

Culturally Responsive Be

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Creating an inclusive workplace can make employees feel welcomed and empowered. The author explores the transformative possibilities that a culturally responsive approach to benefits can have on your organization.



Benefits in the Workplace:

Improving Health and Productivity

by | Paula Allen



Fostering a culture of inclusivity and equity is not just a noble goal but a strategic move that can significantly enhance employee well-being and drive organizational success. By reinforcing a sense of belonging and reducing turnover risk, culturally responsive practices can create a workplace where everyone feels valued and respected. This, in turn, promotes trust and boosts engagement in workplace activities and initiatives. A culture that embraces diversity through inclusive behaviours cultivates a positive work environment and significantly benefits mental health, productivity and retention. This article delves into the transformative power of inclusive benefits in shaping organizational culture and bolstering individual and organizational resilience, offering a hopeful vision of a more inclusive and productive workplace.

Takeaways

- Culturally responsive practices foster a sense of belonging, reduce turnover risk, and create a workplace where everyone feels valued and respected.
- Cultural responsiveness involves acknowledging, respecting and valuing diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives, which creates a safe environment for expression and contribution.
- Regularly assessing and improving benefit programs ensures they remain responsive and inclusive, addressing any disparities in service usage.
- Continuous effort, commitment and learning from all organizational levels are necessary to harness the benefits of cultural responsiveness and drive positive workplace change.

Understanding Cultural Responsiveness

Before delving into benefits, it is essential to understand the concept of cultural responsiveness and what it entails. Cultural responsiveness isn't about tailoring services and approaches to each of the estimated 3,800 cultural groups worldwide, many of which may be represented within a single workplace. Instead, it involves acknowledging, respecting and valuing individuals' diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives. Fundamentally, it fosters a safe environment where people can openly express their needs, feel acknowledged and avoid encountering rigid assumptions about where they belong. This same responsiveness extends to all forms of diversity, including people with or without children, people of all genders, and those with or without disabilities. It involves creating an environment where everyone feels welcomed, respected and empowered to contribute their unique talents and viewpoints. Such inclusivity is integral to establishing the psychological safety essential for optimum well-being and workplace performance.

When contemplating the significance of all this, it's essential to consider the repercussions of the opposite scenario—a culture where individuals' needs and perspectives are disregarded, undervalued or disrespected. It's doubtful that such a culture would harness the best from its people or support attraction and retention. Most certainly, it would not be conducive to a healthy work environment. In essence, the absence of cultural responsiveness contradicts our objectives for benefits. Therefore, benefits must be integral to

the efforts toward responsiveness and inclusivity.

Promoting Cultural Responsiveness

One of the primary benefits of cultural responsiveness in the workplace is its positive impact on mental health and well-being. Research has shown that employees who feel valued and supported in their cultural identities are likelier to experience lower stress and anxiety levels.^{1,2} By promoting a culture of inclusivity and responsiveness, organizations can create a supportive environment where employees feel comfortable seeking help and addressing health issues proactively. This, in turn, can lead to increased productivity and job satisfaction, as employees are more focused and engaged when their mental health needs are met.

An example of where responsiveness in our approach to benefits is in how we can address stigma. Stigma regarding mental health exists in various forms and at different levels in pretty much every culture. While levels of stigma may vary from one culture to another, the differences within a cultural group may sometimes be more significant than between groups. Some may prefer mental health supports that feel less stigmatizing, such as those that offer entry points through physical and mental health services, those with peer support, and digital options where their face isn't shown. Using language that emphasizes situations rather than mental health labels is also likely to engage those individuals who are susceptible to stigma as well as cultures that are particularly prone.

Another example of responsiveness is the ability to choose the type of health support and the professional provider. Well-being spending accounts allow for the flexibility to choose culturally specific therapies and give significant empowerment to the individual. The ability to leverage traditional Chinese, Indigenous or other therapies recognizes the value and importance of such approaches to health. Also, the ability for individuals to choose their counsellor based on the counsellor's background has proven valuable in helping to ease potential anxiety regarding the counselling process. These are both scalable and impactful options responsive to individual needs and preferences.

An effective practice in any program development includes having focus groups to understand the needs of a group and test solutions. This is a natural way to determine whether you are on the right path for your population. Each group has a unique makeup, and benefits that do not resonate are wasted benefits. Focus groups are also valuable when it comes to language. The objective of language is to explain and promote benefits. It must be unambiguous for the group and shaped in a relatable way. If virtually every successful commercial marketing campaign uses feedback from their target population to refine messaging and promote success, we should also use such feedback for the success of our benefit campaigns.

