





Center for Work, Health, & Well-Being



The Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies

Starting a Workplace Health and Well-Being Committee: A Step-By-Step Guide for Managers

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Executive Summary

A Health and Well-being Committee, or HaWC, is a new form of participatory program that gives employees a channel to voice concerns and ideas for improving the workplace. Research has found that HaWCs can significantly lower turnover among frontline workers – and in the process, save an organization money by reducing recruiting and training costs. In addition, HaWCs, which provide an opportunity to empower more people in the organization to share their ideas and perspectives, can have beneficial effects on workers' psychological well-being.

The HaWC model was developed by researchers at the MIT Sloan School of Management and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health as part of a collaboration with a national retail organization. The HaWC program was developed in response to employees' and managers' concerns and reflected input from interviews with employees and managers at the company, as well as insights from recent research on what makes a successful participatory workplace program. The program was then tested in a rigorous field experiment that took place in the e-commerce division of the retail organization.

HaWCs had positive impacts on employees' mental health in the first six months and reduced turnover by 20% over 12 months, all at a comparatively low cost. The researchers estimated that, to achieve the same reduction in turnover through wage increases, the company would have had to raise its hourly pay for frontline workers by 1.5%. These results speak to the value, for both an organization and its workers, of giving employees opportunities to voice concerns and participate in addressing workplace problems.

In this guide, you will find information on what a HaWC is and learn how to launch a HaWC program in your own organization. Topics covered include how to prepare to launch the program, how to set up the program, and how to effectively run it.

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Introduction

Is your organization looking for a cost-effective way to reduce turnover among frontline employees? Are you interested in surfacing good ideas and empowering your workers to improve the workplace and their well-being? If the answer to these questions is "yes," a Health and Well-being Committee program may help. Health and Well-being Committees, or HaWCs, are a new form of participatory workplace program that research has found can significantly lower turnover among frontline workers – and in the process, can save an organization money by reducing recruiting and training costs. In addition, Health and Wellbeing Committees can have beneficial effects on workers' psychological well-being.

A HaWC is a new channel for hearing about what employees across the establishment want and need; it's an opportunity to empower more people in the organization to share their perspectives and help create a better workplace. The HaWC model was developed by researchers at the MIT Sloan School of Management and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health as part of a collaboration with a national retail organization. The HaWC program was developed in response to employees' and managers' concerns and reflected input from interviews with employees and managers at the company, as well as insights from recent research on what makes a successful participatory workplace program. The program was then tested in the e-commerce division of the retail organization using a rigorous field experiment.

In this guide, you will find information on what a HaWC is and learn how to launch a HaWC program in your own organization. Topics covered include how to prepare to launch the program, how to set up the program, and how to effectively run it. Although HaWCs were originally designed for and tested in e-commerce fulfillment centers, this guide offers customizable materials that can be adapted for a range of organizations in order to create positive changes in the workplace.

Throughout the guide, the black compass icon indicates where customization or adaptation may be particularly beneficial. When you see the compass icon, ask yourself: How might this idea best be adapted to our organization's needs? **Background on the HaWC Program** The HaWC program was initially created through a partnership that involved researchers from the MIT Institute for Work and Employment Research (IWER) and the Harvard Center for Work, Health, and Well-being working with business leaders in the e-commerce division of a company with operations across the U.S. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the company was facing significant competition and high levels of turnover among its warehouse workers. Company leaders saw value in implementing a program where frontline workers could voice concerns and participate in carrying out solutions as a means to both improve worker well-being and hopefully reduce turnover. In designing the HaWC program, the researchers drew on prior studies that had shown that participatory workplace programs that provide opportunities for employees to bring up concerns and provide input on solving them can both improve the physical and mental well-being of workers and benefit the organization more broadly.

The HaWC program was tested in the company's fulfillment centers using a rigorous field experiment; some of the warehouses were randomly assigned to implement the HaWC program while others continued with operations as usual. The HaWC's impact on mental health and turnover was assessed by comparing the buildings with and without the initiative over time. The HaWC had positive impacts on mental health in the first six months and reduced turnover by 20% over 12 months, all at a comparatively low cost. The researchers estimated that, to achieve the same reduction in turnover through wage increases, the company would have had to raise hourly pay for frontline workers by \$0.29/hour, which was equivalent to raising total labor costs for those workers by 1.5%. These results speak to the value, for both the organization and the workforce, of giving employees opportunities to voice their concerns and take part in addressing workplace problems.

What is a Health and Well-being Committee?

