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Developing a Brain Healthy Workplace

An Educational Guide to the Brain Health Best Practice Score

HERO Health and Well-being Best Practices Scorecard in Collaboration with Mercer©

The Brain Health Best Practice Score and this Educational Guide are tools that can help organizations identify best practices in promoting workforce "brain health," which refers to the overall health and performance of the brain. The brain is central to our everyday function, creativity, focus, memory, productivity, and success. Brain health includes the ability to process information, perform daily tasks, regulate emotions, and maintain health and social functioning.

The Brain Health Best Practice Score is a subscore derived from the HERO Health and Well-being Best Practices Scorecard in Collaboration with Mercer© (HERO Scorecard). The HERO Scorecard is designed to help organizations learn about best practices for promoting workplace health and well-being, and to discover opportunities to improve and measure progress over time. After you submit your data to the online HERO Scorecard, you will receive an overall score, four subscores for practices addressing specific areas of employee well-being (mental health, DEI, social determinants of health, and brain health), and a brain health best practice score that provides insights organizations can use to improve employee overall health and well-being.

Why the Brain Health Best Practice Score Was Developed

The Brain Health Best Practice Score was developed to help organizations assess their health and well-being initiatives and practices for promoting brain health.

We are living in an economy that requires cognitive skills, our workforce is older but not healthier, and underemployment and wage gaps resulting from poor health and caregiving have an outsized impact on women and minorities. A focus on brain health can help address these challenges.[1]

Advances in neuroscience provide workers and their employers with effective strategies to improve brain health and build the cognitive skills necessary to meet present and future human capital and health challenges. These advances are increasingly important in the current knowledge economy.

Optimizing brain health can promote human flourishing, economic competitiveness, and business success. It can also prepare us for demographic aging, prevent neurocognitive disorders such as Alzheimer's and other dementias, and offer us an opportunity to build prosperous, inclusive, multigenerational workforces and communities.[2]

Our businesses and institutions—our nations—rely on brain power more than ever before to solve critical challenges and drive creativity and analytical thinking. But workplaces and communities lack science-based solutions that build our brains and the bottom line. The Brain Health Best Practice Score and Educational Guide are designed to help address this gap and provide organizations with the evidence-based approaches that matter most.

[1] O'Brien, K. Unlocking Workplace Brain Health to Fuel Prosperity and Healthy Longevity. American Journal of Health Promotion. 2024;38(4):580-583. doi:10.1177/08901171241232042b

[2] Hill, S., & Kern, D. (2015). Brain health: A guide to optimizing performance. Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 57(8), e58-e63. doi:10.1097/JOM.0000000000000508. This article discusses how optimal brain health supports innovation and adaptability, which are key components of heightened productivity and sustained high performance.

How the Brain Health Best Practice Score Was Developed

An organization's Brain Health Best Practice Score is based on a subset of practices in the HERO Scorecard, which assigns a maximum of 200 points across six sections: strategic planning, organizational and cultural support, programs, program integration, participation strategies, and measurement and evaluation.

Practices that support brain health were identified by a core team based on neuroscience research and expertise and given weighted scores, up to a maximum of 100 points. The proposed practices and scores were then reviewed by workforce brain health experts, and their feedback and recommendations were used to refine the brain health best practice scoring model.

The practices included in the Brain Health Best Practice Score and their relative weights are listed below, along with background on each practice.

Question-by-Question Guide

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
Section 1: Strategic Planning	
Q1. Which of the following types of data do you use in strategic planning for your company's health and well-being initiative?	An effective strategic plan requires the use of meaningful data collection and evaluation to improve worksite health and well-being initiatives.[1]
1a. Physical health (1.5 points)	Cognitive performance and health are linked to overall health, especially other chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity, hearing loss, traumatic brain injury, depression, and substance use disorder.[2, 3]
1b. Psychosocial/mental health (1.5)	Psychological well-being can improve cognitive performance in both the short and long term. Some studies have also found that positive psychosocial factors, such as positive affect and perceived control, are associated with better cognitive performance in older adults.[4]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
1c. Social well-being (1.5)	Social well-being and cognitive function are linked, with studies showing that people with strong social ties are less likely to experience cognitive decline. Social engagement can support cognitive reserve, which is the brain's ability to function despite damage or changes. Social activities can also improve mental health and physical activity, which can contribute to better cognitive function. Evidence suggests that greater emotional support is significantly associated with greater cognitive performance.[5, 6, 7]
1d. Employee experience survey (1)	Employee experience and perception of work value have a significant impact on both the mental and physical health of workers. Sense of purpose, meaning, feeling valued, safe, and having agency are associated with improved cognitive performance.[8]
1e. Health and well-being program data (1)	Health and well-being program data help internal stakeholders assess the efficacy of well-being program investments and evaluate resource allocation for future programming. The data collected can also help measure how employees who are utilizing an organization's well-being program are doing according to a variety of key performance indicators related to both well-being and performance across a variety of brain-health related indicators.[9, 10]
1f. Human capital (0)	

