

Stakeholders as Value Creators: The Role of Multi-Level Networks in Employee Wellness Programs

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Abstract

Recognizing the inherent limitations of a single level dyadic approach to stakeholders, this research uses a multi-level social networks perspective to examine value creation in wellness stakeholder networks. This study argues that stakeholder interactions at multiple levels of the network create value for the network and contribute to the marketization of wellness. At the macro level, network relationships create value through embeddedness, which shapes the structural boundaries of employee wellness programs. At the meso level, the stakeholders are relationally embedded in their networks and they create social and market congruence. At the micro level, the relationship among embedded actors contribute to the creation of cultural norms and institutionalization of employee wellness programs. The findings add to our understanding of value creation in stakeholder networks by going beyond dyads to focus on multi-level relationships and embedded actors. This article contributes to research by showing how embeddedness of the stakeholders in multi-layered networks and ties between these actors create value in wellness stakeholder networks. The findings provide insights into the marketization process of wellness as an important aspect of the contemporary marketplace.

Keywords

employee wellness, network of networks, social networks, value creation, wellness, tie strength, embeddedness

Introduction

Organizations have invested heavily in wellness programs to motivate employees to make healthier lifestyle choices and improve their behavior by offering emotional or financial rewards for participating (e.g., Idenburg and Dekkers 2016). Employee wellness initiatives include health insurance discounts for employees who stop smoking, building onsite fitness centers with subsidized membership premiums for employees, and providing low cost, healthy meal options (*The Wall Street Journal*, Chase 2000). Companies have spent millions of dollars over the last fifty years incorporating employee wellness programs in an effort to curb rising health-care costs by fostering a healthy and productive workforce. In recent years, wellness has become a global multi-trillion-dollar industry; embodying diverse sectors that help consumers incorporate wellness activities and lifestyles in their daily lives (Grénman, Hakala, and Mueller 2019). Therefore, wellness has emerged as a central component of the modern marketplace; however, little is known about the role wellness stakeholders play in this growth.

This article investigates how interactions between employee wellness stakeholders shape employee wellness and create value for networks. The results show that the transformation of how stakeholders—including employees, employers,

government, research entities, retailers, wellness providers and insurance companies—talk about wellness, engage with employee wellness programs, and add value to these programs illuminates the commodification of well-being. As such, the findings help illuminate the marketization process of wellness as it shifts from a personal responsibility to a shared one, and as it changes from an individual goal to a network benefit.

The key research question is the following: How is value being created in employee wellness stakeholder networks? Examining the structure of these networks and the implications of these relationships on their network activities sheds light on how these activities shape the growth and structure of wellness programs. Networks are valuable webs of interconnected

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entities that structure markets and the behavior of market actors (Dolbec and Fischer 2015). The shift from a dyadic view of stakeholder relationships to a network view highlights a network phenomenon that elucidates wider corporate practices and employee responses to these practices (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). Moreover, the embeddedness of stakeholders in these interconnected networks highlights an integral part of the value creation process in wellness stakeholder networks and reveals an important aspect of how wellness is marketized.

Wellness has been defined as “the active pursuit of activities, choices and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health” (Global Wellness Institute 2021). Well-being, although often used interchangeably with wellness, generally refers to “the experience of health, happiness, and prosperity” and “it includes having good mental health, high life satisfaction, a sense of meaning or purpose, and ability to manage stress” (Davis 2019). Following these definitions, we prefer to use the term wellness instead of well-being while investigating employee wellness because wellness is an active pursuit associated with intentions and actions toward an optimal health and well-being state. In other words, wellness is an umbrella term that includes physical and mental health as well as well-being intentions.

In this paper, we shed light on employee wellness structures and how organizations market and structure personal wellness into employee wellness, operationalized in wellness centers.¹ Understanding the stakeholder network structure of employee wellness programs is important because stakeholders create value for organizations by increasing financial performance, reputation, and overall organizational performance. Stakeholders have the power to influence the direction of a firm and the structure of the stakeholder network (e.g., Parmar et al. 2010). The relationships between and among stakeholders goes beyond dyadic exchanges to create value for all actors in the network (Akaka and Chandler 2011; Chandler and Vargo 2011).

Furthermore, the position of stakeholders in the network influences the type of value created and for whom (Chang 2020). Additionally, the relationships at different levels in the stakeholder network influences the form of value creation (Domegan et al. 2019). We build on previous literature by providing a multi-level understanding of value creation and examining the influence of embeddedness and tie strength in value creation. Our results show embedded network relationships create value at the macro, meso, and micro levels of employee wellness networks.

At the macro level government, research entities and community organizations create value due to the structurally embedded nature of their relationships. At the meso level, stakeholders’ relational embeddedness to the network creates value by embodying societal shifts in the wellness market structure. Lastly, at the micro level, stakeholders create value through their cultural embeddedness in the wellness networks, which in turn lead to the institutionalization of wellness programs.

The structure of the manuscript is as follows. First, we discuss our theoretical background and detail our methods.

Then, we explain our findings under macro, meso, and micro level discourses of value creation. We conclude with a discussion of our contributions and indicate directions for future research.

Employee Wellness

Employee wellness refers to the collection of initiatives within an organization to promote healthy lifestyles among employees. Wellness programs provide an investment in employees’ social, physical and mental health (Berry, Mirabito, and Baun 2010). The employee wellness market—including health care programs, screening, assessment, education, and apps—has reached nearly \$8 billion in the United States alone and is expected to reach \$11.3 billion by 2021 (*The Wall Street Journal*, Schwartz and Volini 2018).

Initially, wellness programs were established with a focus on the physical health and safety of employees. Currently, programs offer a myriad of options, including tools for financial wellness, mental health, healthy diet and exercise, mindfulness, sleep, and stress management. For example, General Mills’ upper management organizes yoga classes in conference rooms. Levi Strauss & Co.’s CEO established subsidized gym memberships to encourage employees to follow his lead and work out during the day (*New York Times*, Bryant 2017).

Employee wellness programs have been shown to provide cost savings to organizations (Chapman 2012), increase workplace performance and satisfaction, and decrease employee turnover (Ott-Holland, Shepherd, and Ryan 2019). Additionally, the growth of technologies such as mobile health applications, including wearable technologies, has allowed for the expansion of wellness programs beyond corporate walls. Such programs require a social network of stakeholders involved in various aspects of employee wellness, including government, health care providers, suppliers, and retailers, along with the cooperation of the employees that are also networks themselves.

Employee wellness programs have evolved to a more holistic approach towards employee mental health and well-being in addition to physical health (Ott-Holland, Shepherd, and Ryan 2019). Wellness—and well-being—have been investigated widely in marketing (e.g., Sirgy 2021; Yngfalk and Yngfalk 2015; Lee and Sirgy 2004; Ahuvia 2018; Netemeyer et al. 2018; Rodas, Ahluwalia, and Olson 2018; Sirgy, Lee, and Rahtz 2007; Anand Keller, Lehmann, and Milligan 2009). Previous literature emphasizes “high levels of consumer well-being lead to higher levels of consumer quality of life—higher levels of well-being in the form of consumer happiness, life satisfaction, overall happiness with life, as well as societal welfare” (Sirgy 2021, p. 124).

The growth of organization wellness programs reveal how wellness has become an asset in social and professional life rather than being an individual value to aim for (Grénman, Hakala, and Mueller 2019). Employee wellness has been widely accepted as a significant issue for employees, employers, and society (Tuzovic and Kabadayi 2020). Furthermore,

research has found that increasing employee wellness results in increased performance, productivity, job satisfaction, and reduced employee turnover (Bakker and Oerlemans 2011; Keeman et al. 2017). This has led to the growth of employee wellness programs, which have emerged as an important part of the marketplace and organizational life. Additionally, the formation of wellness programs reflects the transformation of individual wellness into the wellness marketplace.

