THE
SKILLS REVOLUTION

WELCOMING WORKPLACE WELLNESS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

WEDNESDAY 28TH NOVEMBER 2018

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

ManpowerGroup®

INTRODUCTION:
THE SKILLS REVOLUTION SERIES

Welcome to ManpowerGroup's event series: The Skills Revolution

For the past four years, ManpowerGroup has hosted The Human Age Series, a calendar of quarterly private lunch events, created for our most forward-thinking clients and associates. Based around our global research that pointed to four mega-trends driving change in workforces around the world and creating a significant impact on organisations today - our events focused on a different world of work trend each quarter.

Shifting demographics, greater individual choice, client sophistication and technological revolution have become increasingly evident since ManpowerGroup identified these trends a decade ago as part of The Human Age era. Together, they have contributed to the emergence of a Skills Revolution, which now provides the key focus for our events.

We invite a variety of guest speakers and industry experts to join us throughout the year at our interactive events to inspire, share their insights and ensure the discussions are practical in focus. By being part of our event series, you will have the opportunity to join a select community of senior professionals from across the business world and influence our thinking on future events and research papers.

The purpose of our interactive events is to ensure our clients are kept on the pace with the latest developments affecting their talent strategy based on current trends.

WEDNESDAY 28TH NOVEMBER 2018

THEME:
WELCOMING WORKPLACE WELLNESS
IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Senior business leaders from the following industries were present:

Coaching, Defence, Fleet Management, Not-for-profit,

Professional Services, Recruitment, Transport, Travel.

INTRODUCTION:

CATE MURDEN, FOUNDER OF PUSH MIND AND BODY

Workplace wellness is moving firmly up the agenda, but there is still a long way to go.

The impact of technological revolution is far-reaching, impacting numerous psychological, emotional and social areas of our lives. In the Skills Revolution, change and uncertainty go hand-in-hand. As technological advances continue to accelerate, employers have a responsibility to not only help their people upskill and reskill, but to support them in adapting to our new world of work.

Workplace wellness is moving firmly up the agenda, but there is still a long way to go. With a recognised stigma still associated with mental health issues, it's clear that not all organisations recognise the importance and value of creating a culture of wellness that encourages open conversation, as well as wellness initiatives that support employees.

Cate Murden, Founder of PUSH Mind and Body, set the scene for the discussion to follow by examining the link between how we feel and how we perform. She then shared suggestions that both people and companies can put into use, to change and improve the way we work, and to create brilliant workplaces.

Why we need to change the way we work

Cate opened the discussion by proposing that despite us being busier than ever, we are not necessarily more productive. Instead, a personal energy crisis is a reality for many. With so much transformation around us from technology, and our ever-changing political and social environment, it may be time to re-evaluate if the ways we've been working are producing the best possible results.

Cate then shared a brief snapshot of the current impact that mental health issues are having within UK workplaces:
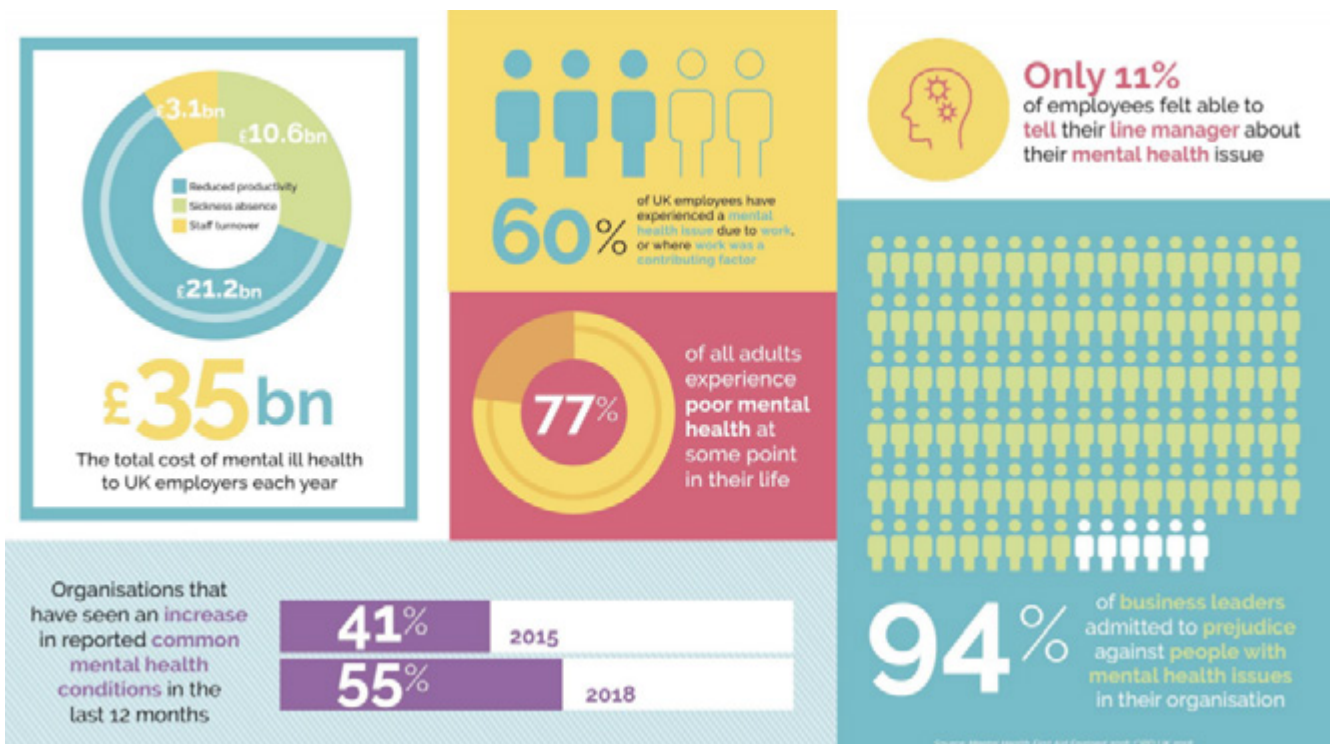
Source: PUSH Mind and Body