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
1g. Occupational health and safety (1)	Occupational safety, including prevention and identification of hearing loss, traumatic brain injury, toxic stress, and air quality, supports brain health and cognitive performance and reduces the risk of cognitive impairment across the lifespan.[2, 11, 12, 13]
1h. Financial well-being (0.5)	Higher financial worries have been associated with higher psychological distress. Young adults who experience annual income drops of 25% or more may be at greater risk of having thinking problems and reduced brain health in middle age. Negative wealth shocks were negatively associated with cognitive function in older adults in the U.S. Financial hardship is associated with mental health challenges and poor brain health.[14, 15, 16, 17]
Q2. Does your organization have a formal, written strategic plan for health and well-being? (Only one box can be selected for a maximum score of 5 points)	
2a. Yes, a long-term plan (two or more years) only (4 points)	Research performed using data from Version 4.0 of the HERO Scorecard showed that having an annual and long-term health and well-being strategic plan was predictive of outcomes, including participation in health and well-being initiatives, medical cost impact, health risk impact, perceived support for organizational health and well-being, etc.[18, 19]
2b. Yes, an annual plan only (3)	See 2a.
2c. Yes, both a long-term and annual plan (5)	See 2a.

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
Q3. Does your strategic plan include measurable objectives for the following?	Measuring outcomes that matter to your organization and your people will help to determine if the brain-healthy strategies and supports you are implementing are achieving intended outcomes and will provide insights about areas for further refinement.
3a. Participation in health and well-being programs (1 point)	Participation in health and well-being programs are an important component of better brain health IF they are provided in a context that also addresses structural aspects of work life and culture with data-driven accountability.[20]
3b. Improvements in health equity (1.5)	Disparities in health and access to care have negative effects on underserved communities and disadvantaged groups. Hearing loss, hypertension, obesity, and depression are examples of conditions that can have a major effect on brain health, but for which access to quality healthcare varies markedly among different communities. African Americans and Hispanics are at higher risk for cognitive impairment than non-Hispanic Whites.[21]
3c. Improvements in health/clinical measures (1.5)	Cognitive performance/health is linked to overall health, especially other chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity, hearing loss, traumatic brain injury, and depression.[2]
3d. Recruitment/retention (0.25)	Measuring recruitment and retention can help to ensure that employees are placed in roles where they can thrive, reducing job-related stress and promoting psychological well-being. By fostering a sense of belonging and stability, effective recruitment and retention strategies create a supportive work environment that encourages positive social interactions and emotional resilience. This, in turn, contributes to improved mental health outcomes, supporting the brain's cognitive function and overall well-being.[22]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
3e. Employee satisfaction/morale/ attitudes or engagement (1.5)	Evaluating employee satisfaction, morale, attitudes, and engagement can contribute to brain health by fostering a positive work environment, reducing stress levels, and promoting psychological well-being. High levels of satisfaction and engagement are associated with lower rates of burnout and mental health issues, thereby supporting cognitive function and emotional resilience. Additionally, a supportive workforce where employee feedback is valued can enhance motivation, creativity, and job satisfaction, all of which are beneficial for overall brain health and cognitive functioning.[23]
3f. Employee perceptions of supervisor/ management support (1.5)	Employee perceptions of caring leadership have been shown to enhance social connectedness and psychological safety. When employees feel safe socially, they are tapped into pathways of the nervous system conducive to productivity, creativity, and wellbeing.[24, 25, 26]
3g. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (1.5)	Social inclusion is an important protective factor against cognitive impairment, as being socially active can improve brain health and emotional well-being. Mental health is directly influenced by stressors and conditions tied to unique individual circumstances. We see this in marginalized communities, for example, where systemic barriers or discrimination contribute to high levels of stress and anxiety.[27, 28]
3h. Productivity/performance impact (0.5)	Productivity and performance serve as indicators of brain health by reflecting cognitive functions such as focus, memory, and decision-making abilities. Optimal brain health supports efficient task completion, innovation, and adaptability, all of which contribute to heightened productivity and sustained high performance.[29, 30, 31, 32, 33]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
Q4. Does your organization provide key components of your health and well-being initiative to all employees, including contract, union, and part-time employees?	
4a. All segments, including non-benefits-eligible population, have access (0.5 points)	Including part-time, contract, and temp workers in your well-being program fosters a sense of belonging, reduces isolation, and ensures equitable access to resources that support mental health, enhancing overall brain health by promoting inclusivity and a supportive community regardless of employment status. Moreover, contract and temp workers are more likely to be Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, female, and nonbinary than those in the directly employed workforce. These populations are at greater risk for mental health challenges and cognitive decline.[34]
Q5. Does your organization provide any key components of your health and well-being initiative to any of the following groups?	
5a. Spouses/domestic partners (1 point)	Including spouses/partners in well-being programs can promote wellness by extending support networks beyond the workplace, fostering mutual encouragement for healthy habits, and creating shared experiences that strengthen relationships, leading to a more holistic approach to well-being that encompasses both personal and professional spheres. Empirical evidence consistently indicates a positive link between greater social support and improved mental health outcomes. [35, 36, 37]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
Q6. Is your initiative designed to provide support to members across all points on the health spectrum—healthy, at risk, chronically ill, and with acute needs?	
6a. Yes, we offer robust programs for individuals in all segments (1.5 points)	Opportunities to build brain skills and resilience exist at all ages and across the spectrum of health. Mitigating risk factors and promoting protective factors can help build cognitive skills and resilience. Interventions to detect and manage risks and brain injuries can prevent further decline. Treatments to improve function and manage illness can help improve quality of life and ability to work. Neuroplasticity allows the brain to recover from injuries, adapt to sensory changes, and potentially delay cognitive decline associated with aging. It also enables the brain to rewire itself to perform new functions, like learning a new skill.[38]
6b. Yes, but we need to improve offerings for one or more segments (0.5)	See 6a.
