The Impact of Excellent Employee Wellbeing
In the last decade, employee wellness has become a key conversation topic for leaders and HR professionals across industries and around the globe. Companies have added game rooms, implemented unlimited vacation policies, offered gym memberships, provided free meals, and offered employees a host of other perks and benefits, all in an effort to improve employee wellbeing and productivity. But do these initiatives truly impact employee wellbeing? And do advances in employee wellbeing actually lead to improved productivity?

The concept of wellness in the workplace is relatively new and many companies are actively creating wellness programs to improve the lives of their employees. However, the exact definition of wellness remains unclear and inconsistent across organizations. Global research conducted by The O.C. Tanner Institute helps establish a definition of employee wellbeing. This paper explains the large benefits in store for companies that are able to improve their employees’ wellbeing and explores why this trend is relevant in the workplace today. It describes, in detail, what companies can do to improve the large portion of life spent at work and, more specifically, investigates how the benefits and perks currently offered at work impact wellbeing and where they fall short.

Additionally, The O.C. Tanner Institute 2015 Health and Wellbeing Study shows that improved wellbeing does in fact have a large impact on employees, the way they work, and ultimately on the company’s bottom-line. Employees who are holistically well deliver a difference for their teams and departments. In fact, as employee wellbeing increases, its positive effects resonate throughout the organization and teams become more productive, more collaborative, and prepared to innovate.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The O.C. Tanner Institute conducted a quantitative study of 2,363 employees covering multiple countries around the world. The survey targeted adults (age 18+) working full-time at companies with more than 500 employees. The study was conducted using an online survey administered to an online panel of individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. The survey solicited respondents’ self-assessment of different aspects of their personal life. Additionally, the survey asked about the various benefits and perks currently used where they were employed at the time of survey. Respondents also self-reported information that was used to build an overall wellbeing profile, a physical wellness profile, a social wellness profile, and an emotional wellness profile. Additionally, respondents self-reported, in detail, how they work and what skills they use at work.

Employees surveyed worked in a broad range of industries and across all job titles and responsibilities. Additionally, respondents represent every workplace age group and a broad range of socioeconomic situations (including education, household income, and gender).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>INCOME</th>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
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<tr>
<td>13% UNDER $40K</td>
<td>2% PRIMARY SCHOOL</td>
<td>40% FEMALE</td>
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<tr>
<td>47% OVER $80K</td>
<td>41% $40K-$80K</td>
<td>60% MALE</td>
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<tr>
<td>30% HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td>68% TERTIARY/UNIVERSITY</td>
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The responding sample is weighted to the profile of the sample definition to provide a representative reporting sample. The profile was derived from census data or, if not available from the census, from industry accepted data. Fieldwork was undertaken between November 4th and November 23rd 2015. The figures have been weighted to make them representative of the aggregated adult (aged 18+) full-time working populations of the United States, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany. The O.C. Tanner Institute makes every effort to provide representative information. All results are based on a sample and are therefore subject to statistical errors normally associated with sample-based information.
WHAT IS WELLBEING?

First, wellbeing is not the same as wellness. Traditionally, wellness programs focus on physical attributes and provide employees with gym memberships, meal plans, and healthy snacks. However, wellbeing is much more than a measure of physical wellness. It is a measure of a person’s perception of how her life is going—whether it is fulfilling and satisfying, whether she feels her best every day, and where her life is headed in the future. Understanding employee wellbeing as a holistic life experience reveals a much broader definition of the term—one in which physical wellness, though necessary and important, is only part of the overall wellbeing story.

For this study, employee wellbeing is measured and defined through a set of questions modified from leading academic research on human wellbeing. The study asks employees to describe their current life situation on a ten-point scale both inside and outside of work. The question was worded: “Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to 10 at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?” Survey respondents chose a step of the ladder they stood on both in and out of the office.

This series of questions also took into account employees’ perceived wellbeing over a time period of five years by adding, “On which step do you think you will stand about five years from now?” Again respondents answered for both inside work and outside work.