A Health and Well-being Committee (HaWC) brings a group of frontline workers and supervisors together to hear about, understand, and design solutions to address sources of stress in the workplace and to take advantage of ideas coming from workers. Workers share their concerns and ideas with the HaWC, which then uses a continuous improvement cycle to prioritize concerns, identify root causes, and develop action plans to address the concerns. The HaWC operates most effectively with strong support from the organization's leadership team, because management support is often needed to implement the HaWC's action plans. In general, the researchers evaluating the HaWC program found that the more workplace improvement projects a HaWC completes in a given time period, the greater its effect on reducing turnover.

HaWCs are designed to address three main categories of concerns. The first category encompasses how people feel about coming to work, also known as the **psychosocial environment.** Issues in this category could relate to workers feeling they are treated well and respected, and whether there is acknowledgment of their life outside of work. The second category is **work organization**, referring to how the work gets done. This category could include concerns and ideas on workflow, training, professional development opportunities, scheduling, and workload. The third category involves ideas and concerns pertaining to the **physical environment**, such as safety hazards.

The Scope of a Health and Well-being Committee		
Category	Definition	
Psychosocial Environment	How people feel about coming to work (i.e., treated well, respected, acknowledgment of personal life)	
Work Organization	How the work gets done & could be improved (e.g., opportunities to learn, workflow, have enough say about how the work gets done, scheduling)	
Physical Environment	Safety hazards & other concerns about the physical environment	
Gray Zone Topics: Hours, wages, changes in corporate policies. If desired, a HaWC can advise management of concerns and suggest possible solutions.		
Note: It is also important to adapt the HaWC scope based on whether the workplace is a unionized setting; in such settings, union representatives should be involved in discussions on topics that may be subject to collective bargaining.		

Some industries require a health and safety committee to meet regulatory requirements. A HaWC can merge with the health and safety committee to fulfill those requirements, or it can remain separate. A benefit to merging may be that the HaWC is seen as less duplicative of existing committees. On the other hand, a combined committee may narrow its focus to concerns about the physical environment and find it difficult to incorporate the other two categories that are important to the HaWC's work.

There are other "gray zone" topics that may or may not be included in the scope of an organization's HaWC. These could be issues that require significant management involvement or capital expenditures. Organizations may specify topics that are in and out of scope, as needed.

Here are just a few examples of the kinds of projects that HaWCs addressed during the warehouse study:

- The problem: Material Handling Equipment (MHE) was parked inefficiently and made certain areas of the warehouse inaccessible. Solution developed by a HaWC: Designated MHE parking lots were created throughout the warehouse.
- The problem: Workers and supervisors experienced heightened stress during operational disruptions (e.g., when a conveyor belt is down) due to unclear processes. Solution developed by a HaWC: A cross-departmental communication procedure was drafted and implemented to coordinate operations during such disruptions.
- **The problem:** Workers felt inadequately prepared when asked to cover work in a different department. **Solution developed by a HaWC**: A cross-training "cheat sheet" was created, with instructions on core departmental tasks.
- The problem: Workers found the music played throughout the warehouse repetitive and lacking in variety. Solution developed by a HaWC: The HaWC surveyed workers about their music preferences and created a curated playlist/radio station list for the building.

HaWC Structure and Leadership

Co-leads Each HaWC is led by two co-leads, one a frontline worker and one a supervisor or middle manager. This structure intentionally brings a frontline worker into a HaWC leadership position so that other frontline workers may feel more comfortable raising an issue to a peer, rather than directly to management. The co-leads facilitate HaWC meetings, coordinate solution implementation, and serve as points of contact for workers and managers who are not members of the HaWC.

HaWC Members A typical HaWC for a workplace of 200-300 people has eight to 12 frontline workers, but the size of the HaWC can be adapted based on the size of the organization or worksite; for example, a HaWC in a smaller retail or restaurant facility may have fewer members. As much as possible, a HaWC should be representative of the facility it serves, meaning that each department and/or shift should have representation on the committee. This can allow other workers to share concerns and ideas with the HaWC member from their department or shift and facilitate a more complete understanding of how an issue affects different areas of the organization. It is also suggested that HaWC members represent a diverse set of perspectives, including people with different tenures and backgrounds.

Communicating with the HaWC It's important to provide multiple ways for workers to share their ideas and concerns so that all workers can choose the way that is most comfortable for them. Communication channels can include anonymous comment slips (put into a HaWC comment box), sharing directly with HaWC members, engagement surveys, ideas coming from the committee members themselves, and other feedback channels already established in your organization. It is also important to establish processes for the HaWC to communicate back to workers by tracking concerns and responses or providing updates on changes made.

Stage One: Getting Ready for the HaWC

Some thoughtful preparation will increase the odds of success for a new HaWC program. Before launching a HaWC, consider the following three questions to evaluate your organization's readiness for this new initiative.

Question 1: Does the organization have sufficient resources to support the HaWC? A

HaWC is a comparatively low-cost program, but it still requires resources from the organization, especially in the early stages. You should consider whether there is sufficient time and capacity for things like recruitment of committee members, co-lead training, and HaWC operations. You should also evaluate any budget implications for time spent on HaWC activities and implementing recommended changes.