Macromarketing literature looks at markets, marketing, and society as they are connected into a networked system (Dixon 2002). Our research helps explain this networked system of the wellness marketplace, the marketization of wellness in these programs, the multilayered embedded relationships in wellness stakeholder networks, and how this creates value in the context of the employee wellness programs. More specifically, this paper expands the idea of a networked system to a multinet system in which the relationships (i.e., strength of ties and embeddedness) create value.

Social Networks Literature

We utilize social networks theory (i.e., network of networks perspective) as a lens to explain the value creating relationships among the stakeholder networks in wellness programs. A social network is defined as “a finite set or sets of actors and the relation or relations defined on them” (Wasserman and Faust 1994, p. 20). Social network theory helps shed light on the multitiered dynamics in employee wellness networks because it uses the structure of the networks to explain stakeholder relationships and identify how the structure affects direct or indirect relationships between the actors (Nowell, Hano, and Yang 2019; Uzzi 1997; Wasserman and Faust 1994).

Our aim is to analyze the stakeholder networks as a whole rather than focusing only on the dyadic relationships because these networks by nature are multilevel, multidisciplinary, and interdependent (Provan, Fish, and Sydow 2007; Raab, Mannak, and Cambré 2015). More specifically, exploring embeddedness and strength of ties, we utilize a network of networks (NON) perspective which is an emerging field within social network theory (Gao, Li, and Havlin 2014).

Network of Networks

The use of social networks theory in marketing is often based on dyads, such as the relationship between the consumer and the company (Pralhad and Ramaswamy 2004). However, to explore large and complex systems like wellness networks, we need to understand the multilayered structure of networks. More specifically, research must examine the relationships among organizations and networks and how they create value by coming together, cooperating, and consequently creating and reproducing within this complex system of networks (Contractor, Wasserman, and Faust 2006; Nowell, Hano, and Yang 2019; Provan, Fish, and Sydow 2007).

In a *network of networks* (NON), relationships are layered and social actors are connected not by simple unidimensional linkages

but multiple connections with different meanings and purposes (Gulati and Westphal 1999). NON's include interdependent networks, interconnected networks, multilayered networks, and multiplex networks. For example, infrastructural systems constitute a network of networks including water, food and fuel supply systems, along with communications, financial markets, and power supplies. Additionally, the Internet of Things (IoT) is an example of networks of networks due to its multilayered structure of industry, home, hospital, education, and transportation networks which are interconnected with each other (Miraz et al. 2018).

Employee wellness networks also fall into the category of a network of networks due to their multilayered structure with multiple networks being interrelated with each other (See Figure 1). This NON structure as well as the node and tie level characteristics of the wellness networks help us explain how the wellness stakeholder networks create value for the members as well as society at large. Analyzing wellness stakeholder networks from a network of networks perspective provides the opportunity to investigate how value is created in the employee wellness structure through the embeddedness and tie strength among these actors, dyads, and networks.

Embeddedness

Embeddedness is related to the time and effort invested in maintaining relationships (Gnyawali and Madhavan 2001). Embeddedness can be reflected by the direct interactions of actors, therefore facilitating trust, reciprocal relationships and solidarity (i.e., relational embeddedness) (Bond et al. 2012; Granovetter 1973; Rindfleisch and Moorman 2003). Additionally, embeddedness can refer to the configuration of a relationship in a network and presence or absence of ties between actors (i.e., structural embeddedness) (Coleman 1988; Granovetter 2005). Lastly, network actors can be embedded in their network via shared norms, values and rules that are prevalent in the network (i.e., cultural embeddedness) (Laud and Karpen 2017; Laud et al. 2015). Research suggests that embeddedness affects value creation (Laud and Karpen 2017; Uzzi 1996). Furthermore, when networks actors frequently interact with each other, their embedded ties reinforce network norms and develop trust in a close-knit network (Coleman 1988).

Tie Strength

The ties between actors of a network are defined by emotional intensity, intimacy, and reciprocity of a relationship (Granovetter 1973). The strength of ties among network actors is crucial to understanding the socio-cultural structure in social networks (Reingen and Kernan 1986).

Although abundant literature has emphasized the advantage of strong ties for their influence and persuasion, (Granovetter 2005; Moran 2005), weak ties are sometimes more important and influential than strong ties. The main argument here is that weak ties are more likely to act as a bridge between otherwise disconnected actors and they provide access to novel information and resources (Chung, Li, and Jia 2021; Granovetter 1973).

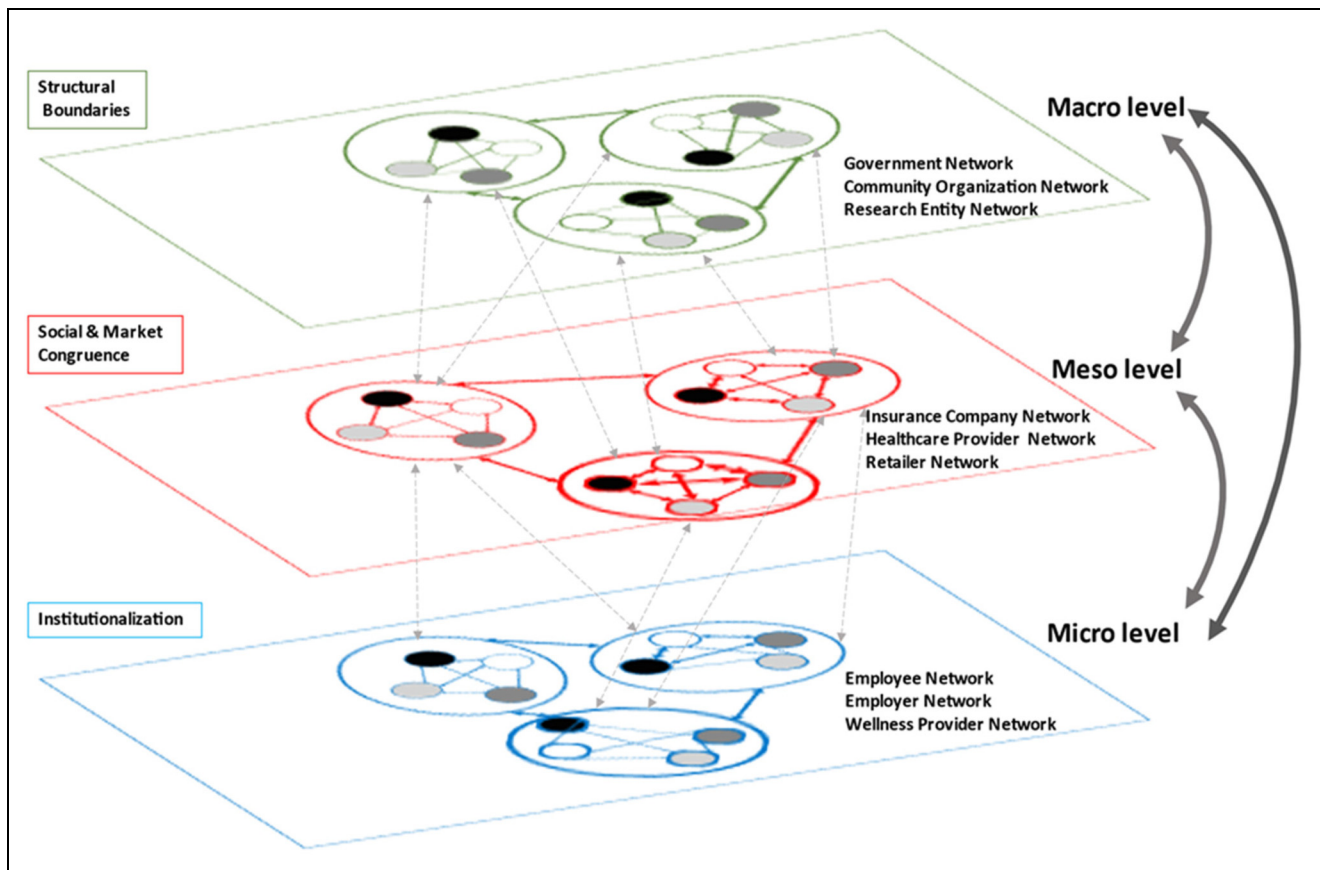


Figure 1. Wellness stakeholder networks of networks structures (Keeman et al. 2018).

