

# Wellness Programs & Job Satisfaction: The Role of Employer Intent



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## Abstract

With an over 60% increase in per capita healthcare expenses in less than a decade, companies are seeking ways to lower company cost by implementing insurance wellness programs (Ghandakly, 2008). Researchers have also shown employees' perceptions of their work environment are an important factor in their performance (Lowe, Schellenbert & Shannon, 2003), and that one aspect of the environment is wellness programs. Research shows that wellness programs result in increased employee health and savings to the company (Grant et al., 2007; Parks & Steelman, 2008). However, studies have failed to examine the possible negative effects of wellness programs. This study examines variables that may be related to both individual and organizational success in relation to wellness initiatives. Employees from several companies were surveyed to determine possible associations between the nature of the wellness program (voluntary or mandatory), perceived employer intent, and employee job satisfaction.

## Theoretical Framework

Perceived Organizational Support Theory (POS) (Eisenberger, Huntington, Huntington, & Sowa, 1986) posits that the ways in which a company treats its employees shapes employees' perceptions about the organization and influence key outcomes, such as job satisfaction. The present study extends POS theory to examine possible associations between employer intent in offering wellness programs and employee job satisfaction.

## Methods

### Participants (n = 76)

❖ A total of 35% male and 65% female employees participated from various professional organizations.

❖ 71% indicated that their participation in their wellness program is voluntary and 29% of participants indicated that their participation is mandated by their company.

❖ 75% of participants are given goals in various health areas that they are asked to address in their wellness program; 55% are not given any health goals, and less than 1% was not sure.

### Instrumentation

*Job Descriptive Index: JDI* ( $\alpha = .86$ ,  $M = 21.32$ ,  $SD = 3.70$ )

The JDI is designed to measure employees' job satisfaction and is a "facet" measure of job satisfaction. The facets included: good, undesirable, better than most, disagreeable, content, excellent, enjoyable, and poor (Bowling Green State University, 2009).

*General Self-Efficacy Scale: GSE* ( $\alpha = .77$ ,  $M = 24.09$ ,  $SD = 4.20$ )

The General Self-Efficacy Scale is a 10-item psychometric scale that is designed to assess optimistic self-beliefs to cope with a variety of difficult demands in life (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995).

*Perceived Positive Employer Intentions Scale* ( $\alpha = .82$ ,  $M = 21.55$ ,  $SD = 4.22$ )

This scale was designed to assess employees' perception of their wellness program and their employer's positive intentions to implement the wellness program (Bailey, Fairbanks, Potocnik, Prevost, Randall, & Schwingel, 2011).

## Results

### RQ1: Is employer intent in offering wellness programs related to employee job satisfaction?

Perceived positive employer intent and job satisfaction are positively associated,  $r = 0.49$ ,  $p < .001$ . See Figure 1.

### RQ2: Is the nature of the wellness program (mandatory or voluntary) associated with perceived employer intent in offering wellness programs?

An independent groups t-test revealed that perceived positive employer intent was significantly higher for mandatory wellness program participants ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ) than voluntary wellness program participants ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ),  $t(73) = -2.10$ ,  $p < .05$ . See Figure 2.

### RQ3: Does efficacy moderate the relationship between employer intent and job satisfaction?

The participant base consisted solely of respondents who felt they could meet the goals set for them by their company's wellness program.