Question 2: Is your organization going through any major changes? It is recommended to avoid launching the HaWC during times of substantial organizational instability, such as a merger or major policy changes affecting a large number of employees. Instituting too many changes at once reduces the likelihood of a successful program.

Question 3: Can you find champions for the HaWC program in management? To

successfully launch and sustain a workplace well-being initiative, it's crucial to gain adequate management support. Supportive leaders help align the effort with organizational goals, provide resources, and engage employees. In unionized settings, involving union leaders is also important. Regardless of where the initiative starts, leadership commitment is key to its success. (See the Additional Resources section of this guide for links to HaWC materials, including a sample presentation for introducing the HaWC model to senior leadership.)

Building Organizational Support To successfully launch and sustain an organization-wide initiative like the HaWC, it is essential to gain support from stakeholders at all levels of the organization, from frontline workers to senior managers. Senior leadership can provide the necessary resources for the HaWC and signal to middle managers and frontline workers that the HaWC should be prioritized. Line managers play an important role in program implementation, manage the day-to-day workflow of the organization, and may also be asked to assist in implementing HaWC improvement projects. Emphasizing the benefits of

the program to both employees and the organization and providing enough time and resources to support the program can help create buy-in.

The primary purpose of the HaWC is to address the concerns of frontline workers, meaning their buy-in and participation is critical for a successful program. Communicating the vision and goals of the HaWC conveys that frontline workers are valuable contributors to the program overall. Frontline workers may be skeptical of the program due to past change initiatives that were ineffective or unsustainable. Acknowledging this skepticism and explaining how the HaWC is different from previous initiatives may build support. Information about the HaWC can also be included in onboarding documents for new hires.

Stage Two: Forming a HaWC

After determining that your organization is ready to launch a HaWC program and key stakeholders are on board, the next step is to begin forming a HaWC. This section will provide guidance on recruiting co-leads and HaWC members, as well as on establishing communication channels from workers to the HaWC.

Recruiting Co-leads Finding the right co-leads is important to the success of the HaWC. Potential co-leads need to have the capacity for additional HaWC responsibilities, be motivated to learn the HaWC processes, and be passionate about leading improvement efforts in the organization. Experience has shown that individuals who are trusted, dedicated, and have good relationships with co-workers are successful in this role. It is important that all co-lead activities take place "on the clock."

The co-lead position can be an opportunity to gain leadership skills and experience. We recommend incorporating the investment in running the HaWC into the annual review of those in this role, so this innovative work is recognized and rewarded as part of the employee's evaluation. It is also important that individuals who are approached about becoming a co-lead do not feel pressured to take on the task. It's expected that co-lead activities will take one to two hours per week, but this could fluctuate, depending on the projects the HaWC is implementing. The organization could also implement co-lead roles on a rotating basis to help with sustainability and avoid co-lead burnout.

Before you launch a HaWC, training about the program is important for building the coleads' skills and confidence. A member of the human resources team or the person leading the HaWC program launch could conduct the training. Training should cover what the HaWC is and how it operates and should provide an opportunity to practice facilitating a HaWC meeting. (In the Appendix to this guide, you'll find some helpful information about leading HaWC meetings, and the Additional Resources section on p. 32 also includes a link to sample training materials for HaWC co-leads.)

Recruiting HaWC Members Frontline workers should make up the majority of committee members; our recommendation is to have only one or two managers, including the supervisor co-lead, serving as HaWC members. Becoming a HaWC member should be voluntary and should be presented as an opportunity to contribute and improve the workplace. Recruitment for HaWC members can be facilitated through flyers, announcements in meetings, and direct conversations with co-leads and supervisors. Make sure you designate a contact person (perhaps the newly recruited co-leads or a management champion) who can answer any questions about the HaWC.

Sharing Ideas and Concerns with the HaWC It is good to have more than one way that employees can submit ideas and concerns to the HaWC. Some people may want to submit their concerns anonymously, so comment boxes should be placed throughout the workplace and in common areas (e.g., in a breakroom or next to the time clock). It's

Co-lead Responsibilities*

- Participate in co-lead training sessions
- Meet as a co-lead team to plan HaWC meetings and activities
- Convene and facilitate HaWC meetings
- Coordinate HaWC action plans
- Communicate HaWC activities across shifts and departments

*All co-lead activities take place on the clock important that workers are regularly reminded about the comment boxes; experience in the warehouse study showed that, in some buildings, the number of comments submitted to the boxes waned over time. A standing task for HaWC members could be to regularly remind their departments or teams about the HaWC's activities and, as part of those announcements, encourage colleagues to share ideas and concerns with the HaWC. Employees may also share concerns directly with a HaWC member or co-lead, and that individual can then raise the issue at a HaWC meeting.

