

An Analysis of Employee Assistance Programs in the Workplace

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Abstract

Across the world among various industries, the concept of employee assistance and/or employee wellness programs are becoming increasingly more popular and widespread. Between the global pandemic, hybrid or fully remote working arrangements, increased cost of living and increasing inflation, this rapidly advancing society provides a new set of challenges that were either nonexistent or not as prominent as when employee assistance programs were first created. Originally instituted as a response to alcohol dependency, the desires and needs for employee assistance programs range from personal employee matters occurring both in the workplace and at home to general depression and anxiety support that is provided by the employer for any reason.

This research presents an opportunity to better understand employee assistance programs from the perspectives of individual use and program effectiveness. A collection of literature spanning four consecutive decades is synthesized and referenced to help build a case for providing corresponding recommendations for the future implementation, management, and oversight of employee assistance programs. The major themes identified throughout the literature include but are not limited to program evaluation and effectiveness, employee retention, program participation, and mental health.

Keywords: employee assistance programs; wellness; program implementation; employee perception

Introduction

Employee assistance programs are becoming more common in modern-day workplace environments, including private, public, and government organizations. They are increasingly prominent as human resource management initiatives and practices within the U.S. (Milne et al., 1994). The extant literature discussing employee assistance programs (EAPs) offers some significant insight into their history as well as their popularity and prevalence in their respective time periods. The analysis of this literature includes an overview of the definitions of these programs throughout the program evolution in the workplace, the initial motivation for the creation of the programs, the differences between how they were originally used in comparison to today, and the differences between their original reach and how many people they impact in the present day. It also sheds light on how the programs are structured in modern work environments, as their implementation is now rolled up into overarching wellness programs and initiatives. The varying types of literature will also be discussed as well as some of the emerging themes that have been

identified throughout the literature. The themes provide some insight into what the focus has been in society with respect to employee assistance programs, and serves the opportunity to provide a glimpse into how these priorities have changed. Recommendations for future employee assistance programs are also included.

Literature Review

The earliest literature on EAPs goes as far back as 1989 and continues up until as recent as 2017. Two research articles were published during 1989, specifically, program evaluation effectiveness research within the biology and medicine sphere. The first article titled “Assessing the Effects of Employee Assistance Programs: A Review of Employee Assistance Program Evaluations” was authored by Angela Colantonio, M.H.Sc. in *The Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine*. The purpose of this research was to assess the effectiveness of employee assistance programs by reviewing recently published EAP evaluations (Colantonio, 1989). The second is a quantitative research study conducted by Terry Moore, MS, RN, COHN in the *American Association of Occupational Health Nurses Journal*, titled “Employee Assistance Program Evaluation: Employee Perceptions, Awareness, and Utilization.” This study determined the extent to which employees were aware of the existence of the EAP and overall perception of the program (Moore, 1989).

Moving to the 1990s, liberal arts research entered the picture in the early decade as two quantitative research studies were conducted in the human resources and psychology fields sought to better understand the dynamic between employees and the service offerings of EAPs. In 1992, Patrice Alexander and Frank J. Smith co-authored an article within the *Journal of Health and Human Resources Administration* titled “Employee Assistance Program Utilization for Substance Abuse Problems and Organizational Climate as Perceived by Supervisory Personnel.” This research focused on the relationship between organizational climate and EAP utilization for substance abuse problems (Alexander & Smith, 1992). Then, in 1994, “Factors Influencing Employees’ Propensity to Use an Employee Assistance Program” was published within the peer-reviewed journal *Personnel Psychology*, authored by Stuart H. Milne, Terry C. Blum, and Paul M. Roman. The research investigated the relationships between employees’ cognitive and attitudinal perceptions of an EAP and their inclination to use it (Milne et al., 1994). Mixed methods research presented itself in the late 1990s, starting off in the health education sphere. In 1996, Carolyn E. Crump, Jo Anne L. Earp, Chris M. Kozma, and Irva Hertz-Picciotto published an article within the *Health Education Quarterly* journal entitled “Effect of Organization-Level Variables on Differential Employee Participation in 10 Federal Worksite Health Promotion Programs.” This research explored whether organizational context and implementation process affected participation in worksite health promotion and disease prevention (HPDP) activities among demographic subgroups (Crump et al., 1996).

