# THE NEXT GENERATION EMPLOYEE WELLNESS PROGRAMS

Employees' Perceptions of Corporate Wellness

# Acknowledgements

# Abstract

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| **Title** | The Next Generation Employee Wellness Programs: Employees' Perceptions on Corporate Wellness |
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| **Course** | BUSN 49 Master Level Degree Project in Managing People Knowledge and Change |
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| **Keywords** | Wellness, Motivation, Choice, Social Control |
| **Purpose** | The purpose of this research is to create a better understanding of how employees perceive corporate wellness at Improve Digital. |
| **Research question** | How do employees perceive corporate wellness? |
| **Contribution** | This research contributes to the society by focusing on an intersection of current topical wellness trends. Furthermore, it contributes to the existing theories of motivation and social control by presenting new ways of managing corporate wellness. |
| **Methodology** | This qualitative research is based on the multi-paradigm of interpretivism and critical stance to make sense of participants' perceptions towards corporate wellness at Improve Digital. Furthermore, this research is an abductive interpretive/critical case study based on 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews. |
| **Findings** | This research indicates that wellness initiatives at Improve Digital started as an experiment and evolved into a managerial strategy. Employees see wellness culture within the organization as a reflection of founders and as their strategy to attract and retain employees, create a strong brand image, to motivate employees, and to restrain them. |
| **Conclusion** | We question if corporate wellness is a managerial strategy, or if it might be just a reflection of personal desires of female founders (gender significance). Furthermore, we argue that employees are encouraged by the 'own choice' discourse of autonomy, which is used as a distraction of existing cultural and social control systems. Moreover, the development of a wellness culture may lead to puzzled employees. Lastly, we question if the overwhelming focus on wellness might lead to a paradoxical effect. |

## List of Abbreviations

KIFs    Knowledge-intensive firms

WHP    Workplace health promotion

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# *"I NEVER DID A DAY'S WORK IN MY LIFE. IT WAS ALL FUN."*

## 1.    Introduction

### 1.1    Overview

The Millennials - those that are born 1980-2000, also called Generation Y – are very health conscious (e.g., Gustin & Ha, 2014; Jang, Kim & Bonn, 2011; Rickes, 2009). They also have significantly different values and preferences than previous generations – i.e., Baby Boomers and Generation X. As being a significant proportion of consumers (in U.S., Generation Y is even the largest number of consumers), they are and will be driving societal trends for a long time. Today's trends related to well-being and health focus largely on *healthy lifestyles* (e.g., eat correctly, exercise regularly, sleep enough), *body-mind balance* (e.g., yoga, mindfulness training), *natural foods* (e.g., organic smoothies, superfoods), *alternative medicine* (e.g., food or herbs as medicine), *supplement use* (e.g., protein shakes, vitamins), *eco-friendly environment* (e.g., energy efficient products), and *desire for convenience and flexibility* (e.g., convenience of things, like ready-to-eat meals/snacks, and flexibility to make spontaneous purchase decisions). There are a lot of innovative shops and applications that respond to these trends. For instance, the emergence of pop-up shops that sell new sustainable products and mobile applications where people can monitor their eating, exercise and sleep behaviour. These trends also influence the working life of the Millennials. Relatively young high-skilled employees are looking for a high level of flexibility and quality of life in their working lives. Over the last decades, knowledge-intensive firms (KIFs) and managers see their employees as the most important resource of the company to gain competitive advantage (resource-based view) (Boxall & Purcell, 2000; Ullrich, 1997). As a result, employee well-being and health are becoming a business value for organizations (Schmidt, Welch & Wilson, 2000; Zwetsloot & Pot, 2004). For this reason, many companies support wellness and health trends by embracing and implementing new initiatives in the workplace. 70% of Fortune 200 companies offer physical fitness programs (Khazan, 2013). The RAND Employer Survey data suggests that 51 percent of U.S. employers with 50 or more employees offer wellness programs (Mattke, Hangsheng, Caloyeras, Huang, Van Busum, Khodyakov, & Shier, 2013). Relatively young and dynamic companies come up with creative ways of cultivating a healthy office environment.

An example company is Improve Digital, which has several offices internationally (headquartered in Amsterdam, the Netherlands) (see Appendix 1 for additional information about Improve Digital). The two female founders – Joelle Frijters and Janneke Niessen – are trying to improve the culture, workplace, and environment for their employees. They have designed and implemented innovative initiatives, such as healthy lunch meals, fresh juices, detox program, boot camp, etc. (see Appendix 2 for additional information about all the wellness programs at Improve Digital). Their way of investing in human capital can be seen as a strategic human resource management, where the employer proactively tries to sustain or improve employees' well-being, health, and happiness.

## 1.2    Purpose of the Study

In the latest decades, scholarly research journals have been focusing on employees' well-being and health from an organizational perspective. A lot of scholars propose an (in)direct link between health promotion, employee well-being, and organizational improvements (Anderson, Serxner & Gold, 2001; Browne, 2000; DeJoy & Wilson, 2003; Grawitch, Gottschalk & Munz, 2006; Schmidt et al., 2000; Williams, 1994). However, these studies have not addressed the employees' perspective. Some recent studies show that there is no cause-effect relationship and, therefore, employees' perception must be taken into consideration (e.g., Persson, Cleal, Bihal, Mandrup, Øllgaard Jakobsen, Villadsen & Andersen, 2013; Wilson, DeJoy, Vandenberg, Richardson & McGrath, 2004). The aim of this study is to create a deeper understanding of how employees perceive the wellness initiatives of organizations. We are doing this by conducting an abductive interpretive/critical case study at Improve Digital. Therefore, this research project seeks to address the following question: '*How do employees perceive corporate wellness?*'

To answer the research question, we will explore five areas:

1. What kind of wellness initiatives were or are implemented at Improve Digital?
2. Why do employees participate and respond to corporate wellness initiatives?
3. How do employees perceive the influence of wellness initiatives on their personal lives?
4. To what extent do employees feel healthy lifestyle choices are enforced by the organization or co-workers?
5. How do employees see the future of wellness regarding the employers´ involvement and impact on personal lives?

## 1.3     Our Contribution

We – Gabrielė and Laura – are a part of the Millennials. We grew up and live in this dynamic society full of wellness and health movements. As the Millennials is the generation that will have to work the longest (since they are the youngest), it is of great importance that their perspective - as employees - is considered. By focusing on an intersection of wellness trends, we have a topical contribution to the society. We wanted to look how societal trends interact with workplaces, and how employees' lifestyles and work are aligned. As most of the wellness initiatives of organizations are relatively new, our contribution is innovative.

From theoretical part, we contribute to the existing theories of wellness, motivation, and social control by presenting new ways of managing corporate wellness, and by exploring a different angle - namely the employees' perspective. We link the theoretical understanding to the organizational practices. This provides new ways for management to view how they interact with employees' well-being and health, and how they integrate health consciousness of the Millennials.

## 1.4     Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured in six chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion.

The present *Chapter I* serves as an introduction to our research. We provide an overview of the contemporary societal trends for well-being and health, and we introduce the case company Improve Digital. Moreover, we present our purpose of the study including our research questions. We also mention our social and theoretical contribution.

In the following *Chapter II,* we present a review of literature that is essential for this specific research. It is divided into five main sections, namely: terminology, preceding scholarly studies, theoretical perspectives on social control, motivational theories, and overview of critical voices towards wellness.

In *Chapter III* we present our methodology. We discuss our ontological and epistemological stances. Further, we discuss how to be reflective researchers to ensure the validity of our study, and we present our biases and preconceptions. Moreover, we present the overall approach of

our empirical work by providing details about our case, participants, data collection, and data analysis.

*Chapter IV* is concerned with empirical data provision, and likewise presents our findings. This chapter is divided into three subsequent sections, namely: information about Improve Digital, the emergence of the wellness programs, and employees' perceptions of wellness initiatives as a managerial strategy. All the findings are illustrated by the exhaustive analysis of empirical data.

*Chapter V* presents deeper, analytical and critical discussion of the findings that are presented in the previous chapter. The empirical findings are discussed together with the literature presented in the literature review. This chapter is divided into four interrelated sections, namely: organizational structure, control and leadership, social control, puzzled employees, and future of wellness and work.

In *Chapter VI,* we close the thesis with a concluding summary to the research purpose presented in the introduction. Moreover, we present our contribution in the knowledge field of corporate wellness. Furthermore, we discuss our limitations from a reflective point of view, and provide suggestions for future research. Lastly, we end this chapter with recommendations for other organizations.

# 2.    Literature Review

For the last decades, theory and research have been focusing on well-being and health in the workplace. Since the evolvement of a 'healthy workplace' notion (Grawitch, et al., 2006), companies have been trying to create such environments for their employees, for instance through wellness initiatives. Our study seeks to explore employees' perspectives on corporate wellness. In the literature chapter, we firstly define the main concepts - corporate well-being, workplace health promotion, managers and employees, management and organizational control in KIFs, and perception and organizational behaviour. Secondly, we discuss the preceding studies about corporate wellness. Thirdly, we explain how corporate wellness is related to social control. Fourthly, we discuss employees' motivations for wellness. Fifthly, we explain the motivational effects of charismatic leaders. Lastly, we present some critical voices on corporate wellness.

## 2.1    Terminology

### 2.1.1    Well-being and Health

Over the past decade, we can see a large shift in employers' attitudes toward employee well-being and health (Nash & Jefferson, 2015). Employers start recognizing the value of a healthy workforce. A great amount of attention has been focusing on worksite wellness programs, and many organizations have implemented them due to the stringent demands of society (Lindenberg, 2014; Spicer & Scott, 2015). With the increased interest of many organizations, the research on employee well-being has grown rapidly (Lowe, 2014). According to Danna and Griffin (1999), well-being is viewed as "comprising the various life/non-work satisfactions enjoyed by individuals (i.e., satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction with social life, family life, recreation, spirituality, and so forth), work/job-related satisfactions (i.e., satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction with pay, promotion opportunities, the job itself, co-workers, and so forth), and general health" (p.359). Since the 1940s, companies came up with initiatives to raise employee work/job-related satisfaction - for instance, hosting picnics for their employees. In the 1970s, companies introduced fitness programs for workers, which has resulted in the abundance of organizational programs designed to maximize employee and organizational health (Grawitch, et al., 2006). A 2010 Bravewell Collaborative Report[1] suggests that a health culture should be

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[1] A 2010 Bravewell Collaborative Report reviews the medical and corporate literature on the cost-effectiveness and efficacy of integrative medicine.

included in well-created wellness programs. In the same vein, Don Hall[2] argues that not only individual changes are necessary for any effective wellness program, but also a creation of a healthy culture - like easy access to healthy foods and snacks, flexible time for exercising at work, provision of healthy meals, encouragement to adopt a healthy lifestyle, etc. Also, Nash and Jefferson (2015) point out that "a workplace culture of health and wellness is characterized by an environment, policies, and cues that encourage healthy choices" (p.316). In other words, a healthy culture is assumed to create a healthy workplace for employees. With a growing need of a healthy workplace, companies started introducing workplace health promotion (WHP) programs. Parkinson (1982) defines WHP as "a combination of educational, organizational and environmental activities designed to support behavior conducive to the health of employees and their families" (p.13). The interest and investment in worksite well-being are parallel to the considerable role of work in many individuals' lives (Grawitch et al., 2006). As employees are spending more than 30 percent of their waking life at work, it is an attractive place for health education and promotion (Conrad, 1987). Therefore, the question for managers may not be whether to introduce wellness programs, but how to design and implement them to create a health culture within the organization (Lowe, 2014). It has been argued that a healthy workplace is based on an understanding of organizational mission related to the performance of both a company and its employees (Grawitch et al., 2006).

### 2.1.2 Management and Employees

Corporate initiatives could be understood by people behind it. A small group of individuals managing the company can influence overall organizational outcomes (Diska, 2013). Consequently, enterprises can become reflections of their management (Son, Fuller, Muriithi, Walters & Kroll, 2015). That is why it is important to understand their experiences, values, social connections and other characteristics (Cannella, Finkelstein & Hambrick, 2008). Nowadays, the use of the word 'manager' has become omnipresent. From some points of view, anyone could be a manager - manager of one's schedule, finances, leisure time, etc. (Pillai, 2011). There are many different definitions of a manager but, in general, a manager is someone who is responsible for a particular task, who is superior, and who manages other people (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). Management can be divided into several level: top, middle

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[2] Founder of Wellsource, Inc. and a provider of innovative online wellness tools, consulting, and guidance to help businesses develop successful wellness programs.

and lower. Top level managers are conceptualized as the ones who "form the inner cadre or circle of people who collectively formulate, articulate, and execute the strategic and tactical moves of the corporation" (Eisenhardt, Kahwajy & Bourgeois, 1997, p.42). Middle-level managers - who operate below top level and above lower level managers - initiate new strategic initiatives, and, support and accelerate strategy implementation (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997; Guth & MacMillan, 1986). Lower level managers - who are an intermediate link between middle-level managers and subordinates - are not only executing instructions of middle-level manager but also distribute work tasks to subordinate workers, inspire them and foster harmony in mutual relations (Giedraitis & Petkevičiūtė, 2013).

Another big part of an organization is its employees. "An employee is usually regarded as a member of the employer's staff and subject to the control of the employer" (Mellow, Niedbalski & Wehmer, 2016, p.46). Specifically, KIFs often see all their employees as knowledge workers because a large part of them has an academic education and/or relevant experience (Alvesson, 2004). According to Swart (2007), knowledge workers are defined as employees that apply valuable knowledge and skills - based on their experience - to new and complex problems in environments. Knowledge in their work is referred as an input, medium and output (Newell, Robertson, Scarbrough & Swan, 2002).