Regardless of the communication channel used, it's important that the HaWC develops a process to communicate back to workers that their concern or idea has been heard by the Committee, even if the concern is not eventually prioritized. This builds trust between the HaWC and the rest of the workforce that submitting a concern is worthwhile. The process could look different depending on your organization, but it could include assigning a HaWC member to directly communicate with the person who submitted the comment or creating a list accessible to the broader workforce where the status of concerns and ideas gets updated regularly.



The HaWC Information Board HaWC Information Boards were used in the warehouse study to inform employees about the HaWC and its projects; an example of a HaWC Information Board is shown at right. Ideally, the Information Board should be located in a central, high-traffic area, such as a break room, so that workers can stay up to date on HaWC activities. The HaWC Information Board can include information about the purpose of the HaWC,



who the committee members are (with pictures if possible), and current and completed projects. Setting up the Information Board can be an easy activity for the HaWC to do early on. That kind of easy and straightforward project (i.e., a "quick win") can help the HaWC build momentum for solving more complex challenges.

Stage Three: Running a HaWC

This section provides an overview of how to run HaWC meetings, the Improvement Project Cycle, and an example of a visual work management tool. Additional materials on running HaWC meetings can be found in the Appendix.

Overview of HaWC Meetings HaWC meetings are designed to engage HaWC members in identifying and prioritizing concerns as well as designing solutions. Although co-leads facilitate the discussion, meetings should provide an opportunity for all HaWC members to participate in the process. HaWC meetings need to occur regularly for the HaWC to make progress. We suggest that the HaWC meet at least twice per month, but some organizations may be able to meet more often. It may be the case that during particularly busy periods, a HaWC has to meet less regularly. We recommend allocating 45-60 minutes for each meeting, and establishing a regular meeting time (e.g., 2nd and 4th Thursdays at 1 p.m.) will help HaWC meetings become routinized into the workplace schedule. HaWC members and co-leads should be compensated for time spent in meetings (i.e., be "on the clock" for hourly employees). When possible, a meeting should occur in a consistent location where the HaWC can establish a HaWC Work Board or other visual work management tool. This could be a room with a white board, bulletin board, or blank wall.

The Improvement Project Cycle HaWC

activities are informed by the Improvement Project Cycle shown at right, which is similar to a continuous improvement cycle. This five-step process guides the HaWC through 1) hearing concerns via HaWC communication channels; 2) prioritizing them; 3) identifying their root causes; 4) brainstorming solutions; and 5) developing action plans and implementing those solutions. A HaWC meeting may include a combination of these activities, and new concerns may not be heard at every meeting.



Discussion Prompts for Each Step in the Improvement Project Cycle

Co-leads can use discussion prompts like these to help focus HaWC members on each step of the Improvement Project Cycle.

Goal	Step 1: Raise Concerns Hear/record concerns	Step 2: Prioritize Concerns Select project that HaWC will take on	Step 3: Conduct a Root Cause Analysis Understand root causes of a concern	Step 4: Brainstorm Solutions Develop a set of solutions	Step 5: Identify Action Plans Plan how to accomplish the solutions
Sample Discussion Prompts	*What has everyone been talking about out on the floor this week? Have you heard any concerns from your co- workers to share? *Was everything as safe as you would like it to have been this week? *What has been stressful about work lately?	*Which concerns we've heard about are both impactful and important? *Which concerns affect many people but are less important? *Which concerns don't impact many people but are still a big problem? *Which are both less impactful and less important?	*Does this issue repeat regularly? If so, why might that be? *Is there something in the work environment that may be causing this problem? What should be different to improve the situation? *What other explanations may apply to this concern?	*If we decide to take on a more ambitious solution, what are the small steps we'd need to take to get there? *Now if we get more practical, what kinds of solutions come to mind? Are there any solutions that would get at a key cause of the problem, but be doable to carry out?	*How will we carry out this project? What is needed? *Who needs to be consulted? What could we share or investigate to address any concerns they may have and get them on board? *Who will carry out this action item? *What is the timeline?

Step 1: Raise Concerns

Improvement Project Cycle Step 1: Raise Concerns and Ideas The first step in the Improvement Project Cycle is raising concerns and ideas in a HaWC

meeting. Concerns and ideas can come from different places: the comment boxes, what committee members are hearing from their co-workers, engagement surveys and/or roundtables, committee members themselves, and safety audits. Co-leads should state explicitly that the HaWC is not only for safety concerns, but also for ideas and concerns about things like how the work gets done, scheduling, workplace supports, and work-family issues. Not every meeting need be one where new concerns are heard, but concerns should be heard at least once a month.