The mental health field started to become more apparent and explored in the mid 2000s literature. In a 2005 *International Journal of Mental Health* journal publication, Allen Daniels, Lisa Teems, and Christopher Carroll authored an article titled “Transforming Employee Assistance Programs by Crossing the Quality Chasm.” The goal of this article was to expand upon a previous assessment of the EAP industry and propose a direction for the industry through assessment and quality improvement (Daniels et al., 2005). Then in 2008, our second mixed methods research study is conducted, however the setting is now within the management sect. Published in *The Academy of*

Management Journal, Adam M. Grant, Jane E. Dutton, and Brent D. Rosso co-authored “Giving Commitment: Employee Support Programs and the Prosocial Sensemaking Process.” The intent of this research was to fill the gap of exploring the possibility that employee support programs may strengthen commitment by fulfilling employees’ other-interested motives to give. As a result, the research offers an expanded view of these mechanisms through which EAPs cultivate affective organizational commitment (Grant et al., 2008).

More quantitative research centered around work environment and rehabilitation began to emerge between 2009 and 2010. Published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*, Angela Martin, Kristy Sanderson, and Fiona Cocker authored “Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Health Promotion Intervention in the Workplace on Depression and Anxiety Symptoms.” The goal of this study was to research whether different types of health promotion intervention in the workplace reduce depression and anxiety symptoms (Martin et al., 2009). Shortly after in 2010, John C. Anema, Jr. and Steven R. Sligar published “Innovation in the Workplace: Evaluation of a Pilot Employee Assistance Program Serving Persons with Disabilities.” The study evaluated an employee assistance program for employees of a NISH affiliate (Anema & Sligar, 2010).

Labor analysis reports became more popular throughout the mid 2000s, specifically in 2011 and 2014. With a focus on employee access to their respective employee assistance programs, Michelle Mayfield of the Bureau of Labor Statistics published an article in *Monthly Labor Review* titled “Health, Wellness, and Employee Assistance: A Holistic Approach to Employee Benefits.” The article “examines access to employee assistance plans and wellness programs among private industry and state and local government workers and discusses recent federal initiatives that promote EAP and wellness” (Mayfield, 2011). A few years later in 2014, M.M. Sulphrey authored “Construction & Validation of Employee Wellness Questionnaire” within the *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*. In an attempt to assess employee wellness, this study developed the employee wellness questionnaire (Sulphrey, 2014).

The late 2000s timeframe included more quantitative research within the occupational and environmental medicine as well as the health and human services environments. Published in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, Haijing Huang, Soeren Mattke, Benjamin Batorsky, Jeremy Miles, Hangsheng Liu, and Erin Taylor co-authored “Incentives, Program Configuration, and Employee Uptake of Workplace Wellness Programs.” The objective of their study was to establish the effect of wellness program configurations and financial incentives on different employee participation rate (Huang et al., 2016). Also, in 2016 in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, Rebecca J. Mitchell, Ronald J. Ozminkowski, and Stephen K. Hartley dive deeper into EAP program’s impact on employee retention as they wrote “The Association Between Health Program Participation and Employee Retention.” Specifically, the purpose of the study was to “examine the impact of health promotion program participation on employee retention rates at hundreds of companies, using multiple years of continuous health plan membership data as a rough proxy for employment” (Mitchell et al., 2016).

Two pieces of the identified literature were published in 2017. The first being published in the *Journal of Health and Human Services Administration* by Stephanie A. Pink-Harper and Beth Rauhaus. Their quantitative research study, “Examining the Impact of Federal Employee Wellness Programs and Employee Resilience in the Federal Workplace” is an attempt to bridge the gap

between the theory-driven creation of employee-friendly policies and the practice of beneficial policies that employees will actually take advantage of (Pink-Harper & Rauhaus, 2017). The workplace safety concern is the center of focus for Leslie Baker and her article titled “Best-in-Class Health & Wellness: Well-Designed Programs Improve Employee & Company Performance.” Published in the peer-reviewed journal *Professional Safety*, Baker (2017) details what an effective health/wellness program looks like, what it should include, and how the employer should manage the lifecycle and conclusion of the program at all stages.