Perceived Positive Employer Intent & Job Satisfaction

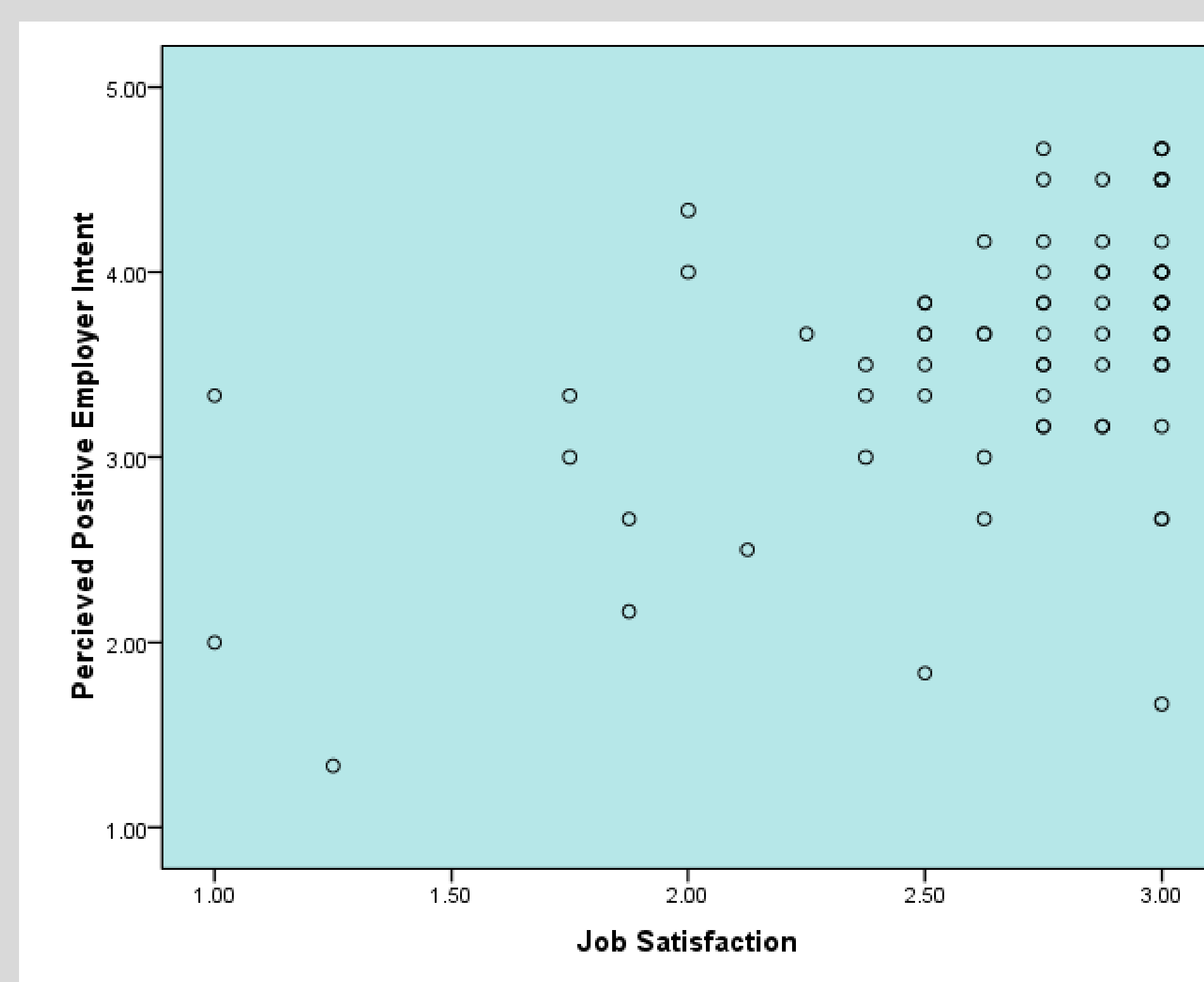


Figure 1

Perceived Positive Employer Intent & Wellness Program Participation

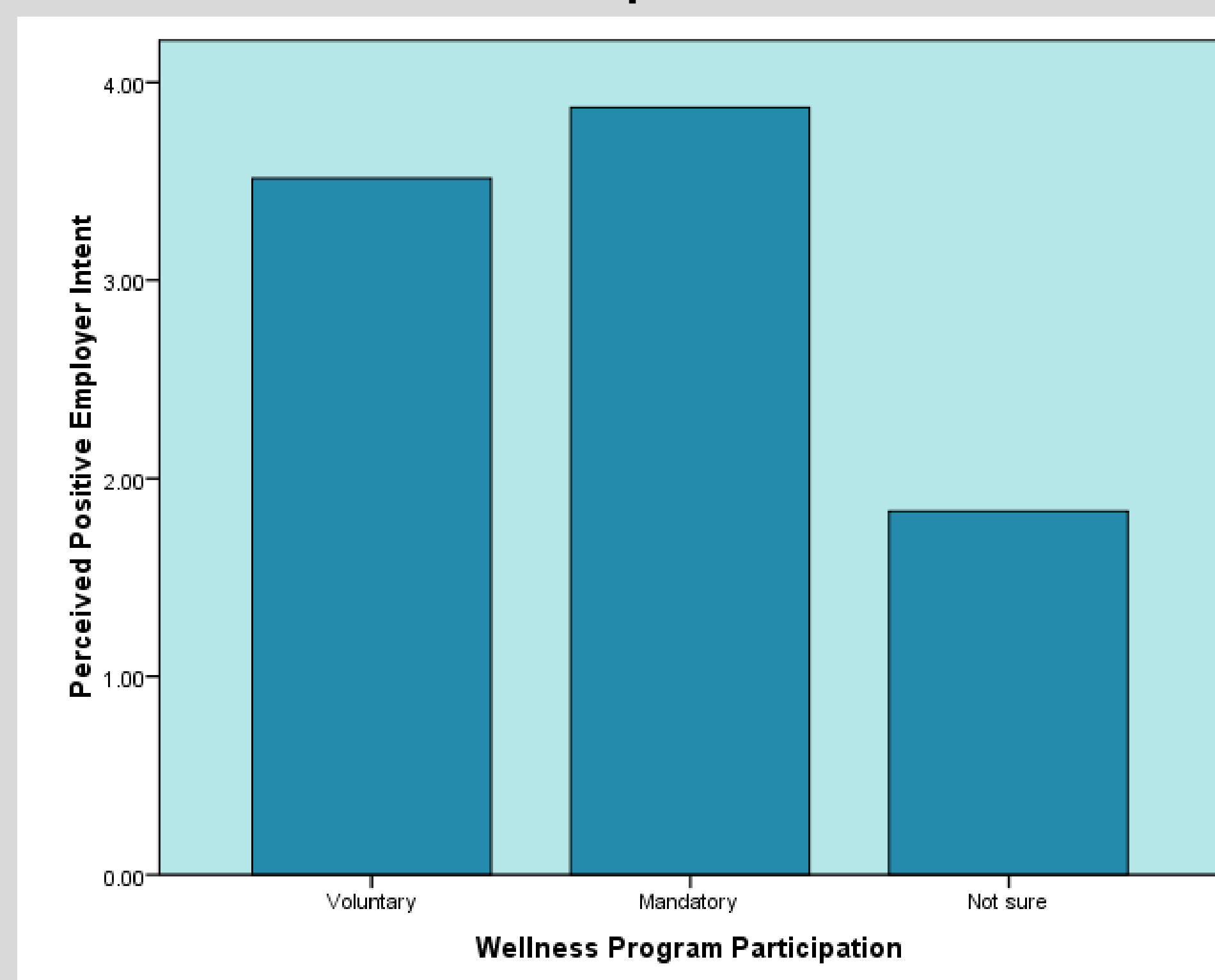


Figure 2

## Implications

How companies craft the messages surrounding introduction and implementation of wellness programs is of critical importance, given findings that perceived employer intent is directly related to job satisfaction. This provides empirical support for using POS theory in studying organizational health programs and important employee outcomes.

Regardless of whether the programs are voluntary or mandatory, when companies offer wellness programs, employees perceive that employer intentions are positive.

Given the findings related to perceived positive employer intent (PPEI), this newly-developed construct and scale warrant further study. PPEI may be a useful tool for researchers studying health programs and organizational outcomes and for employers' use in message framing related to employee program offerings.

## Discussion & Limitations

One of the perceived goals of implementing a wellness program within an organization is to increase job satisfaction, resulting in better job performance. This study provides evidence that offering any type of wellness program is perceived positively by employees and increases their job satisfaction.

These results indicate fascinating findings; one would think that when being forced to participate in a wellness program, employees would perceive the intentions of their employers less positively. This finding shows that at least these companies have found a way to communicate positive intentions when implementing both mandatory and voluntary programs.

The original study aimed to examine efficacy with regard to the variables studied; future research could focus on finding a larger population of participants who feel they are unable to participate in company wellness programs due to health-related issues, age, sex, or disabilities. Efficacy could act as a moderating variable between employer intent and job satisfaction. Future research could also be conducted with regard to message framing and wellness programs.

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