We investigate networks that have strong and weak ties embedded in the network. This helps us explain the relationship dynamics among the members (i.e., stakeholders) and the networks they constitute together (i.e., network of networks). Relationships in this interconnected network show how embeddedness can affect value creation through the overall configuration of the network and the quality of the relationships between actors (Uzzi 1997).

Stakeholder Value Creation

A network is defined by those who are affected by the actions within the network or stakeholders. Stakeholders include any actors – individual, group, or organization – who have a stake in the relationship with the network, from consumers and businesses at the micro level, to the wider community and government at the macro level (Parmar et al. 2010). The interaction between these multiple actors creates value for the network (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). The multi-level structure of the relationships allows for network exchanges within and between networks, with individual actors contributing to marketing shaping discourse (Chandler and Vargo 2011). Chandler and Vargo (2011) posit these individual exchanges simultaneously create market-shaping value due to the embeddedness of actors in the network, and call for further research

exploring the multiple levels, their interactions, and their impact on the evolution of markets.

Research examining the relationship between network interactions and value creation has focused on exchanges between consumer networks, groups, and communities (e.g., Figueiredo and Scaraboto 2016; Kozinets, Hemetsberger, and Schau 2008; Kozinets et al. 2010; Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2013; Hoffman and Novak 1996; Polonsky and Grau 2008; Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder 2011). For example, Figueiredo and Scaraboto (2016) examined collaborative consumer networks and found participants create individual and collective value through specific processes in network object circulation. Their results provide insight into multi-dimensional value creation within the consumer network. Similarly, Kozinets, Hemetsberger, and Schau (2008) revealed that interactions in online consumer networks create value for both the consumer and producer networks through collective exchange, highlighting the exchange of value within and between networks. The dynamism of networks requires investigations that go beyond producer and consumer networks to include all stakeholders as actors in value creation.

Research examining value creation in stakeholder networks is limited. Domegan et al. (2019) propose that all stakeholder relationships at the macro, meso, and micro level are valuable in the creation and exchange of value and highlight the

marketing system as providing the structure for stakeholder engagement. Their propositions note the dynamic and interactive nature of stakeholder relationships and their role in structuring markets at each level of interaction. The authors call for greater examination of these interactions and the value created from these relationships. Focusing on the macro-level, Chang (2020) finds multi-stakeholder interactions influence value creation by creating cultural, social, network, and structural capital. These relationships were found to create value for all macro-level stakeholders in the network, highlighting the need to examine multi-level stakeholder interactions in greater depth.

What previous work demonstrates is that as market actors, stakeholder relationships frame the value creating activities in the network (Wilson and Jantrania 1994). Value is created through the interaction and exchange between embedded social actors (Vargo and Lusch 2008) and social networks facilitate these exchanges as it is the vehicle through which these shared understandings of value are communicated. These activities impact the growth of employee wellness programs and their institutionalization as legitimate paradigms. Thus, it is important to examine the role of actors in the network and how their interactions create value for employee wellness programs.

This research builds on stakeholder value creation literature by examining stakeholder relationships as a multidimensional

network of networks which create value within and between the multiple levels of the network, thus expanding into meta layer networks as proposed by Chandler and Vargo (2011). Our framework considers each individual network actor as a network to provide insight into the structure of stakeholder networks, and in this context, employee wellness networks (Table 2). Applying a multi-network lens to stakeholder relationships provides new insights into how these interactions structure the market of employee wellness.

Method

We adopt an interpretive case study design to explain and theorize how multidimensional relationships in the network create value which structures wellness programs (Gummeson 2017). In particular, our case analysis combines ethnographic analysis and discourse analysis to delve into the idiosyncratic language, symbols, and value systems that define participant experiences of the employee wellness programs. This approach is useful to understand the multilayered relationship dynamics and how this contributes to value creation in employee wellness networks. Through a qualitative analysis of a wellness program, we identify several critical themes in the program's discourse, structural boundaries, embeddedness, social congruence, and institutionalization of the value creation process at macro, meso and micro levels. Then, we theorize with respect to the relationships between these themes and a NON or a multiplex networks structure and the role they play in value creation.

Research Context

The empirical context of this research is a wellness program at a private university in New York State. The university has about 4,000 employees (faculty and staff) and around 19,000 students as of September 2021. Launched in 2005, the university wellness program aims to motivate university employees toward a healthy lifestyle with the focus on exercise, healthy eating and regular health checkups. The wellness program focuses on exercise by offering group classes and private lessons, providing nutrition coaching and healthy recipes, and encouraging a healthy lifestyle through stress management, smoking cessation, and ergonomics. The wellness program has online components including a website and several social media platforms (such as a public Instagram account and Facebook page) that support both online and in person activities.

Data Collection

Data was collected from multiple sources: newspaper articles, interviews, and participant observation.

Newspaper Articles. In order to gather insights on the stakeholder network and their role in the growth and evolution of employee wellness programs, we started with a discourse analysis of newspaper articles (Humphreys 2010a, 2010b; Smith

Table 1. Data Sources and Types.

Archival Data		
Newspapers	Number of Articles	
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	133	
<i>The New York Times</i>	93	
<i>USA Today</i>	28	
Interview Data		
Pseudonym	Gender	Occupation
Jessica	Female	Employee Wellness Ambassador (Key Informant)
Kevin	Male	Health and Fitness Coordinator and Trainer
Kate	Female	Health Fitness Trainer
Daniel	Male	Founder of an Employee Wellness Program, Gym Owner and Trainer
Ali	Male	Founder of an Employee Wellness Program, Gym Owner and Trainer
Brad	Male	Employee Wellness Participant
Carmela	Female	Employee Wellness Participant
Ayla	Female	Employee Wellness Participant
Sandy	Female	Employee Wellness Participant
Yasmin	Female	Employee Wellness Participant
Observational Data		
Sources	Engagement	
Employee wellness Program	1-year participant observation Attending fitness classes, participating in online 'challenges'	

Table 2. Employee Wellness Stakeholders-Network Actors.

