

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYEE HEALTH AWARENESS AND INTERNAL CSR ACTIONS AIMED AT HEALTH EDUCATION AND HEALTH DEVELOPMENT

Zsembery Norbert Ákos^{0009-0007-9088-9892 1*}, Dr. Gósi Zsuzsanna^{0000-0002-0603-5234 1},

¹ Institute of Research on Adult Education and Knowledge Management, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

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Abstract

In today's labour market, workplace health education and development are keys to supporting the physical and mental well-being of employees, which contributes directly to employee satisfaction and organisational performance. The study explores corporate health promotion and health education practices through secondary data collection, highlighting the impact of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) on the maintenance and improvement of employee health. The corporate best practices presented in the research showcase the practical applications inherent in various opportunities related to health education and health development.

1 Introduction

Workplace health education and development are essential pillars in cultivating a high-caliber workforce, increasingly demanded by today's labor market. [5] Both the physical and mental health of employees are crucial factors that directly impact job satisfaction, loyalty, and overall well-being. These factors, in turn, affect organizational performance, which explains why an increasing number of companies recognize the strategic importance of both dimensions—physical and mental health. [15]

2 Materials and Methods

Our research involved secondary data collection. We first established the theoretical framework through a literature review, followed by an analysis of corporate best practices to provide a more comprehensive view of potential solutions for reducing or eliminating factors detrimental to employee health. This approach also examined the effectiveness of these measures and how such initiatives may support certain employees in achieving a sustained, higher quality of life. A limitation of this research is that the examined companies have often not yet made available their related documentations and sustainability reports for the years 2023 and 2024.

3 Fundamentals of Employee Health

To adequately understand this topic, we must take a broader perspective beyond our narrowly defined scope. Health is humanity's most fundamental and essential asset, significantly influencing both economic and societal performance. Lifestyle choices and the environment in which we live exert complex effects on our physical and mental health, resulting in a dynamic condition that continuously fluctuates between improvement and decline. [4] Consequently, physical and mental health are not solely individual responsibilities. According to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, maintaining and promoting health is a shared responsibility among employees, employers, and society. [22],

* Kapcsolattartó szerző.
E-mail cím: zsembery.norbert@ppk.elte.hu

Health status and mortality rates are closely linked to macro-level economic and social factors as well as public awareness of health culture. These aspects are typically shaped during socialization and are influenced by numerous factors. Health development within workplace settings and the acquisition of general health-related knowledge, in particular, have a significant impact on these outcomes. [13]

4 Health Education and Development

In the context of protecting and promoting employee health, two primary categories can be distinguished: occupational health and workplace health promotion. [15] While the literature suggests that these concepts are not entirely separable, there are significant differences between them across various domains. The table below presents these distinctions in a comparative format.

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Occupational Health</i>	<i>Workplace Health Education and Development</i>
Objective	Primarily to prevent workplace hazards and protect employee health.	To improve the long-term health and well-being of employees.
Methods	Health screenings, safety training, accident prevention.	Education on healthy lifestyles, sports and mental support, nutritional advice.
Approach	Reactive, addressing existing risks and health issues.	Proactive, focused on prevention and quality of life improvement.
Target Group	All employees exposed to workplace health risks.	Generally all employees, regardless of working conditions.
Legal Regulation	Mandatory, based on national and EU regulations.	Voluntary, company-dependent, with no obligatory regulation.
Regulatory Body	National occupational safety authorities, WHO recommendations, EU regulations.	Usually internal corporate policies, WHO recommendations.

Table 1. Differences between occupational health and workplace health education and development. Edited by the author based on [1] [6] [11] [23]

Comparing the above elements leads us to a fundamental conclusion: measures under occupational health are mandatory for organizations (with compliance typically monitored), while workplace health education and/or development often consists of voluntary initiatives. Further clarification is also needed regarding the terms "health education" and "health development". Although these are related terms and are often conflated even within scientific discourse, recognizing their differences is important when analyzing corporate activities.

Health education is primarily educational, aiming to inform employees about various health risks, showcase lifestyle best practices, and support employees with preventive tools. [8] This approach emphasizes knowledge transfer and awareness-building through workshops, seminars, or various communication channels. [14] Beyond simply disseminating information, health education fosters skills and encourages lifestyle changes through persuasive communication and

ongoing interaction. While it cannot directly alter factors that determine health, it equips employees to make conscious choices for health maintenance, whether on a community or individual level. [12]

Conversely, health development focuses on active interventions designed to bring about positive changes in employees' actions, lifestyles, and habits. [16] Here, the emphasis is on engaging employees in programs that facilitate practical adoption of healthier behaviors. [19] This category includes initiatives such as sports supports (e.g., AYCM), "fruit days," and corporate team participation in running events. Within workplace health education and development, a clear progression can be observed: most organizations start with health education programs aimed at raising employee awareness and encouraging health-conscious decision-making. As these programs are implemented, development initiatives, such as health-preserving actions, gradually gain prominence.