Section 2: Organizational and Cultural Support	
Q13. Does your organization have written policies supporting employee health and well-being in the following areas?	Health and well-being policies and procedures provide the infrastructure for organizations to appropriately operationalize and execute these initiatives. Policy-based strategies have been shown to increase employee participation in health programs and contribute to improved health. All policies should be clearly written and available for all employees to access for full understanding. The areas listed below have a known association with cognitive health. Physical activity, mental health, stress reduction, minimal alcohol use, healthy eating, no tobacco use, and the connectedness of volunteerism are among the protective factors for cognitive resilience.[2, 39, 40]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
13a. Mental health and well-being (1.25 points)	Mental health and brain health are intricately connected, with each influencing the other in a bidirectional relationship. Poor mental health can negatively impact brain structure and function, contributing to conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, and schizophrenia. Conversely, maintaining good mental health through practices like stress management, social support, and therapy can promote neuroplasticity, enhance cognitive function, and protect against the onset of neurological conditions.[41]
13b. Work/life integration (1.25)	Corporate programs that support work/life balance promote productivity, reduce turnover, and improve employees' mental and physical health.[42]
13c. Work time to participate in health and well-being programs (1.25)	Employees are more likely to participate and engage in workforce health and well-being programs when provided work time for participation. Given the impact of health and well-being programming on brain health, this policy ultimately supports a brain healthy culture.[43, 44]
13d. Physical activity (1.25)	Regular physical activity has been consistently linked to improved brain health and cognitive function. Engaging in exercise increases blood flow to the brain, delivering essential nutrients and oxygen, which can enhance neuronal function and promote neuroplasticity. Moreover, exercise has been shown to stimulate the release of neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin, which can improve mood and cognitive performance. Long-term adherence to a physically active lifestyle is associated with a reduced risk of cognitive decline and may even help mitigate the onset of neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's.[2, 45, 46, 47, 48]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
13e. Healthy eating (1.25)	Healthy eating habits play a crucial role in maintaining optimal brain health and cognitive function. Nutrient-rich foods, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins, provide essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that support brain function and protect against oxidative stress. Conversely, diets high in processed foods, sugar, and saturated fats have been linked to cognitive decline and an increased risk of neurodegenerative diseases. By adopting a balanced and nutritious diet, individuals can nourish their brains, enhance cognitive performance, and promote long-term brain health.[2, 49]
13f. Tobacco free workplace or campus (policy addresses vaping) (1.25)	Smoking has detrimental effects on brain health, leading to a higher risk of cognitive decline and neurodegenerative diseases. The toxins in cigarette smoke can damage blood vessels, reducing blood flow to the brain and depriving it of essential oxygen and nutrients. Nicotine, a highly addictive substance in tobacco, can also interfere with neurotransmitter function, impacting mood, cognition, and memory. Long-term smoking is associated with an increased risk of conditions such as Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia, highlighting the profound negative impact of smoking on brain health.[2, 50, 51]
13g. Tobacco free workplace or campus (policy does not address vaping) (1)	See 13f.
13h. Responsible alcohol and other substance use (1.25)	Chronic alcohol abuse can lead to cognitive impairment, memory loss, and a higher risk of neurological disorders such as dementia.[2, 52]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
13i. Volunteerism or community involvement (1.25)	Volunteering supports brain health by fostering social connections and mental stimulation, which can enhance cognitive function and reduce the risk of dementia. Additionally, the sense of purpose and fulfillment derived from helping others can lower stress levels and improve overall psychological well-being.[53, 54, 55]
13j. Injury prevention and safety (1.25)	Injury prevention is important for brain health because brain injuries can cause short- and long-term impairments and, in severe cases, be life-threatening. Brain injuries can cause symptoms like headaches, dizziness, memory loss, and difficulty concentrating.[56]
Q14. Does your company intentionally promote and encourage a diverse and inclusive workforce through any of the following strategies?	Diversity and inclusion support brain health by fostering environments where individuals feel valued, respected, and empowered, reducing stress and promoting psychological safety, which positively impacts cognitive function and overall mental well-being, ultimately enhancing brain health and performance.[57]
14a. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) (0.75 points)	Employee resource groups (ERGs) can help employees feel a sense of belonging and community, which can positively impact their performance levels. ERGs can also help employees feel more authentic at work, which can help them derive more meaning from their work.[58]
14b. Workforce training and growth opportunities (0.75)	Lifelong learning and personal development can improve brain health by stimulating neuroplasticity, which can lead to better memory and new skill acquisition. Learning new skills strengthens neural pathways in the brain, which can improve performance and the ability to recall information. Training programs that use multiple senses can also improve memory retention and cognitive agility.[59]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
14c. Workforce accommodations (0.75)	Workforce accommodations, crucial for brain health, are adjustments made by employers to aid employees with disabilities or health conditions in their job performance, encompassing workspace modifications, schedule changes, and assistive technologies. These accommodations impact brain health in several ways: reducing stress through flexible work arrangements, promoting work/life balance, preventing burnout by adjusting workloads, and supporting neurodiversity. By facilitating rehabilitation for those with brain injuries, fostering inclusion, and enhancing productivity, these accommodations create environments where employees can thrive both personally and professionally.[60]
14d. Race and ethnicity data are used in strategic planning to identify specific needs (0.75)	Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic populations often experience higher rates of mental health disorders and dementia, exacerbated by factors like socioeconomic status and discrimination. There are also disparities in the mental well-being of caregivers. Recognizing these disparities is crucial for fostering a supportive work environment that addresses the unique needs of diverse employees. By implementing culturally sensitive approaches to cognitive health support and fostering inclusivity, organizations can promote brain health and overall well-being among all employees.[61, 62, 63]
14e. Race and ethnicity data are used in program evaluation to assess health equity issues (0.75)	See 14d.