### 2.1.3    Management and Organizational Control in KIFs

According to Alvesson (2004), the power of management in most KIFs is "strongly affected by the nature of the tasks and qualifications of employees, both tending to weaken the significance and positional power of top management" (p.122). In other words, the power of top management is weaker in organizations with high-educated employees performing complex tasks. Newell, Robertson, Scarbrough and Swan (2009) argue that KIFs try to reflect the more general trend towards flatter, less bureaucratized ways of organizing. As a result, more responsibility is given to employees (i.e., employee empowerment) and management has less direct control as the hierarchical layers (partially) disappear. Newell et al. (2009) explain that this way of highly organically and flexibly organizing is mainly based on teams. They argue that teamwork and collaboration are of great importance in the knowledge creation process. In other words, knowledge work revolves around the social and intellectual capital of the group. The importance of human capital has led to the management of modern organizations respecting and engaging "the freedom of the employee, aligning his or her self-realization with the interest

of the organization" (Arvidsson, 2006, p.42). The freedom of employees creates 'individualism' within the company. According to Bains (2007), individuality means that a company defines itself through "a strong community culture, but it also puts great emphasis on accepting people and encouraging individuality" (p.256). Bains states that "all of this is based on the belief that when people are happy and have the freedom to be themselves, they are more productive and give more of themselves" (p.241). The freedom of employees is common in creative and innovative companies.

How can companies of this sort best be organized? According to Mintzberg (1979), an 'adhocracy' is the most appropriate organizational configuration for those companies. Adhocracy in this sense is often well aligned with the needs of startups and companies operating in fast-changing environments. In some situations, a formalization process will take place when a startup develops itself into a large organization – i.e., moving towards can be referred to a bureaucracy. Within an adhocracy, Mintzberg suggest, "control tends to be based on professionalism and shared, organizational values – referred to as cultural or normative control – rather than on more typical forms of direct control such as direct supervision and adherence to rules and procedures" (cited in Newell, et al., 2009, p.36).

Culture and the management of meaning are therefore central to adhocracies. According to Alvesson (2004), corporate culture involves a "deep level of common agreement on objectives and high level of commitment" (p.132). Alvesson continues that the corporate culture has advantages in the forms of intrinsic motivation (low monitoring costs), flexibility, and high commitment. Moreover, Alvesson points out that creating a distinctive brand image, and corporate culture are important for companies as it emphasizes their distinctiveness and originality. However, in most cases is it difficult to create a distinctive and sufficient corporate culture. It requires a homogeneous and stable workforce (Alvesson, 2004).

### 2.1.4    Perception and Organizational Behaviour

To understand employees' perceptions in this research, we have to understand what a perception means. The research on perceptions can be traced back to Bartlett's (1932) influential work on the constructive nature of cognition, which argues "that schematic thinking dominates human perception in ways that human generic beliefs about the world influence and shape information processes" (cited in Vithessonthi, 2005, p.17). Several authors (e.g., Barber & Legge, 1976;

and Berelson & Steiner, 1964) have extended Bartlett's work. Berelson and Steiner (1964) define perception as a "complex process by which people select, organize, and interpret sensory stimulation into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world" (p.88). In the same line, according to Barber and Legge, (1976), perception is about "receiving, selecting, acquiring, transforming and organizing the information supplied by our senses" (p.7). In other words, a perception is an extensive experience where we interact with and interpret things in our world. Each individual of an organization creates his or her understanding to a phenomenon (Argyris & Schön, 1978). As a result, each person perceives reality differently, and we cannot expect all employees to interpret initiatives for corporate wellness similarly. Furthermore, perceptions also include our attitudes and how we respond to the information – i.e., organizational behaviour. Argyris, Putnam and Smith (1985) propose two kinds of theories of action on how we behave in organizations, namely: espoused theories and theories-in-use. Espoused theories are the views that an individual believes his or her behaviour is based on. Theories-in-use are the views implied by people behaviour, which only can be inferred from observing their actions. According to Stafsudd (2003), espoused theories are separated from the action, while theories-in-use influence actions, as "people act according to the requirements of the governing variables of their theories-in-use" (p.1). Furthermore, theories-in-use tend to have an impact on a person's perceptions of the environment, i.e., the behavioural world. This world is created by practices and traditions of people and is continued by their choice. According to Argyris et al. (1985), a person's actions and behaviour are not accidental. Rather, they are designed by a person itself, who is responsible for his or her design. Therefore, Savaya and Gardner (2012) argue that learning is important, as "one must learn what values and beliefs actually guide one's actions (theories-in-use) and how they differ from the values one espouses (espoused theories)" (p.146).

## 2.2    Preceding Studies About Corporate Wellness

Among scholars, there is a dominant view that human resource management activities are beneficial for the organizational outcomes (Guest & King, 2004; Huselid, Jackson & Schuler, 1997). Particularly, in the WHP literature, a lot of scholars propose a direct or indirect link between healthy workplace practices, employee well-being and organizational improvements (e.g., competitive advantage, performance/productivity, absenteeism, turnover, etc.) (Anderson, et al., 2001; Browne, 2000; DeJoy & Wilson, 2003; Grawitch et al., 2006; Schmidt et al., 2000; Williams, 1994). Those studies are mainly focusing on the organizational or

managerial perspectives. However, there are some sceptical voices among researchers about the evidence of the relationship between human resource management and performance (Guest & King, 2004; Legge, 2007; Thompson, 2011; Wilson, et al., 2004). Wilson et al. (2004) show empirical evidence that there is no cause-effect relation. Additionally, they argue that employees' perceptions and expectations play a crucial role in organizational outcomes, particularly in health and well-being outcomes. Also, Wright (2003) counterbalances the utilitarian and management-driven view - considering employees as a mean to the desired end of higher organizational productivity - by arguing that the pursuit of employee happiness, health, and betterment issues must be included to make a truly valuable contribution. As corporate culture is seldom created but most of the times a reflection of 'personalities of organization' (Crémer, 1993, p.351), companies should take into consideration needs of employees when designing workplace initiatives (Fitz-Enz, 2000). Zoller (2004) argues that employees' needs may differ from managerial needs. As the wellness programs are often voluntary, the employees' motivation, knowledge, and attitudes on initiatives are important determinants of participation (Persson, et al., 2013). By considering employees' perspectives, it is more likely that wellness programs will be well received and adopted – i.e., the agreement of employees (buy-in) to support the program. Therefore, our research focusses on employees' perceptions of corporate wellness.

## 2.3    Corporate Wellness and Social Control

For the last few years, new wellness trends have been emerging in society. Organizations respond proactively to these environmental shifts in employee well-being and health through wellness initiatives. This proactive approach is an ongoing process of improving wellness in the workplace. Especially, relatively young companies - that may not have enough resources and, therefore, not always be able to afford high competitive salaries - come up with new wellness initiatives as high-commitment strategies to involve and engage people. By creating fun and healthy workplaces, organizations hope to improve their outcomes in the forms of motivation, creativity, job satisfaction and staff retention (Bolton & Houlihan, 2009). According to Alvesson (2000), it is crucial for KIFs to retain the loyalty of their workforce. As high-educated professionals are relatively scarce and wanted in the Dutch and international markets, companies invest in innovative wellness initiatives to satisfy and motivate their employees. In this way, companies try to increase the commitment and loyalty of their

employees by enhancing company's culture and workplace. Culture management and managerial exhortations to love the firm - frequently called normative control - are typically associated with high-skilled professional workplaces (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011). Wellness initiatives of companies can be seen as a normative control system. According to Fleming and Stablein (1999), this system of normative control works "internally by engendering people with subjective attributes and dispositions, which are compatible with the maintenance of certain types of work organisation" (p.3). They argue that the subjective attributes and dispositions cultivate a shared meaning and purpose among employees, which are very effective for promoting team building. According to Ginn and Henry (2003), the wellness initiatives provide companies a way to establish and maintain an effective corporate culture. The authors argue that initiatives offer a way of securing the loyalty and commitment of employees by showing them that the organization is concerned about their welfare. In other words, wellness initiatives provide a means of social control (Conrad & Walsh, 1992). Social control refers to "interactions between social network members that entail regulation, influence, and constraint" (Lewis & Rook, 1999, p.63). In 1992, French philosopher Deleuze introduced the new concept of society - a society of control. According to him, "we are in a generalized crisis in relation to all the environments of enclosure" (p.3). Deleuze argues that people are prisoners of their lives, as they are never free from the administrations of the ambient environment, i.e., when one administration finishes, the other one starts. Along similar lines, Crary (2013) states that "in actuality there is an imposed and inescapable uniformity to our compulsory labour of self-management. […] The illusion of choice and autonomy is one of the foundations of this global system of auto-regulation." (p.7). Therefore, by offering wellness programs, an organization can exercise control to manage its employees as the illusions of choice and autonomy are created.

## 2.4    Employees' Motivation for Wellness

Herzberg's motivation theory (1959; 2011) - also known as the motivation-hygiene theory, two-factor theory, and dual-factor theory - states that there are two groups of factors in the workplace that play different roles in motivation and job satisfaction, namely - motivators and hygiene factors. Herzberg describes job satisfaction as working condition in which people can fulfil their needs. Hygiene factors (e.g., reasonable salary, working conditions, good relationship with supervisors, organizational policies) can contribute to job dissatisfaction if they are not met. If

these factors are fulfilled, it creates a neutral state (no satisfaction). Motivating factors are the opposite of hygiene factors. Motivators or satisfiers (e.g., development and growth, recognition and appreciation, being successful and creative, achievement of goals) can directly contribute to job satisfaction. If they are not fulfilled, it creates a neutral state (no dissatisfaction). According to Herzberg, motivators can only motivate people to improve their performance when enough attention is given to hygiene factors. Evans (1998) argues that motivators to achieve corporate wellness are not tied to prestigious position, high salary, or extravagant working conditions. Grawitch et al. (2006) identified four categories of motivators regarding corporate wellness, namely: work-life balance, employee growth and development, health and safety, and recognition. The authors argue that employee involvement is achieved when the wellness initiatives anticipate at least one category. In other words, wellness initiatives should provide physical and/or psychological benefits for participants. Lindberg and Vingård (2012) identified, in employees' view, the most frequently addressed motivating factors relevant for corporate wellness. These are (in descending order): growth and development of the individual; collaboration/teamwork; employee involvement; positive, accessible and fair leader; being treated with respect; positive and social climate; work in line with personal values; recognition; autonomy/empowerment; skilled communication; safe physical work; and, appropriate staffing. In other words, from an employee's perspective, these factors are important to create a work environment that fosters corporate wellness. Conversely, Person et al. (2010) suggest some hygiene factors for employees to participate in wellness programs, such as sufficient incentives; convenient time, locations and schedule; interesting topic; marketing; health beliefs; and, interesting program. When designing and implementing a wellness program, an organization should take these hygiene factors into consideration. According to Ginn and Henry (2003), employees see wellness programs as a tool to find a body-soul balance, which is used to keep employees motivated, driven and healthy in regards to their personal as well as professional lives. Additionally, the authors argue that it gives people a meaningful reason to go to work. Davenport (1999) argues that, from employees' perspective, employment may be seen as an investment in human capital, and, as a result, people might ask themselves if their organization is worth investing time. Employees tend to have a more positive view towards their organizations if wellness programs are seen as an investment in themselves (Galunic & Anderson, 2000).

## 2.5    The Motivational Effects of Charismatic Leaders

Charismatic leadership is also considered to be a tool for positive motivation. The study of charisma started with Max Weber introducing this concept (Bass, Bass & Stogdill, 2008). According to Weber, a charismatic person is distinguished from ordinary people and considered to be bestowed with supernatural, superhuman, or exceptional powers or qualities. Individuals having these characteristics are treated as leaders (Weber, Wittich, & Roth, 1968). House (1976) argues that charismatic leaders have extraordinary effects on followers. "These effects include commanding loyalty and devotion to the leader and of inspiring followers to accept and execute the will of the leader without hesitation or question or regard to one's self interest" (House, 1976, p.4). The ability to inspire enthusiasm and action in followers comes through "personal attributes, behaviors, and exemplary qualities of the leader, especially in situations ripe for change" (Sosik, Juzbasich & Chun, 2011, p.436). When a leader becomes a role model, his or her values, traits, beliefs and behaviour are set as an example for other to follow and develop. In this way, leaders provide "an ideal, a point of reference and focus for followers' emulation and vicarious learning" (Shamir, House & Arthur, 1993, p.585). However, Žižek (2008) argues that charisma can be effective only if the leader and his or her follower creates a strong symbolic identification.