Some concerns may be brought to the HaWC that are out of its scope – for example, concerns about an

individual employee's behavior. Such concerns should be referred elsewhere in the organization, such as to an appropriate manager or to HR.

As concerns are brought up during the meeting, we recommend documenting them on a visual work management tool, such as a HaWC Work Board. The HaWC Work Board shown on the next page is designed to keep the HaWC organized and visually display each part of the improvement project cycle; concerns were written on different colors of sticky notes depending on the category of the concern. (This particular HaWC also incorporated information from a safety audit, and those concerns were given a different color sticky note.) However, this Work Board is just one example of a visual management tool. If you have other practices in your organization, it would be smart to use those.

Tips for Step 1

1) Involve HaWC members in the Work Board: Ask for a volunteer to write the concerns/ideas on sticky notes and place them on the Work Board.

2) Confidentiality: Co-lead facilitators should remind committee members that some concerns and ideas are sensitive and everyone's privacy needs to be respected.

3) Focus on documenting concerns

and ideas: It can be easy to immediately start discussing the causes and possible solutions for the concerns and ideas being raised. Co-leads facilitators should let the HaWC members know that the focus of this part of the cycle is to document the concerns/ideas. Exploring root causes and brainstorming solutions will come later in the process.



Step 2: Prioritize

Concerns

An Example of a HaWC Work Board

Improvement Project Cycle Step 2: Prioritize Concerns and Ideas The next step of the Improvement Project Cycle is prioritizing the concerns and ideas raised in Step 1 using a prioritization tool, such as a prioritization matrix.

A prioritization matrix allows the Committee to evaluate each idea/concern based on two factors: importance (i.e., how serious the problem is) and impact (e.g., how many people it affects). One of the co-leads should lead the HaWC members in a discussion about where each concern/idea should be placed on an impact/importance prioritization matrix like the one shown in the sample HaWC Work Board above. Discussing each concern allows HaWC members to share examples or elaborate on the idea. By prioritizing concerns and ideas in this way, the HaWC can better determine where to invest more time and resources.

It is, however, also important for new HaWCs to tackle some projects where they can quickly demonstrate results and build positive momentum for the program. If there is a concern that can be addressed easily, it can be categorized as a "Quick Action" and moved forward. As an example, in the warehouse study, "Quick Actions" often involved alerting maintenance about a missing or malfunctioning tool.

After all the concerns have been prioritized, the HaWC then decides which concern/idea to take on as its next action project. Typically, this can be done through a simple vote, but it's important to allow members to share their perspectives openly. Concerns that are not prioritized in the current round remain on the board for the group to return to and consider

in the next Improvement Project Cycle round. Co-leads can find helpful prompts for encouraging discussion and generating consensus on p. 25 of the Appendix.

Step 3: Analyze Root Causes

Improvement Project Cycle Step 3: Conduct a Root Cause Analysis After selecting a concern for an action project, the next step is to conduct a root cause analysis, which will allow the HaWC to understand the true causes of the problem and design solutions to address those root causes, rather than only

responding to the symptoms. Solutions that address root causes are more likely to have greater impact.

There are multiple tools the HaWC can use to conduct a root cause analysis. One popular method is a "Five Whys" analysis, which starts with a problem statement, and then poses a series of "why" questions to identify a root cause. Here's an example of the Five Whys approach:

Problem Statement: There is a consistent puddle on the floor of the building.

1. Why is there water on the floor of the building?

Answer: The overhead pipe is leaking.

2. Why is the overhead pipe leaking?

Answer: There is too much pressure in the water pipe.

3. Why is there too much pressure in the water pipe?

Answer: There is a faulty control valve.

4. Why is there a faulty control valve?

Answer: The control valves have not been tested.

5. Why haven't the control valves been tested?

Root Cause: Testing the control valves is not on the maintenance schedule.

For more complex problems, there may be multiple root causes. Another root cause analysis tool called the Drill Down Technique may be better suited for these kinds of issues. Consult the Appendix and Additional Resources sections at the end of this guide for more information on these techniques.

Step 4: Brainstorm Solutions

Improvement Project Cycle Step 4: Brainstorm Solutions With the root causes identified, the HaWC can now start to brainstorm solutions to address them. It may be the case that not all root causes can be tackled by the HaWC, such as those requiring major capital investments.

It is important for the HaWC to brainstorm a range of possible solutions. As HaWC members propose solutions, a Committee member should document each possibility. After a range of solutions have been proposed, the HaWC can review the possibilities and vote on them. When a HaWC is interested in a solution that would require substantial investment, it may explore the feasibility of that solution with management.



Improvement Project Cycle Step 5: Identify Action Plans and Do The last step of the Improvement Project Cycle is to decide what actions need to be taken to implement the solution(s) agreed upon in Step 4. There may be multiple action items for each solution and, with each action, it is important to

identify the person who will be responsible for completing the action as well as the timeline for completing it.