The Evolution of Employee Assistance Programs

It is important to provide an overview of EAPs by detailing the background on the initial creation of EAP programs including their original intent and purpose, how they have evolved over time, and what EAP programs look like in a more modern work environment. In 1989, EAPs were defined in the literature as job-based programs operating within a work organization for purposes of identifying troubled employees, motivating them to resolve their troubles. These programs would provide access to counseling or treatment for the employees in need (Colantonio, 1989). Since then, our conceptual understanding of EAPs have evolved greatly, as today, we understand employee assistance programs as “formalized practices designed to improve employees’ experiences at work by providing emotional, financial, and instrumental assistance beyond the scope of standard HR pay, benefit, recognition and training and development programs” (Grant et al., 2008).

Employee assistance programs were the result of employers wanting to provide a resource to serve as a tool to assist employees with alcohol-related issues that included absenteeism, decreased performance, and the associated impairment of the labor force (Daniels et al., 2005). Daniels et al. (2005) cite that in 1959, approximately 50 different EAP programs existed, compared to today’s amount of more than 65 million people in the United States having access to these programs. In an article published within the *Journal of Rehabilitation*, Anema & Sligar (2010) provide more insight. Formerly known as Occupational Alcoholism Programs during their inception in the 1960s, EAPs were designed to identify and help treat individuals with alcoholism. The idea was that if troubled employees could be identified early, problems could then be minimized, and companies would be able to save more money (Anema & Sligar, 2010). EAPs were “primarily influenced by the growth of Alcoholics Anonymous and eventually shifted away from industrial alcohol programs towards broader employee assistance programs as companies began to extend their alcohol programs to employees that were experiencing mental health problems” (Daniels et al., 2005). However, the 1989 literature regarding the creation on EAPs offers some context on their earlier development with respect to alcohol dependency and mental health. At that time, EAPs typically used the occupational setting for the screening and treatment of patients manifesting personal difficulty which often included alcohol abuse (Colantonio, 1989). It was significant that these programs were offered internally with an on-site counselor as opposed to other externally based programs that contract services from an outside agency, such as a mental health facility (Moore, 1989).

The utilization context and justification of EAP programs started shifting from alcohol dependency to a broader range of issues in the early 90s. More specifically, “early identification, counselling, and referral services remained the mainstay services of EAPs throughout the 1980s, but as EAPs

probed to be cost beneficial, services became broader, and more companies became interested in developing EAPs” (Anema & Sligar, 2010). Alexander and Smith (1992) claim that EAPs were starting to become more broad-brush in their approach, as counselling services were used for a myriad of personal problems, that covered both the employee and their dependents. This is evidenced two years later in 1994 where Milne, Bluhm, and Roman share that EAPs were now used as a basis for supervisors to confront problem employees and further suggest that they seek assistance, or as a resource for employees to use on self-initiated basis for perceived problems with themselves or their family members (Milne et al., 1994).

Entering the 2000s, employee assistance programs started not only expanding their service offerings, but also their overall geographic presence and service locations, making them inherently more accessible and relevant to employees’ lives. The EAP industry evolved and expanded to offer a wide range of behavioral health and human resource services as issues of the workforce changed and new challenges arose (Daniels et al., 2005). Innovations in EAPs have been the result of employers’ desire to integrate their EAP services with the needs of employees outside of the workplace. Consequently, EAP services are now designed to identify and resolve personal concerns including health, marital, family, financial, alcohol, drug, legal, stress, and emotional issues (Anema & Sligar, 2010). Similar to individual businesses, the federal government also began offering an array of health-related policies, with employee assistance programs being included. The programs comprise of the assessment, counseling, and referrals for both personal and work-related issues that might include stress, financial, legal, or family issues, and substance abuse (Pink-Harper & Rauhaus, 2017). Mid 2000s data from the National Compensation Survey show that EAPs are defined as programs that provide a structured plan that typically deals with more serious personal and emotional problems than the problems covered by general wellness programs, which might include marital difficulties, substance abuse issues, and financial, emotional, or legal matters (Mayfield, 2011).

