

# Employee wellness: an essential business strategy

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A few years ago, there was no such thing as an employee wellness programme, but now there are entire departments and businesses dedicated to its success. Is this just a modern trend in the workplace or an essential part of a business strategy?

## What is employee wellness?

Firstly, it is important to have a clear understanding of what employee wellness is. It is the creation of a health culture within the workplace focusing on the promotion, prevention and maintenance of good health so that employees can function at their optimum physical, mental, emotional and social levels and that these factors do not interfere with job performance.

## Why does a business need it?

According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, mental ill-health, stress-related illnesses and illnesses caused by obesity are on the rise globally. Seventy percent of these types of diseases are preventable and are aggravated by lifestyle.

The negative effects of these diseases on the workplace are increased absenteeism and reduced productivity. Not being able to work at optimum levels over a long period of time will, ultimately, cost the employer. As WEF emphasises, the current global economy requires greater adaptability to setbacks. As key players in the economy, businesses need to nurture their workforce's wellness to ensure that they are resilient to change and continue to contribute to a country's economy.

## How do the programmes work?

The success of an employee wellness programme will be determined by its suitability to the workforce in question as there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Employers need first to assess the burden that their particular workforce faces and implement programmes that address these issues. The most common programmes worldwide address stress levels, obesity and Type-2 diabetes.

However, implementation of programmes is not enough and requires buy-in from all levels of the organisation, from the directors and managers, who need to endorse and encourage the programme, to employees who need participate in the initiatives. The responsibility lies with everyone to ensure the programme's success so the individuals and the business benefits from it.

## What is the return on investment?

While 66% of companies (according to WEF) who have comprehensive wellness programmes state that they believe that they give them the edge against their competitors, there are few statistics to support this. Although the WEF is currently addressing this, the fact is that when budgets are tightened, justification for these programmes is required. For this, companies will need to look at their workforce's performance in terms of productivity, absenteeism, moral, company loyalty and staff turnover. All these factors will reveal the overall health and wellness of the business and its employees.

There are no statistics supporting whether employee wellness programmes directly impact on a business' bottom line, but there remains a clear correlation between the level of wellness of a workforce and factors effecting output. Therefore, businesses need to look at employee wellness as an essential part of their strategy to aid and enhance overall productivity.

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