



THE QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE.

Exploring managers' wellbeing, motivation and productivity.

CASE STUDY

ARUP



BUILDING A CARING COMPANY

Evan Davidge – Head of Reward, Arup

“Employees put an awful lot of psychological and intellectual effort into the success of their business, and a good business should be able to reciprocate in kind. That’s what constitutes the modern-day psychological contract.”

Arup is a global, employee-owned firm of designers, planners, engineers, consultants and technical specialists with over 4,000 employees across the UK.

A few examples of their impressive work include the Sydney Opera House and the London Aquatics Centre. The company prides itself on making a sustainable and positive difference in the world, which starts close to home – with making sure Arup’s employees are in the best position possible, both mentally and physically, to do their job and enjoy doing it.

The first step

Arup’s health and wellbeing approach was triggered by the realisation that large parts of its workforce were very hard-working and dedicated – but at the same time lacked understanding about the impact of their working life on their health. There was a culture of excessive working and poor life balance.

Head of Reward Evan Davidge: “We were spending a lot of money looking after and caring for our people, but we had no clear objectives and a disjointed approach. It wasn’t sustainable.”

A few straightforward calculations showed how having a sustainable and integrated health and wellbeing strategy makes business sense. Not

only does it have an impact on the bottom line, it also improves engagement and productivity, reduces risks and costs, targets presenteeism and absenteeism and attracts and retains talent.

A new health and wellbeing approach

Arup wanted the approach to be holistic – and get away from the disjointed and fragmented approach that had been characteristic of how wellbeing had been managed in the business until then. In the new ‘Total Reward’ proposition, employees’ quality of life sits alongside the quality of their work environment, a strong focus on people and personal development, and recognition for their work.

“Arupians have an independence of spirit that is reflected in their work. Our sustainable health and wellbeing strategy empowers them to harness this spirit for the benefit of shaping a better world together.” Health and wellbeing is positioned not purely as an HR initiative, but as an integrated part of the organisation, aligned to the business values of shaping a better world and being a humane organisation.

The challenges: winning management buy-in

Of course, all change attracts opposition. First reactions from senior leaders to the new health and wellbeing proposal were that it was a ‘soft proposition’, which Evan and his group were immediately able to counter with tangible results in terms of business productivity and commercial success. The rock-solid evidence helped senior managers become more committed.

It then became a case of communicating and educating – both on a rational and emotive level. Arup did comprehensive communication campaigns around three key areas: psychological issues, cancer support and musculoskeletal problems. The campaigns were designed with their specific engineering audience in mind.

Everyone got access to an Employee Health Gateway so they could do a self-risk-assessment and calculate their own Health Age, where employees could compare their health age to their actual age by answering questions about their lifestyles. Evan: “Our mission was to make our company 1,000 years younger.”

Getting employees actively involved and aware of their own health, and providing visible and immediate results, proved popular and successful. In addition, a large number of seminars were held where Arup employees were invited to talk about their experiences with, for example, cancer or mental health problems.

Evan spent three months travelling the UK, inviting employees to do a 15-minute biometric test (calculating things like their BMI and cholesterol). Employees who came up at risk were offered health coaching at the expense of the company. “It was a case of showing substantial commitment and investment: we’re willing to put our money where our mouths are.”

The role of line managers

The campaigns were a great way of getting people involved. They opened up the culture and cascaded the message through the company, crucially involving line managers. “Implementing a wellbeing approach starts with line managers. They need to embrace it. Without their support you’re not going to get the stimulus and leadership you need to get things done.”

Arup now offers training to equip managers with the tools to deal with employee issues that may arise. At the moment there’s a recruitment drive for health champions: people with a genuine enthusiasm for the wellbeing of their colleagues

who can network and share ideas. There’s also a plan to train up mental first aiders, who will be equipped to signpost individuals experiencing stress, anxiety or depression and help them get referred into the “psychological pathway”.

Arup wanted to empower employees to take control and responsibility for their own health – and the company would provide the resources and the support they needed to do that.

The results

Evan reports a tangible culture change, which he ascribes to increased openness as well as individual empowerment and responsibility when it comes to health and wellbeing. “The cultural blind spot has largely gone, because we put it out in the open and said: ‘Look guys, it’s okay to have issues you can’t deal with on your own, it’s okay to ask for help’.”

Appropriately for a company full of engineers there’s a strong focus is on quantifying the measures and on collecting solid evidence. Arup has developed a Wellness Dashboard, which shows both the ‘state of the nation’ across the company and provides number-based evidence for future action.

One of the measures showed that there is an 18% reduction in health and wellbeing costs. Mental healthcare claims have gone up by 50% in the past 18 months, but the cost per claim has gone down by 75%. And utilisation of the Employee Assistance Programme, which offers cognitive behaviour therapy, has gone up from 4% to 17% over the past 18 months.

“It shows that we’ve increased awareness and people have cottoned on that early treatment or referral is absolutely essential. It’s the cliché of ‘prevention is better than cure’, and that’s exactly what the figures show.”

What’s more, Arup’s success is not only recognised within but also outside the organisation. The company’s growing collection of prizes now also includes Personnel Today’s 2015 Best Health and Wellbeing Award.