	Employee wellness Stakeholders	The Role of The Stakeholders	Example Data Sources
MACRO	Government Network	The government has the power to regulate the relationship between all of these actors. Norms and regulations follow the innovations such as wearable devices and companies utilizing the information (e.g., fitness data) that they get from their employees. Government network is connected to the insurance network at the meso level.	WSJ, James 1987 NYT, Lohr 2010 WSJ, Dwoskin and Walker 2014 WSJ, McQueen 2006
	Research Entities Network	Research entities network include research firms and universities as actors. This network is connected to the government network.	
	Community Organizations Network	Community organizations network, including actors such as ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), are very influential when they work closely with the research entities to affect government policies.	
MESO	Health Insurance Network	Health insurance networks specialize in developing, implementing and marketing health programs. Employee wellness programs may offer discounted health insurance premiums for the employees, which has been in action after the Affordable Care Act.	WSJ, Haggin 2016 WSJ, Chen 2019 NYT, Lohr 2010 USA Today, Yancey 2013
	Healthcare Providers Network	The basic promise of the employee wellness programs is that when employees get healthier and this results in less doctor/hospital visits. Health care providers collaborate with employee wellness programs and companies to provide in-house care.	
	Retailer Network (e.g., wearable providers)	Retailer networks provide necessary equipment such as wearable devices for the participating employees to use. Retailers collaborate with doctors, gyms, employee wellness programs, and researchers to provide a better service for the participants of the employee wellness programs.	
MICRO	Employer Network (i.e., employer)	The core company that the employee wellness program is based in is one of the important networks in the employee wellness and they have ties with all the other network members. The employee and employer networks as stakeholder networks have a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship in the context of employee wellness. The employer network has the power of data; and they need to make decisions about how to utilize this information.	WSJ, Chase 2000 WSJ, Solomon 1999 WSJ, Mariott 1996 Interviews and Participant Observation Field Notes (e.g., Interviews with Jessica-employee wellness ambassador and Kevin-health and fitness coordinator and trainer)
	Employee Network	Employees are central actors of employee networks. Employees who participate in the employee wellness programs are at the heart of the employee wellness structures because they are connected to many of the other network members.	
	Wellness Provider Network (i.e., consultants, program management)	Employee wellness networks include program managers and consultants are specialists who plan the employee wellness program for their employees, arrange and provide healthcare plans and insurance to ensure the program has acceptable standards.	

and Lux 1993) from three major US newspapers: *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*.

We utilized discourse analysis to examine the linguistic elements associated with the construction of social phenomena (Mele and Spena 2021; Alvesson and Kärreman 2000; Phillips and Hardy 2002). This method is especially effective to tease out value creation in multi-layered wellness networks because this method puts emphasis on text, discourse and context (Phillips and Hardy 2002).

We selected these daily newspapers in the United States because they hold historical archives and they are among the top ten newspapers in terms of circulation and reach. We began our data collection in 1985 because it coincides with the increasing diffusion, legitimization and institutionalization of employee wellness programs. Using keywords related to employee wellness including “wellness”, “employee wellness”, “corporate wellness”, and “wellness programs”, we obtained 254 relevant articles ranging in dates from 1985 to 2018. This set of textual data served as a starting point in identifying the stakeholders as actors in various wellness networks and the relationships between them.

Interviews. To augment the discourse analysis, we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with ten individuals (four males and two females, from age 33 to 65 years old) involved with employee wellness programs as participants, health fitness coordinators, health fitness trainers, founders of employee wellness programs, and gym owners (see Table 1). Our interviews followed the guidelines of McCracken’s long interview process (1988). Each interview started with ice breaking questions, followed by guided questions intended to uncover information about the routines and practices of the wellness program, how the respondent utilized the wellness program, and their interactions with others in the program. The interview protocol outlines the specific themes and questions that were explored in the in the interview phase of data collection (see Appendix A).

To begin data collection, we reached out to a key respondent (a 65 years old female) who is an ambassador of the university’s wellness program and asked if she would be willing to participate in an interview. She then introduced us to three others whom we interviewed. We also used snowball sampling and asked the initial interviewees to nominate other program members. These participants emerged as ideal to discuss the employee wellness program because they were deeply engaged with the program. In this paper, we do not claim that they are representative of all wellness programs, but rather they provide an illustrative example of stakeholders and active participants of an employee wellness program. All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face at the informants’ offices. On average, the interviews lasted about ninety minutes. All interviews were voice recorded and transcribed verbatim to support subsequent data analysis.

Participant Observation. To complement the discourse analysis and interviews, the second author was a participant observer

in the university’s wellness program from November 2018 to November 2019, taking field notes on the activities in these classes and observing the practices of employee wellness and interactions among employees and wellness providers. The author disclosed her identity as a researcher right after entering the program. She attended different fitness classes by the employee wellness program at the university gym. In these classes, she interacted with the instructors as well as other participants. Furthermore, she participated in various online “challenges” created by the wellness program directors as well as attending in person fitness classes. Additionally, the second author subscribed to the program’s newsletter which summarizes the various activities the program is organizing (See Figure 2 for newsletter examples). These participant observations exposed us to the distinct practices, goals, beliefs and rules that operated within the employee wellness program. Through participant observation, we experienced firsthand the value creation of the employee wellness networks in the context of the university wellness programs.

Data Analysis

We employed a grounded theory procedure of open, selective and theoretical coding until stability in interpretation was reached (Altheide 1987; Glaser and Strauss 1967). We followed a methodological approach used in several other studies in consumer research that have analyzed text with an interpretivist approach (Hirschman 1990; Humphreys 2010b). Data analysis and interpretation through a series of memoing sessions were triangulated amongst the researchers (Silverman 2006). This involved an iterative process where we engaged in a continuous back and forth between individual and group interpretations, and similarly going back and forth between the literature and the data. Following a grounded theory approach, data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection.

Stage I

In this stage, we qualitatively analyzed the archival newspaper data following a discourse analysis together with ethnographic-inspired methods. A discourse analysis of the society’s written communications allowed us to observe how norms and values have changed over time (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975). Examining newspaper discourse allows researchers to gain an understanding of societal perceptions and symbolic representations of at various points in time and a view of the changing structures in society (Humphreys 2010a). This allowed us to gain an outside view of the structure of the network as well as its evolution.

Discourse analysis focuses on the relationships among text, discourse, and context (Mele and Spena 2021). Discourse is a set of representations, meanings and statements that together explain a particular version of the social world (Berglund and Johansson 2007; Mele and Spena 2020). Researchers perceive discourse as a construction that is obtained through terms, metaphors and common places. This discourse creates an

interpretive repertoire defined as a cluster of terms used by actors as building blocks for their conversation (Gilbert and Mulkey 1984).

In our analysis, we categorized the emergence of central and non-central actors in stakeholder networks, the history and evolution of wellness programs, and key events in wellness. Through the iterations between this data, interviews and participant observations, we completed our open coding process.

In open coding, we focused on the meanings and symbolic and material elements which emerged. During this process, we discovered specific mentions of employee wellness as themes emerged such as the evolution of employee wellness, community, motivation, employee incentives, and the evolution of privacy (see Appendix B for the Coding Table).

Stage 2

In this stage of our analysis, we delved deeper into the relationships among stakeholder networks. Combining the newspaper data with the wellness program participant interviews and participant observation provided a 360-degree view into the relationships within the network and how this contributes to the overall structure.

We then analyzed the data in the selective and theoretical coding process to identify how the interactions within the employee wellness network create value for employee wellness programs. We examined the literature on social networks and value creation, linking our findings to higher level constructs. Through iterations between our data and the literature, we conceptualized the evolution of employee wellness and information sharing among network actors as a value process. Our immersion into archival data in the form of newspaper text, in-depth interviews, and observational data helped us identify the various roles of network actors in creating value in employee wellness programs.

Findings

Wellness Network Structure

The discourse among the network of stakeholders highlights the importance of their role in creating value for employee wellness programs. The employee wellness network was identified as a multilayered structure with macro, meso, and micro levels of stakeholder networks. Stakeholders within each layer shape the creation of value specific to the network, specifically the creation of structural boundaries, social and market congruence, and the institutionalization of employee wellness programs. Additionally, the value creation process creates market shaping discourse which contributes to the structure of employee wellness.

Figure 1 represents the employee wellness network of networks (NON) identified in the discourse analysis of newspaper articles. We found a multilayered structure with stakeholders interacting within each layer of the network and also between layers, with stakeholders bridging between the macro, meso,

and micro layers of the network. This multiplex structure is essential in value creation as the weak, strong and bridging ties contribute to the information flow as well as power structures and influence. In the micro level, employee, employer and employee wellness provider networks (i.e., consultants, program management) are the main actors (*Wall Street Journal*, Weber 2017). Moreover, in the meso level, we have retailer, insurance networks, and healthcare providers as the main actors (*New York Times*, Lohr 2010). Lastly, in the macro level, the government acts as a central actor, while the community organizations and research entities act as bridges between other actors (e.g., governments, employees and insurance companies) (*Wall Street Journal*, James 1987). We also find that the networks in bridging positions provide essential informational power because they connect actors who would be disconnected otherwise and carry important information from one actor to another (Burt 2004). For example, healthcare provider networks and employee wellness networks bridge micro, meso and macro levels.