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
Q15. Does your company's physical work environment support any of the following?	
15a. Stress management and emotional recovery breaks (1 point)	Stress management and emotional recovery breaks support brain health by reducing chronic stress, enhancing neuroplasticity, improving emotional regulation, boosting mood and well-being, and supporting restorative processes essential for optimal cognitive function and mental health.[64]
15b. Work/life balance (1)	Work/life balance supports brain health by reducing chronic stress, improving cognitive function, enhancing emotional well-being, promoting healthy habits, and facilitating rest and recovery. Prioritizing a balanced lifestyle contributes to overall brain health and resilience, enabling individuals to thrive both professionally and personally.[65, 66]
15c. Healthy eating choices (1)	See 13e.
15d. Physical activity options (1)	See 13d.
15e. Safety features (0.5)	See 1g.
15f. Healthy building design (1)	The conditions in which we work affect cognitive health and performance across the lifespan. In addition to air and water quality, noise mitigation, spaces to focus and to collaborate, opportunities to move and walk, and places to take a break can all support brain health and improve focus, creativity, and productivity. [67]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
Q10. Have you taken any of the following actions to address the impact of "social determinants of health" on employees' healthcare experience?	
16a. Analyze disparities in healthcare outcomes within the workforce (0.25 points)	Disparities in health status may indicate disparate access to services and social determinants and may result in an increased risk for cognitive challenges. Addressing these disparities is crucial for promoting overall brain health and reducing cognitive decline among populations affected by inequities.[68, 69]
16b. Address health literacy and health awareness in culturally relevant and appropriate ways (0.5)	For health literacy to be effective, it needs to be culturally sensitive. Social determinants of health impact attitudes and beliefs, and therefore health behaviors. Addressing these aspects of health can indirectly promote an openness that may benefit brain health through general systemic health.[70, 71]
16c. Ensure providers in the health plan's network match workforce needs (0.25)	Access to sleep specialists, mental health services, health coaching, and audiologists, for example, can provide opportunities to address risk factors for cognitive decline. In addition to reviewing health providers, employers should look at their pharmacy plans to ensure affordable coverage of comprehensive interventions for risk factors for cognitive impairment.[72, 73]
16d. Address the health culture in the community (0.25)	Health behaviors are strongly influenced by cultural norms in particular communities. For example, distrust in healthcare professionals can lead to reduced adoption of vaccines against diseases such as COVID that have been found to impact the brain health of workers with symptoms such as brain fog and memory loss.[74]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
16e. Provide or facilitate access to elder care (0.5)	Caregiving can have a significant impact on health. Female caregivers are six times more likely to experience depression and anxiety than non-caregivers, and twice as likely to develop chronic diseases like cancer, arthritis, and heart disease. They are also more likely to experience dementia. In the U.S., 73% of employees have some type of caregiving responsibility.[75]
16f. Foster social connectedness (1)	Social isolation and loneliness are risk factors for cognitive decline.[76, 77, 78, 79, 80]
16g. Address food insecurity (1)	Poor nutrition is a risk factor for cognitive decline.[81]
16h. Provide or facilitate access to housing (0.25)	Housing profoundly influences brain health through various mechanisms. Environmental factors like air quality and exposure to toxins in poorly maintained housing can directly impact cognitive function. Additionally, unstable housing situations contribute to chronic stress, which can alter brain structure and function, particularly in regions responsible for memory and emotion regulation. Access to stable housing, social support networks, and resources such as healthcare and education are crucial for maintaining optimal brain health and overall well-being.[82, 83, 84]
16i. Provide or facilitate transportation to work (0.25)	Transportation plays a role in brain health. Accessible transportation options can reduce stress and anxiety associated with commuting, promoting better mental well-being. Additionally, active modes of transportation, like walking or cycling, promote physical activity, which has a positive impact on brain health by enhancing cognitive function and reducing the risk of cognitive decline. Conversely, lack of reliable transportation options can lead to social isolation, limited access to healthcare, and increased stress, all of which can negatively affect brain health.[85]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
16j. Provide or facilitate access to childcare (0.25)	Providing childcare benefits can significantly support the brain health of parents by reducing stress and improving overall well-being. Affordable and reliable childcare helps parents manage their work/life balance more effectively, reducing stress and cognitive load associated with juggling childcare and work responsibilities. Additionally, having access to quality childcare enables parents to maintain their professional development and career progression, which can positively impact their mental health and cognitive function.[86]
Q17. Which of the following describes your leadership's support for health and well-being?	Leadership development that incorporates the business relevance of worker health and well-being is crucial for brain health as it fosters a culture where mental and physical wellness are valued, reducing stress and promoting cognitive function. Active participation of leaders in health and well-being programs sets a precedent, encouraging employees to engage in similar practices, which can enhance brain health through exercise, stress reduction, and healthy habits. Leaders serving as role models for prioritizing health and work/life balance not only inspire their teams but also contribute to better decision-making and productivity, positively impacting brain function. Holding frontline managers accountable for supporting employee health and well-being ensures that organizational structures are in place to sustain a brain-friendly work environment, promoting long-term cognitive health and overall well-being.[87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92]
17a. Leadership development includes the business relevance of worker health and well-being (1 point)	Organizations with very supportive leadership were four times more likely to report reduced health risks.