The need to support people to ensure they can move at the right pace and be empowered to adapt to change is becoming increasingly crucial. This, in turn, leads to greater connection, engagement, and productivity.

Cate acknowledged that how we feel profoundly impacts the way we behave and perform. Yet, with only 11% of employees feeling comfortable enough to speak with their line manager about mental health issues, a huge gap exists that is adversely impacting not only individuals, but ultimately, their organisations too.

Some may only associate the term 'mental health' with mental health disorders. Yet Cate suggested we are all continually moving around the mental health and wellbeing continuum. Therefore rather than viewing mental health as something that impacts 1 in 4, she put forward we should consider this as impacting 1 in 1.

Creating brilliant places to work allows people to create their best work

Responsibility

The responsibility to change our current ways of working and the resulting impact this is having on our mental health, is one that rests on both individuals and their companies. Cate put forward that 'we must all take responsibility for our own self-development, self-awareness, and self-care.'

Individuals must understand how they work best and try to communicate this to their employees. Organisations, in turn, need to work hard to create open, honest, authentic environments where they can energise their employees rather than take energy from them.

Understanding the impact of change

Cate suggested that the times we live in require a new set of rules and a new way of engaging with employees. While historically, many companies may have focused on becoming good at thinking and doing, they may not have been so concerned with also becoming good at 'feeling'. This includes understanding the impact that change is having on people. The need to support people to ensure they can move at the right pace and be empowered to adapt to change is becoming increasingly crucial. This, in turn, leads to greater connection, engagement, and productivity.

Getting buy-in from the top

Although corporate wellness is a recognised strategic priority within some organisations, Cate suggested it is not always on the agenda for everyone, and that some leaders in particular, may struggle to recognise its importance. In such cases, it was recommended that corporate wellness could be repositioned as a business problem, answered by a people solution. Introducing tangible business metrics can be one way to help leaders recognise the value of implementing wellness initiatives. (For example, metrics focused on attrition rates, sales targets, and productivity).

Cate concluded her presentation by posing the question: *How can we all create brilliant places to work?*

In addition to individuals taking responsibility for their mental wellbeing, employers have an increasingly important responsibility to create an environment where people can truly thrive.

Embracing wellness as an essential element of the workplace

In many workplaces, a general lack of understanding exists regarding the importance of wellness. Despite the significant link between high performance and strong mental and physical health, many organisations are not set up to support people with their mental fitness.

It was acknowledged however, that wellness means different things to different people (particularly from one generation to the next). Therefore, it's vital that organisations actively open a dialogue with their employees to find out what their perceived needs are, so that initiatives and programmes can be tailored to address these.

To avoid the conversation between senior management and the rest of the business feeling like 'them and us', it's crucial that employers humanise and personalise this. This is particularly important when it comes to encouraging an open conversation around mental health.

To ensure that corporate wellness is taken seriously, there is a need for *genuine* buy-in from senior leadership. However, it was suggested that we still have a long way to go before the majority of leaders embrace wellness as an essential element of the workplace.