The significance of traits and gender plays an important role in leadership. According to House & Howell (1992), charismatic leaders can be differentiated from non-charismatic leaders based on the following personality traits:

> "…cognitive achievement orientation; strong tendencies to be creative, innovative, visionary, and inspirational; high levels of work involvement, energy, and enthusiasm; a strong propensity to take risks; self-confidence; a high need for social influence coupled with a strong concern for the moral and nonexploitive use of power in a socially desirable manner; willingness to exercise influence but not to be dominant, tough, forceful, aggressive, or critical; strong inclinations to be confident in, and encouraging toward, followers and to show a developmental orientation towards followers; and tendencies to be nurturant, socially sensitive, and sensitive to and considerate of follower needs." (p. 90)

These traits are both masculine as feminine specific. Nevertheless, a larger part of the traits are based on a masculine charismatic leader. In contemporary literature, charisma is portrayed as an exclusively male attribute. For instance, Chin (2007) emphasizes the masculine traits of the

charismatic leader by saying "charismatic leadership has been a trait frequently found and associated with great men leaders; consequently, effective leadership has been associated with 'masculine traits', and characterized the leadership of men within male-dominated contexts." (p.5). In the same vein, Devarachetty (2012) argues that "it is unlikely that women will emerge as charismatic leaders when the attributes used to describe such leaders are primarily masculine" (p.124). From the perspective of these authors, we could infer that charismatic leaders, in general, have a more masculine leadership style. However, Devarachetty's study only included 7,4% female leaders (92,6% male). This low representation of women in leadership roles and gender biases prevalent in society might have reflected in charismatic literature (Lindholm, 1990). Furthermore, House and Howell (1992) argue that the follower satisfaction is high when leaders are "more feminine and nurturant and less masculine, dominant, critical, and aggressive" (p.89). In other words, feminine traits are important for a charismatic leader to gain high follower satisfaction. Another study of Sosik and Dinger (2007) found that "men may be more effective than women in formulating inspirational vision statements. Whereas women may be more effective at articulating inspirational visions because of their expressiveness." (p.150). To conclude, to be successful, leaders need both masculine and feminine traits.

## 2.6    Critics of Corporate Wellness

Spicer and Scott (2015) state two main reasons that explain why companies are trying to introduce wellness programs. First reason is that it is greatly marketed. Second reason is that people buy into the idea of wellness. Some sociologists even believe that "in an increasingly secular society, wellness fills a void that religion used to" (Spicer & Scott, 2015, p.28). Even though the popularity of wellness programs is rising and many companies are introducing them to improve organizational outcomes, some authors (e.g., Diener, 1984; Spicer & Scott, 2015) state that corporate wellness creates not only benefits but some shortcomings as well. First of all, well-being is considered a subjective matter (Diener, 1984). In other words, a person's overall experience reflects his/her self-described happiness. Also, Diener (1984) states that 'ideal condition', which is used to define well-being, is different across cultures. Therefore, wellness initiatives could be understood differently - e.g., what one person likes, the other one might dislike. Furthermore, Spicer and Scott (2015) conducted a cultural and historical analysis of ideas about organizational wellness. The findings show that many programs have modest

results at best - a decreasing number of participants, unwillingness to stick with the programs, and censure towards weaker employees. Some of the projects even create guilt and anxiety in workers. People become anxious about losing their job if they do not participate in the programs. Sometimes, images of 'perfect' examples create tensions within employees. People - who cannot reach the results - give up and the fit ones judge them for not meeting the standards. Also, as employees use a lot of energy to improve their health, sometimes they have less time to focus on their core tasks and responsibilities.

In the book "The Wellness Syndrome" (2015), Cederström and Spicer criticize current wellness trends. According to the authors, wellness is not something we choose; it is a moral responsibility. "While we often see it spelled out in advertisements and lifestyle magazines, this command is also transmitted more insidiously, so that we don't know whether it is imparted from the outside or spontaneously arises within ourselves" (p.5-6). Cederström and Spicer present three main groups to whom people owe a responsibility to be healthy: (1) corporations; (2) the market; and, (3) ourselves.

Nowadays, working life is changing rapidly. For this reason, a fierce competition is forcing people to react quickly to these changes. The new emerging trend of employees describes them as boundaryless, i.e., with more autonomy and accountability (Mellner, Aronsson & Kecklund, 2014). As boundaries between work and non-work are becoming less and less visible, and current demands, as well as the importance of being healthy, are growing, employers are trying to interfere in personal lives of employees. "They emphasize their role as mere facilitators, encouraging individuals to make the 'right choices'." (Cederström & Spicer, 2015, p.45).

All people have inherent rights to freedom, to make their choices, and to be themselves. Although, Cederström and Spicer (2015) argue that reality is more constrained. To become employable, people need to respond to the demands of the market and create themselves in a way which is desirable for employers. According to the authors, the archetypical worker from being workaholic and focused on his or her job has changed to constantly developing, 'exercise-addicted corporate athlete' seeking to be a demanded human being.

Bauman (2000) argues that responsibility to be healthy lays in oneself. "You owe your body thought and care, and if you neglect that duty you should feel guilty and ashamed. Imperfections of your body are your guilt and your shame. But the redemption of sins is in the hands of the sinner, and in his or her hands alone." (p.67). For a deeper delving into self-analysis, the father

of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud states that the worst enemy of a person is a person itself. No bosses or coaches can make people feel worse or guiltier as themselves. Internal boss is usually very aggressive. "We might hate the authority figure which demeans us by asking prying questions about personal habits' but we hate ourselves more." (Cederström and Spicer, 2015, p.47).

As wellness is a subjective matter, it is important to align wellness programs with the expectations and desires of employees. Additionally, wellness programs should reflect on the environment (other individuals, corporations, market). To conclude, now the time is ripe for a detailed study of how wellness programs develop and how they impact employees in wellness process.

# 3.    Methodology

In this chapter, we present our overall methodology. Firstly, we show our philosophical grounding, including our ontological and epistemological stances. Secondly, we discuss how to be reflective researchers to ensure the validity of our study. Thirdly, we examine our biases and preconceptions. Lastly, we present the overall approach of our empirical work by providing details about our case company, data collection (research site, our participants, and interviews) as well as the data analysis.

## 3.1    Philosophical Grounding

Our thesis is focused on qualitative research creating a deeper understanding of how people make sense of their lives and their world (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research lies within the idea that "meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world" (Merriam, 2002, p.3). As our social research is shaped by paradigms, we present our ontological and epistemological stances to deal with ambiguity. This provides more insight into our research perspective and our way of interpreting. Our ontological stance describes the reality as multiple constructions and interpretations. With this view, we hold an anti-positivist approach because we believe there is not one 'objective' truth.  Our epistemological stance is constructed around the knowledge arising from interpretation and, therefore, our aim is to recognize the multiple 'truths' that managers, employees and former employees of this study present to us.

Taking our ontological and epistemological stances into account, we base our research on the multi-paradigm of interpretivism and critical stance to make sense of participants' perceptions towards corporate wellness at Improve Digital. On one hand, the interpretative qualitative approach focuses on "how individuals experience and interact with their social world" (Merriam, 2002, p.4). That is why we are interested in understanding how employees perceive corporate wellness at Improve Digital through analysing the subjective experiences of the participants (thoughts and understandings) at a particular time and context. On the other hand, we have based our research on the critical qualitative approach as well, as we were interested how political and social aspects of the situation shape the reality (Merriam, 2002). In particular, we explored if employees feel enforced by the company into lifestyle choices, giving us an insight into how the company shapes its reality constructions in a way that is beneficial for the

whole organization. Overall, the interpretive and critical approaches helped us to understand the processes of subjective reality and critically dispute them (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009; Prasad, 2005). By merging the two paradigms, we wanted to understand how employees perceive the corporate wellness in relation to potentially contextual factors, such as management control or corporate culture.

Furthermore, this research is an abductive interpretive/critical case study. The abductive approach has some characteristics of both induction and deduction (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). In an abductive mode of inquiry one iteratively moves back and forth between a person's pre-understandings, various theoretical perspectives, and empirical data to creatively inference to the best explanation (Martela, 2011). Case study research suggests that the researcher is interested in intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit, such as individual, group, institution, or community (Merriam, 2002).

## 3.2    Reflexivity

The relationship between the researcher and his or her study is very important. According to Wolfinger (2002), "prose inevitably embodies the author's tacit convictions" (p.92). In the same vein, Becker (1986) argues that, "You have already made many choices when you sit down to write, but you probably don't know what they are" (p. 17). To avoid biases and assumptions, argued by Tracy (2010), a good researcher pursues reliability, generalizability, validity and objectivity. All these qualities of the research can be increased by 'reflexivity' (Smith, 2006). According to Alvesson & Sköldberg (2009), reflection means "thinking about the conditions for what one is doing, investigating the way in which the theoretical, cultural and political context of individual and intellectual involvement affects interaction with whatever is being researched, often in ways difficult to become conscious of." (p.245). Being a primary instrument for data collection and analysis, we are aware of our effect on this study, as our bias could have had an impact on the research (Merriam, 2002). Being reflexive could help us avoid biases and improve the quality of our interpretations for this project.

As we were born in 1991-1992 and belong to the Millennials generation, our perceptions are shaped by our generation's values, preferences, and demands. We are aware that we cannot prevent our research from biases and our pre-understandings of corporate wellness. For that reason, we have taken into consideration our subjectivity towards the study as the knowledge

cannot be independent of social construction and people's judgments (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). As one of the authors (Gabrielė) was working at Improve Digital, Laura conducted all the interviews to have more open conversations with participants, as they could feel more relaxed talking with an unbiased person.

Additionally, Finlay, (1998) argues that subjectivity can be seen as a resource. It is more important to use it for getting more insight into the material than to learn how to eliminate it. According to Ratner (2002), recognizing subjectivity gives an advantage of reflecting on whether it facilitates or hinders comprehension. As Gabrielė already knows the environment of Improve Digital, she has a better understanding of employees' thoughts and their perceptions of corporate wellness. Also, knowing the reality of the company benefitted our research by comparing employees' answers and the real experiences. This relates to the espoused theories and theories-in-use, showing the different views of employees' actions - believed actions and real actions inferred from observing their actions (Argyris, et al., 1985).

On the other hand, Gabrielė's preconception about the company and employees could have had a negative impact on her analysis on employees' perceptions. Also, as employees knew that the interview data will be analysed by Gabrielė, they might have been afraid of sharing too much information and might have changed their answers to look better and to avoid judgment.

Furthermore, participants might have boosted their identities by presenting themselves in a better light (Alvesson, 2003). The interviewees may use the interview to "express, elaborate, strengthen, defend, and/or repair a favored self-identity" (p.20). In this way, participants can create a valued self-image by saying what they think that managers and we expect them to say.

## 3.3    Empirical Work

### 3.3.1    Data Collection

**Research Site**

Our research is based on the case company Improve Digital. To have a better understanding of the context of our study, we explored our empirical data alongside with scholarly research papers of corporate wellness. The company Improve Digital was suitable to our research area as it is a relatively young and internationally operating company, which provides many wellness products and services to its employees. Moreover, the company is still in its growing phase and,

therefore, it experiments with new and innovative initiatives for corporate wellness. As Gabrielė did her internship at the company, it ensured us to have easy access to information. The managers were very interested and helpful in our research, because they are still experimenting with wellness initiatives and, therefore, curious to receive more insight on how employees perceive these initiatives. After conducting the interviews, we still had the opportunity to contact them if necessary.

**Participants**

We conducted twelve interviews with people that work or have worked at Improve Digital: three managers and nine employees (including two former employees). The three managers have the positions of People Operations Manager, Senior Manager, and Office Manager. By interviewing the managers, we wanted to receive general information about the corporate wellness initiatives (provided initiatives, accessibility, communication, etc.), the reasons why they have started the initiatives (managerial perspective), and how they design and implement them. By doing the interviews with employees, we wanted to explore their perceptions towards the corporate wellness initiatives. We had no specific gender, age or nationality preference, but randomly selected the employees. Additionally, we included two former employees in the research as we wanted to investigate if there is a significant difference in their attitude towards corporate wellness at Improve Digital or if their habits and lifestyles have changed after leaving the company. All the participants are high-educated people, and some of the employees are IT professionals. The average age of employees at Improve Digital is 32 years, and the average age of the participants of our research is 34 years old (including managers). The sample size of nine people (excluding three managers) is sufficient to understand the variation in employees' perceptions and experiences. Therefore, there was no need to interview more employees of Improve Digital.

**Interviews**

As one of the authors (Gabrielė) have worked for the company, it was easy to schedule the interviews. All interviews were conducted in two days. As our aim was to encourage employees to tell us as much as possible about their experiences and perceptions regarding corporate wellness initiatives, we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with open-ended questions. This means that we had prepared in advance an interview guideline with stated and structured questions to make results comparable (see Appendix 4 for additional information about the interview guideline), but, at the same time, it allowed us to get additional findings

that were not foreseen in questions. In order words, it not only enabled us to guide interviews but also granted flexibility to us. As Gabrielė knows the managers and employees personally (except the two former employees), Laura conducted the interviews with them. In this way, we wanted people to speak openly to Laura, and we wanted to avoid preconceptions based on Gabrielė's experiences. The two former employees were interviewed by Gabrielė. Furthermore, after obtaining the respondents' permissions, we recorded all interviews (except Daniel's interview). With the recordings, we could perform an in-depth analysis of the interviews - including interviewees' tones and emotions. The interviews were conducted in English or Dutch and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

The interviews with employees were divided into five main themes. Firstly, we started by introducing ourselves and our master's project and, after that, we asked the participants some introductory questions concerning personal information, educational background, their daily habits and lifestyles, and wellness initiatives at Improve Digital (sub-question 1). Besides to get to know them, we wanted to establish a comfortable relationship and conversation between them and us. Secondly, we asked some general questions regarding wellness promotion at work to create a better understanding of how they view the 'wellness' concept, and to get more information about their participation (sub-question 2). Thirdly, we asked some questions about their lives outside work to compare the influence of wellness initiatives in their personal lives (sub-question 3). Fourthly, we asked questions about the culture at the company. These questions were mainly used to explore more about the wellness culture, and if people felt ever pressured by management and/or colleagues (sub-question 4). Lastly, we asked them some concluding questions to discover what the actual impact of the wellness initiatives was on people's lives, how they see the future of wellness, and to what extent employers can be involved in employees' lifestyles (sub-question 5).

