UPnGO with ParticipACTION
Building active workplaces

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Introduction
At ParticipACTION, the goal is to get 10% of Canadians sitting less and moving more by 2020. Such a lofty goal requires effective, measurable physical activity interventions that meet people where they are in their busy lives. Lamentably, most Canadians are sedentary for 69% of their day1 — and much of this time is spent sitting at work. Sitting for long periods has been found to be associated with increased risks of developing heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, obesity and some cancers.2,3 So whether we are in front of a computer, on the phone or in a meeting, we need to change how we work.

Introducing UPnGO with ParticipACTION, a workplace physical activity program that aims to make physical activity both accepted and expected at work. It has been shown to foster an active workplace, specifically targeting relatively inactive and sedentary employees, and has armed participants with practical tools of behaviour change to help sustain the positive habits that UPnGO with ParticipACTION aims to develop.4

UPnGO with ParticipACTION began its development with a healthy grounding in behaviour change theory. Specifically, the intervention is guided by the Behaviour Change Wheel framework,5 which suggests that individual’s physical activity behaviour is influenced by capability, opportunity and motivation. The 6-week pilot program consists of three essential program elements: 1) education and training on physical activity behaviour change skills, 2) real-world physical activity opportunities, and 3) senior leadership support of engagement in UPnGO with ParticipACTION and physical activity at the workplace.

The program is delivered to employees through a digital platform and mobile application, as well as through off-platform activities, such as onsite weekly walking activities and real-life challenges. The digital platform allows participants to self-monitor daily steps by using a wearable step-tracking device, to complete activities related to goalsetting and action planning, and to engage in light competition and social support with colleagues. UPnGO with ParticipACTION provides employees with weekly challenges and

SUMMARY
To combat sedentary behaviour and support physical activity opportunities in the workplace, ParticipACTION developed UPnGO with ParticipACTION — a workplace physical activity program that aims to make physical activity acceptable and the norm in the workplace.

Currently in its piloting phase, this article provides an overview of the program and successes in pilot worksites.

Cover photo: Executives from Canadian Press play a game of horseshoes during Week 4’s UPnGO Outside recess theme.
personalized step goals based on their self-described level of activity and sitting time. UPnGO with ParticipACTION then rewards users’ achievements with points that can be redeemed in an online store for healthy products.

There are five components of UPnGO with ParticipACTION that set the program apart from others in the workplace wellness landscape:

1. A focus on physical activity as the key wellness behaviour to impact.
2. Delivery of a theory-based, evidence-informed “curriculum” to equip participants with practical tools of personal behaviour change.
3. Personalized physical activity goal setting, tracking, challenges and rewards.
4. Utilization of an ecological approach (e.g., social and environmental strategies), which emphasizes organizational support for changes in workplace physical activity culture. Senior management provides permission (e.g., formal email communication) to encourage employees to stand, stretch, and walk outside during meetings and breaks, as well as role-modeling active behaviour themselves.
5. Timely communications and strategically placed nudges or reminders to motivate employees and create new social norms within the workplace.

The Pilot

In 2016, UPnGO with ParticipACTION launched as a pilot with two phases. The first version of the program was launched in March with five organizations in British Columbia. Following the first pilot phase, modifications to the program were made, which were informed by results and feedback from the initial pilot sites. This new, modified version of the program was then piloted at nine different organizations; five in BC and four in Ontario in the fall of 2016. This phase has just been completed and evaluation is ongoing.

