A CULTURE OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The challenge of integrating cultures following a merger or acquisition has received intense scrutiny in recent years. One key aspect that has received less attention, however, is what we call "culture of health."

While the meaning of "culture of health" differs depending on each company's unique personality and priorities, Optum® defines it as a work environment where employees have resources, tools and a support system that empowers and motivates them to take responsibility for their own health.

Well-designed wellness programs can help employers create a culture of health in the workplace. It creates an environment that encourages employees to perform at their best while enabling healthy choices throughout the workday.

Thanks to advances in health technology and behavioral-change science, achieving a culture of health at work seems more possible than ever. Yet many organizations continue to struggle to reach this goal.

What behaviors and attitudes set apart those employers who feel they've established a culture of health among their employees?

To find out, Optum partnered with the National Business Group on Health to perform an analysis based on the Optum annual "Wellness in the Workplace" study.

We identified several differences between companies that feel they've firmly established a culture of health and those that feel they have not.

Strategy
Nearly three-fourths of companies with an established culture of health view their health and wellness programs as important to their overall business strategy.

Motivation
The reasons for offering health and wellness programs are also revealing. Companies with an established health culture focus on promoting a more productive workplace, offering a competitive benefits package and improving employee morale.

Planning and budgeting
The two kinds of organizations also differ markedly in planning and budgeting. For instance, half of the employers with an established culture of health have a formal wellness plan. Additionally, 61% of firms with an established culture of health expect to increase their health and wellness program

Optum® research has found that employees are more engaged in work and loyal to companies that have a well-established culture of health.

Reasons for offering health and wellness programs differ among companies with an established culture of health and those without one.
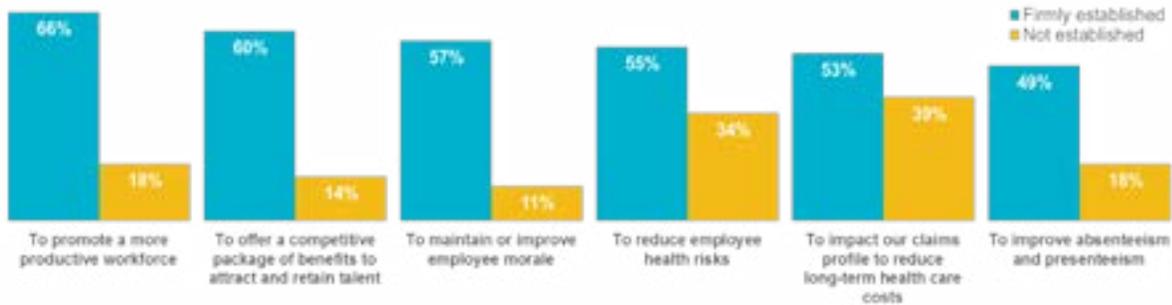
budget within the next three years.

Holistic approach to well-being

Companies with a culture of health offer their employees wellness programs that encompass a holistic view of their health. For example, 75% offer programs addressing behavioral health, 78% social health and 75% financial health.

Women's health

Employers with a culture of health are also more likely to offer fertility, maternity, neonatal and other women's health programs.

Healthy work environment

Six out of 10 companies with a culture of health recently made physical changes to their work environment. The top environmental changes made by companies with an established health culture include healthier food/beverage options in vending machines, indoor walking paths, healthy catering options for meetings and ergonomic standing desks.

Digital technology

With easier access to technology, the adoption of digital engagement strategies has grown dramatically. Nearly all employers that have an established culture of health use some form of employee engagement technology, such as mobile messaging, activity trackers, health-related mobile apps and social networks.

Confidence in employees

Employers with an established culture are more likely to believe that their employees are confident healthcare consumers. For example, nearly two-thirds believe that their employees know how to navigate the healthcare system (64% vs. 11% for firms without a health culture), take responsibility for their overall well-being (59% vs. 5%), and feel that they have enough money to pay for healthcare in retirement (45% vs. 2%).

Conclusion

While there is no magic bullet to creating a culture of health, there is a formal process for assessing culture and a set of best practice approaches to building that culture. Employers that have achieved it tend to focus on a variety of drivers, including communication, employee morale, senior management buy-in, tracking return on investment, strategic planning and dedicated staff.

They also understand that establishing a culture of health can lead to more productive, satisfied and loyal employees.

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