



78th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management August 10-14, 2018 | Chicago, Illinois, USA

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Improving Lives

Improving Health and Well-being in Society: How Can Organizations Help?

The 2018 Theme asks the question: How can organizations contribute to the betterment of society through elevating the health and well-being of those who live in it? What role can organizations play in positively affecting the physical, psychological, social, and financial health of individuals, groups, communities, countries, regions, or global society?

Organizations are integral to, and have an interdependent relationship with, society. As such, they affect whether societies realize their members' health ("complete physical, mental and social well-being," WHO 1946) and overall well-being ("being happy, healthy and prosperous," Merriam-Webster). However, the role of organizations and the responsibility for improving lives is unclear, as is the extent to which their efforts have been successful.

The Theme will explore such issues as whether (and why) organizations have a responsibility for improving the lives of individuals in society. Do organizations have an obligation to "give back"? Are there benefits for organizations who seek to improve lives as a strategic opportunity? Could—and should—organizations play more of a role in the overall health and well-being of a society? What does it take to achieve a coordinated and sustained effort from organizations to address the grand challenges of improving a society's physical, psychological, social, and financial health? How can health and well-being become part of the conversation in upper echelons of organizations? What types of leadership approaches will engage people in making positive differences in their lives, on both large and small scales? If organizational purpose is to ensure that lives are better, what should organizations do differently?

A number of recent trends have created unique opportunities for organizations to have a positive impact. Aging, the rise of mental health issues, diversity in communities, financial insecurity, and the role of technology in facilitating constant connectivity have created challenges that organizations may be in an ideal place to address. What organizational solutions responding to these current trends are having a *positive* impact on the health and well-being of those affected? Under what conditions do organizational solutions transform the impact of current trends into positive effects for health and well-being of those in their local and global communities? We seek to showcase work that informs these issues. Diverse forms of research are pertinent, some examples of which include:

- What organizations are doing to ensure that digital technology/robotics positively impacts the health and well-being of employees and better serve the health and well-being of individuals, communities, and society.
- What organizations are doing to positively impact the health and well-being of an aging workforce.
- What organizational actions are providing a basis for employees with mental/physical health concerns to flourish.
- What organizations are doing to contribute to a more inclusive society and the health and well-being of diverse communities.
- What solutions organizations (individually or collectively) offer to ensure the health of the planet and, thereby, improve societal health and well-being.
- What organizations are doing to encourage and sustain financial well-being, both for their employees and for those impacted by their operations.

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There is also rising inequality. Our society comprises “haves” and “have nots,” and increasing segments of society are disenfranchised as a result of prejudice, poverty, conflict, and disasters. What role can organizations have in improving the lives of vulnerable populations? What would the implications be for the care of vulnerable people? How can different types of organizations measure their impact on the health and well-being of a society’s most vulnerable groups, such as:

- the unemployed
- the working poor
- immigrants
- refugees and other displaced persons
- those living in poverty?

Pause for a moment and imagine what is and what would be possible if we seriously considered the involvement of organizations in creating a better society. Some potential questions for our diverse community to explore:

— What would it mean for organizations to seriously take into account the health and well-being of their employees and those doing life-changing work in unique contexts? What organizationally sponsored initiatives make a positive difference to the health of employees? How, when, and why does organizational performance positively impact health and well-being?

— Under what conditions do structures and processes promote societal health and well-being in the short-term and longer term? How are organizational products and services making a difference to societal health and well-being? What conditions facilitate organizations promoting human and environmental health in their supply chain and sourcing decisions? What can organizations do to enhance financial well-being in society?

— What factors facilitate and reinforce attention and action on society’s health and well-being at different levels? How do advocacy groups and Internet activism positively affect organizations’ health and well-being goals? How do organizations use their influence to advance the health agenda of public policymakers? What facilitating conditions support organizational success in improving health and well-being? How do community dynamics and nonprofit organizations shape its impact?

— How do institutional contexts facilitate the collaboration and pooling of resources to positively address societal health and well-being? What organizational capabilities facilitate the detection of societal need for help in the context of natural and human-caused disasters?

— What forms of organizational alliances/partnerships facilitate a positive impact on health and well-being? What are effective methods of knowledge transfer between organizations in the effort to cure diseases?

— How does management education positively impact the health and well-being of students and contribute to improving the lives of vulnerable groups in society? What role should management education play in promoting the health of the planet and the lives of its people?

As we prepare for the 2018 Annual Meeting in Chicago, I hope that you will think creatively, broadly, and provocatively about Improving Lives from many different perspectives.

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