In addition to the expansion of services, Daniels et al. (2005) share that the geographic presence of the programs has expanded as well. The employee assistance program industry outside of the United States has grown at a rapid pace, partially due to the globalization of most U.S. businesses. In fact, “much of the international demand for EAPs can be attributed to the development of worldwide corporations. To serve large multinational corporations, EAP providers had to abandon their traditional model of delivery in favor of programs that contractually provided a wide range of services with a large network of affiliates” (Daniels et al., 2005). Throughout the mid to late 2000s, we start to see that employee assistance programs are for the most part rolled up into broader enterprise-wide wellness initiatives and programs. Daniels et al. (2005) share that the EAP industry is faced with the challenge of distinguishing itself within the behavioral healthcare industry and healthcare in general. Consequently, EAPs now provide services ranging from traditional counseling and drug-free workplace training to wellness services and management of behavioral health benefits (Daniels et al., 2005).

The literature encountered provides different perspectives on the term “wellness,” which leads us to believe that the definition of what wellness is remains subjective and not as clear-cut as expected. The President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports defines wellness as a multidimensional state of being describing the existence of positive health in an individual as exemplified by quality of life and a sense of wellbeing (Sulphrey, 2014). Two additional definitions

are provided. Cofounder of the National Wellness Institute, Bill Hettler defines wellness quite simply as “an active process through which the individual becomes aware of, and makes choices toward, a more successful existence,” whereas C.B. Corbin defines wellness as an individual’s state of wellbeing that contributes to an improved quality of life (Sulphey, 2014).

As of 2016, The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) considers health education, nutrition services, lactation support, physical activity promotion, screenings, vaccinations, traditional occupational health and safety, and disease management as general health and wellness issues (Pink-Harper & Rauhaus, 2017). Despite the varying definitions of the term “wellness” and their respective levels of details, organizations and businesses are acknowledging the need for and eventual benefits of enterprise-wellness programs, and are starting to take their implementation more seriously, as evidenced by the existing literature.

Analysis

The collection of research articles, reports, and studies presented throughout the fifteen sources utilized for this study span 33 years and take place in the United States, India, and Scandinavia. The research was conducted within several different industries such as biology and medicine, occupational health, rehabilitation, psychology, management, labor and industrial relations, professional safety, health education, and health and human services. Despite the broad range of publication dates, geographic locations, and the settings in which they were conducted, there were four different themes related to EAPs that were identified connecting these pieces of literature. These themes include program evaluation, employee retention, employee participation in the program, and the relationship between employee assistance programs and individual employee mental health.

Program Evaluation

Five articles shared the common theme of providing details and recommendations on specific characteristics that EAPs should be evaluated on, including characteristics that they should include. Specifically, two articles reviewed existing literature on how the programs were evaluated and what they were evaluated on, and three articles depicted the elements that made effective employee assistance/wellness programs. Colantonio’s (1989) articles were assessed in program description (including subjects, setting, type of intervention, and format), evaluation design, and program outcomes. As a result, a methodological analysis was then performed for program description, EAP evaluation design (research design, variables measured, and operational methods), and program outcomes (Colantonio, 1989). Anema & Sligar (2010) also conducted a review of existing documents and their own quantitative research. The study methods comprised of “a review of program performance against the initial objectives, satisfaction surveys administered to employees, comparison of program data with benchmarks, and a focus group with stakeholders” (Anema & Sligar, 2010). Additionally, Anema & Sligar (2010) claim that performance was measured through the reviews of documents from the NISH EAP, annual reports, an internal survey of employees, reports to NISH, and follow-up reports. Satisfaction surveys were also developed and administered to employees to determine each group’s level of satisfaction with the program (Anema & Sligar, 2010).