These questions reveal an unfortunate trend. In the context of wellbeing, employees rate their life at work today lower than their life at home and future life. On average, employees rate their life inside work today at 5.24
on the 10-point scale. Surprisingly, there are not any statistical differences in this score across company size, job-title, age, education level, income, industry, or job classification. In fact, though not statistically significant, it is interesting that this trend holds true within the Human Resources department – the very department helping the organization address employee wellbeing.

While employees rate their life outside work today higher than their life inside work today, it is important to note that the relationship between these two scores is moderately correlated. This means that these scores generally move in the same direction. In other words, as an employee’s life at work improves, so does their life outside of work and vice versa. It is intuitive: employee wellbeing does not end at the door – whether that be the home door or the company door. Since wellbeing is a measure of an employee’s lifestyle, it is not limited to the workplace. We predict that as work-life balance continues to erode into work-life integration, this relationship between perceived life quality inside and outside of work will continue to blur for many employees.

The survey also reveals that employees are optimistic about their future. Employees increase their inside work score, on average, by 1.12 (to 6.36) and their outside work score, on average, by 1.43 (to 7.27) when asked about their perception into the future. Looking at current and future wellbeing measures perception and expectations, and reveals whether employees are optimistic about their future wellbeing. Understanding what employees predict for the future lends insight on their overall wellbeing perspectives.
In the end, wellbeing is a combination of life inside work and life outside work both today and in the future. These scores are correlated to each other. Additionally, these four variables yield a chrombach’s alpha score of .805. In other words, analysis confirms that these scores combined together are related and internally consistent. Therefore, as an overall wellbeing measure, the mean score across all four wellbeing categories was calculated and is used in analysis as a single measure called overall wellbeing.

Combining the home and work dimensions with the now and future dimensions yields an overall wellbeing score for each employee. The distribution of overall wellbeing scores has a range of 10 with a low score of 0 and a high score of 10. The mean overall wellbeing score from the sample is 6.18 with a standard deviation of 1.99. Based on their responses, survey participants were classified into four categories: poor overall wellbeing, average overall wellbeing, good overall wellbeing, and excellent overall wellbeing. Poor overall wellbeing was classified as having a score less than 1 standard deviations lower than the mean. Average overall wellbeing was classified as having a score between 1 standard deviation lower than the mean and the mean itself. Good overall wellbeing was classified as having a score between the mean and 1 standard deviation above the mean. Excellent overall wellbeing was classified as having a score 1 standard deviation above the mean or higher.

**THE DIMENSIONS OF WELLBEING**

Given the expanded definition of wellbeing that includes an employee’s holistic life experience, what is it that creates wellbeing? The O.C. Tanner Institute 2015 Global Health and Wellbeing Study found that an employee’s wellbeing is largely affected by three dimensions of wellness. These three dimensions are physical wellness, emotional wellness, and social wellness.

**PHYSICAL WELLNESS**

In the Health and Wellbeing study, having good physical wellness is defined by being in good health, practicing a healthy lifestyle, and being physically able to do what you need and want to do each day. In order to measure physical wellness, a physical wellness index was created using 19 different elements of physical wellness and includes both positive health habits such as seeing a doctor and losing weight and negative health habits such as smoking. It also takes into consideration how well employees track and maintain their physical health, and it asks respondents to state their
level of agreement with statements such as “I wake up feeling rested” and “I am physically able to do what I need each day.”

Combining these survey questions yields a physical health index with a maximum score of 16 and a minimum score of -1. Overall, the average for the physical wellness index is 6.09 with a standard deviation of 3.03. To better interpret the data, respondents were classified into four categories based on their individual physical wellness score: poor, average, good, and excellent physical wellness. Respondents classified into the poor physical wellness category scored less than 1 standard deviations below the mean of the index. Respondents classified as average physical health scored between 1 standard deviation below the mean and the mean itself. Respondents classified as good physical health scored between the mean and 1 standard deviation above the mean. Finally, those classified as excellent physical wellness were respondents who scored more than 1 standard deviation above the mean.