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
17b. Leaders are role models for prioritizing health and work/life balance (1)	Leaders and managers may have significant influence on employee cognitive well-being.
17c. Leaders actively participate in health and well-being programs (1)	Leadership support is a key contributor to the success of health and well-being policies and procedures. Leadership support is associated with employee perceived support for health.
17d. Leaders hold their frontline managers accountable for supporting the health and well-being of their employees (1)	Frontline managers play a crucial role in support health and well-being efforts. They help to set positive examples for their team, help team members create systems and processes that support their well-being, and support their team members health and well-being goals. In these ways, frontline managers can promote a brain-healthy culture by trying to reduce stress and improve physical and mental well-being.
Q19. Which of the following elements affecting employee health and well-being are included in your organization's leadership training?	
19a. Resources to help employees address social risk factors (0.5 points)	Social determinants of health (SDOH), or social risk factors, are the conditions where people live, work, learn, play, and are born. They can have a significant impact on a person's health, including their risk of mental health conditions, dementia, and Alzheimer's disease.[93, 94]
19b. Psychological safety (0.5)	Psychological safety is linked to brain functions that regulate emotions and cognitive processes. The amygdala, prefrontal cortex, and hypothalamus are key brain areas involved in psychological safety and emotional regulation. The limbic system, often called the emotional center of the brain, also plays a role, deciding if something is threatening or rewarding about five times per second.[95]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
19c. Leaders' role as an influencer of employee health and well-being (0.5)	See Q17.
19d. Opportunities for growth and advancement for under-represented groups (0.25)	Improving opportunities for growth and advancement for under-represented groups can support brain health by reducing stress and anxiety associated with discrimination and limited career progression. Additionally, enhanced career prospects can lead to better socioeconomic conditions, which are linked to improved access to healthcare, nutrition, and mental well-being resources, all of which contribute positively to brain health.[96, 97]
19e. Workload management (0.5)	Effective workload management is essential for brain health as it helps in maintaining optimal cognitive functioning and reducing stress levels. Poor workload management can lead to chronic stress, cognitive overload, and burnout, all of which can negatively impact brain health, including memory, decision-making abilities, and overall mental well-being.[98, 99]
19f. Empathy and compassion training (0.5)	Increasing empathy and compassion across the workforce can enhance prosocial cultures leading to the release of neurochemicals such as oxytocin that promote trust and psychological safety in organizations.[100]
19g. Manager effectiveness (0.25)	Supportive leadership behaviors reduce employee exposure to workplace stressors and corresponding job stress to improve employees' physical and mental health.[101, 102, 103, 104, 105]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
Q20. Which of the following describe the involvement of employees in your health and well-being initiative?	
20a. Employees are formally asked about their perceptions of organizational support for their health and well-being (e.g., annual employee survey) (1 point)	Formally inquiring about employees' perceptions of organizational support is helpful because their perceptions influence their stress levels, job satisfaction, and overall mental health, directly impacting cognitive function and brain health in the workplace. Understanding these perceptions allows organizations to implement effective strategies that foster a supportive environment conducive to optimal brain functioning and overall well-being.[106]
Q22. Are mid-level managers and supervisors provided any of the following tangible supports for employee health and well-being?	Investment in managerial capacity ensures that employees receive consistent, informed support, fostering a healthier, more cognitively robust work environment.[103]
22a. Budget or resources for team-level activities (0.5 points)	See Q22.
22b. Recognition of their efforts (0.25)	See Q22.
22c. Training specifically related to health and well-being resources and assessing needs (0.5)	See Q22.