**Setting at Improve Digital**

Laura went to the headquarters in Amsterdam to conduct the interviews with the managers and employees. The office is located in a large building where multiple innovative companies have office spaces. The building has an inspiring environment with extra facilities, like restaurant, flex-working places, meeting rooms, etc. The first impression of the work atmosphere was very positive. However, the office was not big enough comparing with the amount of people working there. It was also quite noisy. The Office Manager explained that they are moving to another office building after the summer as the current one is not big enough anymore. The different

work teams are divided by tables. The people were very friendly, helpful and interested in our research. To have a more private place, the same manager arranged a separate room where Laura could have the conversations with the participants. The two former employees were interviewed by Gabrielė on Skype. During the interviews, we tried to create a very personal and interactive setting with the aim to have an informal and comfortable conversation where participants share their viewpoint and perceptions with us.

### 3.3.2    Data Analysis

We gathered the empirical data from the interviews by transcribing all the recorded interviews in Word. Our data analysis is based on the four levels of interpretation: (1) interaction, (2) interpretation, (3), critical interpretation, and (4) reflective interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). In the first review, we started the interaction with empirical data by reading through all the data to get a first general impression - i.e., interaction. In the second review, we explored the underlying meanings by interpreting empirical data - i.e., interpretation. We did close readings of our interviews and made initial codes – such as, 'fun', 'healthy' and 'team building' - to make sense of our data. This was the starting point to organize the data. After that, we searched for background information about the concept of 'fun' at work as we discovered that many wellness initiatives had the aim to create a fun workplace. Subsequently, we focused on the salient themes, contradictions (empowerment vs. control), repetitions (e.g. organizational discourses), cultural mechanisms, etc. We pointed down all findings in a separate Word document, and grouped our codes into meaningful categorizations – such as 'experiment', 'reflection of founders' and 'strategy of management'. We discovered how the experimental project had developed into an organizational strategy to attract and retain talents, build a brand image, motivate employees, and restrain them. We brought all the empirical data together in our analysis – Chapter 'Findings'. During the third review, we made critical interpretations by analysing the power relations and control mechanisms - i.e., critical interpretation. We decided to explore the literature of 'social control', see how this is related to the strategy of corporate wellness, and to discover what types of control are related to our case. Our critical interpretations are presented in the Chapter 'Discussion'. In the fourth review, we reflected on our claims that we presented - i.e., reflective interpretation. The reflective interpretations are given in the Chapter 'Conclusion'.

This inquiry process is based on abductive reasoning as we moved back and forth between our preunderstanding, various theoretical perspectives, and empirical data to creatively inference to the best explanation (Martela, 2011). In this way, we had the possibility to capture and take advantage not only of the systemic character of the empirical world but also of the systemic character of theoretical models (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). As our research area is very topical, the abductive process was appropriate as it allowed us to be creative and intuitive to discover new aspects. This approach creates "fruitful cross-fertilization where new combinations are developed through a mixture of established theoretical models and new concepts derived from the confrontation with reality" (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p.559). In order words, we used the case study of Improve Digital for theory development and refinement of concepts rather than inventing new ones. We contribute to the existing theories of wellness, motivation and social control as we are exploring new ways of managing corporate wellness.

# 4.    Findings

This chapter contains an analysis of our main empirical findings. Firstly, we provide the general information about Improve Digital company. Secondly, we discuss the emergence of the wellness programs at the organization. Thirdly, we present employees' perceptions of corporate wellness as a managerial strategy: (1) to attract and retain employees, (2) to create a strong brand image, (3) to motivate employees, and (4) to restrain them. All the findings are illustrated by the exhaustive analysis of empirical data.

## 4.1    Information About the Company

Our research was conducted at Improve Digital - an independent publisher monetization technology provider offering programmatic solutions. The company was founded by two female entrepreneurs - Joelle Frijters and Janneke Niessen. Improve Digital is a fairly new but rapidly growing tech-company. As stated on their website, people are the core of Improve Digital business. That is why a significant amount of company's resources are allocated on the creation of a positive environment for relatively young (average age 32) and diverse workforce (more than 80 employees from 21 different countries). At the moment, Improve Digital is offering many programs for its employees. Most of them are health related - massages during office hours, boot camp twice a week, healthy lunch every day, healthy juices. Other programs and initiatives are aimed at team building - beer o'clock every Friday, movie and bowling nights, table football and table tennis. Additional initiatives are offered to make the overall organizational environment more positive and enjoyable for employees - barista once a month, Dutch language classes for foreign employees, flex programs for employees who want get more free days (see Appendix 2 for additional information about the wellness programs offered by Improve Digital).

## 4.2    Starting as an Experiment

Improve Digital is currently offering a large variety of wellness programs for employees. The first wellness initiative started approximately two years ago when the founders of Improve Digital bought table football and table tennis for employees to relieve stress, relax between working hours and have fun with co-workers. Seeing a positive side of new initiatives (e.g.,

employees bonding during matches), Joelle and Janneke decided to implement social gatherings after work, such as beer o'clock Fridays. Step-by-step Improve Digital started introducing new initiatives for employees. It all began as an experiment of managers in a relatively young and tight organization, which now results in a wellness culture and atmosphere within Improve Digital. According to People Operations Manager Sophia, the company does not have one strategy relating to wellness programs, but offers products and activities that people are interested in:

> *"Hmm, well, actually it happened a bit like…, hmm, we do not have a strategy saying: 'People need to be more healthy or fit'. It is more that we try to do some extra stuff besides work, like fun stuff that people can do together as a team, do together, so it is also a team building part. So, yeah…, it just happened that juices came up, it just whatever people think about, we try to do." (Sophia, People Operations Manager)*

Former employee Christian states that the company did not present all the initiatives as one plan but offered them as separate initiatives:

> *"No, there was not really an official communication about, like 'We are going do all those great things', which probably would have been good to know, or good for them to get the positive feedback from it. But it is more…, hmm, offering things one by one." (Christian, former employee)*

### 4.2.1 Reflection of Founders

Most of the wellness initiatives at Improve Digital come from the founders - Joelle and Janneke. Driven by their strong personal motivation, recently, the founders started focusing on the implementation of healthy programs in the organization. According to Senior Manager John, it all began when both of the founders got pregnant:

> *"Both the founders were pregnant, and, also, Janneke had something like 'the pregnancy belly is not going away'. So, Janneke started working out with a personal fitness instructor. For this, she also needed to adjust her diet. And that is the reason that she started the detox program. And also Joelle joined. Then they initiated the detox program at the office." (John, Senior Manager)*

Employees notice that most of the wellness initiatives come from the management. The way founders change their lives, the company changes as well. William and former employee Ryan noticed the relation between Janneke's personal life and company's changes. When the founder starts something new in her life, then, after some time, employees get the same novelties offered:

> *"It is also a little bit of reflection of Janneke and the management. Let's say, when she changes then, the company also changes [laughing]. It is kind of more…, it is less about…, it is about employees, but it is also a lot about Janneke because five or six years ago it would not be so, because she had a different lifestyle. But now, she has children, so we started also with Sinterklaas [St. Nicholas Feast in The Netherlands] celebration. And now she tries to be healthier, so the whole company gets healthy. But that is good because you find something that is important, and you bring it to the company, to the other people, us. And, health is very important to everyone, right? So, it is very good." (Ryan, former employee)*

> *"I know for a fact that Janneke, one of the founders, has come up with this detox idea because she actually did it herself. [...] She told me that she did it and that she was…, she thought it was great. She told me that she wanted to introduce it because she had a good experience with it." (William)*

William also believes that female employers have a large impact on the overall wellness in the company. According to him, there is a difference between companies led by males and companies led by females. Female managers are more enthusiastic when it comes to the implementation of their ideas, and want to share their view more quickly than men:

> *"And, actually, it all relates to the founders, because…, not to generalize but…, you notice that it is run by women because mostly they have a bit more proactive ideas how to encourage the personnel to be healthier, more active, more social. And, actually, that is the difference between, I think, a company where females are in charge instead of males. If they have an experience with something that they like, they want to share it. Mostly quicker than it might be in the male founders." (William)*

Even though most of the participants agree that the largest part of the initiatives are suggested and implemented by managers, employees are pleased with management decisions and initiatives. Charismatic leadership plays here an important role, as people feel inspired by their

managers and show their support and devotion by joining the programs. Jacob and Charlotte express their trust in management emphasizing the femininity traits of leaders, as they are seen as taking good care of employees:

> *"Yeah, why not. Or…, oh well, I think it is largely arranged by Sophia. I think she has a good idea about what people like and what not. So far, I agree with what she came up with. Perhaps it is not necessary to include my opinion." (Jacob)*

> *"I am not for or against, I trust their decision."(Charlotte)*

### 4.2.2 Fun and Healthy Workplace

Since the beginning of this year, the company started initiating more wellness programs to encourage having 'fun' and supporting 'healthy' habits and lifestyles. Many of the initiatives focus on fun activities, healthy food and drinks, and sports exercises - such as beer o'clock, movie night, healthy lunches with co-workers, healthy snacks, detox program, boot camp, etc. As the employees of Improve Digital are relatively young and health conscious, this indicates that the wellness initiatives can be seen as a response to the demands of youthful employees in a playful and healthy way. The following employees gave us some examples of how they perceive the concept of 'fun' at work:

> *"It comes in fun ways, and you can talk about the juicing. Maybe something funny happened in the boot camp, so they will share experience. […] Outside the juicing, people are talking during beer o'clock, when they can have alcohol or whatever, it comes in fun ways." (Charlotte)*

> *"There are a lot of fun things to do at work. […] When all goes well, we will soon also have yoga. And, I think that one of my colleagues is organizing something nice. We are also thinking about roller blades." (Carmen)*

> *"And it is also fun [he talks about the detox], you get to know a little bit more about your body. You think that you are hungry, but you are not. So, your body can actually have more than you think. It is a mental thing. At least I saw it as fun." (William)*

Charlotte considers sharing experiences and having conversations with colleagues as fun. Carmen finds a playful workplace (with activities like yoga and rollerblading) fun and William

likes to learn more about his body and health. For this, we can infer that employees perceive fun at the work differently. Also, 'healthy' is seen as subjective. What one person defines as 'healthy', the other one might perceive completely differently. The interviews indicate that most of the people working at the company take care of their health by eating healthy and doing sports. Nevertheless, each of them defines their healthy lifestyle differently. By seeing other employees and comparing oneself to another, people create different understandings of what is healthy and what is not. According to Carmen, most of the employees at Improve Digital exercise regularly and take care of their health. When she talks about herself, Carmen thinks that she is not that health conscious:

> *"Yes, we have some people who are very fanatic with sports. Everybody does sports here. Although, almost everyone. […] I eat normally not very healthy [laughing]. So, I do not eat enough vegetables and fruits. Very bad actually [whispering]. And I would like to join the yoga. Hmm…, and I would really like to join the mud masters, but I have to train for that…, but I am considering doing that." (Carmen)*

The subjectivity of 'being sportive' is also clearly seen from Katie's point of view. According to her, she does not do much of sports, even though twice a week Katie is going to horseback riding practices. This example shows different standards people have for calling themselves sportive:

> *"Concerning my lifestyle, I do not do that much of sports apart from horse riding twice a week and…, hmm, that is it, I do not really…, yeah, that is it." (Katie)*

Although Katie does not find herself sportive, she finds it necessary that the fun activities are organized in a healthy way. This was also confirmed by Daniel and Christian:

> *"As long as it is healthy and in a good way, then, yeah, it is okay." (Katie)*

> *"The demands to a healthier life increase, so also the demands to healthy products and services increase." (Daniel)*

> *"At the moment, healthy stuff is getting a common thing that people want to get, so I think that everybody appreciates stuff like that." (Christian, former employee)*

However, not all wellness activities are perceived as fun and healthy at the same time. Some activities may even be bad for employees' health. We noticed in some cases a contradiction

between 'fun' and 'health'. A good example is Carmen. She started drinking alcohol because of the beer o'clock and parties at Improve Digital. At her previous job, they also had social drinks, but there she did not drink alcohol. As the reason for starting drinking, she said that the social drinks at Improve Digital are more fun:

> "There are a lot of fun things to do at work. Also, I notice, that in the past, I only stayed for a few minutes at the social drinks at my previous jobs. Besides, I do not really like a liquid dinner. But now, I stay much longer. I try often to stay till the end. [...] Hmm…, it is also more fun. I worked before at companies where they also had drinks at the Friday afternoon, but at Improve Digital, it is more fun. So, you will drink more. So, yes, at Fridays I drink." (Carmen)

In Carmen's case, the company has encouraged her to have unhealthy habits as she was stimulated to start drinking. To compensate her relatively unhealthy behaviour, Carmen started drinking fresh juices (provided by the company) that contain a lot of vitamins:

> "Well, I started with drinking more. So, I thought, I have to compensate it with something. Before, I did nothing." (Carmen)

Whether an individual employee considers wellness initiatives as healthy is depending on the perceived advantages and disadvantages of those initiatives. In Carmen's case, she experienced the benefits of the healthy juices. However, she also experienced the disadvantages of her drinking behaviour. For that reason, according to her, the wellness initiatives did not improve her health, but it remained more or less the same.

