



THE
HEALTHY
BUSINESS
BRIDGE

How employee health
creates business wealth

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CHAPTER 3 : INVESTMENT IN PEOPLE

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1. PEOPLE ARE A COMPANY'S GREATEST ASSET

How often do we hear that phrase? Yes, we know that no business can function without its people - its employees. We are also aware that cost comes into the business on two feet. We understand that absent employees and underperforming employees are a direct cost to the business. How much do we appreciate the hidden indirect costs within the business associated with these direct costs?

For example, the direct cost of sickness absence in the UK in 2013 was quoted as being £29 billion (PWC) and has continued to increase. The cost of stress alone in the UK in 2013 was quoted as being £6.5 billion. Taking a typical absent employee, consider the hidden indirect costs to the business that arise from the underperformance of colleagues who are doing their own work as well as helping to carry out the absentee's work. This indirect cost can be up to 3 times the direct cost of the absent employee.

Today, the economic value of people being at work and being productive has never been more important, as well as the benefits for individuals of having a job and feeling valued and earning.

We, as human beings, are like trees in the forest - some tall, some small, some fat, some thin; but we are all individuals with our individual needs. Each of us has unique requirements for water and nutrients to allow us to grow to our full potential. How can a business help employees achieve their full potential? It is enlightened self-interest for any business to help employees to achieve their full potential since the benefits to the employer are clear.

Organisations today are facing many challenges. Not only are many of them now working within the global market place as leaner organisations; but they need to encourage and obtain the optimum performance and productivity from each and every one in their organisation if they are to meet their business and profit goals.

This requires not only ensuring the optimum state of physical health of all employees but also the optimum state of psychological wellbeing. Employers need to help all of their employees to understand the changes taking place in the business and how to manage these changes from their perspective within their organisation. This requires training in change management for all employees so that they themselves can manage the change and contribute to the success of the business. However, the training in change management alone will not define success.

The vision of the business needs to be communicated throughout the organisation to ensure that all employees share that vision and are engaged with the organisation so that they can contribute to the achievement of its business goals. In this way, employees will feel valued and involved in knowing that what they do will contribute to the business achieving its goals.

Story:

Recently, a corporate client - the UK arm of a global organisation - purchased a company in the UK resulting in many changes with the integration of the new business. The MD had the vision and said that he had communicated this vision to his senior managers. However, after several employees had been seen by Occupational Health, the reality was different. These employees were under great pressure from the organisational changes which resulted in an increased workload for all. Since they did not know the vision for the organisation, they became disengaged from it and started to develop symptoms of stress and distress. It was clear that some action was needed.

Following the occupational physician's discussion with the Managing Director, a change management education programme was introduced by him throughout the business to ensure that all employees had an understanding of his vision. The effect was dramatic. When the managers started to communicate this vision to their team members and the changes that they needed to adopt to ensure they were engaged in achieving their goals, they felt valued and motivated and started to suggest new ideas to achieve the business goals.

They felt proud to belong to the business and to help the organisation to achieve its business goals and continuing profitability. This improved not only the productivity of the employees but also the brand identity of the business in the community, with employees talking to friends in their community about their important contribution to the success of the business that they worked in. How do you think that this contributed to making them the employer of choice in the area?



2. DEVELOPMENT AND FITNESS FOR THE JOB IN THE UK OR ABROAD

Employers have by law a duty of care to all their employees, whether working in the United Kingdom or abroad. It is important to assess the physical and mental health of a potential new employee once the job has been offered to the candidate. To do so before the job has been offered may be seen as discriminating against the candidate under the disability aspects of the Equality Act 2010. The purpose of the pre-placement health assessment using, in most instances, a health questionnaire administered by Occupational Health in confidence is to review the health of the new employee and to suggest if any reasonable adjustments are required for that person in performing the job. In effect, it is an assessment of the health risks facing them.

In most cases following a telephone discussion between the Occupational Health professional and the new employee, simple adjustments may be required and recommended. For example, suggesting that a risk assessment is carried out for a display screen user when they join the business or ensuring that colleagues and the first aiders at work are aware that an employee is a diabetic in case they have a "hypo" at work. Another example is where an employee has a mild hearing impairment. The degree of impairment can be discussed on the phone and if necessary the employer can be informed of the adjustments required. The consent of the new employee always needs to be sought before the employer and colleagues are informed.

Certain high risk jobs

In certain safety critical jobs a full medical examination is required, often with additional tests. This may, for example, relate to driving vehicles where an HGV license is required or working with hazardous materials. Occupational Health professionals discuss with the Human Resources manager the type of pre-placement assessment that is required for a given job based on the H&S risk assessment. In the case of more complex jobs, assessing the health risks is particularly important.