As a part of holistic wellbeing, physical wellness has a large impact on an individual’s total wellbeing score. As employees progress from poor physical wellness through to good physical wellness, overall employee wellbeing scores also improve from a low of 5.22, on average, to a high of 6.66. It is interesting to note that, on average, there is not an increase in overall wellbeing as an employee progresses from good physical wellness to excellent physical wellness. This would indicate that physical health, at some level, plateaus in association with overall wellbeing. It means that once you hit a certain level of good physical wellness, meaning you are doing the essential things to maintain your physical wellness, then there is little satisfaction, on average, to gain by further increasing your physical health.

As employees progress from poor physical wellness through to good physical wellness, overall employee wellbeing scores also improve from a low of 5.22, on average, to a high of 6.66.
Social wellness is another key component of wellbeing. Having good social wellness is grounded in work-life balance and the presence of quality, positive interactions with others both at work and at home. From the survey, 16 questions were used to derive an overall social wellness index. The social wellness index takes into consideration how well a person interacts with others, how others interact with them, and how their company and people at home interact with them on a social level. The survey collected levels of agreement with 16 statements such as “I have a best friend inside/outside of work” and “At least 80% of my conversations focus on what is going right.” Additionally, respondents were asked about the philosophies they believe their company holds such as “Work should be the primary priority in a person’s life” and “Work productivity is more important than building relationships with co-workers.”

Combing these questions yields a social wellness index score between 0 and 6. The distribution of social wellness scores has a range of 5.25 with a low score of 0.75 and a high score of 6. The means social wellness score from the sample is 3.86 with a standard deviation of 0.76. Based on their responses, survey participants were classified into four categories: poor social wellness, average social wellness, good social wellness, and excellent social wellness. Poor social wellness was classified as having a score less than 1 standard deviation lower than the mean. Average social wellness was classified as having a score between 1 standard deviation lower than the mean and the mean itself. Good social wellness was classified as having a score between the mean and 1 standard deviation above the mean. Excellent social wellness was classified as having a score 1 standard deviation above the mean or higher.

Social wellness has a large impact on overall wellbeing. Employees with excellent social wellness had overall wellbeing scores of 7.21, over two points higher than those with poor social wellness.
Social wellness also has a large impact on overall wellbeing. Employees with excellent social wellness had overall wellbeing scores of 7.21, over two points higher than those with poor social wellness. Too often companies overlook the influence social interactions have on employees. In a drive to get improved productivity, companies focus on simply getting more work done, when in reality, employees who have excellent social wellness actually yield higher productivity at work than individuals with poor social wellness.

**EMOTIONAL/MENTAL WELLNESS**

The third dimension of wellness is emotional wellness. For the study, having good emotional wellness is defined by combining 15 survey questions into an emotional wellness index. The questions used in the index define feeling positive, liking what you do, not being overwhelmed or overstressed, having purpose in your life, and aligning to personal and organizational values. “Life is rewarding” and “I see the positive impact my work has” are examples of statements respondents were asked to agree or disagree with. The O.C. Tanner Institute’s emotional wellness index takes into consideration how well talents are utilized, feelings of belonging, level of stress, liking work beyond just a paycheck, and feeling like you have control in your life.

Combining these survey questions yields an emotional wellness score between 0 and 6. The distribution of emotional wellness scores has a range of 5.47 with a low score of 0.53 and a high score of 6. The mean social wellness score from the sample is 3.89 with a standard deviation of 0.93. Based on their responses, survey participants were classified into four

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*In previous publications of this study the term mental wellness was used exclusively to describe this dimension of wellness. For the purposes of this study, the terms mental wellness and emotional wellness are used interchangeably and meant to describe the same dimension of wellness.*
categories: poor emotional wellness, average emotional wellness, good emotional wellness, and excellent emotional wellness. Poor emotional wellness was classified as having a score less than 1 standard deviations lower than the mean, average emotional wellness was classified as having a score between 1 standard deviation lower than the mean and the mean itself, good emotional wellness was classified as having a score between the mean and 1 standard deviation above the mean, and excellent emotional wellness was classified as having a score 1 standard deviation above the mean or higher.