The evolution of employee wellness programs reveals a paradigmatic shift in the relationship between employer networks and employee networks and the overall creation of value in the network of networks. The creation of value is not limited to the employer/employee relationship but all networks in the employee wellness network contribute to value creation. The structure of the relationship between these actors that are also networks themselves creates value for those in the NON. These exchanges are a part of the value creation process that builds on the strengths of network ties (Vargo and Lusch 2008; Wasserman and Faust 1994). Understanding this structure is important to help explain the value creation process in employee wellness NONs. In other words, demonstrating that the stakeholder network consists of multilevel set of networks within the larger network allows us to go beyond the dyadic perspective to a networks perspective. This allows us to examine the multiple layers of engagement among actors and highlight the various ways in which these networks create value through their position in the network and hierarchy of discourse.

Stakeholder Network of Value Creation

Wellness stakeholders provide value to the wellness stakeholder network at the macro, meso, and micro levels through the creation of structural boundaries, promotion of social and market congruence, and institutionalization of employee wellness. Wellness networks formed as a market response to the growth of well-being. The formation of the wellness network subsumed the individual conceptions of wellness, creating a corporate approach to wellness. The interactions and embedded relationships among multi-layered wellness stakeholder networks contribute to the socialization of wellness and shape the market side of well-being (Sirgy 2021). The following section details these findings using the data from the discourse analysis of newspaper articles.

Change Your Habits, Change Your Life: The How of Habit Change

When it comes to habit change or creation, it takes more than simply a strong desire. You must understand how habits form and what gives them their sticking power.

In this session we will unravel the how of habit change and form a personal habit strategy.

SPACE IS LIMITED!

Register by clicking this image.

The session will take place on ZOOM.

TRY THESE!

- FORWARD LUNGES
- JUMP SQUATS
- SIDE LUNGES
- BKWD LUNGES W/ KNEE
- DRIVE
- SIDE KICKS R
- SIDE KICKS L
- JUMPING JACKS
- PUSH UPS
- MOUNTAIN CLIMBERS
- TUCK JUMPS
- GLUTE BRIDGES
- BURPEES!

TOM HAS LOST 60#!

What's your advice for someone wanting to improve their health?

"Do not try to make large changes in your lifestyle. Keep the changes small and tackle them one at a time".

How do you stay motivated?

"Every change I made offered small results. Each of these small victories kept me going".

Tom suggests, "Do not try to reach your goals by making sacrifices. Try to switch your tastes toward healthier alternatives".



EAT LOCAL,
OFTEN

Figure 2. Employee wellness program newsletter example.

Macro-Level Value: Structural Boundaries

Stakeholders at the macro-level of the network shape the structural boundaries of employee wellness (Lawrence and Phillips 2004) through their societal level interactions (Domegan et al. 2019). Their macro-cultural discourse provides value to the network by giving legitimacy to the structure of corporate wellness and generating trust in the standards of practice. Employee wellness stakeholders at the macro-level include the

government network, community network and research entities network (see Figure 1). Additionally, we find relationships between the macro-level actors and the other levels (e.g., insurance networks at the meso level). The embeddedness of the actors and their relationship in these networks are sources of trust, legitimacy, and reliability (Simpson 2015), and therefore value creation (e.g., Granovetter 2005; Grewal and Slotegraafm 2007; Laud et al. 2015; Zukin and DiMaggio 1990).

The data show that as the wellness industry grows, macro-level stakeholders step in to regulate employee wellness by creating policies or laws protecting participants and conducting research to validate the employee wellness structure. The movement from individual interests in wellness to corporate interest increased after a 1987 research study identified a link between employee behavior and healthcare costs (*New York Times*, James 1987). The profit/loss potential had insurers, regulators, and employers examining avenues for implementation. This is highlighted in James' 1987 *New York Times* article, which reports:

Some insurance regulators, for example, are considering new rules that would force insurers to build economic incentives for healthy life styles into their programs... Workers, in turn, might see the cost of their own contributions to health insurance go up or down, depending on their life styles. The study also raises significant legal questions. Workers may view employer surveys of their habits as an invasion of privacy, some compensation consultants say. (*New York Times*, James 1987).

As evident in the quote, the absence of a structure for the implementation of employee wellness created uncertainty. Insurers and employers want to decrease costs but also must account for potential legal issues by incentivizing or penalizing employee behavior. The lack of structure necessitated government intervention to regulate the corporate approach to employee wellness. Therefore, in these macro-level networks, we observe the government networks taking control over insurance networks and employer networks. As a result, structural embeddedness is achieved through the centralized position of the government. This regulation process is one of the consequences of embeddedness that affects value creation (Uzzi 1997; Laud and Karpen 2017).

Macro-level stakeholders have the authoritative influence to regulate the network (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975). As legitimate social institutions, their agency validates the formation of boundaries of practice in employee wellness. As the highest level of authority, the government network formalizes the legal boundaries of employee wellness through government commissions (*The Wall Street Journal*, McQueen 2006), senate bills (*New York Times*, Andrews 2010), and congressional amendments (*The Wall Street Journal*, Lewis and Khanna 2013). Community organizations ensure employee rights are protected and research institutions provided better data for decision making.

When looking at embeddedness as “a logic of exchange that shapes motives and expectations and promotes coordinated adaptation in that actors do not selfishly pursue immediate gains, but concentrate on cultivating long-term cooperative relationships” (Uzzi 1996, p. 693), the network (in this case macro level network of networks) acts as a demarcating social boundary around opportunities that are assembled from the embedded ties that define membership and enrich the network. This type of embeddedness by macro-level

stakeholders imparts an authoritative influence, giving legitimacy to these forced structures of employee wellness.

Additionally, the embeddedness of stakeholders in the macro level network as well as their relationships with the actors in meso and micro levels create trust. This trust is important especially in relation to information sharing (e.g., employers having sensitive information about their employees) and privacy.

An ongoing issue brought about by privacy advocates is the extent of protection to health information. The evolving technological aspect of employee wellness programs, including the use of wearables, complicates privacy protection, as elaborated in this 2014 article in the *Wall Street Journal*:

A recent review of 43 health- and fitness-tracking apps by the advocacy group Privacy Rights Clearinghouse found that roughly one-third of apps tested sent data to a third party not disclosed by the developer. One-third of the apps had no privacy policy. “For us, this is a big trust issue,” said Kaiser’s Dr. Young.

Consumer wearables fall into a regulatory gray area. Health-privacy laws that prevent the commercial use of patient data without consent don’t apply to the makers of consumer devices. “There are no specific rules about how those vendors can use and share data.” (*Wall Street Journal*, Dvoskin and Walker 2014).

As the above quote highlights, the evolution of wellness brings about new practices which shift the boundaries of practice into areas without formal protections. The role of the community network is important in protecting employee wellness consumers and creating trust in the evolving structure. The establishment of protections by macro-level stakeholders such as the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (*The New York Times*, Andrews 2010) creates protective boundaries of practice. As authoritative actors in the employee wellness network, macro-level stakeholders demonstrate a centralized structure in which the government and other regulatory stakeholders have a central position and hold power over the rest of the network. Their oversight creates trust in the structure of employee wellness. Additionally, the position of the actors embedded in this centralized network contribute to the value creation process by regulating the wellness programs and creating structural boundaries.