Whenever possible, we recommend that HaWC members be tasked with carrying out actions. Distributing responsibilities across the Committee gives members a greater feeling of ownership of the action project. It also allows frontline employees to develop their skills and demonstrate leadership and helps prevent co-leads from being overburdened with carrying out the action plans. It may be the case that members need guidance and support from co-leads in carrying out their action steps, especially if the tasks fall outside their routine roles or they are not confident they are authorized to carry them out.

We also recommend that at least one meeting per month be dedicated to implementing projects. Based on experience from the warehouse study, this helps members feel more engaged and make progress on projects.

Reflection At the end of each Improvement Project Cycle, take some time with the HaWC to discuss what went well and think about what could be improved in the next cycle. Remind HaWC members that positive workplace change is a continuous, often gradual process and that challenges provide an opportunity to learn for the next project.

Leading the HaWC: Guidance for Co-Leads

Co-leads play a critical role in the efficacy of the HaWC. They plan and facilitate meetings, coordinate action plans, and serve as a bridge between the HaWC and management. This section will provide guidance on these key co-lead tasks.

Planning HaWC Meetings Prior to each HaWC meeting, co-leads should come together and plan the meeting. Co-leads can use the meeting minutes template in the Appendix of this guide to help structure the HaWC meeting.

During the planning meeting, co-leads can reflect on the previous HaWC meeting, review notes, and identify where in the project cycle each project is in order to facilitate the group through the different steps. Co-leads create an agenda that is shared with the rest of the HaWC during the meeting and identify who will lead each agenda item. Though it may be an organizational norm for the supervisor co-lead to take on the main facilitation role, it's important that both co-leads are given the opportunity to facilitate as they are comfortable.

We recommend that co-leads take additional planning

HaWC Meeting Checklist

Prior to the Meeting

- Meet to plan meeting
- Send meeting reminders to HaWC members and their supervisors

During the Meeting

- Share agenda with HaWC members at the beginning of the meeting.
- Ask for a volunteer to take notes and to manage the Work Board or other visual management tool.
- Provide an opportunity for each HaWC member to speak at least two times during the meeting.
- Try to ensure that each HaWC member leaves the meeting with at least one task.

time early on in the program to learn the HaWC materials and think through discussion

facilitation strategies. You can access resource materials for HaWC co-leads both in the Appendix to this guide and via the Additional Resources section on p. 32.

Leading HaWC Meetings The checklist on p. 19 includes key features of a successful HaWC meeting. It's important to establish positive meeting norms early on so that HaWC members know what to expect when coming to a meeting and feel comfortable participating in the discussion.

Share the agenda at the beginning of the meeting so the group knows what will happen during the meeting and members can help keep the meeting on track. Ask for volunteers to take notes and manage the Work Board or other visual management tool. The HaWC could also establish a rotation for these tasks. Involving HaWC members in the meeting helps keep members engaged and distributes responsibilities across the group.

Co-leads should remember that HaWC members may be hesitant to share their perspectives, especially early on. It can be helpful to acknowledge the personal risk while also affirming that members should think of this as a safe space to raise ideas, questions, and concerns about work and that frontline workers' voices are welcome and crucial to the HaWC's effectiveness.

Bringing Action Plans to Life When possible, each HaWC member should leave the meeting with at least one task. This task could be related to the HaWC's current action project or it could be as simple as communicating with their fellow workers about what the HaWC is up to. We also recommend that co-leads budget one to two hours of work per week for coordinating HaWC action projects, but the time required may vary by the complexity of the action project. In the warehousing study, we found that a co-lead's investment of time and effort beyond facilitating HaWC meetings was a key component for HaWC success.

Key Strategies for Success and Sustainability

The HaWC is intended to be adaptable to the unique needs of each organization. However, based on our experience in the warehouse study, there are core program elements and

strategies for senior leadership that will increase the likelihood of the program's success and sustainability. Those core elements include:

- Shared HaWC leadership, with a frontline worker co-lead and a supervisor co-lead
- Committee membership that consists primarily of frontline workers
- Regular HaWC meetings, with a minimum of 2 per month suggested
- The Improvement Project Cycle used as a guide for HaWC meetings
- Responsibility for implementing projects is distributed across co-leads and HaWC members.

