ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

Year 7 - number 264 Wednesday 25 october 2023

Creating a work environment that supports employees' mental health

The mental well-being of employees is not only an ethical responsibility, but a strategic imperative for companies. Let's take a look at why, what methods are used and the benefits

In today's fast-paced and competitive working world, **employee mental health** has become a central issue in companies. The speed and pace of the working world puts a strain on workers who are subjected to ever-increasing levels of stress. In addition, remote working makes the line between life and work increasingly blurred, leading HR managers to prioritise the well-being and mental health of employees.

Taking care of employees' mental well-being is indeed good not only for productivity, but also for more loyal and motivated employees.

In this article, we explore why this topic is so important, what strategies companies adopt to **create a healthy work environment** that takes care of the mental and psychological well-being of employees, and the benefits companies can gain from implementing these strategies.

The importance of employee mental health

To understand the importance of the topic of mental health for companies and employees, let us look at some data.

- Approximately **15% of adults of working age have dealt with a mental disorder at work**, this corresponds to more than 1 in 6 people.
- Globally, an estimated **12 billion working days are lost each year due to depression and anxiet**y, costing $1 trillion per year in lost productivity.
- The survey published in the report 'Future Workplace 2021 HR Sentiment Survey' found that **68 per cent of HR managers consider employee well-being and mental health a top priority**.
- The **corporate wellness market** is now estimated at $20.4 billion in the US and is expected to grow to $87.4 billion by 2026.

These data are impressive, especially to think that the working environment creates psychological disorders for more than one in six people. This is why it is important to understand what strategies we can adopt to focus more attention on this issue and offer the necessary tools to those who need them.

Strategies to promote a healthy working environment

Companies use different strategies to promote and support the psychological well-being of employees, below we see strategies that are suggested by international organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), the UK mental health foundation and the HR industry report 'Future Workplace 2021 HR Sentiment Survey'.

1. Promoting mental health awareness

The journey to better mental health starts with **awareness** and **understanding**. Managers should initiate conversations about mental health to eliminate the stigma that this topic carries and **promote a corporate culture that is open to accepting psychological problems**. To do this, managers should actively promote the topic of mental health through workshops, seminars, training sessions and regular meetings on available mental health resources.

Not only that, the company should foster a physical space to provide the opportunity for regular meetings where employees can openly discuss their concerns and share their experiences.

Providing a physical space for these issues is crucial to encourage employees to recognise and seek help for mental health problems at an early stage.

2. Providing employee assistance programmes

Many companies offer **assistance programmes** to provide counselling, support and resources to employees facing mental health problems. These programmes can be invaluable for people dealing with stress, anxiety or other mental health issues, as they offer confidential and professional assistance.

3. Management training

Another key element in caring for employees' mental wellbeing is **training managers to recognise the signs of mental health problems** in their team members and to offer support. Providing managers with the tools to deal effectively with mental health problems can make a significant difference in employee well-being. Managers should conduct **regular one-to-one follow-ups** with their team members to discuss workload, job satisfaction and general well-being. These conversations can help identify early signs of stress or burnout and enable managers to offer appropriate support.

4. Encouraging work-life balance

Managers must set an example when it comes to maintaining a **healthy work-life balance**. They should encourage employees to take paid leave, to unplug when off duty and to avoid excessive overtime.

Not only that, managers should also offer support to employees who need to attend to personal matters, attend medical appointments or take care of family needs.

Another strategy used by companies is to offer flexible working arrangements such as remote working, flexitime or a compressed working week. These options can help employees manage their work-life balance and reduce stress, contributing to better mental health. In addition, flexible working can increase job satisfaction and productivity.

5. Offer stress management resources

Offering **stress management** resources such as meditation and mindfulness programmes, access to a quiet room or even a gym is another way to take care of employees' mental well-being. Exercise and relaxation techniques can help employees manage stress and anxiety, contributing to better mental health.

More and more companies are ensuring that employees have easy access to mental health resources, both within the company and externally, and provide information and support on mental health services and local helplines.

6. Mental health days

A popular strategy in the US is to give employees **'mental health days'**, i.e. days off to devote to their mental health, without requiring a specific reason. This recognises the importance of mental wellbeing and reduces the stigma associated with mental health days off.

The benefits of taking care of employees' mental wellbeing

Within companies, mental health is crucial for several reasons: it has a direct impact on the well-being and performance of employees, as well as on the overall health and productivity of the organisation itself. Below we look at some of the benefits a company can gain from taking care of its employees' mental health.

Employee well-being and productivity

When employees enjoy good mental health, they are more likely to be satisfied, engaged and motivated, resulting in an improved quality of life. Indeed, **psychological well-being has been shown to have a direct impact on work performance**.

Reduces absenteeism and presenteeism

A stressful and psychologically overwhelming work environment often leads to absenteeism (employees absent themselves from work due to mental health problems) and presenteeism (employees are physically present at work but are not fully productive due to mental health problems). These problems are among the most common in a work environment that does not consider employees' mental health and can lead to significant productivity losses and increased health care costs.

Team dynamics

A mentally healthy workforce tends to improve **relationships** and **teamwork**. Employees are more likely to collaborate effectively and communicate openly, which leads to a more harmonious working environment.

Innovation and creativity

Good mental health is often associated with higher levels of **creativity and innovation**. When employees are mentally well, they are more likely to think outside the box and find new solutions to problems.

Corporate culture

Mental health initiatives help create a positive corporate culture that values employee well-being. This, in turn, can attract the best candidates and improve the organisation's reputation.

Reducing conflicts in the workplace

A focus on mental health can help **reduce workplace conflicts** and problems related to stress, burnout or interpersonal conflicts. This can lead to a more harmonious and productive working environment.