Good emotional wellness has the largest impact of any individual wellness dimension on overall wellbeing. The data shows that employees with excellent emotional wellness have an overall wellbeing index score of 7.76, while employees with excellent physical and social wellness lag behind with overall wellbeing scores of 6.66 and 7.21, respectively. Additionally, the increase in overall wellbeing between poor emotional wellness and excellent emotional wellness is 2.26 (more than a 20% increase on the overall wellbeing scale).

The research shows that each of these dimensions play a crucial and independent role in improving wellbeing and allowing employees to lead their best lives. While each of these dimensions independently improve wellbeing, combined they are much more powerful. When employees rank excellent in all 3 wellness categories, they average a wellbeing score of 8.14 compared to an average score of 5.74 for those who don’t rank excellent in any of the wellness categories. Therefore, it is important to think about all aspects of wellbeing when constructing employee programs aimed to improve employee wellbeing.
How will an organization benefit from encouraging and empowering employee wellbeing? Employees who are holistically well deliver a difference for their teams and departments. In fact, as employee wellbeing increases, its positive effects resonate throughout the organization.

Organizations that successfully improve employee wellbeing should expect to see a large increase in work productivity both on an individual and a team level. Employees were asked to rate their current work output as a percentage of the maximum potential output that they individually are capable. Those with poor wellbeing self-reported, on average, that they are only working at 64% of their maximum output. Additionally, those with a poor wellbeing viewed their immediate work teams more negatively and assessed that their team was only producing, on average, 61% of their maximum output. Employees and teams in any organization that are only giving 2/3 of their effort or less to the organization can dramatically affect the bottom-line due to lost productivity time.

As employees climb the wellbeing ladder, they feel their personal productivity improve and they see their immediate team members as more productive as well. Compared to those with poor wellbeing, those with.

The result of excellent wellbeing
excellent wellbeing rate their personal work output as 19% higher (83%) and the work productivity of their immediate team 20% higher (81%). It isn’t hard to imagine what a 20% boost in personal work output across any company would do for any organization.

**IMPROVE SKILLS THAT PRODUCE GREAT WORK**

In addition to working harder, the study reveals that employees who are holistically well also work smarter. In past research, the O.C. Tanner Institute took a look into a portion of 1.7 million instances of award-winning work (we call this great work) from companies all over the world. These accounts of great work were written by supervisors or colleagues and described what a person did to be deserving of a corporate monetary award. In studying these descriptions, we identified 5 skills that were essential and most often described across all of the award-winning pieces of great work. Those 5 skills are:

1. **Ask the right question.** Curious, thought-provoking questions are the first step to discovering out-of-the-box solutions.

2. **See for yourself.** Get firsthand knowledge of the problem at hand, so you can understand what’s been tried before, and how recipients will use your solution.

3. **Talk to your outer circle.** Speak to people outside of your regular team, and incorporate their perspectives, insights, and ideas for a well-rounded solution.

4. **Improve the mix.** Experiment, add, subtract, and hone. Keep working at your idea, and don’t be afraid to tweak it, until it’s just right.

5. **Deliver the difference.** Remain involved and engaged with the delivery and implementation of your solution so that you can see the difference you’ve made and help with any issues that may arise.

In fact, our past research found that

- 88% of great work begins with someone asking the right question
- 87% of great work involves an employee seeing for themselves
- 72% of great work benefits from employees talking to their outer circle
- 84% of great work is a product of improving the mix
- 90% of great work projects finish with an employee delivering the difference
The findings from The 2015 O.C. Tanner Institute Health and Wellbeing study find a strong correlation between wellbeing and an employee’s ability to deliver on these key skills that lead to great work. The study shows that employees with high measures of wellbeing are actually better at doing each of the five great work skills. The numbers show that healthy, happy employees are actually better at making a difference for your teams, customers, and company. Please see Appendix A for a detailed description of how each of the skills indices were developed.