Key Learnings

One unique aspect of UPnGO with ParticipACTION was the use of a rigorous process evaluation to make evidence-informed program refinements. We used web-based systems to monitor participants’ on-platform engagement, such as number of step-tracking days and number of on-site walking activities organized. Participant and stakeholder surveys and interviews were also conducted at the end of the intervention to assess participants’ perception of the UPnGO with ParticipACTION program. Results of the UPnGO with ParticipACTION phase-one pilot intervention were promising. The program demonstrated short-term positive impact on several behavioural outcomes, including a significant reduction in workday sitting time, a significant increase in motivation for physical activity, and a statistically non-significant increase in daily steps between week 1 and week 6.
Importantly, there was a positive and significant association between levels of implementation (extent to which the intervention components of UPnGO with ParticipACTION were carried out as planned) and program outcomes. When participants were categorized into high- (>60%) vs low- (<60%) implementation groups, a significant increase in average daily steps was observed in the high-implementation group, but not for the low-implementation group. This finding provides important evidence to support the design of UPnGO with ParticipACTION while also indicating the need to enhance implementation to an optimal level. These data helped us to identify the areas for program refinement including:

- enhancing communication materials to clarify program objectives, activities and incentive systems,
- adding an onboarding period to familiarize participants with program structures, UPnGO with ParticipACTION platform features, device synching and activity tracking, and
- increasing emphasis on involvement of organizational staff as change agents or “champions” to drive organizational engagement and ownership (e.g., additional incentives and training).

Data from the phase two process evaluation will investigate how these modifications impact implementation levels and program effectiveness of UPnGO with ParticipACTION.

What are Pilot Sites Saying?

UPnGO with ParticipACTION is changing culture:

“TELUS has innovation as a core value. With UPnGO, we are using the power of the Internet and innovative technology to help our team members to be active, healthy and well.”

— Steve Podborski, Director & Wellness Champion, TELUS

“UPnGO has helped us encourage our employees to be more active during the day. Employees tell us they have more energy and feel more productive. Our work is typically deskbound and mentally complex. The achievable changes encouraged each week through the UPnGO challenges are changing habits and encouraging more social time between co-workers.”

— Lynn Frazer, Vice President, Human Resources, TRADER Corporation/autoTRADER.ca

“I think this program is incredible! It has really helped our morale.”

— Sue Meester, Postmedia Workplace Contact

“There has been a positive change in the attitude of the participants in the office, and I have noticed big changes in myself as well. My legs are leaner, and I feel stronger. Never thought just walking would do this!”

— Megan McNeil, KDL Champion

UPnGO with ParticipACTION is also changing habits:

“Moving and walking has given me more energy during the day. I can’t imagine not taking breaks and sitting at my desk working all day anymore. So this has been a great idea to get people moving!”

— Judy Johnstone, BC PSA Participant
“I made the conscious effort to walk up or down to the 3rd floor or basement bathrooms (I’m on the second floor) at least once a day to get those extra steps/points in! I also ran to my gym class at lunch (instead of biking) in order to get some extra steps in, which was great as I spent more time getting fresh air. I have also been sharing the awesome-ness of this pilot study with friends in other ministries and non-government employees. Everyone is impressed that an initiative, such as this one, has had so much support from executive.”

— Amanda Ng, BC PSA Participant

What’s Next?

ParticipACTION envisions UPnGO with ParticipACTION being a vital player in the Canadian workplace wellness marketplace. UPnGO with ParticipACTION is a program that empowers companies to create active workplace cultures and drive individual behaviour change among their employees — utilizing a progressive combination of technology, rewards and on-the-ground engagement. What other programs lack — and where UPnGO with ParticipACTION excels — is in marrying the online (digital/social) world with the real-world (workplaces).

The full, UPnGO with ParticipACTION year-long program will be available to Canadian companies in 2017. Companies that are looking for wellness solutions for employees who spend the majority of their day being sedentary, generally commute to work by car or transit, and find it hard to fit physical activity into their day, will find that UPnGO with ParticipACTION can make a real shift towards an active workplace culture and individual employees’ behaviour.

At ParticipACTION, we are excited about the opportunity UPnGO with ParticipACTION creates for both employees and employers to change how we work. Ultimately, we are working towards a Canada where physical activity is a vital part of everyday life.

If you are interested in learning more about UPnGO with ParticipACTION, visit our website (https://www.participaction.com/en-ca/programs/upngo) or email us at upngo@participaction.com.

References