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
Section 3: Programs	
Q24. What programs or services does your organization offer to help individuals manage one or more physical or mental health issues?	
24a. Educational programs focused on self-management (0.25 points)	Educational programs focused on self-management can improve brain health by empowering individuals with knowledge and skills to adopt healthier lifestyles and adhere to treatment regimens for neurological conditions. These programs also foster self-efficacy and motivation, leading to better disease management and potentially slowing cognitive decline.[107]
24b. Coaching/counseling delivered through multiple interactions with a health professional (0.25)	Health coaching can improve brain health by promoting lifestyle changes such as regular physical activity and balanced nutrition, which are known to support cognitive function and reduce the risk of neurodegenerative diseases. Additionally, health coaching can enhance mental well-being through stress reduction techniques and personalized strategies that address factors impacting brain health.[108, 109]
24c. Healthcare navigation supports (0.25)	Healthcare navigation supports can improve brain performance by facilitating access to preventive care and treatments that optimize neurological health. Additionally, reducing barriers to healthcare can enhance overall well-being, which in turn supports cognitive abilities and performance.[110]
24d. Virtual care (0.25)	Virtual care can improve brain health by providing convenient access to mental health services, promoting early intervention and continuity of care for conditions like anxiety and depression. It also allows for personalized monitoring and management of neurological conditions, enhancing patient engagement and outcomes.[111]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
24e. Interactive digital expert system (0.25)	Interactive digital expert systems can support brain health by providing personalized advice, cognitive exercises, and reminders for medication adherence, thereby promoting mental stimulation and enhancing overall cognitive function. Additionally, these systems can track progress over time, facilitating early detection of cognitive changes and enabling timely intervention strategies.[112, 113]
Q25. What types of health and well-being issues does your health and well-being initiative address?	
25a. Chronic physical and mental health condition (2 points)	Some chronic physical conditions can impact brain function by causing high blood sugar levels or disrupting blood circulation. Chronic mental illnesses can affect a person's cognition and emotions as well as mental health. Some common chronic mental illnesses include anxiety disorders, mood disorders, and depression.[114, 115]
25b. Physical health (1.75)	See 1a.
25c. Mental and emotional well-being (1.75)	Employer-sponsored, evidence-based workplace mental health programs can be beneficial for both employers and employees, resulting in reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as a positive return on investment.[116]
25d. Financial well-being (0.5)	See 1h.

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
25e. Career growth (0.5)	Career growth can positively impact brain health by providing opportunities for cognitive stimulation, skill development, and personal fulfillment. Engaging in challenging tasks and continuous learning fosters neuroplasticity, which can help maintain cognitive function and resilience as individuals age. Furthermore, a sense of achievement and purpose derived from career advancement can contribute to overall well-being, promoting mental health and reducing the risk of cognitive decline.[8]
25f. Personal growth (1)	Personal growth fosters brain health by encouraging individuals to engage in activities that promote cognitive stimulation, such as learning new skills, pursuing hobbies, and seeking out novel experiences. These activities stimulate the brain, leading to increased neuroplasticity and the formation of new neural connections, which can enhance cognitive function and resilience. Embracing personal growth also contributes to psychological well-being, reducing stress levels and promoting overall mental health, thereby creating a supportive environment for brain health.[8]
25g. Social or relational well-being (1.75)	See 1c.
Q26. Are any of the following digital/virtual features incorporated into your health and well-being programs?	
26a. Virtual delivery of services is offered (0.25 points)	Digital and mobile applications can support brain health by providing accessible tools for cognitive training, mental health monitoring, and protective factors such as physical activity and sleep and stress management. These applications offer interactive exercises, mindfulness practices, and personalized feedback, which help users maintain and improve their cognitive functions, manage anxiety and depression, and promote overall well-being. Additionally, they enable continuous tracking and early detection of cognitive decline, allowing for timely interventions.[111]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
26b. Online social connection and group support (0.25)	See 26a.
26c. Program incorporates use of tracking devices such as an accelerometer, glucometer, automated scale, or sensor technology (0.25)	Tracking devices provide data that can inform wellness programs aimed at promoting healthy habits that support overall brain health. Additionally, these devices enable early detection of health issues, facilitating timely interventions and improving employees' cognitive function and mental well-being.[117, 118]
26d. Mobile applications (0.25)	See 26a.
Q27. Does your organization, including any specialty vendors or health plans you use, provide any of the following resources to support individuals in managing their overall health and well-being?	
27a. Employee assistance program (EAP) (0.25 points)	On-site health services and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) promote better brain health by providing convenient access to preventive care, mental health support, and resources for managing stress and emotional well-being, thereby reducing the negative impact of workplace-related stressors on employees' cognitive function and mental health. These services also foster a supportive work environment that prioritizes employee well-being, which can enhance job satisfaction and overall brain health.[119]
27b. Behavioral health advocacy services (0.25)	Behavioral health advocacy enhances brain health by raising awareness about mental health issues and promoting access to necessary resources and support services. This advocacy helps reduce stigma, encourages early intervention, and ensures individuals receive comprehensive care for their mental and neurological well-being.[73]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
27c. Onsite fitness or wellness center (0.75)	See 27a.
27d. Onsite or near-site medical clinic (0.5)	See 27a.
27e. Childcare assistance (0.25)	Childcare support enhances employees' brain health by reducing parental stress and anxiety associated with balancing work and childcare responsibilities, while also providing opportunities for social support and promoting a supportive work environment conducive to mental well-being. Access to reliable childcare services enables employees to better focus on work tasks, leading to increased productivity and reduced cognitive strain.[120]
27f. Elder care assistance (0.5)	Caregiving support programs alleviate stress and provide resources for employees balancing caregiving responsibilities, contributing to improved brain health by reducing strain and fostering a supportive work environment. Access to education, social networks, and flexible work arrangements further enhances employees' ability to manage their caregiving roles while maintaining mental well-being.[121, 122]
27g. Financial well-being (0.25)	See 1h.
27h. Medical decision support (0.5)	Medical decision support systems can enhance brain health by providing personalized treatment recommendations and early detection of neurological conditions through data-driven analysis. These systems integrate patient data with the latest medical research to assist healthcare professionals in making more accurate and timely decisions. See also 24c.
27i. Legal assistance (0)	
27j. Concierge services (0)	