Meso-Level Value: Social and Market Congruence

Stakeholders at the meso-level of the network create congruence between societal and market values through their industry and organizational level interactions (Domegan et al. 2019). Meso-level discourse emphasizes the changing market structure of employee wellness due to societal and industry shifts. Stakeholders create value by bridging between the macro and micro levels to normalize wellness. Employee wellness stakeholders at the meso-level include employee wellness provider networks, healthcare provider networks, insurance networks, and retailer networks providing products or services used in employee wellness (see Figure 1).

Meso-level stakeholders normalize the market structure of employee wellness through their relationships with other stakeholders in the network. Pressure to keep up with rapidly changing technologies has led to healthcare providers partnering with wearable technology retailers, a partnership which also gives providers and insurance companies access to better health data (*The Wall Street Journal*, Haggin 2016), but can cause privacy concerns. To combat these concerns, providers make the argument for broader level benefits of this data collection, such as the company BodyMedia used in the example below (*New York Times*, Lohr 2010).

The company has been working closely with Apple and Google, to develop its smartphone application. It opens the door to allowing a person to monitor a collection of the 9,000 variables – physical activity, calories burned, body heat, sleep efficiency and others – collected by the sensors in a BodyMedia armband... The body is a data source, to be collected and analyzed...In health care, that means using data to make “better personal and policy choices.” (*New York Times*, Lohr 2010).

For BodyMedia, the use of established retailers and emphasis on the functional benefits of their technology helps to normalize consumer use. Emphasizing the benefits and agency of the user bridges the conceptualization of employee wellness between the macro and micro networks. Additionally, the integration of elements in popular culture such as the use of brand name wearables (Apple, Fitbit) and popular television shows like *The Biggest Loser* (*USA Today*, Yancey 2013) further socializes wellness.

The stakeholders at the meso level are embedded in the network through their relationships with each other. Therefore, this embeddedness results in value creation via closeness and trust between the stakeholders. The interaction among the various networks provides value by creating a collectively constructed structure of employee wellness programs. The collaboration between central actors in retailer networks such as Apple with health care and health insurance networks normalizes the shifts in the paradigm of employee wellness. This socialization of wellness facilitates the adoption of employee wellness programs as a normative routine, as is seen in this consumption example illustrated in an article in the *Wall Street Journal*:

Many employees are fans of the programs...employees consider such programs a benefit and enjoy the idea of being rewarded for a healthy lifestyle. Chereesa Williams (employee)...each morning steps on an employer-provided scale that syncs with her phone, and wears a company-provided Fitbit to track her steps all day. “Nowadays if you don’t have your health, you don’t have anything,” said Ms. Williams, 59, who’s lost 15 pounds in the past year and gets about \$1,200 discounted from her health premiums annually. (*Wall Street Journal*, Chen 2019).

For Chereesa, participation in the employee wellness program was a routine part of her day. The use of the Fitbit simplified participation and enhanced her agency over her health. Using

established retail entities that consumers are already familiar with, such as Fitbit, provides for a more seamless integration of employees into a wellness program and the collection of health data with minimal burden on the user. Relational closeness (Uzzi 1996, 1997) or strong ties (Granovetter 2005) between the actors of the network (e.g., employee and wearable provider-Fitbit) contribute to the value creation process at the meso level. Furthermore, wearables as a technology that is already in use in society it adheres to mainstream social standards, thus garnering comprehensibility and normative acceptance. These stakeholder collaborations create value by normalizing the changing market structure of employee wellness.

Micro-Level Value: Institutionalization

Stakeholders at the micro-level of the network institutionalize the corporate approach to wellness through their local level of network interactions (Domegan et al. 2019). They provide value to the employee wellness network by creating cultural cognitive acceptance through the generation of intrinsic and extrinsic value to stakeholders. Employee wellness stakeholders at the micro-level include the company network, consumer network and employee wellness network (see Figure 1). Employer stakeholders adopt employee wellness programs to alter behavioral norms in the employee network and create value for network stakeholders. Aside from decreasing health-care costs, research found healthy employees were happier and more productive, and wellness programs were a great tool for recruiting talent. Chase (2000) highlights this in their *Wall Street Journal* article, noting:

Investing in employee health used to be seen mainly as a liability... Under the new paradigm, Ms. Pronk says, “health is seen as an asset. A healthy work force is a competitive advantage for a company, because healthy employees have high productivity.” Indeed, many managers say they intuitively believe the physical well-being of their work force promotes the fiscal well-being of the company. (*Wall Street Journal*, Chase 2000).

As Ms. Pronk highlights, the benefits of employee wellness programs were found to go beyond the employees to the network. Realizing the value of adopting wellness programs, the structure of employee wellness shifted from a one-way direction approach to the adoption of employee wellness as a corporate culture (*Wall Street Journal*, Solomon 1999) and community (*New York Times*, Chen 2016) in an effort to create greater acceptance among stakeholders. The quotation below also shows the community building that leads to value creation at the micro level:

I’ve become friends with the people in my group classes. We’ve had lunch together gone to work out outside of group classes. (*In-depth interview with Yasmin*)

A small group of us continued to “work out” and support each other’s fitness efforts during times when Better Me was not offering any remote programming. (*In-depth interview with Carmela*)

This community building in turn strengthens the embedded ties between actors as well as triads at the micro level of analysis (i.e., employees, employers and wellness providers). Wellness providers bolster the relationship between the employee and the employer by providing them another layer of platform to connect with in addition to work related relationships.

Aside from highlighting the benefits of better health, employers use a variety of incentives to create value to employees and encourage their adoption of wellness including lower premiums (*Wall Street Journal*, James 1987), cash bonuses (*New York Times*, Andrews 2010), state-of-the-art onsite fitness centers (*Wall Street Journal*, Mariott 1996), increased healthy food options at cafeterias (*Wall Street Journal*, Solomon 1999) and fitness challenges (*Wall Street Journal*, Bachman 2016). Additionally, the implementation of activity trackers has proven to be a significant motivator to be active and its widespread use in the wellness marketplace helps facilitate its adoption (*Wall Street Journal*, Dwoskin and Walker 2014). Providing such intrinsic and extrinsic incentives creates value for employees as well as employers (Holbrook 1999). In our in-depth interviews, using wearables during work outs and daily activities came up as an emerging theme. Wearables became a motivator to encourage the employees to participate more in the wellness provider activities.

Moreover, it is also evident in our newspaper data that the actors in this level are culturally embedded in the network. Shared norms, values and rules which are prevalent in the network emerge at this level. This embeddedness in the network influences the consumers' value co-creation behavior (Laud and Karpen 2017; Laud et al. 2015). The *strong ties* among the employer, employee and wellness providers via engagement in wellness facilitates the institutionalization of wellness programs as part of the corporate culture and its cultural cognitive acceptance among wellness stakeholders.

Evidence from the participant observation data provide an in-depth look at the micro-level marketization of wellness. The employee wellness program creates value for stakeholders through its use of brand name wearable (e.g., Fitbit, Apple Watch) to record wellness data, specialized wellness program communications to motivate use of the wearable and collection of data, and high-tech software to provide feedback on the data and enable the creation of a wellness community. Institutionalizing employee wellness as community structure creates greater acceptance among the stakeholders (Coskuner-Balli and Ertimur 2017). The following examples from one of the program's weekly communications highlights these efforts to build wellness as a community:

Stay motivated this season by creating fun challenges with friends! Click "Challenges" from the menu on the top. You'll see any existing challenges, or you can "Create Challenge" by clicking the button in orange. Choose from any healthy habit, and discover new ones. Start inviting people. Have fun! (*Field note*)

I primarily interact with the other employees in my office who participate in the Better Me group classes. There are several people in

my office who go to them as well. I have also participated in a few fitness challenges through the app and interacted with others on my team through the app. (*In-depth interview with Ayla*)

As evident from the quotes above, participation in fitness challenges and interacting with immediate colleagues through the program are common practices. The emphasis to challenge your friends, join a challenge, and invite others underscores the programs efforts to move away from individual conceptualization of wellness. Additionally, the creation of community allows for participants to become ambassadors of the wellness program, as is demonstrated in the observation below of the online community page for the wellness program:

Jessica is so dedicated to the program and so supportive towards the members. She always comments on posts and answers others' questions on the social media page of the wellness program to keep the engagement high. (*Field note*)

Here, Jessica's involvement in the employee wellness program has evolved from an individual effort to a community mentality. Her engagement with the community as an ambassador for wellness bridges between participants and wellness providers. The interactions within the community create cultural cognitive acceptance of employee wellness via cultural embeddedness and contributes to the institutionalization of the corporate approach to wellness.