Besides Carmen, Peter and Jacob also told us about the drinking culture at Improve Digital - e.g., the Friday afternoon drinks:

> "Ok, the biggest team building activities I do with my colleagues is drinking, like I have seen from other companies. Then we could easily develop a drinking culture." (Peter)

> "But over the weekend, as the Friday afternoon drinks start, I usually drink too much." (Jacob)

Our analysis indicates that not all employees joined the health activities offered by the company. For example, Carmen, Katie, Peter, and Jacob joined the wellness activities mainly related to fun rather than to health (e.g., beer o'clock, movie night). Also, employees generally

perceive the wellness initiatives as a tool for having fun which is not necessarily meant to improve health habits and lifestyles. This is in the same line with the incentive of the management. According to People Operations Manager Sophia, the management thinks it is important that employees are happy at the office, and not necessarily fit. In this way, the company takes a role of supporter by facilitating wellness products and activities for employees:

> *"The main reason [of wellness initiatives], we do not want them to be specifically fit, we just want them to be happy here. [...] And everything is provided for them, it is not that we want them to be fit. It is more that we want them to have fun here, and that they like it here, that the atmosphere is good." (Sophia, People Operations Manager)*

### 4.2.3 Getting More Engaged

The founders noticed that the wellness initiatives seemed to improve relations between employees. For this reason, the company started organizing extra fun activities for team building and improving personal relations between co-workers, such as bowling and movie nights. These activities were initiated to encourage employees to have good work relationships (i.e., team bonding) and non-work related relationships (i.e., social bonding). As a result, people become more engaged, and perceive these fun activities as a tool to better connect with their co-workers:

> *"Yeah, I think it is really nice because it does bring people together and it is not only the focus on work. Because you spend most of your life at work, in the office, most of your day, so I think it is quite nice that it is not... The relationships you have with your co-workers are not based only on work, but also on enjoyable things. You can talk about something different or enjoy something together." (Katie)*

> *"And, hmm…, I get along with colleagues and it is nice working with them and they are fun outside of work, so it is a bunch of people that I would hang out and do it with." (Peter)*

> *"Whatever you have, the purpose is getting groups together, to talk, to chat, when it is not on a particular file or particular project for work. When it is a little bit outside of it, then you kind of get more…, you relate to that person more. I think that then it also helps when you are coming to work together, to know a bit more about that person, how*

*they work, how they are doing together and how it can actually be fun. So, it is building on the relationships, it is team building relationships, and I think everyone here likes each other." (Charlotte)*

Katie, Peter, and Charlotte emphasize their personal relations with co-workers by saying that they do enjoyable things together. Additionally, Peter and Charlotte mention that they find important to have good relations with co-workers also outside the office. Basically, from all the interviews with participants, we can infer that they perceive their time at the office not only as work but also as fun as they build personal relations with their co-workers. Also, employees perceive health activities as team building in a positive sense, as people share healthy habits and lifestyles together. For example:

*"Yes, it really helps with team bonding between the colleagues. And when we all are healthier, then we will probably be more at the office." (Carmen)*

*"But, yeah, it was really good for team building, it was very good. They [the company] need these kinds of things where they can bring people together. It is always very good for the company, especially, in a scale up. Because in a scale up you tend to lose a touch with people, because you hire a lot of new ones. And if you can do it in a healthy way it is more positive." (Peter)*

Both, Carmen and Peter, share the opinion that healthy activities are good for team building. Carmen emphasizes the benefit of organizing team building activities in a healthy way by saying that people will be fit and, therefore, will come more to the office. Peter emphasizes the importance of team building as the company is still in its growing phase. An example of team building activity in a healthy way is the detox program. About 20 people joined the three-day program in the Amsterdam office. As it was quite demanding, people were supporting each other during those three days. Also, employees talked a lot about the detox program in the workplace. This is highlighted by Charlotte and Katie:

*"When we were doing juicing, yes. Because it was also a bonding thing, people were not eating any food, and I saw that they were going through their pain together, that is what you do, and it is working out." (Charlotte)*

*"The detox, it brought a lot of people together, because they are talking a lot about it and saying it is hard, they are trying to support each other. So, yeah, they talk… It brings conversation together." (Katie)*

From this, we can infer that the health initiatives create a team spirit and encourage conversations between employees. Also, manager John confirmed that health activities are related to team building by emphasizing that both health and team building are important for the company:

*"Not only for health but also for team building. That is also important for us. For example, the boot camp. That is not only related to health but also to team building. In this way, you get to know each other in a different way. Also, you see other teams. So, that is also important." (John, Senior Manager)*

Nevertheless, John is aware that some of the wellness activities encourage a drinking culture which does not promote health:

*"Also, for example, going to the cinema helps for team building. That is not really related to health because you drink beers at the end. For team building it is really good, but I do not know if it is good for health." (John, Senior Manager)*

## 4.3  Becoming a Strategy

As wellness is becoming a part of Improve Digital culture, managers see employees identifying themselves with it and what kind of impact it has on them. According to a new Office Manager Emma:

*"In that way, it has become part of our culture that people know that on Monday morning all healthy stuff is brought in for that week. Also, when we do not serve some products or services - for example, a salad for the lunch - then people will find it strange. So yes, in that way it is entirely integrated into our culture." (Emma, Office Manager)*

Emma adds that it is becoming a 'normal' thing to be healthy, drink freshly squeezed juices, do sports exercises, etc. The manager gave an example of how employees do not find it strange when she is not eating but just drinking juices during lunch time:

*"So, they do not think that it is strange when they see me drinking from a bottle at lunchtime – rather than eat something. I find it very pleasant that it is known among the people." (Emma, Office Manager)*

Noticing the impact the individual wellness programs have on the company and how employees react to it, managers of Improve Digital decided to make wellness programs permanent and create a plan for it. In this way, one-time experiment evolved into a planned program. The company created a clear and comprehensive wellness program, which is connected to the culture and strategy of the organization. Manager Sophia confirmed to us that they already have a program until the summer:

*"I mean, we have a program a bit set until summer." (Sophia, People Operations Manager)*

When asked about the wellness at Improve Digital, employees recognize it now as one big strategy of managers for three reasons, which will be explored more below: (1) to attract and retain talents, (2) to create a strong brand image, and (3) to motivate employees.

### 4.3.1     Attraction and Retention of Talents

Being in a technology sector, Improve Digital has many high-educated employees - i.e., knowledge workers (Alvesson, 2004). Employees, who are professionals of the specific matter, are very valued and wanted by other organizations and head-hunters. According to William and Charlotte, most of Improve Digital employees are high-educated and, therefore, get a lot of job offers from other companies:

*"So, basically, Improve Digital is already well rated in the media market, and I think a lot of people who are working here, including me, are getting a lot of questions from head-hunters or other companies if you are interested working for them. [...] I think this is the company which is also in the market of people… The people who work here are…, hmm, all the companies want to have these people in their own companies." (William)*

*"It is a hard industry, hard to understand what programmatic technology is, we train people, and we are a tech company. I think we have the smartest people. So, we need them. We get people from internships, we train them and then if they like what they do, they really will attach to the company. [...] I have recruiters coming all the time, but I*

*am happy here, I am good. You know when you start feeling 'hmm, it is not so good',*
*then you might think differently. But now it is good." (Charlotte)*

Understanding the need to retain talented people, Improve Digital managers started changing
the atmosphere of the company. They are creating it a place where people could enjoy working,
have incentives to come every morning, and get additional benefits besides monetary
compensation. According to managers Sophia and John, Improve Digital sees their employees
as an asset that must be retained within the company. Therefore, it is more worth to invest a lot
of resources in wellness programs and in the creation of wellness environment rather than losing
high-educated employees:

> *"Because, hmm, now, we have… We have expensive people, and we want them to enjoy*
> *it here, so they stay and stick around here. That is basically the point, that is why we*
> *are all doing it because in the end it is better to... Because we invest in them a lot as*
> *well, and learning…, like, they have to learn the business, what we are actually doing,*
> *so, it is, it is good for them. It is good for us as well because they stick around, they stay.*
> *And that is why we try to…, hmm, to do all this stuff." (Sophia, People Operations*
> *Manager)*

> *"When you lose someone who does not remain employed…, yeah, well..., to recruit*
> *someone again…, it is not only the recruitment costs, but it costs the company when*
> *someone is not productive anymore. This is because someone does not like it anymore,*
> *and before a new person is up and running, then you are a few months further. You will*
> *lose money because of that. You can easily earn this back by these initiatives. [...] That*
> *is important. In that way, you let people commit to your company." (John, Senior*
> *Manager)*

Most of the participants mentioned that wellness initiatives are becoming a large part of
Improve Digital culture and that employees see it as a managerial strategy to retain talents.
According to Charlotte and Jacob, the company is undertaking many different actions to create
an enjoyable place to work. For instance, managers take care of employees, include their needs
in decision making, and create a united culture where people want to stay and commit to the
organization:

> *"Well, I said that it is about wellness. I am saying, generally speaking, it does not*
> *happen that one particular thing will retain employees, it is part of a bigger picture, it*

*is part of what they are doing. It is part of what the company does. Taking their needs*
*into consideration, creating one culture, making it a place where people want to come,*
*where they want to work together and no one wants to leave. [...] So what they are*
*getting is that they will have loyalty and that loyalty goes a long way." (Charlotte)*

*"Yes, I never saw before that so much was done to the welfare than here. That is also*
*the reason why I really like working here because there is such good care for everyone."*
*(Jacob)*

Also, Charlotte mentioned an example of how Improve Digital is creating an environment
where people do not want to leave - even when they aim to do so:

*"I remember when one of our colleagues was going to leave, and she gave her*
*resignation and then she realized that it was her actual last day, and she was saying*
*that I do not know why I am doing this, I really like my job. So, on her last day, actually,*
*she stayed. She ended up doing a different role in the company. Because she really liked*
*Improve Digital." (Charlotte)*

According to William, Improve Digital has a reputation for being a personnel-friendly company
with the focus on appreciating and valuing employees besides paying high salaries:

*"Hmm, and if money is not the only thing that you are passionate about, but also the*
*other things that you mentioned, then I think that this company is able to make the*
*statement that they are good for personnel. And if you are somebody who is interested*
*in that, you have bigger chances of working here, than in any company where you can*
*earn a lot of money but does not have all these kinds of initiatives. And I think that when*
*you are good to the people, the people are good to you." (William)*

However, the organization employs people with different habits and norms, therefore, people
have different needs, and expectations from the company and not all of them value notions of
wellness. Former employee Ryan said that for him the most important thing is to be well
compensated. Only when the basic needs are covered, extra benefits could be introduced and
implemented in the company:

*"Yeah, I think it is very good, but I do not think it is the most important thing that people*
*value. Because…, what employees value is, of course, they value this, but, their first,*
*their basic needs... You know Maslow's pyramid? So, first, their basic needs have to be*

*covered. Once everything is settled, and they are being rewarded fully, both in terms of money, but also in terms of the work they are doing, only then comes kind of extras and little things. And not the other way around." (Ryan, former employee)*

### 4.3.2    Brand Image

Another way of how employees perceive the provision of wellness programs and products is a strategy to build a stronger brand name. Being known as the company that cares about the well-being of its employees, Improve Digital is creating its positive image in the market. According to Peter and William, the company will receive many benefits as long as they focus on their employees and their wellness:

*"I am not sure if less people are sick, but I think it is a great way of selling the company." (Peter)*

*"Yeah, not only the wellness but in general the whole concept of how you treat your personnel is very important, I think. I have worked in companies which do not have the focus on personnel, and, you see that in the long-term they, the personnel, will leave. And also, the whole corporate image of the company is being completely destroyed by people who have worked there and had a very bad experience. It is like a form of free, well, it is not free publicity because you pay for it, but eventually, it will work to something positive." (William)*

### 4.3.3    Motivation of Employees

Improve Digital responds to (or even exceeds) the demands of its employees by using motivational strategies. Besides salary, the company comes up with secondary benefits for wellness creation at the company, with the aim to motivate and inspire their employees. For example, Charlotte and Christian told us:

*"Actions for help which is overall wellness, because, yeah, I mean little things too: ping pong table, football table, things like that keep employees being motivated. It is not all 24/7 at your desk; it is also a time when you are in the office that you are not at your desk, and it is about people getting along together and actually working together and*

*other things like helping to make food, whatever. That helps to work together. It is not all health or overall wellness, but I think…, you know at our age…, the general age here is quite young, health here is good, everyone is pretty fit here. I think health is only a part of it, the overall wellness is more important. I think it is pretty awesome."* (Charlotte)

*"I think for a lot of people, you know, hmm, a healthy lifestyle tends to be reflected in their motivation to work as well, so, hmm, you know, that is why…, that is why employers want to put these things in place."* (Christian, former employee)

Charlotte explains the strategy of wellness initiatives to motivate employees by emphasizing that is not just about health but about team building; which she sees as beneficial for the overall wellness atmosphere at the workplace. Christian argues that people with a healthy lifestyle tend to be more motivated. As the company wants to retain and attract motivated people, it, therefore, takes the role of supporter of healthy habits and lifestyles. This role is communicated by the 'own choice' discourse. With this, the company emphasizes the choice employees have to participate in wellness activities or use healthy products. The 'own choice' discourse of the management is based on self-motivation. Practically, all employees share the opinion that they should get the opportunity to make their own choices as the motivation comes from their inner selves. For example, the following employees told us:

*"Well, still…, it has to come from yourself. [...] Because in the end, I think we really want to do it all, but it is nice when it is a choice. [...] Well, you [as a company] cannot expect that all employees will join because it is the choice of the person if he or she wants to join."* (Carmen)

*"It is not because other people motivate me, I am motivating myself. [...] So it is more like my own motivation. [...] I think they do not need to push people to do it, it is more like they know that people are interested in it, and there will always be people who join."* (Charlotte)

*"Hmm, I think it was pretty clear with those things that they were optional. [...] But it should be optional, and there should not be a feeling of any peer pressure for people to avail these things, because then you are getting it wrong, if you are doing that."* (Christian)

> *"Because I think that they want people to decide for themselves, if they want to do it or not."* (Katie)

The employees' thoughts emphasize the strong culture of making your own decisions, with a shared believe that motivations come from your inner self. Nevertheless, we discovered that in some situations the founders of Improve Digital try to influence employees' decisions by inspiring them. Peter and Katie expressed it in this way:

> *"Yeah I think it is a role model as well. People at the all levels of the business…, you can see them going out and they keep being fit and healthy. So it does influence you."* (Peter)

> *"Hmm, well, I guess in the case of Janneke, yes, she is in the mood to be healthy and lose weight, and, hmm..., and I guess she gets inspired by this, and she is trying to push…, put it in a company. So everyone can have access to it, which is nice, that everyone can have access to it for free and not have to pay for it. […] She is inspiring to be healthy and not forcing us to do anything, just proposing an option for us to participate."* (Katie)

Our analysis indicates that employees perceive the two founders as charismatic leaders as they have created an image of being health conscious. This image is so strong that people are naturally drawn to it. The following example highlights how the company provides some guidelines how to be healthy:

> *"And this [health initiatives] is another way of showing employees that they can be motivated to be healthy."* (Peter)

The company creates awareness among employees about health, which might inspire and motivate them. However, the creation of awareness does not necessarily inspire people to participate in wellness activities. Further in the interview, Peter told us that he was not participating in most of the activities. Nevertheless, he feels inspired and motivated. This can be seen as a contradiction:

> *"I would say those two words inspired and motivated. […] But I do not see myself, hmm…, joining the boot camp…, yet, hmm…, I cannot really think of why it just not on my..., not on my radar. […] Okay, I am not taking up the main initiatives at the moment*

*like the massages, or the boot camps, but…, I mean it is encouraging me and influencing me to be taking better care of myself." (Peter)*

### 4.3.4    Restraint of Employees

Another way of how employees perceive the provision of wellness programs and products is a strategy to restrain employees. Our analysis indicates multiple situations where employees felt influenced, constrained or even pressured by social control. We identified three forms of social control at Improve Digital: (1) from management, (2) from individual co-workers, and (3) as a group effect.

**Social Control From Management**

The 'own choice' discourse within the company emphasizes the 'autonomy' of employees. However, our analysis indicates that this discourse contains some elements of social control from management. This leads to a contradiction between freedom to make your own choices and the management who is inviting, encouraging or forcing employees to take part in the wellness activities. In some cases, employees even felt constrained by management in their choices. For example, Ryan told us that some people might feel a bit pressured by Janneke and other managers when the management gets very upset if people do not join the wellness activities:

> *"Maybe somebody feels a bit pressured [...] Although, it was very important that you would go to stuff parties or something like that. They [managers] would get very upset if you do not go." (Ryan, former employee)*

From this, we can infer that employees felt indirectly constrained by management in their choices as managers showed their disappointment. In the same vein, from the interviews with managers, we discovered some elements of pressure in the encouragement from them. For example, managers John and Sophia told us:

> *"I would say that we, as a company, can give this to employees, but not that we push them. Because then you will force people to follow a certain direction. We can only say: 'We think this is good'. Of course, you want to have a nice working atmosphere by having healthy and fit people, but I would not want to force people." (John, Senior Manager)*

*"We do not push them into doing things. Although, I try to get on a personal note and touch by saying: 'Okay, come on, you are participating, right?' And otherwise: 'Why not?' And in that way, I tried to encourage them to participate in gym because it is a more emotional way of getting people." (Sophia, People Operations Manager)*

This example indicates that the managers are not entirely aware that their positive approach of promoting wellness initiatives might be interpreted as pressure by some employees. For instance, when John shares his opinion to employees by saying: 'We think this is good', he actually communicates managerial expectations to employees. Moreover, Sophia believes she is not pushing but encouraging employees. In most cases, employees will interpret her promotion of wellness as encouragement. However, it is possible that some employees are afraid to tell their superiors 'no', and this can be perceived indirectly as a constraint to them.

Our analysis also indicates that some employees felt directly constrained by management in their choices. For example, Christian and Jacob told us that they were pushed to participate in a wellness activity:

*"Hmm, probably with the boot camp maybe some people felt pressured. I wanted to do it. But I know that they are pushy, probably, because they just wanted to make sure they had the numbers after they paid for it. Hmm, but, of course when it comes to massages, you [as a company] want to have a full schedule, if you are paying them as well. With things like that, I think they are always going to fill up." (Christian, former employee)*

*"Oh ha-ha, yes, that [he refers to the massage] was definitely something I otherwise never would do. I was there to fill a gap. I was not registered at all, but someone else could not go anymore. So someone had to go. I really did not like that someone was touching me." (Jacob)*

This way of direct constraint is clearly in conflict with the 'own choice' discourse of management. To sum up, in the cases where social control is exercised, the choice, autonomy, and self-motivation of employees are affected by management. This is not in line with the managerial discourse of 'own choice'.

**Social Control From Individual Co-workers**

At Improve Digital, individual employees influence other employees' choices to whether or not participate in wellness initiatives. In other words, individuals' responses to wellness initiatives are, in some cases, influenced or even forced by peer pressure. For example, Katie, Carmen, and William told us that they sometimes feel pressured when colleagues try to convince them to join:

> *"Yeah, from my colleagues [laughing]. Like, they are going to say: 'Oh come on, join join', or 'Why are you not coming tonight?', for example, for the cinema night. It does make me feel a bit guilty for not joining, but at the end of the day it is taking some of my personal time so, if I decide not to go, it is my own choice. But I feel a bit guilty if I am not going, yeah." (Katie)*

> *"So with the boot camp, people say to each other: 'Join us'. [...] Yes, mainly colleagues who are stimulating each other to join. They approach each other by saying: 'Come on, join us' or something similar." (Carmen)*

> *"Because, actually, I would not participate, and then a few of my colleagues told me: 'Are you also joining the detox program?', and I was like, no, it is not... I do not think it is for me." (William)*

Katie feels guilty when she does not participate in team activities in her personal time. In this way, her feeling of being 'guilty' is influenced by her colleagues. Even though William did not want to participate in the detox program, he confessed to us that he was convinced by another person and eventually he joined. Carmen felt pushed by co-workers to join the boot camp. From her interview, we could infer that Carmen considers herself less sportive than others. Also, Jacob told us that the pushy way of colleagues could be very annoying when you cannot identify yourself with those sporty types of people. He describes it even as a 'must' feeling, by saying the following:

> *"On the other hand, more or less, I can imagine that people have the idea of 'I have to do it'. This could also be disadvantageous. Certainly, because it is all young guys who are working here. So the people here are pretty motivated to be healthy. If you, as a person are different, then it might be not that nice. [...] You will get that 'must' feeling" (Jacob)*

From the other perspective, Peter told us that he and his colleagues make jokes about people who do not join the boot camp:

> *"Hmm, yeah it is also a source of humour, so you can... So, for example, I know one of my colleagues is definitely never going to do a boot camp so it is funny and you make jokes about it"* (Peter)

Peter thinks it is funny, however, the person who is being teased might experience it differently. For example, Jacob told us:

> *"Well, there a few people, I will not name the names, who find it stupid if you are not participating in, for example, a boot camp. So yes, I believe there is social pressure. [...] Hmm..., well yeah, questions like: 'Gosh..., why do not you join the boot camp?' And things like that. Or something like: 'Oh well, I think you can use some exercise'. So, this kind of lame comments. It is a little teasing. Some men among each other, I think."* (Jacob)

Manager John also describes a form of social control by employees, by saying the following:

> *"Oh yeah, something your hear people talk to each other about products, and then they say like: 'Well, you should not take that because it consists a lot of sugar'. Or when someone drinks a Coca-Cola, then the others will say to that person how much sugar it consists. But yeah, things like that happen, but if someone wants to drink a cola, then he or she can do that of course. [...] Here, they really emphasize that you can do your own thing. But yeah, they hold up a mirror (Dutch saying for other people reflecting on your habits/behaviour)."* (John, Senior Manager)

John emphasizes the own choice of employees by saying: '…then he or she can do that of course'. However, at the same time, he told us that people reflect on the behaviour of others by making comments. This can influence people's choices and self-motivation. To sum up, in the cases where social control is exercised, the choice, autonomy, and self-motivation of employees are affected by co-workers. Even though there are neither forced expectations to be healthy nor a very elaborate plan to use wellness to improve corporate outcomes, the peer pressure still emerges.

**Social Control as a Group Effect**

As a lot of wellness initiatives of Improve Digital focus on team building, people do not want to be left out. This creates a group effect, and influences a person's choice and motivation to whether participate or not in wellness initiatives. For example, Carmen and Peter told us:

> *"Everybody does sports here. [...] Yeah, we like it to do it together." (Carmen)*

> *"You do not want to be left out." (Peter)*

From the quote of Carmen, we can infer that most people at Improve Digital are very sportive and participating together in the wellness initiatives. The emphasis lies on 'doing it together'. This leads to a group effect, where people will invite, encourage and force other people within a team. Also, Charlotte told us that she joined the boot camp because other colleagues were joining as well:

> *"And also with people that I know, it was more fun and easier. So I was thinking 'let's try it, let's see what it is'." (Charlotte)*

The reason why Charlotte participates is that she likes to workout with people that she knows - in other words, because of the group effect. Furthermore, William gave an example of social control during the detox program:

> *"I think it is a good thing to do not only with your friends but also with your colleagues. [...] So you have sort of like a social control, you know. I think it is really good that people can actually see when you are cheating [he talks about the detox program]. But that does not happen, and I think that it is really good, and you also bond a little bit with your colleagues." (William)*

During the detox program, people were not allowed to eat for three days. These days, people not only supported but also checked other people to verify if someone was cheating. This is a clear example of social control. To sum up, in the cases where social control is exercised, the choice, autonomy, and self-motivation of employees are affected by different groups.

# 5. Discussion

In this chapter, we critically interpret our findings. Firstly, we discuss the importance of organizational structure, control and leadership. Secondly, we discuss the company's 'own choice' discourse that is used as a way of control. Thirdly, we explain how the emergence of the wellness culture makes employees feel puzzled. Lastly, we discuss the future of wellness and work.

## 5.1    Organizational Structure, Control, and Leadership

The way the organizational structure, control and leadership are organized is essential for designing and implementing wellness programs. Improve Digital is a medium-sized tech-company with more than 80 employees that provides services to customers. As a relatively young and flexible organization, Improve Digital is structured around work teams. This way of organizing structure is typically aligned with an adhocracy, as the company can quickly respond to its fast-changing environment. Due to the relatively flat organization structure, in line with Mintzberg (1979 cited in Newell, et al., 2009), the social control at Improve Digital is based on normative control rather than on more typical forms of direct control such as direct supervision and adherence to rules and procedures. In other words, culture and the management of meaning are therefore central to these types of companies. By creating a wellness culture, we argue that Improve Digital may try to create a deep level of mutual agreement on objectives and high level of commitment, which can be considered as a strategy to increase loyalty. Additionally, the company's innovative way of promoting wellness can be seen as a way to create a distinctive brand image. Our argumentation about the creation of the wellness culture and distinctive brand image is in line with Alvesson's (2004) view on corporate culture (see literature review).

Furthermore, from the interviews with employees, we could infer that the two founders of Improve Digital were in a life-changing period (after they had given birth) when they started promoting wellness at the company. The strong personal motivation of the founders has led to the introduction of healthy products and activities into the workplace. The founders initiated wellness based on their lifestyles. We can infer that the employees feel inspired by two founders (especially Janneke), as they show their support and devotion by joining the programs. Here, we view the founders as charismatic leaders. However, we question if their feminine and nurturing traits are playing a crucial role in the wellness promotion, as charisma is portrayed in

contemporary literature as an exclusively male attribute (see literature review). Against the contemporary literature about charismatic leaders, we argue that it is nowadays still quite exceptional that a company is run by two women. This may explain why charismatic leaders are generally seen as masculine. In the same vein, Lindholm (1990) argues that the relatively low representation of women in leadership roles and gender biases in society may be reflected in charismatic literature. Nevertheless, as we did not interview the founders, we have limited information about their traits and actions. Therefore, we cannot make further statements about the significance of gender in wellness promotion and say much on how wellness has been related to leadership models as discussed in the literature review.

Furthermore, we question if the initial wellness choices - initiated by the two founders - were based on their personal motivation (as persons) or if it was meant to be a managerial strategy (as leaders). The founders may have experienced the positive side effect of the wellness initiatives along the way, and transformed it into a planned strategy. However, the wellness initiatives can also be just a reflection of personal actions of founder rather than a rational/managerial action. This gives a broader perspective on how managers work. Here, management can be seen as multi-dimensional. As the founders are influenced by the society trends, the society shapes management and, at the same time, management is shaping the society. The relations between society, management, and employees are based on dialectical organizational dynamics.