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
Q28. In which of the following ways does your organization use your employee health and well-being data to design and operate your programs?	See Q1.
28a. Identify needs for new programs or services (0.25 points)	See Q1.
28b. Provide targeted outreach to groups relevant to their needs or gaps in care (0.25)	See Q1.
28c. Personalize interventions at the individual level (0.25)	See Q1.
28d. Inform health professionals to better support participants (e.g., support health coaching) (0.25)	See Q1.
28e. Ongoing, real-time feedback to participants (0.25)	See Q1.
Q29. Do you have an ongoing process of identification, outreach, engagement, and intervention to connect individuals to the most relevant resources for them?	
29a. Yes (1.5 points)	

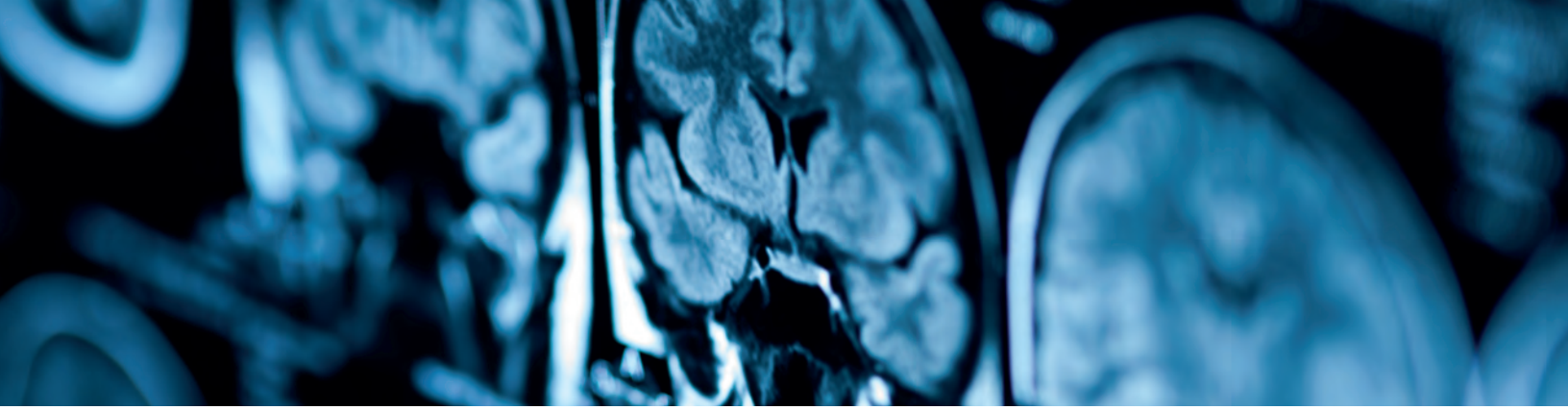
QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
Q30. Has your organization taken any of the following steps to manage employee disabilities?	
30a. Modified temporary jobs for employees ready to return to work but not to their former jobs (0.75 points)	Engaging in work stimulates cognitive functions through problem-solving, decision-making, and social interactions, which can enhance memory, attention, and executive function. Additionally, work provides a sense of purpose and routine, which can reduce stress and promote mental well-being, thereby protecting against cognitive decline and conditions such as depression and anxiety. Regular mental engagement and social connectivity at work also contribute to maintaining and potentially improving brain health over time.[123, 124]
30b. Strategies to direct disabled individuals to appropriate health and well-being programs (0.25)	Physical illness and disabilities can have a profound impact on an individual's brain health. Adults with disabilities report mental distress almost five times as often as adults without disabilities. Although the prevalence of dementia in people with intellectual disabilities was found to be higher at a younger age than in the general population, adequate education, prevention of head trauma and stroke, and treatments for hypertension and depression may reduce the risk of dementia.[125, 126]
Section 4: Program Integration	
Q32. Are your health and well-being programs integrated in any of the following ways?	
32a. Health and well-being program partners (internal and external) refer individuals to programs and resources provided by other partners (0.25 points)	Community and other business partnerships can bring added value for the employees of both organizations.[127, 128]