Socializing Wellness Through Agency

Agency is conceptualized as "the capacity of socially embedded actors to appropriate, reproduce, and, potentially, to innovate upon received cultural categories and conditions of action in accordance with their personal and collective ideals, interests, and commitments" (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994, p.1442). Consumer agency is a key value for the continued growth of employee wellness. Stakeholders and their embeddedness in the network promote agency as a key benefit to the formal structuring of wellness, highlighting individuals' power over their well-being through employee wellness programs. Participants experience apprehension in moving from conceptions of wellness as an individual responsibility to a collective approach. Concern over sharing information that is considered private, such as weight, body mass index, and eating habits, is overcome through promoting the value in participating, namely the ability to obtain a wealth of data over their health for better decision making. Thus, individuals are able to gain agency through their participation in employee wellness programs (Borgerson 2005). We explored this idea further through in-depth interviews with employee wellness program coordinators and participants.

Employee wellness program participants touted the agency over their health through the program. They dismissed any concern over privacy by emphasizing trust and their overall gains of participation. This is highlighted in our interview with Jessica who has been actively involved with the employee wellness program since it began. She states:

Trusting your institution is important. Before the biometrics screening, I did read the document about how my information will be used. [My employer] was getting general results rather than all the blood work results. You need to trust your institution not to use your data in a bad way. (*In-depth interview with Jessica*)

Jessica emphasizes the importance of trust that the employee must feel towards the employer in order to willingly share their health information. She is confident that her employer is not going to take advantage of the power they have through knowing personal information about their employees' health and knows that there are formal structures in place so this does not happen. Trust occurs in parallel with embeddedness, because it builds a set of obligations and a feeling of mutual expectation (Uzzi 1996). The strong ties between the employer and the employee lead to a higher level of trust (Granovetter 1985). Additionally, the boundaries created by the macro-level stakeholders also contribute to the increased level of trust and confidence in employee wellness programs.

Moreover, as participants become more integrated in the employee wellness program their feelings of agency and control over their health increases. Interviewee Kevin touches on this in his interview in stating:

I have done it [biometric testing] from the beginning every year and I did it from the start before they even got in to giving you \$100 for participating. I just felt it was a nice opportunity to get information about my bloodwork and some other information about myself for free from my employer with no copay and I was intrigued by the idea of [my company] offering that opportunity for an employee. I jumped right on it and when started giving employees \$100, I was like people are so stupid if they don't participate. (*In-depth interview with Kevin*)

Kevin highlights the increased agency over his health through participation and at *no cost* to himself. In fact for Kevin, the monetary incentive was not necessary due to the value he was getting in participating, highlighting his cultural cognitive acceptance of employee wellness processes as normative part of his employment.

In summary, employee wellness stakeholders promote agency to maximize feelings of control over individual health as it is subsumed under the corporate paradigm. The embeddedness of actors within the stakeholder network is valuable in the construction and maintenance of employee wellness programs because the embeddedness gives them the platform to "appropriate, reproduce, and, potentially, to innovate upon received cultural categories" in accordance with their personal and collective ideals and interests (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994, p.1442). This facilitates the cultural shifts from the macro to the micro environment (Humphreys 2010b) and creates value for the stakeholders in return (Laud and Karpen 2017; Laud et al. 2015).

Discussion

How Stakeholders Build Value for Wellness Programs

Our results reveal the dynamic role of stakeholders and the interactions between them in creating value for the employee wellness network. Value is created through the collective practices of all the actors in the social network rather than dyads of actors such as employee and the employer. Our findings show the value created by network stakeholder structures the growth of wellness as it shifts from individual conceptualizations to a market paradigm. Macro-level stakeholders provide value to the network by giving legitimacy to the structure and generating trust in the boundaries of practice. Meso-level stakeholders provide value to the network in normalizing wellness by bridging between the macro and micro levels, creating social and market congruence. Lastly, micro-level stakeholders provide value to the network by creating cultural cognitive acceptance of employee wellness and institutionalizing wellness as a community. Additionally, the findings highlight the integration of embeddedness and tie strength in the value creation (See Figure 3). The embeddedness of the stakeholder at the macro, meso and micro levels and tie strength between stakeholders impact the value created in the network.

Through a multiplex network of networks perspective, we examined wellness stakeholder discourse and interactions beyond dyads of actors to multilevel network interactions. In employee wellness networks, what we can see is that neither of the stakeholders act alone. The exchanges within and between stakeholder networks at the macro, meso, and micro levels of discourse all contribute to the marketization of wellness.

Marketization of Wellness

Our categorization of macro, meso, and micro stakeholders in the wellness network provides a focused understanding of the exchange within the employee wellness network. We find the interrelationships at each level work to create the market structure for wellness and bring it into the social domain (Fliigstein 2002). This process leads to the marketization of wellness and specifically employee wellness, whereby individual conceptions get subsumed by a corporate approach. The commodification of wellness allowed for the formation of a formal employee wellness market and the institutionalization of a market structure that includes stakeholders at the macro, meso, and micro levels of the network.

These marketplace exchanges elevate wellness as a legitimate industry worthy of large-scale action (Cook 2004). Network stakeholders contribute to this marketization through value creating activities, which legitimize employee wellness. Specifically, we find the creation of shared conceptions of value in wellness helps sanction market activities. Defining wellness as beneficial to participants legitimizes the commodification of well-being (Cook 2004). The embeddedness of stakeholders in the wellness network supported the transition of well-being into a wellness