## 5.2    'Own choice' Discourse Versus Social Control

The wellness initiatives of Improve Digital can be considered innovative in the technology and online advertising industry as they focus on having fun, supporting healthy habits and lifestyle, and self-motivation of employees. The 'fun' management philosophy is communicated to employees in the discourse of 'own choice'. According to Barker (1999), this is a value-based discourse that "workers use to infer and deduce 'proper' and behavioural premises: ideas, norms or rules that enable them to act in ways functional for the organization" (p.39). Additionally, the 'own choice' discourse emphasizes the 'autonomy' of employees. The company's focus on fun and autonomy can be seen as a form of creating 'individualism' within the company (see literature review). However, from our interpretive/critical point of view, we argue that the 'own choice' discourse is used to distract employees from normative control systems - which include fun activities, healthy food and drinks, and sports exercises - as employees believe they are not

controlled and have autonomy. Moreover, these normative control systems are used to enhance the culture in the workplace. We noticed that the corporate wellness initiatives are used to influence and control employees' behaviour while the managerial discourse influences employees' interpretations. As the management emphasizes own choice, employees perceive their participation in wellness programs as voluntary and based on self-motivation. We saw that instead of encouraging individualism, the managerial discourse creates a social control (see Table 1).

*Table 1: Normative control mode and its distraction*

| Mode of Control | Principal dysfunction | 'Own choice' as a distraction |
|---|---|---|
| Normative / cultural (or even 'clan') | Social control<br>● Management<br>● Individual co-workers<br>● Group effect | Individualism<br>● Own choice<br>● Autonomy |

We argue that the discourse of 'own choice' is used by management to steer the balance between personal objectives and entire company's culture. As the management is creating a wellness culture, people feel the need to join the programs to belong to the wellness community. If they do not join, other employees might see them as outsiders. Even though there are neither forced expectations to be healthy nor a very elaborate plan to use wellness to improve corporate outcomes, the peer pressure still emerges because of the wellness culture created by the management. For this reason, it could be argued that peer pressure is indirectly coming from managers. Additionally, the creation of wellness culture might lead to a strong group effect within a company. The different demands from groups may, in this way, affect managerial choices for wellness initiatives. In this case, motivation and control are also coming from employees rather than solely from managers. This creates a vicious circle, where motivation and control are coming from the top (management) and the bottom (employees). Here, our argumentation is not entirely in line with the scholars Cederström & Spicer, who, rather cynical in outlook, viewed the wellness society as a top-down approach from management to employees.

## 5.3   Puzzled Employees

Nowadays, people are facing many demands and expectations from the society. There are specific frameworks set for the 'perfect human being', such as be healthy, be productive, be happy, be a good person, etc. In the book "The Wellness Syndrome" (2015), discussed in the literature part, Cederström and Spicer argue that the current typical worker is an 'exercise-addicted corporate athlete' seeking to be a demanded human being, rather than workaholic, focused only on his or her job. Being more conscious about health, employees improve their well-being and a corporeal image. The boundaries between work and non-work are becoming less and less visible. As a result, we see employers using their current position to influence and interfere in the lifestyles of 'boundaryless' employees (Mellner, et al., 2014). An example of work and non-work relation is Scania company, where employers have created 'the 24-hour employee policy' (Holmqvist, Maravelias & David, 2010). Managers claim that they care about employees, and their interest in employees' well-being does not end after work hours. On one hand, this shows a connection between managers and their employees, but, on the other hand, this type of interference in person's life can imply violations of personal rights and choices. Managers of Scania acknowledge that only healthy and fit employees are seen as an attractive workforce. For this reason employers create a specific environment where group pressure constantly reminds employees of their responsibility to take care of their health. It could be argued, that nowadays, in the work environment it becomes more important to be fit and healthy rather than be a hard working employee (Cederström & Spicer, 2015). But then the question is to what extent should people take care of their health and how much can it interfere with their work life? Our analysis indicates that Improve Digital employees feel puzzled by the current demands to be healthy and to be a good employee. Employees feel a struggle in choosing whether to work hard until the end of the day, or to go to a boot camp which starts at 17h, and in that way not finish their jobs. Playing table tennis or table football for half an hour might also seem like a waste of time. On the other hand, people may not be able to focus eight straight hours and need to clear their heads and relax. The answer to these struggles lay in the demands to be healthy and happy. To whom do we owe this responsibility? If wellness is a personal choice and responsibility, then what about the demands from corporations and markets? Our analysis indicates that employees of Improve Digital are feeling pressure from managers and co-workers to do sports and eat well. On the other hand, being a good employee requires performing your tasks efficiently, which means - long working hours and focus. This

contradiction leads to the struggle of employees, whether to join wellness activities by following the others, or keep focusing on work tasks.

Moreover, we argue that managers' desire for their employees 'just to have fun' does not present the real situation. Employees do not feel comfortable being forced into doing something that does not express their personality. "To become yourself, you have to become better - and to become better, you have to reach your goals" (Cederström & Spicer, 2015, p.12). This view of Cederström and Spicer shows a contradiction, as you can only become yourself if you reach your goals, but in current society, people have responsibilities not only to themselves but also to others. As a result, people are reaching goals of someone else instead of their own. Employees might feel forced to create another version of themselves to 'fit' in organizational culture and to be competitive.

## 5.4    Future of Wellness and Work

Employers, in general, want to be involved in healthy lifestyles of their employees to have better organizational outcomes (e.g. competitive advantage, performance/productivity, absenteeism, turnover, etc.). At the moment, it is getting more popular for employers to provide tracking wristbands and smartphone applications to their employees. The tracking wristband counts your steps and other movements, and the applications (connected to them) are used to keep track of the consumption of water, coffee, food, etc. Improve Digital is considering to introduce tracking wristbands for their employees when they move to their new office (after summer 2016). The management wants to use the step-trackers for organizing a challenge between employees. As work teams are very competitive, managers view the step-challenge as a fun activity for employees. Both managers and employees emphasize that this kind of health monitoring should be optional and that there should not be a feeling of any peer pressure. However, as we discussed before, employees' own choice is sometimes influenced or constrained by social control. It is questionable to what extent the step-challenge will be the own choice of employees as the Improve Digital culture is competitive. According to Kinley (2013), when the company introduces the self-tracker, individual employees will likely use it to gain competitive advantage. For this reason, employees may feel indirectly forced to use self-trackers to get promotion opportunities. For example, when employees resist wellness or health programs, he or she might get less attractive for the employer. In other words, it is all based on the 'law of attraction' principle, which means that you as an employee should be attractive (e.g.,

be healthy, happy, and good looking) in order to be employable and successful. Here, we view companies not just as places to work, but as institutions that are controlling employees' personal lives. As all movements are being recorded, this could be seen as new ways of management. Managers can widen their power by having control of employees' personal lives. However, as personal data is very vulnerable, it can be harmful when employers or third parties (e.g. insurance company) abuse this data to interfere in people's lives.

The monitoring way of managing wellness is demanding for large investments in human capital. Nevertheless, employees are not always aware that companies invests a lot of resources in them, and perceive the wellness services and products as 'normal'. For this reason, companies should be careful that the motivation strategies would not become hygiene factors (see Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivations discussed in literature review). Employees might feel that something fundamental is missing when company quits facilitating wellness services and products. Eventually, this may lead to dissatisfaction among employees, which can be seen problematic. In line with this thought, it could be argued that the company should continue with their wellness promotion to avoid dissatisfaction. However, we raise the question if this continuous way of improving wellness ultimately could lead towards a 'wellness obsession' (e.g., extreme self-obsessive behaviour when you monitor everything), and whether this could also lead to employee dissatisfaction. As people are unlimitedly seeking for ways to more fit, productive and happier, their desires and demands can no longer be fulfilled. This obsessive focus on wellness may create a paradoxical effect: people may become less healthy and happy from this constant pressure to seek wellness. This is because they might have the feeling that employers do not tolerate unhealthy lifestyles and unhappiness as it is people's own choice and responsibility to become or to be healthy and happy. This is similar to what Cederström and Spicer argue about responsibility (see literature review). Ultimately, people may get bored and exhausted from the society's wellness obsession. With the result, that wellness turns into a meaningless concept.

# 6.  Conclusion

In this chapter, we close the thesis with a conclusion to the research purpose introduced in the introduction. Firstly, by summarizing our main findings, we answer the research question: *'How do employees perceive corporate wellness?'* Secondly, we present our contribution in the knowledge field of corporate wellness. Thirdly, we discuss our limitations from a reflective point of view and provide suggestions for future research. Lastly, we end this chapter with recommendations for organizations.

## 6.1  Concluding Summary

In the last decades, we have witnessed evolutionary changes in the wellness and health landscape. The generation of the Millennials are very health conscious, and they are and will be driving societal trends for a long time. These trends influence the working life of the Millennials. This results in employee well-being and health becoming a business value for organizations. Relatively young and dynamic companies come up with creative ways of cultivating a healthy workplace environment. As previous research mainly focuses on managerial perspectives and organizational outcomes, the purpose of our study aimed to gain a better understanding of employees' perceptions of corporate wellness. By combining literature review with interview responses, our study uncovered that the wellness initiatives started as an experimental process where the organization proactively tried to improve wellness in the workplace through innovative programs. At a later stage, this ongoing process evolved into a managerial strategy, which results in changes of employees' perceptions and new interpretations of corporate wellness.

As most of the wellness initiatives come from the founders, employees perceive wellness culture within an organization as a reflection of them, and as their strategy to attract and retain employees, create a strong brand image, as well as to motivate and restrain employees. To retain high-educated employees and attract new talents, companies are creating 'fun' and 'healthy' workplaces where people could enjoy working, have fun with their colleagues and get extra benefits besides monetary compensation. In general, employees perceive this way of enhancing the workplace as a tool for having fun which is not necessarily meant to improve health habits and lifestyles. Furthermore, companies are trying to build a personnel-friendly image of themselves within markets by showing that they care about their employees. Moreover,

companies are seeking to motivate employees by inspiring them and by creating awareness about wellness and health. However, the creation of awareness does not necessarily lead to participation in wellness activities. In general, employees share the opinion that they should get the opportunity to make their own choices as motivation comes from their inner selves. Nevertheless, in the cases where social control is exercised, the choice, autonomy, and self-motivation of employees are affected by management, co-workers or different groups.

## 6.2    Our Contribution

Wellness has come a long way from being perceived as an odd way of taking care of yourself, to being seen as a 'normal' practice. Nowadays, wellness is becoming a big part of our society. 70% of Fortune 200 companies offer physical fitness programs (Khazan, 2013). The RAND Employer Survey data suggests that 51 percent of U.S. employers with 50 or more employees offer wellness programs (Mattke, et al., 2013). With this in mind, we argue that wellness plays a major role in contemporary society. Nevertheless, the wellness phenomenon is not yet fully explored by the researchers. Most of the wellness studies focus more on general trends of well-being than on in-depth analysis. As an example, Cederström and Spicer (2015) concentrate on the prevailing movements of wellness, where they are going and how they change current society. As an addition to this, we did a case study with an in-depth analysis of wellness culture within a certain organization, focusing on the emergence of the wellness, creation of its culture and perceptions about it. The strength of this in-depth method is the high levels of details that allow greater insight into employees' perceptions. As our case company is not randomly selected, our findings on employees' perceptions can be transmitted to similar companies when contextual and cultural factors are carefully considered.

## 6.3    Limitations and Future Research

We used a single case study to investigate unusual cases - i.e., innovative trends and experimental changes in corporate wellness. Our in-depth investigation consisted of a small number of individuals. There was no need to interview more employees of Improve Digital, as our sample size was sufficient to understand the variation in employees' perceptions of that particular company. However, the data gathered is limited as all of our respondents come from one single organization. For this reason, our findings cannot simply be generalized because they

are embedded within the context of particular culture and industry of the organization. Moreover, as one of the authors (Gabrielė) has worked at the company, her personal preconceptions and relations with participants may have affected the research. As we were aware of this in advance, we tried to use the subjectivity to our advantage to gain multiple interpretations. Furthermore, we interviewed four people who are not part of the Millennials (>35 years). As they are from an older generation, they might have a different view on the current wellness trends and demands. Nevertheless, because these people work in an environment with mostly young people, we do not see this as a major limitation. Moreover, as we did not interview the founders, we have limited information about their actions and initiatives regarding wellness at Improve Digital. As a result, our analysis is based only on managers and employees' perspectives. Another limitation is that we could not compare the employees' perception before and after implementations of workplace wellness programs. For that reason, we could not investigate if perceptions of people have changed during the development of a wellness culture.

The literature on corporate wellness from the employees' perspective is still rather limited, and with our research we hope to contribute new knowledge to the phenomenon of corporate wellness, especially adding a more critical perspective on it. As we provided an in-depth study instead of a broader analysis, the richness in our empirical data and findings presents interesting topics and interpretations which can be very useful. Especially, as more organizations start implementing innovative wellness programs. We believe that literature of corporate wellness has underestimated the employees' perception as, particularly in relatively young and flat organizations, the workforce is involved in initiating, designing and evaluating new wellness initiatives. As our research is very topical, we suggest doing future research in this particular area and analyse the connection between control, motivation and corporate wellness. Furthermore, we suggest investigating value-based discourses in wellness promotion. This could provide more developed insights into the control mechanisms that are hidden in the wellness programs. Furthermore, we propose doing more research on our critical discussion points: if corporate wellness is a managerial strategy, or if it might be just a reflection of personal desires of female founders (gender significance); how social control mechanisms may influence or constrain employees' choices; how employees struggle with the new wellness culture; and how the overwhelming focus on wellness might lead to a paradoxical effect. Moreover, we propose developing a more comprehensive study by considering not only one but several organizations (e.g., of different sizes, organizational structures, leadership styles)

with wellness programs. This could lead to a creation of a better understanding of corporate wellness as a broader phenomenon. Additionally, as hinted in limitations, we suggest developing a more long-term research where employees' perception before and after the implementation of wellness programs are investigated. This might show the changes in perceptions during the development of a wellness culture. With these suggestions, we believe that future research on this topical and widely practiced concept of corporate wellness can develop further over time.