Three articles are centered around the question of what makes an effective employee assistance program. Daniels et al. (2015), Sulphey (2014), and Baker (2017) all provide their own recommendations and suggestions on how management in any industry can help create a more effective and meaningful EAP/wellness program. Daniels et al. (2015) lists the five guiding principles for the EAP industry as being safe, client/company-centered, equitable, efficient, and timely. Sulphey (2014) suggests elements that management should consider for an employee wellness program to be effective, including establishing objectives and goals that are clear, communicating to and engaging all levels of employees to the programs, and creating a supportive environment. Similarly, Baker (2017) puts it simply as she starts by explaining, “A good wellness or health program is also practical, accessible, and easy for employees to understand. The goal is to make employees aware of the program, explain why it is important to them, outline program benefits, and describe the various ways employees can participate.” Baker (2017) also mentions the criticality of employee engagement and management support of a program, as well as the recommendation of management viewing wellness programs from the perspective on employee recruitment.

Employee Retention and Turnover

On the note of employee perceptions and recruitment, the next theme that was identified throughout the literature was the concept of employee retention and corresponding turnover intention. The study conducted by Pink-Harper and Rauhaus (2017) sought to explore which factors impact federal employees’ satisfaction with health and wellness work-life programs as well as the impact that employee’s satisfaction with health and wellness work-life programs has on employee turnover intentions. Employee commitment is then viewed through the engagement lens as Grant et al. (2008) explore how employee support programs cultivate affective organizational commitment, where the theoretical perspective for explaining this is based on the central principle of social exchange theory, which is that individuals reciprocate what they receive (Grant et al., 2008). In their study, they developed theory from interview data to deepen the knowledge about the mechanisms through which giving builds commitment, whereas in their second study, they used quantitative survey data to conduct an exploratory test to examine the relationship between giving behavior and commitment (Grant et al., 2008). Lastly, Mitchell et al. (2016) estimated the association between telephonic programs or health risk surveys and retention and found that participation in health promotion initiatives was associated with health plan retention. Moreover, efforts to maintain or increase health activation among employees may lead to increases in retention (Mitchell et al., 2016).

Program Participation

The third prominent theme that is identified throughout five of the fifteen articles is the concept of program participation among employees. The common thread that ties these five articles together is the level of engagement and support that management provides. Specifically, the study conducted by Crump et al. (1996) indicated that employees were more likely to participate in worksite health promotion and disease prevention programs if they work for organizations where employees endorse such programs. The study by Moore (1989) explored which methods of communications were successful in informing employees of the EAP, what reasons were holding employees back from using the EAP, and if employees who had used the EAP were satisfied with

the services offered. The importance of employee perception is especially highlighted in the study by Milne et al. (1994) who found that confidence in the EAP is a highly significant contributor to inclination to use the program, and with that, “one’s expressed level of confidence in the EAP is significantly influenced by one’s familiarity with it and perceptions of its accessibility as well as by one’s perceptions of top management and supervisory support for it” (Milne et al., 1994). Mayfield provides a view of government workers, and shares that while state and local government workers are more likely to receive EAP benefits than their counterparts in private industry, union workers and workers in larger establishments tend to have greater access to these benefits (Mayfield, 2011). Lastly, Huang et al. (2016) found that employers who offer incentives and provide a comprehensive set of program offerings have higher participation rates.

Mental Health

The last major theme that has emerged from the literature is the theme of mental health with respect to employee assistance programs. The 1990s research conducted by Alexander and Smith (1992) found that employees in need of EAPs are deterred from seeking help by job complacency, while those who are less secure in their job future will utilize the EAP when their performance is being affected by personal issues. With that, “Total abstainers and heavy drinkers exhibited unwillingness to use the EAP while drinkers identified as moderate exhibited more willingness” (Alexander & Smith, 1992). In their more recent 2009 study, Martin and colleagues found that when the aim is to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety in employee populations, a vast range of health promotion interventions are effective (Martin et al., 2009).

