** could arise from a number of different issues, and the GC's office, RE/FM, OSH, FIN, HR, and OPS could work together to identify common causes for the mistakes: lack of knowledge, lack of accountability, performance pressure, poor performance measurement, and morale issues. RM and OD might collaborate to ensure that interventions are developed and implemented to improve decision quality and to

reduce the probability of significant mistakes.

- **Unskilled Workers** could be addressed through a collaboration of functions that have a training component. This would include HR, OD, the GC, OSH, FIN, and OPS. HR could conduct a training needs assessment for all departments, and then training program development and delivery would follow based on the needs.
- **Accidents/Injuries** could be addressed by understanding their root cause. OSH would investigate with assistance from RM. The root causes embedded in the design and functioning of the physical built environment would involve RE/FM, or those within business processes would involve OPS. FIN would contribute to developing cost reduction strategies that address the root causes.
- **Management Problems** due to managers who are poorly trained, unmotivated to manage, unsupervised, unsuited to the job, or have “an axe to grind” could be addressed several ways depending on the cause. HR could investigate causes and collaborate with OD, OSH, and OPS as needed to recommend management or design changes to reduce future problems. FIN and GC could assist with change implementation, especially if the problems result in significant costs and/or lawsuits.
- **Sickness Absence** could be addressed by understanding whether causes reside within the workplace, outside the purview of the organization, or both. HR, OSH, and OPS could investigate the problem with FIN and RM assessing the size of the problem and the need to act to reduce the problem. RE/FM and OD could devise the appropriate interventions to reduce sickness that is attributed to the physical work environment or job stress-related factors associated with the psychosocial environment.
- **Voluntary Turnover** could be addressed by understanding its underlying causes through exit interviews conducted by HR and observations made by OPS and management. Similar to sickness/absence issues, the response to controlling unwanted voluntary turnover, OSH, OPS, and HR could investigate to determine the source(s) and size of the

problem, with RE/FM and OD tasked to devise appropriate interventions. FIN and RM could be involved intervention implementation along with the GC should turnover be related to legal issues present in the workplace.

- **Illegal Activity**, could be addressed through investigations by HR, OPS, RM, and the GC, depending on the offender, with discussion of how to eliminate the illegal activity. Depending on the degree of risk the illegal activity poses to the business, RM and FIN may take the lead in implementing the intervention and see it to its conclusion. The GC may take it to the next step of litigation or defense with HR's assistance.
- **Presenteeism** (coming to work despite illness, injury, anxiety, and other personal issues, resulting in reduced productivity) could be addressed in a manner similar to sickness absence as it represents a loss of productivity even though employees are present at work. HR, OPS, OSH, and RE/FM could co-investigate sources of the problem, which could be the result of any number of factors. Should the physical plant and indoor environment be a source of the problem, FIN and RE/FM would address the problem. Should organizational issues be the source of the problem, OD and OPS would collaborate to change work processes and organizational policies.
- **Lawsuits** require the entire cross-functional team to work collaboratively to understand the conditions that led to lawsuits being filed. There are likely to be multiple failures across business functions which planted the seeds of dissatisfaction and frustration to the point of employees seeking outside help to address their complaints. Most if not all business functions could be involved in addressing lawsuits. An audit of all business function legal compliance could potentially lower the risk of future lawsuits.

While it may be tempting to think that this is the ideal and that this will never happen, we actually have experience with such a business model which has proven to be highly successful in the past. The model is the creation of *cross-functional teams*. In this case, ***a cross-functional management structure*** would be created. A cross-functional management structure would consist of a team of high-level managers from each of the functions that affect employee health,

well-being, and productivity (e.g., the functions listed above), led by the owner or CEO of the business who would direct the managers to work together to synchronize business strategies, goals, and plans to coordinate their actions toward support of their primary goal. They consult with each other to ensure that decisions made by any one do not cause downstream problems with other functions. When problems come up, they consult with each other and problem-solve solutions to reduce threats to their primary goal. They recognize the value of each other in building both business success and a healthy and highly engaged workforce.

This is what a ‘healthcare business’ looks like and acts like. Any organization can be a healthcare business. The key ingredient is a primary focus of all parties on developing and executing strategies, goals, and plans that result in employee health, well-being, and productivity. **It becomes a ‘healthcare’ business because the organization directs its focus and actions to the *care of employee health and well-being*.** Decades of evidence has shown that productivity will follow.

### ***Conclusion***

Leaders who need a business case to invest in health and well-being, are thinking about this challenge the wrong way. Employees are the lifeblood of any business—the pandemic has shown us this truth in many ways. The ROI is obvious. Which side do executives want to stand on: invest in employee success or invest in employee replacement?

Every employee failure (management and executives included) through quits, absence, workers compensation, presenteeism, inattention, risky short-cuts, unskilled actions, neglect, harassment, and intentional harm is a significant threat to business success. This realization should elevate the importance of the care and protection of all employees so that these failures don’t happen or at least minimized to the extent possible. To ensure that the organization as a whole operates in this manner—supporting employee effectiveness and minimizing employee failures--businesses need to create healthy workplaces that promote employee health, safety, and well-being through coordinated strategies, goals, plans, and actions executed by a cross-function management team. When the whole organization pulls together in the same direction, businesses and employees will succeed together.

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**Table 1: Work-Related Barriers to Business Success**

<b><u>Work-Related Barriers</u></b>											
<b><u>Business Function</u></b>	Job Vacancies	Weak Culture	Decision Mistakes	Unskilled Workers	Accidents/ Injuries	Managemt Problems	Sickness Absence	Voluntary Turnover	Illegal Activity	Presenteeism	Law-suits
Human Resources (HR)	X			X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Organizational Development (OD)		X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
Risk Management (RM)	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X
General Council (GC)	X	X	X	X		X		X	X		X
Real Estate/Facilities Management (RE/FM)	X	X	X		X		X	X		X	X
Occupational Safety & Health (OSH)	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Operations (OPS)	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Finance (FIN)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Employee Assistance (EAP)	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Human Factors/ Ergonomists (HF/E)	X			X	X		X	X		X	X

Figure 1. 'Healthcare Business' Model Showing Collaborative and Integrated Functions