## 6.4 Practical Implications

Based on our theoretical contributions, we developed practical implications for organizations to consider. At first, besides having a Human Recourse Manager, dynamic companies with high-educated employees could consider also having a Welfare Manager. Responsibilities and tasks of this manager are related to compliance (e.g., tax and health insurance), hiring and recruitment, employee motivation, employee well-being, and company image. Moreover, we suggest companies to invest in employee branding both internally and externally. For example, make the internally promoted wellness programs also visible externally on the company's website and through recruitment channels. This could not only contribute to the retention of valuable employees, but also in the recruitment of potential talents.

Secondly, drawing on the scepticism towards employers' involvement in employees' personal lives, we advise employers not to focus too much on monitoring employees' daily movements and consumption through self-trackers. We argue that it should be an employee's own decision whether to use self-tracker or not. Also, personal data should not come into the hands of the employer or third parties, otherwise, people may perceive this as a way to control rather than to support healthy habits and lifestyles.

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# Appendix 1 - General Information about Improve Digital

**About Improve Digital**

Improve Digital (founded in 2008) is owned by Swisscom PLC[3] company and is headquartered in Amsterdam, with offices in the UK, Germany, Belgium, Italy and Spain. At the moment, Improve Digital has more than 80 employees, who come from more than 21 different countries, creating a diverse environment within the organization. Improve Digital is Europe's Advanced Monetisation Technology Platform for Publishers. The company provides an innovative, single-platform solution to automate and improve the monetisation of advertising and audience across all screens, formats, and through all public and private sales channels. The company works with over 250 of the top publishers and media owners across the globe, and through them, supports the marketing efforts of tens of thousands of advertisers.

**About the Founders[4]**

<u>Joelle Frijters</u>

Joelle is CEO and co-founder of Improve Digital. Since its founding in 2008, Joelle has led the company through a period of tremendous growth, seeing it emerge as a market leader in programmatic advertising.

Joelle is a thought leader within the technology and online advertising industry, sought after as a speaker and commentator on topics ranging from entrepreneurship, digital marketing technology, and media revenue strategies. She is a guest lecturer on the MBA Entrepreneurship course at IESE Business School, and is also an active board and committee member, affiliated with regional and global organisations such as Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB).

Prior to Improve Digital Joelle spent many years as a director at Microsoft, where she launched and oversaw Microsoft's private advertising network in the EMEA region. Prior to Microsoft, with support from Nickelodeon and Isobar, Joelle initiated one of the very first social media start-ups, which was later sold to media giant Sanoma. Very early in her career, she worked with KLM, and it was here that her passion for yield and revenue management was born.

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[3] Switzerland's leading telecoms provider which offers Internet and digital TV, fixed networks and mobile communications to corporate and residential customers.
[4] The information is taken from company's website [http://www.improvedigital.com/about_us]

Janneke Niessen

Janneke is Chief Innovation Officer and co-founder of Improve Digital. She is the driving force behind the company's 360 Platform.

In her industry, Janneke is a sought-after speaker and thought leader, regularly appearing at events to discuss entrepreneurship and digital marketing; and she is an active board and committee participant with industry trade associations such as the IAB (Interactive Advertising Bureau). She started her career 15 years ago as online media director at the first Dutch online media agency. Janneke went on to co-found DQ&A – an ad operations company with worldwide offices.

Janneke was named 2014 EY Entrepreneur of the Year. At a personal level, she is a strong and vocal advocate for greater computer science and entrepreneurship education, beginning as early as the elementary school years. More broadly, she is an active voice in the Netherlands and across the EU, helping to highlight national and regional market strengths and reinforce their importance within the global technology landscape. Janneke's true passion is in advancing technology, with a primary goal of fostering innovation today and in the future.

# Appendix 2 - Wellness Programs at Improve Digital

**Current wellness programs**

❏ Table football - one of the first initiative offered for employees 2 years ago to relieve stress and have fun with co-workers;

❏ Table tennis - one of the first initiative offered for employees 2 years ago to relieve stress and have fun with co-workers;

❏ Beer 'o'clock - social drinks at the office every Friday starting at 5 pm;

❏ Orange juice machine - initiative offered for employees 1 year ago, to have freshly squeezed orange juice at the office every day;

❏ Detox program - a full body detox program offered for employees to cleanse bodies from toxins, heavy metals, stones and even excess fat from the liver. The program lasted 3 days, and all employees were offered a chance to participate for free;

❏ Fresh juices - after the ending of the detox program, freshly squeezed juices started being delivered twice a week to the office;

❏ Bootcamp - training programs for employees for 10 weeks. Trainings are being held 2 times a week starting at 5 pm. So everyone can choose the best timing to join;

❏ Massage - once a month a masseur is coming to the office and employees can book a 20min massage;

❏ Barista - since recently the company has a barista coming every Monday to the office;

❏ Healthy lunch - recently the company hired a cook to prepare healthy lunch every day (including salads, soups, fruits, healthy snacks, etc.);

❏ Movie night - social gathering with co-workers outside of the office and after working hours. Up to now, Improve Digital had organized one movie night with social drinks afterwards;

❏ Bowling - social gathering with co-workers outside of the office and after working hours. Up to now, Improve Digital had organized one bowling night with social drinks afterwards;

- ❏ Dutch language classes - Dutch language course offered for international employees;

- ❏ Flex program - In exchange for a certain percentage of the salary contribution, an employee may take certain incremental vacation days per month;

- ❏ Summer and Christmas celebrations - every 6 months Improve Digital is throwing a party for employees and offering a day of activities and gifts;

- ❏ Sinterklaas celebration  - St. Nicholas Feast celebrated in The Netherlands;

- ❏ 5 years anniversary - Company is celebrating employment of 5 years by throwing a party for employees and giving 2000 euros for traveling with family;

- ❏ Birthdays celebrations - every employee's birthday is commemorated by having a small gathering in the office and giving a small gift and a card signed by everyone.


**Upcoming wellness programs**

- ❏ Family Day Picnic - Improve Digital is planning to have Family Day Picnic for employee and their partners and children;

- ❏ Yoga - Improve Digital is planning to provide yoga practices for employees.

# Appendix 3 - Interviewees

| | Name | Age | Department | Tenure |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Employees** | Katie | 28 years | Marketing | 1,5 years |
| | Peter | 26 years | Platform | 1 year and 4 months |
| | Charlotte | 40 years | Business Solutions | 2 years and 10 months |
| | Jacob | 34 years | Platform | 1 year and 9 months |
| | William | 40 years | Product | 1 year and 7 months |
| | Daniel | 42 years | Human Resources | 4 years and 9 months |
| | Carmen | 28 years | Platform | 9 months |
| | **Name** | **Age** | **Position** | **Tenure** |
| **Managers** | John | 49 years | Senior Manager | 2 years and 3 months |
| | Sophia | 27 years | People Operations Manager | 1 year and 4 months |
| | Emma | 35 years | Management Assistant & Office Manager | 3 months |
| **Former employees** | Christian | 30 years | - | - |
| | Ryan | 26 years | - | - |

# Appendix 4 - Interview Guideline

**Questionnaire for employees**

Introduction question

1. Could you introduce yourself in terms of personal information, educational background and lifestyle; values and beliefs?

General questions about wellness promotion at work

2. Based on what we heard, the company has some wellness services - like detox program, boot camp trainings, massage, and fresh juices - in the workplace. First of all, do you see it as a wellness program? Can you think of any other wellness services within the company?

3. Did you participate in detox program, boot camp trainings? Do you use massage, fresh juices? If yes, how often?

4. How does the company inform you about those wellness services?

5. What is your opinion of the promotion of corporate wellness by the company? Do you think that it is important/necessary? *(Explain)*

6. How do you feel about this wellness promotion of the company? Are you motivated/inspired? *(Explain)*

Outside work (after work hours and in weekends)

7. Is there a difference between your health lifestyle inside and outside work? *(Explain)*

8. Do you think that the health promotion also affects your lifestyle/habits outside work? If yes, do you feel motivated/inspired to have a healthy lifestyle outside the workplace? *(Explain what you do differently than before)*

9. Were you already using juices or going to a massage/boot camp before the company started promoting them? If yes, explain.

Culture

10. How do employees talk about the wellness services? For instance, do you talk about it with your colleagues? *(Explain)*

11. Have you ever felt pressured to adopt more healthy lifestyle/habits by your managers? Or by your colleagues? *(Explain)*

12. Do you see yourself consuming these products/services if the company was not promoting it? *(Explain)*

13. Do you think that your lifestyle/habits would have changed if it would cost you something? *(Explain)*

Ending questions

14. Do you want the company to continue with wellness promotion? *(Explain)*

15. Do you think it is beneficial for the company to continue with wellness promotion? *(Explain)*

16. Employers, in general, want to be involved in the healthy lifestyles of their employees in order to have better organizational outcomes (e.g. competitive advantage, performance/productivity, absenteeism, turnover, etc.). What do you think about this?

17. [Concluding Question] What is your overall opinion about wellness initiatives at Improve Digital? Does it have any impact on you?

Reflection

❖ Before we leave the room, do you have any questions or concerns?

❖ Any reflections you would like to share with us?

❖ Thank you for your participation!

**Questionnaire for managers**

Introduction question

1. Could you introduce yourself in terms of personal information, educational background and lifestyle; values and beliefs?

Wellness promotion

2. How do you promote the wellness services? Do you use any techniques to motivate employees? *(Explain)*

3. Do you think that it is important/necessary for the company to promote wellness? *(Explain)*

Accessibility to the wellness service

4. How can employees access the wellness service?

5. Do employees need to sign up for the wellness services? If yes, how?

6. Do employees need to pay extra for the wellness services? *(Explain)*

Participation of employees

7. How are wellness programs taken by employees? Were there any difficulties? (Or do you feel that more and more employees are using wellness program?) *(Explain)*

8. How were employees involved from the beginning (before implementing a wellness service)? Did you ask employees opinions beforehand and after implementing programs? *(Explain)*

9. Do you monitor wellness programs?

Success of wellness services

10. Do you think that employees are feeling inspired (overall opinion)? *(Explain)*

11. Do you think that employees are feeling motivated (overall opinion)? *(Explain)*

12. Do you think that employees adopt healthy lifestyles/habits because of the wellness promotion from Improve Digital? *(Answer this question by making a distinction between work and outside work lifestyles)*

Ending questions

13. Employers, in general, want to be involved in the health of their employees in order to have better organizational outcomes (e.g. competitive advantage, performance/productivity, absenteeism, turnover, etc.). What do you think about this?

14.  Do you think the company should continue with wellness promotion? *(Explain)*

15. [Concluding Question] What is your overall opinion about the wellness initiatives at Improve Digital? Does it have any impact?

Reflection

❖  Before we leave the room, do you have any questions or concerns?

❖  Any reflections you would like to share with us?

❖  Thank you for your participation!

**Questionnaire for former employees**

Introduction question

1. Could you introduce yourself in terms of personal information, educational background and lifestyle; values and beliefs?

General questions about wellness promotion at work

2. Based on what we heard, the company has some wellness services - like detox program, boot camp trainings, massage, and fresh juices - for in the workplace. Can you think of other wellness services within Improve Digital?

3. Did you participate in detox program, boot camp trainings? Did you use massage, fresh juices? If yes, how often?

4. How did the company inform you about those wellness services?

5. What is your opinion of the promotion of corporate wellness by the company? Do you think that it is important/necessary? *(Explain)*

6. How do you feel about this wellness promotion of the company? Were you motivated/inspired? *(now and at the time working at Improve Digital) (Explain)*

7. Is there a similar approach of wellness program in your current company?

Outside work (after work hours and in weekends)

8. Was there a difference between your health lifestyle inside and outside work? *(Explain)*

9. Do you think that the health promotion also affected your lifestyle/habits outside work? If yes, were you also motivated/inspired to have a healthy lifestyle outside the workplace? *(Explain what you did differently than before)*

10. Were you already using juices or going to a massage before the company started promoting them? If yes, explain.

Culture

11. How did employees talk about the wellness services? For instance, did you talk about it with your former colleagues? *(Explain)*

12. Have you ever felt pressured to adopt more healthy lifestyle/habits by your managers? Or by your colleagues? *(Explain)*

13. Do you think that your lifestyle/habits would have changed if it would have cost you something? *(Explain)*

14. Are you still consuming the products and/or using services like this? *(Explain)*

Ending questions

15. Employers, in general, want to be involved in the health of their employees in order to have better organizational outcomes (e.g. competitive advantage, performance/productivity, absenteeism, turnover, etc.). What do you think about this?

16. Do you think it is beneficial for the company to continue with wellness promotion? *(Explain)*

17. [Concluding Question] What is your overall opinion about the wellness initiatives at Improve Digital? Did it have any impact on you?

Reflection

❖ Before we leave the room, do you have any questions or concerns?

❖ Any reflections you would like to share with us?

❖ Thank you for your participation!