Care navigation is a high-value service that simplifies the sometimes complex process of piecing together fragmented services and benefits. Another opportunity for care navigation is responding to unique needs. With that, it is a highly rated resource that addresses many issues, including culturally responsive benefits.

The Importance of Continuous Improvement

For those of us who come from business backgrounds where the idea of continuous improvement is ingrained, this approach is also applicable to culturally responsive benefits. To strengthen the responsiveness of an organization's benefits program, these critical questions need to be answered on an ongoing basis:

- Are there any groups that use services at a much lower level than others?
- Do we know why?
- What is the process for responding to concerns?
- Are concerns dealt with in isolation, or do they inform improvements?

It is important to keep in mind that responsiveness and inclusivity form the foundation of equity. Health equity plays a vital role in better health outcomes, a factor that shouldn't be overlooked.

Prioritizing a Healthy Workplace

Focusing solely on individual health support is only one aspect of a comprehensive workplace health strategy. Neglecting the impact of workplace experiences would be a significant omission. From a programming perspective, prioritizing manager training is not just valuable but arguably indispensable. Managers play a pivotal role in shaping employees' experiences, and when their behaviours are aligned, it greatly influences organizational culture.

Through the research conducted by TELUS Health in the TELUS Mental Health Index, we have found that five behavioural traits are associated with better mental well-being and productivity among employees:

1. Inclusive behaviour
2. Showing an orientation and prioritization of the success of the team instead of individuals or themselves
3. Showing empathy and kindness
4. Demonstrating purpose and inspiration
5. The ability to make decisions with autonomy.

Each of these behavioural traits can be developed with awareness and training. The first three are foundational and align strongly with a responsive and inclusive culture.

Mitigating Turnover Costs

Cultural responsiveness plays a crucial role in mitigating turnover costs by fostering a sense of belonging and loyalty among employees. When individuals feel included and valued in the workplace, they are less likely to seek opportunities elsewhere. This reduces recruitment and training costs associated with employee turnover and contributes to a more stable and cohesive workforce. Among several long-established points of evidence on this,^{3,4} Deloitte found that organizations with inclusive cultures are twice as likely to meet or exceed financial targets, three times as likely to be high-performing, six times more likely to be innovative and agile, and eight times more likely to achieve better business outcomes. These positive organizational outcomes contribute to lower turnover rates.⁵

Additional Strategies

Building a culturally responsive workplace requires a concerted effort from organizational leaders and employees at all levels. Here are some strategies to foster cultural responsiveness and reap its benefits:

1. **Leadership Commitment:** Senior leaders should demonstrate a strong commitment to equity and inclusion in their actions, their language, and what they do and do not support.
2. **Training and Development:** Besides manager training, employee training and development can counter unconscious bias, build cultural competency and foster inclusive environments.
3. **Open Communication Channels:** Create open communication channels where employees feel comfortable sharing their experiences, concerns and suggestions for improving cultural responsiveness in the workplace.
4. **Supportive Policies and Practices:** In addition to reviewing benefit structures, review and update organizational policies and practices to ensure they are inclusive and equitable for employees from diverse backgrounds.
5. **Employee Resource Groups:** Establish employee resource groups or affinity networks to support individuals and provide input on organizational opportunities.
6. **Continuous Evaluation and Improvement:** Regularly assess the effectiveness of cultural responsiveness initiatives, and solicit employee feedback to identify improvement areas and make necessary adjustments.

Conclusion

Embracing cultural responsiveness in the workplace yields numerous benefits, from promoting mental health and well-being to enhancing productivity and retention. By fostering an inclusive and equitable work environment where every individual feels valued and respected, organizations can unlock the full potential of their diverse work-

BIO

Paula Allen is the global leader and senior vice president of research and client insights at TELUS Health and leads a team of data scientists, researchers and experts in various areas of health and communications strategy. Building on a clinical background, Allen is a well-recognized expert in all areas of workplace mental health and has more than 20 years of experience relating to workplace research, disability management, health consulting, product development and operational leadership.



force and create a thriving culture of belonging. Through collective effort, commitment and continuous learning, organizations can harness the power of cultural responsiveness to drive positive change and success in the modern workplace. In all of this, culturally inclusive benefits are a vital component. 🌐

Endnotes

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