In the following sections, we will discuss actions from both categories; however, it should be noted that our research focuses primarily on organizations where health development initiatives are already in place.

5 The Role of CSR in the Corporate Environment

At this juncture, one might reasonably ask why companies, beyond mandatory occupational health measures, would invest in voluntary initiatives like health education and development, especially considering cost-efficiency principles. This question brings us to corporate social responsibility (CSR), as mentioned in the title. Large corporations recognized decades ago that, as they grew, so too did societal expectations of them. It became crucial to find ways to meet these expectations without losing sight of profit maximization as their primary goal. CSR offered an ideal solution to balance these dual objectives. [24]

While CSR encompasses a broad range of activities beyond health and sports, the latter has proven particularly popular among companies. This is no coincidence; promoting mental and physical health not only addresses societal expectations but also provides further advantages to the organization. [17] This benefit, known as "health gain", is observable on two levels. At the corporate level, the primary advantage is cost reduction, derived from improved employee performance and reduced absenteeism among healthier workers. Additionally, CSR initiatives enhance the company's image and competitiveness, as health-conscious workplaces are more attractive in the labor market and contribute to customer satisfaction. On an individual level, health development leads to improved employee health and quality of life. This results in fewer accidents, enhances employees' market value and satisfaction, and strengthens their loyalty and commitment to the company, ultimately contributing to improved performance. [15]

6 Corporate Best Practices

Based on the regional division guidelines of SZVMSZK [18], we will examine the CSR initiatives of the largest employers in Western, Central, and Eastern Hungary who have published publicly accessible, research-relevant documents on the topic.

6.1 Audi Hungaria Zrt.

Located in the Western Transdanubian region of Győr-Moson-Sopron County, Audi Hungaria Zrt. employs 12,144 workers, making it the region's largest employer. [2] The company refers to its health-related initiatives under the umbrella term "Health Management."

"The purpose of Health Management is to maintain and improve employees' health and well-being, and, of course, to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of safe, non-hazardous, and motivating working conditions." [3]

This quote highlights the company's commitment to both physical and mental health. Audi's health management program encompasses occupational health services supported by fitness assessments, general and specialized medical care (e.g., Audi Checkup, physiotherapy,

continuous 24-hour emergency services), and health awareness programs. These programs focus on healthy eating, restful sleep, addiction prevention, and stress management. Notable initiatives include the “Audi Checkup” and the “Mental Health Service.” The Audi Checkup offers a tailored health program for all employees, providing a clear overview of their health and fitness status, along with lifestyle and wellness advice if needed. Participation is voluntary and free of charge. The Mental Health Service offers support from a team of psychologists and mental health professionals, with individual consultations available following a preliminary mental health assessment. Additionally, employees have access to services such as vision care, foot assessments, smoking cessation programs, and a “Sleep Well, Live Awake” sleep program. [2]

6.2 Magyar Posta Zrt.

Magyar Posta Zrt. has long been the largest employer in Central Hungary, with 21,317 employees as of the third quarter of 2024. [10]

According to its 2022 sustainability report, Magyar Posta supports employee health through comprehensive and personalized measures. The organization provides various occupational health screenings and rehabilitation services, with a particular focus on supporting employees with musculoskeletal issues, who receive annual retreats to aid their recovery. Through the National Comprehensive Health Screening Program, many employees voluntarily received a health overview, supporting the company's preventive health efforts. Mental health receives special attention during stressful periods, with psychologists available for support. Additionally, employees are eligible for discounted access to the nationwide AYCM pass, which grants entry to hundreds of sports and recreational facilities. Employees and their families can also participate in sports events organized by the Eastern and Transdanubian Postal Sports Associations, which fosters community engagement. [9]

6.3 TESCO Global Zrt.

In the eastern region, TESCO Global Zrt. is a major employer actively promoting employee well-being, with a reported 8,476 employees.[21]

TESCO's health initiatives include the “Diversity and Psychological Safety” training, which supports mental safety in the workplace by addressing biases and promoting an inclusive work environment. The company also offers special leave options, including additional paid and unpaid leave for employees with caregiving responsibilities. A unique feature is the “phased return policy,” allowing employees recovering from long-term illness to work half-time during the first month back while receiving full pay.[20] Like Audi and Magyar Posta, TESCO also participates in the AYCM program and encourages employees and their families to join corporate and regional sports club events for fitness and community-building purposes.[21]

7 Conclusion and Outlook

Profit-driven operations provide a strong incentive for companies to align with market and social trends, as evident from the examples provided. Each of these companies has, over several years, endeavored to incorporate the principles of physical and mental health preservation and development into employees' daily routines. This is done not only to enhance employee well-being but also to further their own market interests, creating a “win-win” scenario. Whether these CSR initiatives are morally questionable or can be regarded as genuinely altruistic actions is a question best explored in future research.

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