HRD

The only independent strategic HR publication

the**HR**DIRECTOR

JANUARY 2021 | ISSUE 195

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{ TRUE COLOURS }

"DEVELOPING PEOPLE, BUILDS COMPETENCY, BUT THE BEATING HEART OF GOOD CARE IS HUMANITY"

ALSO FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

TRENDS FOR 2021 Panicked businesses stuck band aids and gaffer tape around problems. What lies beneath is about to be exposed

THE SKILLS GAP This white-knuckle ride will see people switching roles en masse and rapidly gaining a completely different set of skill

VIRTUAL COLLABORATION Simply replicating the office virtually, won't cut it. It's a mix of push and pull, the synchronous and asynchronous

RISE OF EMPLOYEE AUTONOMY Micromanagement becomes obsolete, once a diverse group of people are on mission and purpose

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

HR Directors can enhance their strategic business impact as they tackle unprecedented employee health challenges in the year ahead. Supporting employee health, managing absence and embracing testing enabled continuity and productivity for organisations last year, and raised many questions about how to navigate 2021. Is this a burden for HR leaders to bear, or an opportunity they should not miss?

ARTICLE BY MATTHEW BERGMANN-SMITH, CEO, EMPACTIS

People management is a gargantuan task this year, bringing uncertainty and risk. Employee health now plays a dominant role in HR decisions and is critical to organisational continuity. Six trends set the context for HR leadership in the months ahead.

ONGOING DISRUPTIONS
Normality and the rollout of any vaccine will take time, and further pandemic waves will create more absence spikes and disruptions. HR leaders must inform executive responses - but standard HRIS and business systems are not designed for real time absence or health data. The need to connect specific sickness absences to test bookings was never envisaged, so HR directors should make a case for appropriate systems for ongoing challenges that will only become more complex with new test types and immunisation opportunities. How will you manage testing to get healthy staff back sooner? *How will you know who has and has not had a vaccine? Which employee groups are safe together?*

DAMAGED EMPLOYEE TRUST
Unfortunately, employees no longer assume safety at work. Many are nervous about returning from the perceived protection of their homes. Strategic HR Directors must lead initiatives that motivate staff to return, otherwise resistance, performance issues, impractical demands and grievances could impede continuity and drive disharmony. HR leaders must redefine policies, defend the reasonableness of decisions, and deal with any refusals to return or inequality accusations. New policies are needed – such as how firms deal with refusal to take vaccinations. *How will you maintain an accurate audit trail of decisions and actions, to defend against claims or show regulatory compliance?*

TSUNAMI OF HEALTH ISSUES
Workforce health is complicated by new factors, including the unfolding impact of 'Long COVID'. Stress, fear, and bereavement mean many workers will return with mental health issues. Others may be burnt out. Sensitive and informed engagement is essential, with health cases and associated issues such as absence and performance issues carefully tracked and connected. HR leaders must direct a joined-up approach and help managers throughout the organisation engage around tough topics, including suicide.

What systems will you provide to help managers, prompt them to act when needed and guide them to the data and information they need?

healthcare. Immunity to a range of common diseases may have waned. Social distancing has minimised the contacts that usually challenge

This year HR leaders must effect important changes and take a stronger position on employee health, which must be on the Board agenda. Productivity worries, rising employee health costs and the risks of getting responses wrong all require strategic solutions. Health data is as important as finance data and an influencer on the bottom line and cashflow. Leaders need complete, current, and consistent data about employee presence and fitness to solve operational challenges and drive recovery. This supports investment in systems, processes, and platforms to capture data, enable processes and connect workflows across the organisation.

UNFORTUNATELY, EMPLOYEES NO LONGER ASSUME SAFETY AT WORK. MANY ARE NERVOUS ABOUT RETURNING FROM THE PERCEIVED PROTECTION OF THEIR HOMES. STRATEGIC HR DIRECTORS MUST LEAD INITIATIVES THAT MOTIVATE STAFF TO RETURN

HOME WORKING PAIN
Many organisations hoped that redeploying staff to remote working was temporary. Now it appears a long-term challenge. Institute for Employment Studies research revealed an immediate increase in MSK issues[1] due to inadequate, unergonomic home-working. Disengagement, stress and social isolation can result if managers struggle with remote management. HR leaders must now not only manage extra health cases but set and defend parameters for adjustments and OH referrals. *How will you identify and deliver adjustments? How will you know when to review? How can you ensure that records 'follow' employees around the organisation?*

and sustain everyone's immune system, and many people have missed immunisations or boosters. *What data do you have to help you spot emerging issues? How will you monitor the effectiveness of actions taken?*

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH EVOLUTION
OH is often seen a reactive necessity only to shorten absences or mitigate potential claims. Now it supports continuity: firms turned to providers for testing and may do so again if private COVID-19 vaccinations become possible. Unregulated operators and unqualified practitioners present risk however. HR leaders should educate themselves to make smart decisions. Potential regulatory changes also

These challenging times are a golden opportunity to demonstrate strategic value. HR leaders must help the organisation look beyond this pandemic to the next and encourage changes that will pay huge future dividends. Helping to address today's business challenges can show the true power and contribution of HR in sustaining a healthy and high-performing workforce.

1. https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/ies-working-home-wellbeing-survey

RISING COSTS
Rising sickness absences bring lost productivity and temporary staffing costs, while greater usage of PMI, EAP and other benefits may also drive policy cost increases. Unforeseen consequences of 'protecting the NHS' will compound sickness absences from COVID-19. Neglected and undiagnosed health conditions will surface, including impacts of lockdown obesity and alcohol abuse, plus conditions and cancers ignored or undiagnosed without routine

loom: the eventual impacts of the workplace health Green Paper consultation may not only be the envisaged requirement for all employers to offer OH support. They may be broader and influenced by COVID-19. HRDs will play a key role in shaping responses. The most proactive will grasp the chance to redefine overall employee health and wellbeing strategies. *How will you manage OH and health providers? Can your systems support a portfolio of health providers and consolidate employee health data?*

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