Recommendations

More research on the overall effectiveness and utilization of employee assistance/wellness programs should be conducted within larger global organizations, and from the perspective of employees as a whole, regardless of their individual situations. As specified throughout the literature, employee assistance programs were originally created a response to increasing rates of substance use and abuse, specifically, alcohol dependency. The value of EAPs has expanded further from substance abuse and is now a vital asset for employees regardless of what personal problems or obstacles they may be facing. For the purposes of this literature review, little research has been identified that is centered on EAP programs benefitting employees from a more holistic perspective. In global organizations, or organizations that have a growing international presence, varying cultures, political leanings, and individual privileges or shortcomings can all play a pivotal role in not only how employees are able to respond to employee assistance/wellness programs but also how effectively these programs can serve employees.

Recommendations for Program Evaluation Research

Some recommendations on improving the program evaluation process as a whole were offered in the literature. Colantonio (1989) recommends that future evaluations should be sure to include variables and indicators that describe subject populations more comprehensively in order to obtain a better understanding of employees’ employment status and personal level of substance abuse. This would give the audience a more informative perspective of the research participants and

would lead them to making more meaningful conclusions. Colantonio (1989) also recommends providing more information on the nature of the interventions.

Pivoting to a focus on disabled individuals, Anema and Sligar (2010) claim that the nondiscrimination policies of the American Disabilities act have created unprecedented opportunities for EAP counselors to be in the forefront of bringing rehabilitation services into the workplace. That said, “there is scant information in the literature about the role of EAP counselors who work with employees with disabilities and therefore the opportunities for rehabilitation professionals may not yet be fully realized” (Anema & Sligar, 2010). Moreover, Anema and Sligar (2010) mention further recommendations for study include comparing and contrasting the separate needs of disabled and abled employees and conducting interviews with disabled employees to identify unmet service needs.

Recommendations for Individual Employee Research

Additional research recommendations are focused on the concept of improving the understanding of individual employees with respect to their involvement and utilization of employee assistance programs. Future research should make more of an emphasis on determining which factors are most prevalent to an employee’s willingness to use employee assistance programs. This would provide the EAP/wellness and HR spheres with more meaningful insight on how effective and useful EAP programs can become (Alexander & Smith, 1992). Regarding health promotion initiatives, little research has studied the exact impact of health promotion efforts on employee retention across a larger sample of employers. Moreover, “future studies should continue a line of research looking to estimate relationships between many other financial and nonfinancial outcomes and health promotion program participation” (Mitchell et al., 2016). It was not until recently where researchers began assessing worksite health promotion and disease prevention activities from a more holistic and ongoing program perspective, as opposed to previous research that was focused on restrictive smoking policies and smoking cessation programs (Crump et al., 1996).

Since employee assistance programs have proven to be successful among many industries and organizations, there is an increasingly prominent need to explore them further from the workplace environment perspective. Moreover, more workplace behavior research needs to be published in the organizational behavior, human resource management, and industrial/organizational psychology professional spheres (Milne et al., 1994). With that, Pink-Harper and Rauhaus (2017) recommend that future research explore how agency missions and values are incorporating in the strategic planning of employee wellness and benefits. Specifically, “When assessing human capital by agency type, researchers may be able to more fully contribute to a greater understanding of how groups of public servants reach a sense of wellness and job satisfaction. Future research should further explore the agency typology of the workplace environment in other ways to further understand the dynamics of this expected relationship” (Pink-Harper & Rauhaus, 2017).

Summary

When appropriately implemented and managed, employee assistance programs (EAPs) can serve as an effective and meaningful resource for employees in various workplace settings, among

varying industries. The evolution of EAPs is worth noting as it parallels the struggles of the average employee at each respective time period and workplace settings and industries. The literature analyzed for the purpose of this research begins as far back as 1989 and continues up until 2017. Two research articles were published during 1989, specifically, program evaluation effectiveness research within the biology and medicine sphere. At the start of the 1990s, liberal arts research entered the picture as two quantitative research studies were conducted in the human resources and psychology fields sought to better understand the dynamic between employees and the service offerings of EAPs. The mental health field started to emerge as a prominent sector and was explored in the mid-2000s literature, and more quantitative research centered around work environment and rehabilitation materialized between 2009 and 2010. Labor analysis reports started to become more popular between 2011 and 2014, and the late-2000s offered quantitative research within the occupational and environmental medicine environments as well as the health and human services environments. The most recently published literature in 2017 is both an attempt to bridge the gap between theory-driven creation of employee-friendly policies and a detailed view of what makes an effective health and wellness program.

