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The struggle to put culture into a neatly defined box

Brokers know all too well that even the best benefits plan can be derailed by ill-fitting company culture.

By Natalie Dolce | August 18, 2021



Be intentional on what you are trying to create culture-wise and make sure your people believe in what you believe. (Photo: Torrey Schenewerk, GCS Photography Inc.)

Imagine, if you will, a company that makes culture its top priority instead of, say, revenue generation or product development. What would such an initiative look like? Surely, it would be similar in that it would be measurable with definable goals and ROI. Not necessarily, say the experts at a panel at BenefitsPRO Broker EXPO 2021. Many of the industry's most recognized benefits leaders tackled the hard questions surrounding the C's in our not-so "new" normal: culture, communication and creativity.

"I see a lot of clients wanting to see immediate ROI on it and that isn't possible in my opinion," said Andrew McNeil of Arrow Benefits Group. "If you see things working smoothly, that is the ROI but it doesn't happen overnight."

Also rid yourself of the notion that culture is easy to quantify, said Eric Silverman of Voluntary Disruption. "It is up to the employer to define what that culture is and then share it downstream."

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Yet companies don't have to be convinced that culture and the other intangible major Cs — creativity and communication — are integral to their operations.

Here too, though, companies find a definitive plan of action can be evasive. There is no one-size-fits-all solution from a communication perspective, according to Ed Ligonde of Nielsen Benefits Group.

"I am a visual learner myself. I need to be in front of something to understand it," said Ligonde. "Everyone learns things differently and communication and trying to think of a way to communicate to the masses is key because we work with both multigenerational and multicultural audiences."

These subtleties in communication and culture can be a drawback, though, when a company tries to tackle important initiatives such as DEI, the panelists said.

So many employers that brokers work with don't seem to want to put an emphasis on DEI and don't know where to start, McNeil said. "There is no one size fits all," he continued. "What we say is you need to look at the needs of your organization and who within your organization can help you."

The media doesn't help either, said Ligonde, who noted it does a great job of taking these positive movements and making them seem gimmicky. "It isn't a true story of what is going on internally. I have seen it with some employers. That is damaging to your culture at the end of the day."

His best advice to companies about DEI and other initiatives: Be intentional on what you are trying to create culture-wise and make sure your people believe in what you believe. If they don't, he continued, it is ok if they leave. "You want to be around people who buy into the mission that you believe."

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