Strategies for Senior Leadership Like many initiatives, HaWCs need executive champions if they are to reach their true potential. Here are some ways organizational leaders can support a successful HaWC launch:

- First, make sure the organization is ready to launch the program. Consider using an organizational assessment to explore whether it is the right time to launch a change initiative like the HaWC.
- Invest the necessary resources into the HaWC. Ensure there is sufficient time dedicated to co-lead planning, HaWC meetings, and implementing action plans outside of HaWC meetings. Account for the HaWC in the yearly budget. Be sure the resource investment continues past the initial launch phase.
- Have regular check-ins with HaWC leadership. Schedule monthly check-ins with HaWC co-leads to support their efforts. To avoid co-lead burnout, make sure that the work of co-leading a HaWC is considered an integral part of each co-lead's annual goals and performance review; recognize HaWC co-leadership as an opportunity for employees to demonstrate their leadership potential.
- Share the HaWC's successes. Be vocal to the organization that you are supportive of the HaWC; regularly communicate the HaWC successes to the broader workforce. This sends a signal that the HaWC is an important initiative and encourages further investment.
- Build in time to reflect. Plan periodic reflections to consider how the HaWC is going.
 Solicit feedback, whether formally or informally, to understand how the HaWC is being experienced across the broader workforce.

"People see things, they get things done—the communication board, the things that are going on—it's really helped connect folks back to the concept of 'I've got a voice. I know if it's being heard.""—*Building Manager at a HaWC site*

"The HaWC allows the associate to voice their concerns. It gives them the power to make changes and see changes made. With corporate, an employee goes 'I see this issue,' [and] corporate tells them 'Stay in your lane.' With the HaWC, it's 'Let's see what we can do to fix it."—*a HaWC Member*

"The HaWC has been well-received here. Associates feel that this is a group they can go to about anything. The HaWC has a broader scope than the safety committee. It gives them the ability to talk about many different types of things at the peer level. It's opened up communication in the building."—*Building Manager at a HaWC site*

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Appendix

Suggested Flow for HaWC Meetings

	Step 1: Raise Concerns (10-15 min.)	Step 2: Prioritize Concerns (10-15 min.)	Step 3: Conduct a Root Cause Analysis (10-15 min.)	Step 4: Brainstorm Solutions (10- 15 min.)	Step 5: Identify Action Plans (10-15 min.)
Goal	Hear/record concerns from communication channels	Select next project that HaWC will take on	Understand root cause of a concern	Develop a set of solutions	Plan how to accomplish the solutions
	*Share concerns from comment boxes, from what people are hearing, and from HaWC members.	*Take sticky notes from concern box and discuss Importance (how serious?) vs. Impact (how many affected)?	*If the concern is more complex, conduct root cause analysis using the Drill Down or Five Whys techniques.	*Brainstorm solutions to address root causes.	*Brainstorm and assign tasks to achieve the chosen solution(s).
Reminders	*If concern is in the HaWC scope, write it on a sticky note, and place in "Concerns" area of the HaWC Work Board. Different colors can be used for different types of concerns. Tip: Focus on hearing concerns; avoid jumping into solution mode.	*Move sticky notes into appropriate section of impact/importance prioritization matrix. *After discussion to identify key concerns, vote on the next to tackle, and place the sticky note about it in the "Upcoming Projects" column.	*Use the Five Whys approach for simpler problems, or Drill Down for more complex problems that may have multiple causes. *Discuss and vote on which root cause or causes to address. Choose one that is impactful but manageable.	*Identify which solution (or set of solutions) to target for action. *Add solution chosen to the sticky note about the concern; move the sticky note to "Current Projects" column.	*Write responsible person and timeline on a green sticky note and place it in the "Current Projects" column. *Recap what each member needs to do in advance of next meeting.

Some Useful Prompts and Phrases for Facilitating HaWC Discussions

Encouraging general participation:

- Thank you to all who are participating. Would anyone who hasn't spoken yet like to share a comment?
- Great to have your ideas, [Name], and we can hear more from you later. Is someone else ready to share?
- Has everyone been heard?

Encouraging dialogue, differing opinions, and testing for consensus:

- Does anyone see this differently? Is there an argument to be made for seeing this differently?
- We know it might be difficult to disagree, but it's beneficial to hear different opinions. Does anyone have a different view?
- Let's hear from everybody.... Let's hear some other opinions.... What do others think?
- Is this a decision we can all support? Can we all live with this decision?

Addressing pessimism:

- We understand that something like this may have not have worked in the past. What was learned from that situation? How can we try again differently?
- We all know how quickly things change around here. There are lots of new faces. Every day is different. So some of the roadblocks we hit before might not get in the way this time. Let's think it through and see if we can identify some new ideas.

Deciding whether a concern is a "quick action" or not:

- Are there multiple or deeper causes to this concern, or can it be addressed with one or two simple steps?
- How much planning/preparation will it involve to implement this plan? How many decision-makers and/or steps are involved?
- Does it make sense to try a quick action on this, and if it doesn't work, decide whether to prioritize it as an improvement project?

Getting beyond "Ask the supervisor":

- How is the supervisor likely to respond to this request?
- [If negative reaction anticipated]: Do we need to think through some possible solutions first before raising it up to the next level? The more we can think through and propose a practical strategy, the more likely it is that the supervisor will respond positively.