Employee assistance programs evolved greatly over time to align with the changing needs and circumstances of employees. Originally in 1989, EAPs were nothing more than programs existing to identify troubled employees and encouraging them to overcome their obstacles, however since then, our understanding of EAPs have changed considerably. EAPs began shifting from alcohol dependency to a broader range of issues in the early 1990s as counselling services that addressed a wide array of personal problems became more popular. The beginning of the 2000s not only was the start of the expansion of service offerings, but also the expanding geographic presence and service locations, resulting in these types of programs quickly becoming more realistic and attainable for employees. As EAPs started to become more broadly implemented with a wider focus, some overlap and consolidation of employee assistance programs and wellness programs began to form. Different definitions of the term “wellness” were presented in the literature and still exist in global workplaces today.

Four major themes regarding employee assistance programs emerged, including program evaluation, employee retention, employee participation in the program, and the relationship between employee assistance programs and individual employee mental health. Five articles shared the common theme of providing details and recommendations on specific characteristics that EAPs should be evaluated on, including characteristics that they should include. Specifically, two articles reviewed existing literature on how the programs were evaluated and what they were evaluated on, and three articles depicted the elements that made effective employee assistance/wellness programs. Three articles are centered around the question of what makes an effective employee assistance program. Daniels et al. (2015), Sulphey (2014), and Baker (2017) all provide their own recommendations and suggestions on how management in any industry can help create a more effective and meaningful EAP/wellness program. The next theme that was identified throughout the literature was the concept of employee retention and corresponding turnover intention. Studies sought to explore which factors impact federal employees’ satisfaction with these programs as well as the impact that the employees’ satisfaction has on turnover intentions. Other studies explored how employee support programs cultivate affective organizational commitment as well as the relationships between health promotion initiatives and health plan retention. The third prominent theme that is identified throughout five of the fifteen

articles is the concept of program participation among employees. The common thread that ties these five articles together is the level of engagement and support that management provides. The last major theme that has emerged from the literature is the theme of mental health with respect to employee assistance programs.

Research recommendations were offered under two categories: recommendations for program evaluation research and recommendations for individual employee research. Regarding program evaluation research, the inclusion of variables and indicators as well as more information on the nature of interventions was recommended. Also, it was advised to compare and contrast the needs of disabled and not disabled employees to better understand specific service needs. Regarding individual employee research, future research should make more of an emphasis on determining which factors are most prevalent to an employee's willingness to use employee assistance programs. In addition, it is recommended that future research explore how agency missions and values are incorporating in the strategic planning of employee wellness and benefits.

About the Author

Nicole Stefko is a third year PhD student in Marywood University's Strategic Leadership and Administrative Studies program. Originally from Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania, Nicole resides in New Jersey with her fiancé. Nicole is an employee of the global technology risk management team at Prudential Financial in Newark, New Jersey, and has academic research interests in the diversity, equity, and inclusion space as they relate to the promotion of a welcoming workplace culture. As Nicole believes that leadership within any industry should be empowered to create an environment where employees can easily thrive, she hopes that her future research publications will contribute to the progressive advancement of strategic shifts in leadership efforts to help foster a more supportive, accessible, and inclusive workplace culture. She is optimistic that her efforts will be especially meaningful for historically marginalized and disenfranchised communities, such as people of color, neurodivergent individuals, disabled individuals, and members of queer/LGBTQIA+ communities in the workplace.

Some of Nicole's previous doctoral research includes (but is not limited to): a proposal for a four-day workweek, a proposal for gender-inclusive restrooms at Marywood University, the case for an increased federal minimum wage, the examination of the relationship between workplace climate for inclusion and perceived self-efficacy and satisfaction among employees, the impacts of inequality on neurodiverse students, the assessment of leadership's impact on emotional intelligence in the workplace, and the impact of leader behavior on employee experience.

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