Working abroad

Where employees are being recruited on assignments to work abroad for a given period, a full medical examination is likely to be required for the employed person and relevant travel immunization will be provided as part of the risk assessment process. Occupational Health is likely to include an assessment of the health of the partner and children using questionnaires based on the health risks in that location. Many employers who have employees contracted to work abroad provide comprehensive medical insurance including emergency evacuation. Those not doing so expose employees to greater risk should a health problem arise.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF EMPLOYEES

Most people expect to progress in their career at work. In today's business world, as already mentioned, employees may move to another business to gain promotion if there is no potential opportunity in their current employment.

It is not appropriate for Occupational Health to be involved in assessing an employee's health for promotion unless the employee is moving to an assignment abroad as described.

Whilst it is often not possible for career progression to be vertical, alternative progression to another role with wider responsibilities can be just as rewarding.

4. LINE MANAGERS' TRAINING NEEDS

A key task is the training of line managers in understanding Occupational Health's role and how Occupational Health professionals can help Human Resources and line managers when employees are off sick and getting them back to work quickly. By asking the Occupational Health professional to see the employee, assess him or her, and advise on how best to return that employee back to work is more likely to achieve an earlier outcome. Adjustments to the working hours and duties may be required for a temporary period, as advised by Occupational Health, before the employee gets back to their full-time work activities. Where this is not possible, permanent adjustments may be required which are discussed with HR, the employee and their line manager. By managing the return to work in this way with the help of Occupational Health will result in saving time and money for the business.

Many managers are experts in their technical or professional field but their skills in people management can often be limited. Part of the added value of Occupational Health is the way in which they can help managers to understand how to communicate with employees who are off sick and how to undertake a return to work interview with input and advice from Occupational Health and Human Resources.

A line manager who has had training in understanding how Occupational Health can help employees, and with guidance from Human Resources, is more likely to be able to manage difficult conversations with an employee and to conduct a successful return to work interview following sickness absence.

5. FEELING VALUED

Employees have different expectations in a job. Some are happy to come to work and do their job and then go home without any further thought about work. Where employees are well informed about the purpose of the business, together with its values and goals, and are asked to contribute to solving problems in their roles, not only does this help them to be more engaged but to feel valued as well. Nevertheless, this is not always the case!

Story:

Some years ago in a factory where a colleague of mine was working, he had noticed that a group of female employees on the production line were ensuring that the chocolate biscuits had an even coating of chocolate. He believed that they would be more productive if they were not in a group but worked alone along the line.

In attempting to propose this plan, their line manager told him he was happy for these women to work in a group since the job was monotonous and they were able, by being in a group, to discuss and solve their domestic problems together. The women were content with their boring job and their ability to chat about their daily problems. The manager could not find better people to do this boring work to such high standards. The employees felt valued by the manager who complimented them on the quality of their work.



6. THE HEALTH RISKS AT WORK

Much of the work that Occupational Health professionals conduct with Human Resources and line management involves risks associated with equality or risk assessment and what is regarded as reasonable employment practice. The risks associated with health, although covered by law, may be hidden and not easily recognised as health risks at the early stages. It is often at a later stage that employment law comes into force. The value of early intervention when Human Resources managers call upon Occupational Health to assist with a clinical condition cannot be emphasised enough in dealing with employee sickness absence and underperformance.

The health risks associated with health & safety legislation in relation to accidents and environmental health in the work place are much more clearly identified. The potential cost to the business in not dealing with sickness absence and underperformance without early intervention by Occupational Health may lead to more expensive legal action at a later stage.

Story:

A senior manager in a business development role covering a territory from Russia to South Africa was put on a final written warning for a period of two years following an incident with a colleague who had then put in a grievance. The senior manager was a great asset to his employer in his role and was referred to Occupational Health to see what support they could provide.

On seeing the employee, it was clear that he had some issues with managing his boundaries in relation to his behaviour with colleagues. He was referred for psychological help and, after a few months of psychotherapy, he had a greater understanding of what had happened and how he was able to adjust his thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

The added value to the manager was that he had a better understanding of how to behave and work with colleagues with respect. His family relationships improved too.

The benefit to the business was that their brand from Russia to South Africa was not damaged and there was only a limited period of absence of the manager from the business. Costly employment of temporary staff was avoided. The senior manager happily accepted the adjustments to his role going forward and learned a great deal from the help he had received from Occupational Health.



YOUR REFLECTIONS ON CHAPTER 3

- **Do your employees feel that the company adopts a duty of care?**
- **Do you assess the health of employees only after the job has been offered?**
- **What health assessment do you undertake for employees working abroad – and for their family members?**
- **What personal development training do you offer to employees?**
- **What change management and resilience training do you offer to employees?**
- **How do your Human Resources managers work with Occupational Health to manage sickness absence problems to avoid health risks at a later stage?**

Look forward to learning more about Dr Doreen's new book as publication approaches.

