

Short Commentary

Brain Health Best Practice Score: How Do Organizations Measure Up?

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Businesses and institutions rely on brain power to make important decisions, to solve critical challenges, and to think creatively and analytically. Employees also report that their work plays a major role in their brain health. However, most employees are reporting that work negatively impacts their brain, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) New Approaches to Economic Challenges initiative estimates that impaired brain health is costing the global economy as much as \$8.5 trillion a year in lost productivity. This calls attention to the need for organizations to promote a healthy brain culture in their workforce, involving the implementation of programs and policies and creating an environment that supports brain health and function [1-4].

The HERO Health and Well-being Best Practices Scorecard in Collaboration with Mercer® (HERO Scorecard) is a free online survey that was designed as an educational and benchmarking tool to help employers identify and assess their use of practices that support more effective health and well-being initiatives. Version 5 of the HERO Scorecard was updated in 2021 to include recent emerging best practices in health and well-being initiatives in each of the six domains that the Scorecard measures (i.e., strategic planning, organizational and cultural support, programs, program integration, participation strategies, and measurement and evaluation). In late 2023, HERO convened a group of workforce brain health experts for an exhaustive review of the Scorecard to identify the workforce health and well-being practices that related to brain health. After extensive discussion, the final proposed practices were assigned tentative scores (out of a possible 100 points). Six independent subject matter experts then reviewed the proposed items and scores. Their feedback was combined and informed further revisions to the items included and final point allocations. A list of all practices included in the Brain Health Best Practice Score can be found in the HERO Scorecard user’s guide. In brief, the score is an indication of an organization’s adoption of practices related to policies, leadership support, programs, lifestyle behaviors, and the built environment. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the number of practices and points by section for the Brain Health Best Practice Score [5].

Among the 388 organizations that completed the HERO Scorecard Version 5 through March 31, 2024, Brain Health Best Practice Scores were retroactively calculated. Organizations were categorized in many ways to examine variations in Brain Health Best

Table 1: Brain Health Best Practice Score Questions, Practices, and Points by Section.

Scorecard section	Number of questions	Number of practices	Points
Strategic planning	5	21	25.25
Organizational & Cultural Support	8	45	34.25
Programs	7	34	18.50
Program Integration	4	11	6.50
Participation Strategies	3	9	7.25
Measurement & Evaluation	1	7	8.25
TOTAL	28	127	100

Scores by size, industry type, percent of employees working remotely, geographic location, percent of workforce that is female, and age of employees.

- Organizations were categorized by size into small (<500; n=118), midsize (500 to <5,000; n=161), and large (5,000+; n=104) organizations.
- Industry type differences were assessed between financial (n=37), hospitals/healthcare clinics (n=36), technical/professional services (n=68), government (n=52), education (n=58), manufacturing (n=34), and other (n=55), as well as for organizations that identified as high tech (n=90) organizations.
- The percentage of employees working remotely was categorized as fully in-person (n=38), <25% remote (n=150), 25 to <50% remote (n=54), 50% to <75% remote (n=39), and 75% or more remote (n=70).
- Geographic location was categorized as organizations with headquarters in Western (n=135), Midwestern (n=86), Northeastern (n=83), and Southern (n=81) regions.
- Percent of workforce that is female was categorized as ≤40% of employees are female (n=141), 41 to 59% of employees are female (n=101), and ≥60% of employees are female (n=136).
- Age of workforce was categorized as above the median age (>43 years; n=162) of responding organizations average age of employees and equal to and below the median age (≤43 years; n=211).

The mean Brain Health Best Practice Score for all respondents was 46.2 points. When comparing the Brain Health Best Practice Score by organization size (Table 2), large organizations received higher scores (mean = 58.8 points) than small organizations (mean = 33.2 points) or midsize organizations (mean = 46.9 points).

Table 2: A comparison of Brain Health Best Practice Score by Organization Size.

	n	Brain Health Score (X ± SD)
Small (<500 employees)	118	33.2 ± 18.4
Midsize (500 to <5,000 employees)	161	46.9 ± 19.3
Large (>5,000 employees)	104	58.8 ± 18.7

Large variations in Brain Health Best Practice Scores were observed among different industry types, with mean scores ranging from 40.8 for governmental organizations to 60.5 for financial service companies (Table 3).

Table 3: A comparison of Brain Health Best Practice Score by Industry.

	n	Brain Health Score (X ± SD)
Education	58	47.3 ± 22.5
Financial services	37	60.5 ± 20.6
Government	52	40.8 ± 16.3
Hospitals/Healthcare clinics	36	48.1 ± 22.6
Manufacturing	34	41.2 ± 20.0
Other services	55	41.5 ± 19.9
Tech/professional services	68	47.0 ± 20.3
Identified as High Tech	90	50.7 ± 21.0
Not identified as High Tech	294	44.6 ± 20.9

Brain Health Best Practice Scores differed among organizations with varying proportions of remote workforce. Overall, the organizations that reported being fully in-person scored the lowest of all groups with a score of 37.0. By contrast, organizations that reported 25-49% of their employees regularly work remotely reported the highest average score of 54.7. Table 4 displays the Brain Health Best Practice Score for all remote workforce categories.

Table 4: A Comparison of Brain Health Best Practice Score by Percent of Workforce that Regularly Working Remote.

	n	Brain Health Score (X ± SD)
Fully in-person	38	37.0 ± 21.2
<25% remote	150	46.5 ± 20.6
25% to <50% remote	54	54.7 ± 21.5
50% to <75% remote	39	47.4 ± 20.2
75% + remote	70	42.9 ± 19.9

The comparison by U.S. geographic regions revealed minimal differences in the Brain Health Best Practice Score by region (Northeastern 47.2 ± 22.4, Midwest 46.1 ± 22.2, Southern 44.4 ± 21.0, West 47.0 ± 20.0). Similarly, there were minimal differences in the Brain Health Best Practice Score by the percent of female in the workforce. Organizations with ≤40% of employees that are female scored the lowest (43.3 ± 21.6), whereas organizations with similar percentages of male and female employees and those with ≥60%

female employees scored slightly higher (41-59% female = 48.5 ± 19.3, ≥60% female = 47.4 ± 22.7). Finally, the average Brain Health Best Practice Score was found to be comparable between organizations that report an average employee age above 43 years (45.9 ± 22.1) and those with an average employee age ≤ 43 years (46.9 ± 21.0).

Overall, these findings highlight numerous opportunities for improvement in the implementation, promotion, and evaluation of workforce health and well-being initiatives to address brain health. Insights from neuroscience highlight the connection between physical health, mental health, and brain health. Organizations need to understand these connections in order to develop successful workforce health and well-being initiatives that positively impact the brain health of their workforce, ultimately leading to more healthy, happy, and productive employees. The HERO Scorecard's Brain Health Best Practice Score can act as an educational tool to help organizations better understand how practices related to physical health, mental health, social connection, etc. are associated with brain health. Further, it can help inform an organization's strategic plan by identifying areas of opportunity in which new programs, policies, and interventions can be implemented with the goal of improving workforce brain health. Organizations are encouraged to take the HERO Scorecard annually to measure progress and identify new areas of opportunity and focus [5,6].

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