Greater demand for innovative, alternative solutions is often the driving force behind new conceptual approaches, technologies, and investments in an evolving industry. In the field of worksite health promotion (WHP), this demand has multiplied over the last few years owing to rising health care costs, an emphasis on personal responsibility for health, increased chronic disease prevalence, and the implementation of the Affordable Care Act regulations.

Several new books have been published in the first half of 2015 that introduce new approaches and models to enhance workforce and organizational health and well-being through culture and organizational change. While some aspects of the books share common theoretical and research grounding, they differ considerably in their key messages, perspectives, and approach for promoting workforce and organizational health. All three of the books challenge WHP practitioners to incorporate new approaches into the design, implementation, and evaluation of WHP, sometimes by calling into question the effectiveness of the field’s historical approaches. The authors of this section reviewed the books not necessarily to endorse the views of their authors but, rather, to expose readers of this journal to alternative viewpoints. In doing so we also recognize that optimal progress is often made when we are challenged not only to consider new perspectives, but also to recognize the valuable practices, research, and models that have helped us to achieve our many successes to date. The reviews are followed by a table that summarizes key messages and recommended strategies across the reviewed books.

How to Build a Thriving Culture at Work by Rosie Ward, PhD, and Jon Robison, PhD

Focused on building a thriving culture that supports both employee and organizational well-being, Ward and Robison exhort their readers to overcome “paradigm paralysis” and embrace their seven points of transformation in this sometimes-adversarial depiction of the health promotion field. They draw heavily from the field of industrial organizational development to introduce readers to the work of Senge, Schwartz, Byrum, Schein, Lencioni, Deci, and Wheatley, and suggest how to apply powerful organizational development concepts to build cultures of health. For the authors, this translates into developing a thriving workplace culture that focuses on well-being, relationships, employee happiness, “good” human nature, and the organization as an ally. Furthermore, seven points of transformation are outlined to drive employee and organizational well-being. This holistic approach is offered as a “new paradigm,” and is described as different from a “traditional biomedical approach.” The authors emphasize that “it takes tremendous courage and commitment to face a complex adaptive challenge like transforming your workforce culture.” They also suggest that straddling both paradigms will not reap optimal benefits. In sum, this book introduces readers to concepts and theories that can have great application to the WHP field and encourages us to embrace research outside of the wellness field.

Workplace Wellness That Works: 10 Steps to Infuse Well-Being & Vitality Into Any Organization by Laura Putnam, MA

Like the other books featured in this review, Laura Putnam’s book focuses on developing a workplace culture that supports wellness initiatives. The role of culture and environment on shaping individual choices is balanced with an emphasis on strategies to more effectively engage individual end users, with suggestions on how to increase intrinsic motivation. Her approach combines evidence-based practices in worksite wellness with disciplines and practices from other fields, such as education, organizational development, and design thinking. Focused on “overcoming the engagement conundrum,” Putnam’s approach to design, implementation, and measuring the impact of worksite health promotion programs requires that organizations shift their focus away from individual approaches to first address organizational support for workforce health. In addition, employers and practitioners must widen their view of wellness to address a more holistic approach that contributes to one’s vitality and sense of meaningful purpose in life. Moreover, she highlights the benefits of partnering with organizational functions, such as learning and development, to integrate concepts into leadership development and management training programs. Putnam warns the reader that culture change and this broadened view may require addressing elements that seem to be outside of the traditional wellness purview. Her approach includes 10 steps organized into three sections and are written to appeal to practitioners at multiple levels of experience. Throughout this book, Putnam provides numerous ideas to revisit or reboot an existing wellness program or to “start a movement” within an organization, coupled with numerous examples and case studies throughout.

Shared Value-Shared Results: Positive Health as a Win-Win Organizational Philosophy by Dee W. Edington, PhD, and Jennifer S. Pitts, PhD (cover in press; unavailable at this time)

Taking key stakeholders to a higher philosophical and strategic level is an essential element in the win-win approach proposed by Edington and Pitts in their book. Introducing the Edington-Pitts Model for Positive Organizational Health, authors highlight that this new model builds upon Edington’s 2009 Zero Trends work and reflects a much broader, systems-thinking approach that uses...
systems thinking and human-centered design principles to achieve a flourishing employee population and organization. In doing so, the value and relevance of positive psychology, positive organizational scholarship, appreciative inquiry, and behavioral economics are introduced to assist the reader in exploring disciplines outside of the traditional wellness arena. Within their model, five pillars support the healthy foundation that is essential for creating a flourishing organization. These pillars include visible and thriving support of the traditional wellness arena. Within their model, five pillars support the healthy foundation that is essential for creating a flourishing organization. These pillars include visible and thriving support of the environment in which individuals’ overall health, the authors outline key stages (assessment and preparation for a new approach, identifying meaningful values and results, developing leader and changing the culture, measurement, and communications) to achieving shared values and shared results. Similar to the other authors, Edington and Pitts encourage readers to embrace a new approach to organizational health and introduce readers to research and evidence that have shaped their proposed model.

Differentiating the Approaches
The table above compares and contrasts our perceptions of the key messages, perspective, and approaches observed in the three books we reviewed.

Jennifer Flynn, MS, Health Management Strategy Consultant, Mayo Clinic

Jessica Grossmeier, PhD, MPH, Vice President of Research, HERO

The Industrial-Strength Tools Needed for Improving Health Promotion Practice and Fostering a Shift to Well-Being

Standing on a catwalk overlooking the Toyota Plant Assembly line in Aichi, Japan, was a defining moment for me in my understanding of principles of continuous quality improvement. I felt I was watching a world-class orchestra with performers, instruments, and their surroundings in sublime resonance. It was mesmerizing to see the cadence of a workflow perfectly adapted to the environment. That’s because I was observing more than 30 years’ accumulation of “Kaizen,” or continuous process changes designed to mistake-proof the interactions between people, materials, and machines. “Lean” production concepts such as “just in time,” “one piece flow,” and the Deming cycle came alive in front of me as I watched these Japanese workers so skillfully applying their Kaizen tools. And, as I had learned in many other work settings during 5 years of hands-on Kaizen training, this quest for perfection will never cease in large manufacturing given its smart use of data to get closer and closer to defect-free products and services.

While many health promotion practitioners may be unfamiliar with tools such as Six Sigma and Lean, large companies competing on quality use “black belts” deeply trained in deploying these tools. A concept that practitioners and researchers alike embrace, though, is the use of metrics to plan and improve. Still, we are green belts at best compared to Kaizen black belts. To improve a process in large companies, individual performance and environmental factors are measured simultaneously to test how a systems change affects worker performance. In wellness, we have evidence-based metrics for individual practices.