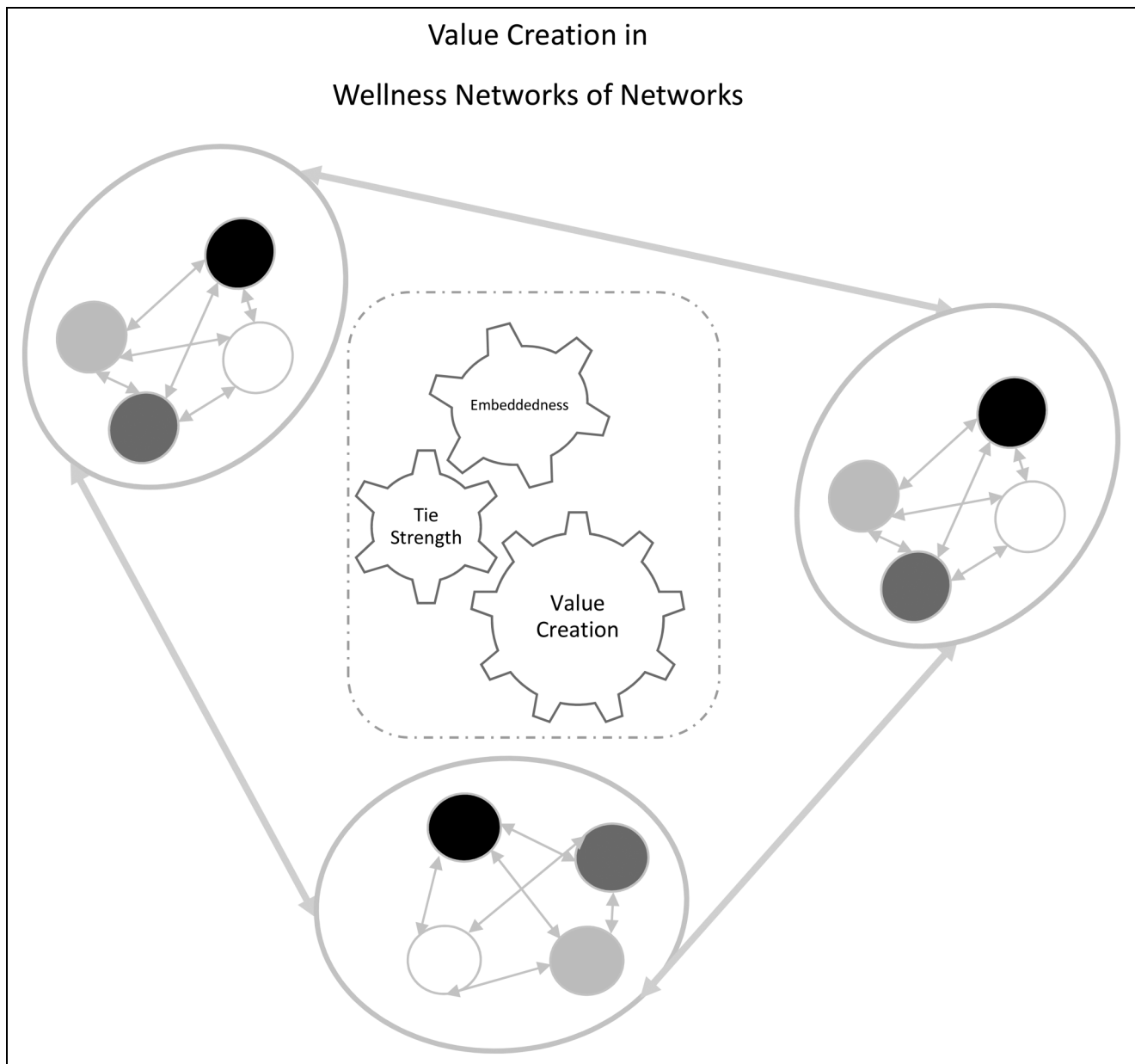


Figure 3. Wellness stakeholder networks of networks structures.

market system. Stakeholder exchanges define the market structure and create congruence between market and stakeholder values (Domegan et al. 2019). The creation of value in these interactions legitimizes the wellness market (Venkatesh and Peñaloza 2006) and its marketization.

Additionally, we find the emphasis on agency created value by generating a sense of control for stakeholders. The creation of shared understandings stabilizes network interactions within and between the macro, meso, and micro levels of the network (Fligstein 2002). This social structure allows for the formation of network ties among multilevel stakeholder networks and the reproduction of the network configuration. This process reinforces the stratification of wellness and supports its growth into a multilevel market structure.

Overall, we find the wellness network, and specifically the multiplex relationships between stakeholder networks, plays a vital role in structuring this market response to well-being. Taking a network of networks view allows the examination of the interrelationships between stakeholders at all levels of the wellness network. Though the network appears to function as unified system, it is the stakeholder interactions which create and reproduce the marketization of wellness. The embeddedness of stakeholder networks shapes their centrality and tie strength, influencing value creation at the macro, meso, and micro levels of the wellness network. These interactions create the structure which transforms individual well-being into a market for wellness.

Future studies may look at the effects of self-tracking and self-quantification as a market phenomenon in wellness networks. Wearable brands such as Fitbit and Garmin act as mediators between different stakeholders (e.g., consumers, healthcare providers, insurance companies) by providing structured platforms for data collection and stakeholder interaction.

Conclusion

Prior research has examined stakeholder value creation (Chang 2020; Domegan et al. 2019), however these studies explored stakeholder relationships as one-dimensional. This study adopts a multidimensional networks of networks approach to go beyond the static view and examine the multiple layers of involvement in value creation. Utilizing Granovetter's embeddedness and strength of ties notions, we argue that the strength of ties among wellness stakeholders and their embeddedness in the network affect the value created in stakeholder interactions. These interactions shape the market for wellness and provide for its marketization.

Through a combined analysis of newspaper discourse, interviews, and participant observation, these findings shed light on our understanding of value creation in employee wellness NONs. Taking a multi-level view of networks enhances our understanding of the position each stakeholder holds in the network and the influence of their network position in structuring the market. Each stakeholder takes on a role, which shapes value creation activities and impacts the institutionalization of market paradigms. Understanding this web of relationships is vital for those within or entering the network.

Our research adds to the literature on value creation in stakeholder networks (Chang 2020; Domegan et al. 2019) by revealing a process of 1) macro level stakeholder network creating structural boundaries, 2) meso level stakeholder network implementing the congruence of societal shifts with market structures, and 3) micro level stakeholder network focusing on institutionalization. Lastly, our research is a response to Sirgy's (2021) call for a greater understanding of consumer wellness (e.g., well-being) by bringing in the *market* aspect of consumer wellness.

This paper sheds light to the marketization of wellness, revealing how consumer/employees participate in wellness programs, and become part of a wider network of wellness, under the purview of organizations. Overall, these insights can help organizations take into account the various stakeholder networks and especially the influential actors in those networks when planning promotional strategies.

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Note

1. We note that this use of wellness may be culturally bound, as the research context is in the US, where wellness is generally associated with such centers set up and run by organizations for their employees.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

I am doing a research project on employee wellness programs. Thank you so very much for your time and effort! Could you please tell me a little bit about yourself?

Employee Wellness Programs:

- 1) Are you a member of an employee wellness program? If so, which one?
- 2) Why did you join?
- 3) What types of resources (if any) does it offer?
- 4) Could you please tell me about your wearable device?
- 5) How often do you work out?
- 6) How often do you work out with your wearable?
- 7) Are you happy with your wearable device?
- 8) Have you ever experienced any issues with using the wearable?

About Wellness Programs Social Media Resources

- 1) Are you a member of a social media group for the employee wellness program?
- 2) Tell me about your interaction with this social media community group.
- 3) Do you post photos on these groups? How often?
- 4) Do you comment on posts on these groups? How often?
- 5) Do you comment on photos these groups? How often?

- 6) Have you made friendships inside the group that you carry on outside of social media?
- 7) Are your interactions with these acquaintances outside of social media different than those within social media?
- 8) Do you notice a difference in comments or likes of your posts depending on the gender of the individual commenting?
- 9) How do you communicate with these individuals outside of the social media community page?

Appendix B

Summary of Codes and Categories across Phases of Data Analysis

First rounds-Codes: Employee incentives (e.g., employees were paid \$100 for getting their blood tested), monitoring device (e.g., Fitbit, Apple watch), privacy, confidentiality, information security, gender differences, honesty/cheating, program implementation issues, insurance, digital currency (e.g., Sweatcoin) legislative/law, information sharing, user experience, connecting with others, well-being, healthy eating, recipes, changes in the program, growth, fitness classes, community, motivation



Next rounds-Categories: Macro-level value creation and structural boundaries, meso-level value creation and social and market congruence, micro-level value creation and institutionalization

Codes: Legislative/law, program implementation issues, insurance, information sharing, user experience, connecting with others



Current categories: Network dynamics, embeddedness, tie strength among actors, value creation in the network, agency over privacy

Codes: Stakeholder networks, privacy, data security, confidentiality, connecting with others, well-being, changes in the program, fitness classes, community, motivation