To make the business case for workplace wellness and to gain the buy-in from CEOs and CFOs, the need to link this to numbers and solid metrics was recommended. (For example, a deeper understanding of what is contributing positively and negatively to attrition rates, productivity, and output).

Even if investment is made in wellness initiatives however, people need to be genuinely encouraged to take part in these. Education can make a huge difference. (For example, rather than perceiving those who exercise at lunchtime as taking time away from their desk, the focus could be shifted to what people can produce as a *result* of that break).

At the same time, attendees considered the potential risk of employers *imposing* wellbeing initiatives on employees. To avoid the perception of an adult/child relationship between employers and employees, it is equally important to give everyone the choice. There must be recognition that some people will decide *not* to take up wellness initiatives and that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach does not work.

Building an environment where individuals can thrive

The rate of change we are experiencing in the world around us is exponential. This is also being translated into the workplace, with changing expectations from both employers and employees, and shifting pressures.

Therefore, in addition to individuals taking responsibility for their mental wellbeing, employers have an increasingly important responsibility to create an environment where

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people can truly thrive. Leaders, in particular, have a crucial role to play in creating the right culture and behaviours where wellness becomes part of an organisation's DNA.

This includes recognising the factors that contribute to people's stress. And while stress doesn't just come from the workplace, organisations have a responsibility to acknowledge their ability to *add* to the existing stress in people's lives.

It was proposed that factors contributing to workplace stress include teams not working well together, resulting in communication breakdowns. In many companies 'presenteeism' is still an issue. A lack of flexibility is yet another factor. It was put forward that the greatest enemy of flexibility is trust. For many organisations, this could mean they 'talk a good game of modern ways of working, but don't necessarily make it work well.'

At times however, initiatives to encourage new ways of working can be introduced without being tested first. One attendee referenced a piece of Harvard research that explored whether hot desking and open-plan office environments actually lead to greater collaboration or not. The importance of organisations understanding the impact of any new concepts introduced and what's right for *their* organisation, is vital to ensure employees can be as engaged and productive as possible.

Organisations must also recognise that any inability on their part to undertake suitable strategic workforce planning will impact employees. It was suggested that the workforce should ideally be considered from four different lenses: Employees, Adults, Consumers, and Human Beings. For employees to have a positive experience in the workplace and deliver their best work, all four elements must be taken into consideration.

Mental health meets technology

While the long-term effects of our increasing interaction with technology are yet to be fully understood, our use of technology is another factor that is no doubt impacting our mental health. It was noted that there has been a substantial rise in autism in the last 20 years and was suggested that this could be linked to the way we are interacting with technology. It was recommended that 'we need to get on top of how we apply technology to us as humans.'

Shared responsibility to promote stronger mental health

As much as employers have a responsibility to create a healthy culture and workplace environment, individuals must also take responsibility for any changes they may need to make. This includes recognising where their behaviours may be contributing to poor mental health.

For example, attendees noted the impact that the increasing blurring of private life and work life is having, making it harder for people to separate the two. Boundaries are often crossed and there is an increasing inability to switch off. While the culture of some organisations adds to this challenge, in some cases, individuals may simply like feeling 'needed.' It was therefore suggested that individuals need to consciously 'opt out of always being on.' Expectations around response times also need to be carefully communicated and managed.

Supporting any wellness initiatives introduced to organisations and actively providing feedback to employers on the impact and success of these, are further ways that employees can help to contribute to stronger mental health, not only personally, but across their organisations.

CONCLUSION

There has been much conversation about workplace wellness - however it is increasingly important to ensure this moves to practical action, for the benefit of employees, organisations, and society in general.

In recent years, there has been much conversation about workplace wellness and a growing number of organisations are recognising the need to address this. For the majority of organisations however, this may not necessarily be a key strategic priority just yet. It is increasingly important to ensure this becomes more than a conversation and moves to practical action, for the benefit of employees, organisations, and society in general.

To promote and embrace wellness, shared responsibility from both employers and employees is vital. In addition to individuals taking responsibility for their mental wellbeing, employers have an increasingly important responsibility to create an environment where people can truly thrive.

While this involves investing in employees to increase the resilience of people and of organisations, it also involves examining existing workplace practices to see where changes can be made. As with any new initiatives introduced, a one-size-fits all approach will not work, and balance is necessary. Ultimately, genuine buy-in and support from senior leadership is critical to ensure workplace wellness can truly become embedded within an organisation's culture.

When a wellness culture is created and nurtured, it is not only the 'right thing to do' but makes good business sense. Connection, engagement, and high performance are all impacted when people are able to thrive and work at their best. In such an environment, organisations can remain innovative, competitive, and better equipped to withstand unforeseen future challenges in our ever-changing world of work.