Prompting reflection and dialogue in planning meetings:

- How did you feel about the last HaWC meeting?
- In our last meeting, did we hear from everyone? Was airtime shared equally? (If not): How can we make that happen?
- Have there been any topics that are too hot to touch lately? I understand it may feel too risky to address a topic like that in the HaWC meeting, but it might be helpful to discuss it here and why it feels uncomfortable to address. What do you think?

A Sample Template for HaWC Meeting Minutes

The space below can be used to take meeting minutes. Fill out each section as relevant.

Reasons for notetaking:

Provides a written record of how and why HaWC projects were selected

Helps keep track of projects past and present as the composition of the HaWC changes over time

Creates a record of past concerns raised to return to in a new project cycle

Offers lessons learned on what did and did not work in the past.

Agenda:

- •
- _
- -
- •
- •
- •

Attendees:

Updates on projects:

Raising and Prioritizing Concerns

List all concerns raised in the meeting including reasons for concern. Which ones were prioritized as <u>quick action</u> items?

Concerns raised (and reasons)	Quick Action Item (Y/N)?	Quick action solution?

Describe the process of prioritizing and voting on concerns.

Which concern was prioritized as the major <u>improvement project?</u> Reasons prioritized (include any key points discussed)?

Root Cause Analysis

What root causes of the problem were identified? Which key cause or causes were prioritized and why?

Solutions & Action Steps

What solutions were brainstormed? Which ones were selected and why?

What action steps were identified? To whom were they assigned? On what timeline? Record here:

Action Items	Responsible Party	Timeline for Accomplishing

Other notes:

Explaining Root Cause Analysis Techniques

Explaining the Five Whys Often when we think of a problem, it is really a surface-level symptom of a deeper problem. If we can get an understanding of those deeper causes, we can create a solution that address the root causes and it is much more likely to have greater impact.

There are a couple of tools that we can use to get to these deeper causes. The first is called the Five Whys – maybe you're familiar with it. We start with a problem statement and ask a series of Why questions so we can find the root cause. Then we can generate a solution. (See example on p. 17.)

The Drill Down Technique For more complex concerns, the drill down technique allows for more in-depth analysis of the root causes by exploring multiple first-level causes, then also looking at multiple second-level causes (the causes of the causes). By breaking a problem down into its pieces, we can identify simpler and more manageable solutions than if we try to tackle the problem as a whole.



Additional Resources

- Supplementary Materials for Forming a HaWC. This collection of online resources is designed to make it much easier for you to set up a HaWC program in your organization. The resources include:
 - Tools and Resources for Running HaWC Meetings
 - <u>Presentation to Accompany Initial Meetings of a Health and Well-Being</u> <u>Committee</u>
 - Presentation for HaWC Co-Lead Training Sessions
 - <u>Start-Up Materials for the HaWC Committee</u>
 - An Overview Introducing Senior Leadership to the HaWC Model
 - An Overview of the HaWC Program for New Hires.
- <u>Work Design for Health Employer Toolkit</u> from The Work and Well-Being Initiative. This free online toolkit, created in 2021 and updated and expanded in 2024, maps how employers can create work environments that foster worker health and wellbeing. The toolkit was developed by researchers from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and the MIT Sloan School of Management. It includes a section on creating opportunities for employee influence.
- <u>"7 Strategies to Improve Your Employees' Health and Well-Being,"</u> by Erin L. Kelly, Lisa F. Berkman, Laura D. Kubzansky, and Meg Lovejoy. *Harvard Business Review*, Oct. 12, 2021.

This short article offers practical, research-based insights for redesigning work to improve worker well-being.

 <u>Cost of Turnover Tool</u> from the Aspen Institute Workforce Strategies Initiative, March 2019.

This worksheet offers a methodology for creating a rough estimate of direct and indirect costs associated with employee turnover.

 <u>"Three Steps Managers Can Take to Empower Workers,"</u> by Martha E. Mangelsdorf, August 23, 2024.

For their doctoral dissertation at MIT Sloan, Arrow Minster, now an assistant professor of management at San Francisco State University, studied an empowerment program that aimed to help workers in a hospital system identify and solve problems in the workplace. This brief summary highlights three insights for managers from Minster's dissertation.

- <u>"Five Whys and Five Hows,"</u> American Society for Quality (ASQ) website. This page provides a brief explanation of the Five Whys method as well as a related Five Hows technique. It also contains links to additional articles.
- <u>"The Art of Root Cause Analysis,"</u> by Vidyasagar A., *Quality Progress* 49, Issue 1 (January 2016): 48.

This brief article, available via the American Society for Quality (ASQ) website, discusses the Five Whys analysis technique.