



Promoting Psychological Health While Going Through Change

Change within your organization can occur in many ways.

As our society progresses, so does every organization's need to better address the changing complexity and composition of its employees. These changes can affect a number of aspects of your organization (1), including diversity, inclusivity, health and wellness, structuring, and technological development.

Today's employers are typically handling three to four generations of employees concurrently, creating potential challenges in terms of helping all employees transition to any new work model or structure. As an organization, it's vital to support employees and members of the organization through these changes, empowering them to embrace new ways of growing, communicating, and executing tasks.

Preparation for change

Change within your organization can have a huge impact on employees, both physically and psychologically. Stress for some employees, as well as potential mental health issues, can be triggered by sudden, unplanned developments. (2) Therefore, it's vital for leaders within your organization to inform employees of any requisite changes.

Proper preparation for change can occur by observing the following steps:

1. **Set expectations.** Let your employees know what will be expected of them moving forward, including any expectations regarding their new roles, technology, and skill development.
2. **Recognize their efforts:** Congratulate your employees on the hard work they've done within your organization, and let them know that the changes are positive. It may also be helpful to frame the changes as a possible reward for all of the hard work they've done.
3. **Be specific:** Let your employees know exactly what changes will be occurring so that there are no surprises.
4. **Break changes into steps:** Give all of your employees the opportunity to adjust to the changes before they take full effect.
5. **Listen to, and be open to, feedback:** Some employees may have additional difficulties with adjusting to the changes. If this is the case, be open to addressing their concerns and suggestions.

In addition to being properly prepared for change, it's important to be aware of why changes occur in the first place. Organizational changes can occur as a result of either internal or external factors, which can include company growth, economic factors (e.g. recessions), a shift in company policy, or the appointment of a new C-Suite employee (e.g. CEO).

Conflict resolution and prevention

Even when fully prepared, some employees may not welcome the changes and this can ultimately create tension within your organization. Therefore, a viable and established EFAP program is an organization's primary solution for preventing and dealing with any potential conflict as a result of necessary change. (3)

When working through these changes, listening and addressing employee concerns are essential steps to developing trust within your organization. In addition to having your HR department at the ready, all leaders within your organization must be prepared to take stock of any miscommunications or misunderstandings, and offer solutions, whenever possible.

While navigating conflicts, a mediator should be appointed, if possible, in the event that an easy solution is not attainable. Ultimately, your HR department and the leaders within your organization are responsible for supporting employees through any changes and moderating any potential conflict that may occur.

Supporting psychological wellness through change

For employees with mental health concerns, major changes can elevate anxiety, and in some cases, feel traumatic. In order to decrease the chance of any employee experiencing mental health issues, it's important to aim your organization's focus on employee well-being.

To accomplish this, your organization must ensure that all employees transition through the changes safely, both physically and mentally. This assurance will often ensure greater productivity and creativity while working through the transition.

This means that preventative care through EFAP services is crucial. (4) Prevention initiatives may include:

1. **Nutrition:** This includes access to healthy and nutritious meals and snacks, as well as nutritional consultations, when necessary and applicable.
2. **Health and wellness opportunities:** These specific services may include discounted membership rates, online or onsite tutorials or learning sessions.
3. **Counselling services.** Having counselling services available on-site is crucial for any employee who requires immediate access to them, especially in the event of a crisis.

Mental health challenges can be prevented

Approximately 47% of employees in Canada say that their job is the most stressful aspect of their life. (5) In the United States, 25% of employees say the same.

In addition, approximately 23% of employees say that they feel comfortable speaking to their employer or HR department about the nature of this stress, which is a relatively low number, considering the number of people in the workforce. In cases of change within the organization, the stress can increase significantly.

Preventative measures offer the opportunity for employees to realize their full potential and provide them with motivation to help them attain peak performance. (6) These also include addressing and identifying potential psychological triggers, including whether or not mental stresses and conditions may have worsened as a result of the changes within your organization.

Creating a psychologically safe and healthy work environment and empowering management to debrief is essential for ensuring a smoother transition for all employees, including those who may be working with mental health challenges.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges that some major organizational changes may present, it's important to make transitions within your organization as the most positive experience possible for employees of all ages and backgrounds.

Maintaining transparency will help all employees prepare, and provide additional support for any employees who may need psychological preparation. Your regard for the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of employees, before, during, and after a major transition in your organization can help to ensure a healthy, productive work environment in the future.

References:

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