Employees are more satisfied with their jobs when they are holistically well. Our research shows that 89% of employees with excellent wellbeing agree with the statement “Overall, I am satisfied with my job.” Only 44% of employees with poor wellbeing would agree.
In addition to job satisfaction, and perhaps related, respondents who are holistically well also plan on staying with their current company for longer than those whose wellbeing is only poor or average. Employees who have either good or excellent wellbeing plan on staying at their companies, on average, for about 10 more years. Those with poor or average wellbeing only plan on staying, on average, about 8 more years. This means that, on average, employees who have high levels of wellbeing plan to stay at their company for 2 additional years compared to those with low levels of wellbeing.

**On average, employees who have high levels of wellbeing plan to stay at their company for 2 additional years compared to those with low levels of wellbeing.**

Employee wellbeing doesn’t just affect individuals—it affects the teams, innovation, great work skills, tenure, and ultimately bottom-line of your organization. Creating a wellness initiative that works takes an understanding of the many dimensions of wellbeing, will make a difference for your employees and your company for years to come.

**IMPACTING WELLBEING**

The study also asked employees about perks and benefits currently offered at the company they worked at. Overall, we asked about 26 benefits and perks ranging from traditional benefits such as fair salary, bonuses, and paid leave to non-conventional benefits such as free food, open work spaces, and on-site day care.

In the end, 7 benefits impacted overall wellbeing the most: fair base salary/pay, family emergency leave / family care leave, paid vacation time, maternity leave, open work spaces where teams can meet and collaborate on projects, paid sick leave, and above and beyond employee recognition. These seven benefits saw the largest difference in average wellbeing between employees who have the perk/benefit at their company compared to employees who do not have the perk/benefit at their company.
Among the 26 benefits asked about in the survey, 7 benefits impacted overall wellbeing the most: fair base salary/pay, family emergency leave/family care leave, paid vacation time, maternity leave, open work spaces where teams can meet and collaborate on projects, paid sick leave, and above and beyond employee recognition.

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<tr>
<th>PERK/BENEFIT</th>
<th>HAVE</th>
<th>DO NOT HAVE</th>
<th>DIFFERENCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fair base salary/pay (i.e., company offers competitive wages relative to education and experience)</td>
<td>6.54</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family emergency leave / family care leave (i.e., for health matters employees are guaranteed unpaid leave with no threat of job loss for specified amount of time)</td>
<td>6.38</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid vacation time</td>
<td>6.26</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>0.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maternity leave</td>
<td>6.33</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>0.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open work spaces where teams can meet and collaborate on projects</td>
<td>6.59</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid sick leave</td>
<td>6.29</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>0.74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Above and beyond recognition (i.e., program to recognize excellent performance)</td>
<td>6.58</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>0.74</td>
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Of the 7 benefits/perks that most impact wellbeing, 5 are traditional benefits: fair base salary/pay, family emergency leave / family care leave, paid vacation time, maternity leave, and paid sick leave. However, employee recognition and open work spaces are of particular interest because they are the only 2 environmental benefits to have a large impact on wellbeing. This finding reveals that company culture is just as important to employee wellbeing as traditional benefits.
Encouraging employees to appreciate, educating them on how and when to recognize one another, and empowering them with intuitive recognition tools, are excellent steps to improving employee wellbeing. When employees feel appreciated, and report being appreciated often, they have higher overall wellbeing both inside and outside of work at work. In a separate question, we asked more specific questions on the recognition culture at employees’ companies. We found that employees who felt appreciated over the past month had wellbeing scores 13% higher, on average, than employees who didn’t feel appreciated.

Additionally, we found that frequency of recognition had an even larger impact on employee wellbeing. Employees who received recognition often or always scored 7.2, on average, on their overall wellbeing compared to 5.36 for those employees who are rarely or never recognized at work. That is a 17% increase. These effects carry over time. The more often employees feel recognized and appreciated, the stronger the positive effects on their overall wellbeing. That means the stronger your culture of recognition, the more your employees’ wellbeing improves. And, as previously discussed, that translates into more productive teams who are better equipped to deliver groundbreaking, difference-making work for your organization.

