


Analyzing Behavioral Implications of Face Mask Wearing to Slow COVID-19 in Organizational Workplaces

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ABSTRACT

As a global struggle against COVID-19 played out over the past few years, we analyzed the policy and tactics required to follow the recommendations of scientists and health professionals to achieve physical and psychological well-being by wearing masks to slow the spread of the SARS-CoV-2. While today's conversations have turned largely to vaccinations more than masks, we may find that the behavioral implications have similarities. An online survey from a business-focused social media network is employed to understand the issues for and against mask wearing. The survey findings showed that 60% of organizations have created some kind of health pact, pledge, or commitment and that most plans identified impact everyone who interacts with a business, not just employees. The findings do not shed much light on what drives people to opt out of mask wearing. The practical findings are that there is a need for achieving, understanding, and subsequent buy in of mask wearing that would be helped with a solid plan. The limitations of the research are primarily the small size of the convenience sample and the fact that the population may be restricted. Replication of this type of study with a formal, qualitative approach aimed at populations of interest is highly recommended.

KEYWORDS

Acceptance, COVID-19, Mask, Plan, Policy, SARS-CoV-2, Science, Social Distance

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has challenged individuals and organizations resulting in a public health crisis that plays out every day in workplaces across the country. From hospitals to hotels, salons to schools, grocery stores to gas stations, organizations are struggling with how to manage the decision making, policy making and implementation of necessary COVID-19 safety protocols to keep businesses open and customers healthy. This environment demonstrates a need for U.S. researchers to focus on the perceptions of the population toward mask wearing, policy making and enforcement, prosocial behaviors, trust, and emotional intelligence within the workplaces that drive our economy. There are many questions to be answered in terms of achieving physical and psychological well-being by

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wearing masks to slow the spread of the SARS-CoV-2. There is an obvious need for national action plans to address the pandemic.

Scientists, health professionals, and key leaders across the Nation are searching for answers to acceptance or rejection of mask wearing as we address the COVID-19 pandemic. Science tells us that the work environment is physically and psychologically improved because of wearing masks to protect ourselves and those with whom we come in contact. Statistics have consistently shown that mask wearing, along with other measures like hand washing and social distancing, slows the spread of SARS-CoV-2. The research described in this article represents a first attempt at understanding the dynamics of mask wearing in workplaces.

This project analyzes the policy and tactics organizations are implementing to follow the recommendations of scientists and health professionals to fight the pandemic. This survey used qualitative information to provide an early look at what organizations are doing, and how their efforts are received by their workforces. An online survey from a business-focused social media network is employed to understand perceptions of people for and against mask wearing, building on anecdotal insights provided by chief communications officers from U.S. organizations. This research collects and analyzes organizational views from employees and from top and middle managers. The important consideration is whether organizations have made decisions to mandate or encourage mask wearing via an institutional pact, pledge, or commitment, and the rationale and enforcement of that decision.

The research focuses on the speed with which organizations have moved to establish organizational standards for behavior, to whom they apply, the motivation to act in concert with expectations, and the reasons for non-compliance. Future research can build on the insights found via these early steps.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The goal is to create a recommended path forward for organizations seeking to create physically and psychologically safe workspaces. To that end, the researchers tested a survey on a small group of professionals, then sent it out on LinkedIn requesting participation. The survey was titled “Mask Wearing in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Searching for Answers.” The request for participation appears below.

As the Nation works through the COVID-19 pandemic, scientists and health professionals tell us that wearing masks is helpful in creating a physically and psychologically safe environment to protect personal health and the wellness of others. Two researchers have created a short survey to understand the dynamics of mask wearing in workplaces.

The primary inquiry seeks organizational views from employees and from top and middle managers. The researchers want to determine whether organizations have made decisions to mandate or encourage mask wearing via an institutional pact/pledge/commitment, and the rationale and enforcement of that decision.

During testing of the survey questions, initial responses ranged from companies having some plan, mandatory or no, to having no plan. The researchers are interested in using data collected to suggest a plan of action. The researchers look forward to analyzing the data and drawing some conclusions.

We hope you will decide to participate. Your responses are completely anonymous with absolutely no way of identifying any participants. Once you have started the survey, you may end participation at any time.

Twenty-two people completed the survey in the two weeks it was offered on the social media site. The questions were:

1. Has your organization created some type of Health Pact/Pledge/Commitment? If you answer no, please proceed to Question 6.
2. To whom is it applicable (employees only, or visitors/guests/contractors/etc.)? Please check all that apply.

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