Checklist: Supporting Mental Health Inclusivity in the Workplace

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Mental health is an essential aspect of employee well-being, and came into sharper focus as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and all of its fallout. While the stigma surrounding mental health issues has previously caused many employees to want to keep these issues private, there are concrete steps that employers can take to support employee mental health.

Not only is supporting mental health the "right thing to do," but companies have an incentive to foster a safe and supportive workspace for all employees in order to reduce employee attrition and training costs, attract new employees in a competitive environment, and create a culture of inclusivity that allows employees to fully contribute and innovate. For public companies, shareholder proposals on this topic are becoming more prevalent. In addition, large asset managers want companies to disclose how boards are overseeing corporate culture and may support shareholder proposals or vote against relevant directors if companies appear to lag their peers.

Employers can positively contribute to employee well-being through working practices, resource availability, and leading by example. It's also essential to assess and address any gaps among employee groups. Below are ways companies can support mental health inclusivity in the workplace.

1. ## Encourage a Healthy Work-Life Balance for All

   Business productivity and your employees' well-being do not have to be at odds. To promote a better work-life balance for all employees, be flexible as much as possible with working hours to accommodate employees' family appointments and differences in working preferences. In addition, encourage employees to take regular short breaks. Having intervals throughout the day to enjoy some tea, change scenery, or take a power nap will help your employees reduce their stress and anxiety levels and boost their productivity.

2. <u>Track Employee Mental Health</u>

Include questions to measure mental health in your employee engagement survey. Ask questions that measure awareness of mental health resources and the organization's mental health support. Disaggregate ratings by race and gender to understand any gaps in the well-being of your employee groups. Don't forget to use 1-1 check-ins as opportunities to gauge the well-being of your employees and understand the support that managers need to provide. Here are some rating survey questions (ratings on a spectrum from strongly agree to strongly disagree):

- Our culture supports my health and well-being.
- My job gives me the flexibility to meet the needs of both my work and personal life.
- I have a clear understanding of the mental health resources and services available to me.
- The mental health resources and services offered here meet my and my family's needs.

3. <u>Give Employees Access to More Robust Support Services</u>

Ensure that all employees are aware of the mental health resources available to them. Provide mental health education and informational sessions about various topics that impact employee mental health, such as how to avoid burnout, stress management, time management, meditation, and mindfulness.

Employee assistance programs (EAPs) can be useful because they help employees deal with challenges ranging from relationship troubles to financial concerns. They usually offer counseling and bereavement support and legal and medical information. Check to see if your EAP offers services that your employees from underserved backgrounds may need, such as healing spaces through informed therapy and faith communities. Also, gauge which employees are taking advantage of the EAP services. If you find that your EAP services fall short of your employees' needs, consider additional resources you can provide. There are plenty of providers that deliver a

range of helpful tools that make it easier and more accessible for employees to look after their health.

4. **<u>Assess Your Benefits Program to Ensure Mental Health is Included</u>**

Review your health benefits program to ensure that you provide mental health services. Ask the following questions:

- Do your benefits offerings (such as your EAP) include sufficient mental health resources?
- Are you measuring employee engagement with your mental health resources and any gaps that may exist in your employee groups?
- Are there additional mental health resources that you can be provided to your employees?

5. **<u>Conduct Psychological Safety Training</u>**

Companies should train managers on how to communicate about race, diversity, and inclusion and how to support their teams when traumatic events related to race, gender, or other dimensions of diversity occur. Equip managers with training to sharpen their deep-listening skills. Ensure managers understand how racism and exclusion are unconsciously carried out and teach skills for managers to disrupt their bias and the bias of others. This training should be communicated along with the importance of the company's culture and employee mental health, and treated as an asset to leaders looking to advance in the organization.

6. **<u>Acknowledge & Address Current Events and the Context of Racial History</u>**

When traumatic events that affect underrepresented communities occur, leaders and their organizations can acknowledge what's happening and reduce work-related pressure for employees these events may directly impact. Companies should include this aspect of communication in their management training, but support often can

begin with simple questions like, "How are you doing?" or "What do you need?" – at the management and company-wide level. Companies can create environments that promote meaningful discussion of what's going on by encouraging managers to check in with affected employees and fully listen and by acknowledging the potential impact with a succinct company-wide message.

7. **<u>Support Managers to Lead by Example</u>**

Managers' actions set a precedent for the rest of the business and should reflect how the board and executive team wants the workforce to operate. For example, suppose managers work crazy long hours, avoid taking breaks, and reply to emails on holidays and personal vacations. In that case, not only is the management team likely to burn out and pass that on to direct reports, but they also are not modeling a good balance for the rest of the organization.

If the company has determined that well-being is a valued part of its culture – and communicates to employees, prospective employees and shareholders – it is risky to encourage or allow managers to conduct their day-to-day work in a way that cuts against that. That means that workflows need to be monitored throughout all levels of the organization, so that managers also have the support and structure they need to be able to complete their work within reasonable hours.