Employees who felt recognized at work score 13% higher on the wellbeing index. Additionally, employees who were recognized often/always scored 17% higher than those who were recognized rarely/never.
CONCLUSION

As organizations better understand employee wellbeing they will be better equipped to implement programs that successfully impact employee wellbeing. Companies stand to gain large benefits if they can successfully improve employee wellbeing. Employees who are holistically well work harder, work smarter, and stay at organizations longer as their wellbeing improves. The O.C. Tanner Institute 2015 Health and Wellbeing Study shows that improved wellbeing does in fact have a large impact on employees, the way they work, and ultimately on the company’s bottom-line. Employees who are holistically well deliver a difference for their teams and departments and, as employee wellbeing increases, its positive effects resonate throughout the organization and teams become more productive, more collaborative, and prepared to innovate.

As employee wellbeing becomes the topic of conversation in business, leaders and HR professionals should keep an open mind about the broad implications of a wellbeing solution. Strategically combining traditional benefits/perks such as salary, paid time off, and maternity/paternity leave with environmental benefits/perks such as open workspaces and employee recognition will lead companies in the right direction to impacting employee wellbeing.

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O.C. Tanner, on the FORTUNE 100 Best Companies to Work For® list for the second year in a row in 2016, helps organizations create great work environments by inspiring and appreciating great work. Thousands of
clients globally use the company’s cloud-based technology, tools, awards, and education services to engage talent, increase performance, drive goals, and create experiences that fuel the human spirit. Learn more at octanner.com.

The O.C. Tanner Institute regularly commissions research and provides a global forum for exchanging ideas about recognition, engagement, leadership, culture, human values, and sound business principles.

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Appendix A: Great Work Skills Index

ASK INDEX

In the Health and Wellbeing study, this index was created using 9 different elements of asking the right question. It asked respondents to state their level of agreement with statements such as “I gave a lot of thought to what outcomes would delight the recipients of my work” and “I thought carefully about what would really make a difference.” Combining these survey questions yields an ask index with a maximum score of 6 and a minimum score of 0. Overall, the average for the ask index is 3.3712 with a standard deviation of 1.26322.

OUTER CIRCLE INDEX

In the Health and Wellbeing study, this index was created using 5 different elements of asking the right question. It asked respondents to state their level of agreement with statements such as “I went outside my regular team to get insights about the work I was doing” and “I consulted with people
that I wouldn’t normally talk to.” Combining these survey questions yields an ask index with a maximum score of 6 and a minimum score of 0. Overall, the average for the ask index is 3.1009 with a standard deviation of 1.36912.

**GO SEE INDEX**

In the Health and Wellbeing study, this index was created using 5 different elements of going and seeing for yourself. It asked respondents to state their level of agreement with statements such as “I made an effort to see from the vantage of those who receive my work” and “I explored many possible sources of information about my work.” Combining these survey questions yields an ask index with a maximum score of 6 and a minimum score of 0. Overall, the average for the ask index is 3.5567 with a standard deviation of 1.25419.

**IMPROVE THE MIX INDEX**

In the Health and Wellbeing study, this index was created using 5 different elements of improving the mix. It asked respondents to state their level of agreement with statements such as “I brought together concepts and ideas that hadn’t been combined before” and “My work represented significant innovations when compared to the norm.” Combining these survey questions yields an ask index with a maximum score of 6 and a minimum score of 0. Overall, the average for the ask index is 3.4749 with a standard deviation of 1.25939.

**DELIVER INDEX**

In the Health and Wellbeing study, this index was created using 5 different elements of asking the right question. It asked respondents to state their level of agreement with statements such as “After completing my work, I stuck around to observe how it went” and “I felt a continued sense of ownership in my work as it was rolled out.” Combining these survey questions yields an ask index with a maximum score of 6 and a minimum score of 0. Overall, the average for the ask index is 3.8289 with a standard deviation of 1.23459.

**OVERALL INDEX**

In the Health and Wellbeing study, this index was created using 29 different elements of asking the right question. It is a combination of all of the questions asked for the indices above. Combining these survey questions yields an ask index with a maximum score of 6 and a minimum score of 0. Overall, the average for the ask index is 3.4833 with a standard deviation of 1.15116.