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
32b. Health and well-being program partners "warm transfer" individuals to programs and services provided by other partners (0.5)	See 32a.
32c. Partners collaborate as a team to meet regularly, share information, and track outcomes (0.5)	See 32a.
32d. Automated processes for sharing information between partners (e.g., shared vendor portals, regular data exports between vendors, embedded into electronic medical record, etc.) (0.5)	See 32a.
Q33. Are steps taken to ensure health and well-being is integrated with the efforts in any of the following areas?	
33a. Employee assistance (0.25 points)	See 27a.
33b. Disability management (0.5)	See 14c.
Q34. Is your organization's health and well-being initiative integrated with your worksite safety program in any of the following ways?	
34a. Safety and injury prevention are elements of health and well-being goals and objectives (1 point)	See 1g.

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
Q35. In what ways does your organization actively participate in community initiatives focused on health and well-being?	
35a. Encourage employees to volunteer in the community (0.75 points)	See 13i.
35b. Sponsor community health events (0.5)	See 13i.
35c. Partner with other community organizations to address social determinants of health (0.75 points)	See 32a.
35d. Refer/connect employees to community resources that address social determinants of health (1 point)	See 32a.
Section 5: Participation Strategies	
Q37. Which of the following social strategies does your organization use to encourage participation in health and well-being?	See 1c.
37a. Group goal setting or activities (0.5 points)	See 1c.
37b. Affinity groups connecting people with common interests or characteristics (1)	See 1c.
37c. Supporting a cause (0.25)	See 1c.
37d. Peer support (1)	See 1c.
37e. Allowing family members, friends, or community members to participate (1)	See 1c.

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
Q38. Do health and well-being program communications include any of the following?	Communication strategies are crucial for the uptake of workforce brain health and well-being programs, as they play a pivotal role in raising awareness, engaging employees, and reducing stigma surrounding cognitive health issues. Clear and effective communication helps employees understand the benefits of participating in programs, such as improved well-being, reduced stress, and increased productivity. Tailoring communication to different audience demographics and preferences ensures maximum reach and engagement. Additionally, fostering open dialogue and providing ongoing support through various communication channels encourages employees to actively participate in mental health initiatives, contributing to a healthier and more supportive work culture overall.[71, 129]
38a. Multiple communication methods/ formats appropriate for targeted populations (0.75 points)	See Q38.
38b. Communications tailored to specific subgroups based on demographics or health status (0.75)	See Q38.
38c. Communications directed to spouses and family members as well as employees (0.5)	See Q38.
Q39. Does your health and well-being engagement strategy intentionally help employees consider how participation in the health and well-being initiative aligns with their goals, values, or purpose in life?	Life satisfaction is an asset associated with better general health. Higher life satisfaction is also associated with lower risk of dementia.[130]
39a. Yes, a great deal (1.5 points)	See Q39.
39b. Yes, somewhat (1)	See Q39.
39c. Yes, a little (0.5)	See Q39.

QUESTIONS and PRACTICES	BRAIN HEALTH RELEVANCE
Section 6: Measurement & Evaluation	
Q52. Please indicate which of the following types of data are used to evaluate health and well-being initiative performance. Only select the types of data that are periodically reviewed (at least once per year) and used to influence program decisions.	
52a. Psychosocial/mental health (1.5 points)	See 1b.
52b. Physical health (1.5)	See 1a.
52c. Overall well-being, life satisfaction, and quality of life (1.5)	Overall well-being, life satisfaction, and quality of life are closely associated with long-term brain health. Research suggests that individuals who report higher levels of well-being and life satisfaction tend to have better cognitive function and a reduced risk of cognitive decline and dementia later in life.[130]
52d. Social well-being (1.5)	See 1c.
52e. Financial well-being indicators (0.25)	See 1h.
52f. Employee engagement, morale, or satisfaction (1)	Employee engagement, morale, and satisfaction are closely linked to brain health as they contribute to overall well-being and cognitive function. When employees are engaged and satisfied with their work, they experience lower levels of stress and higher levels of happiness, which can positively impact brain health. A positive work environment characterized by supportive relationships, meaningful work, and recognition stimulates the brain's reward system, promoting the release of neurotransmitters associated with well-being, such as dopamine and serotonin. Moreover, high levels of employee engagement and satisfaction have been associated with better cognitive performance, including enhanced decision-making, problem-solving, and creativity, further supporting brain health over the long term.[130]
52g. Occupational health and safety (1)	See 1g.



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