



CORPORATE HEALTH

A worthwhile investment?

Dr John Brazier gives a broad overview of this new shift in corporate culture that is beginning to reshape the concept of 'corporate health'.

In the past everything was about numbers. Productivity was founded on shifting numbers, like how many boxes one man can produce in a given day or hour. Whether for an international footballer, a line manager or a box-maker, their performance was, and still is, founded on numbers.

Until lately the term 'Corporate Health' meant nothing more than the company's financial state, including investment, costs, projected profits and losses. The colour black indicated a healthy state and the colour red indicated sickness.

Historically Corporate (or share holders) has always only been interested in the bottom line. The employee was nothing more than a factor of production whose contributions were solely to help bring in profits. Of late, Corporate appears to have a gentler face. 'Healthy Corporate Culture' means not just having a team of well-motivated, revenue-churning high achievers. It means pursuing the well-being of employee is just as important as pursuing the bottom line; and neither should take precedence over the other. Corporate leaders are beginning to see the vital link between employee health and corporate success and the relation of these to staff turnover and brain drain.

Areas to enhance corporate health now include: life-work balance; work stress reduction and self-optimization skills; developing human health capital; spirit, community and social responsibility.

Investing in health capital is a viable strategy for corporate success. In the conventional setting, health has always been an individual issue outside of corporate time and interest. It's a matter between you and your doctor. This corporate indifference was maintained because of an erroneous perception that "corporate empathy and care" could only add to the cost of production, making Corporate less competitive.

So, if you're off sick typical comments made by non-empathetic organizations are:

*How long will it be before you return? This isn't helping us reach our targets!
Why are you off more than the other staff? You need to get yourself sorted out.*

All of these statements add further stress to a situation that is already affecting the company's and the person's productivity. Pressure is even greater now with most investors and shareholders demanding more bottom line profits. The real fact remains that, without profit there isn't a corporate or a business.

However, companies have now started to recognise that not only are there many ways to make profit, but life, performance and productivity are all intrinsically linked to the health and well-being of their employees. A happy employee is a profitable employee. Teams are individuals put together. A well-balanced and healthy individual brings positive energy to any team by increasing communication and enthusiasm, while decreasing negativity and being sensitive to change.

Our personal and corporate needs are one and the same. As individuals we want the best from our mind and body. Corporate want us to have good health and energy so our ideas and drive are positive, and our productivity and performance is high, focused and innovative.

But stress creeps in ever so often. It can start as a physical or mental problem. Either way it causes the blood to drain from the digestive organs and the brain, so that we become focused on the stress and be physically strong to deal with it. If we don't burn this off (or deal with it) it starts to cause digestive problems, which lead to fatigue and physical pain (e.g. lower back pain) which then leads to mental stress because we don't have the energy to cope with our pain and stress, which leads to more pain and more stress! This unfortunate cycle leads to illness and depression (burnout and lack of commitment).

Everywhere Corporate is making an



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“Corporate want us to have good health and energy so our ideas and drive are positive”

attempt to correct this. My brother is a manager for the largest internet company in the world. To help him and his colleagues deal with obvious stress they built a gym with glass walls across the corridor from his office. The problem is that he now has twice the stress as before because his real stress wasn't lack of exercise, it was lack of time to do it! And now he has to watch others enjoying the gym while he puts on more weight and takes time off work for illness (more this year than ever before)!

When the stressors of work life and home life are analysed, it was found that higher earners often burn out as constant pressure takes its toll. Managers find company expectation causes a reduction in family time creating more pressure. All of this leads to sickness, absenteeism, poor performance and a high turnover of staff, causing corporate to experience a major loss on their biggest investment – the employee.

The more highly-paid the employee, the higher the costs to the business if they are absent or leave the employment - finding and retraining new personnel, relocation and new package, loss on business continuity, the time it takes to build trust and new business and etc. But most of all the increase of stress affecting work colleagues and team members leading to further absenteeism and burnout of others. In short, it pays to invest in your investments!

The NEW corporate health is focused on stimulating employees to create a better work life balance. Aspects of different medical systems are offered including:

Psychological team building seminars; stress & health education seminars, on-site gyms and exercise opportunities, complementary health treatments, workstation analysis, and better nutritional offerings from vending machines and so on.

One of the biggest growth areas in corporate health is in education of personal responsibility, including recognising the causes and effects of stress. To achieve a sustainable work life balance each individual needs to understand his or her choices on a daily basis. By better understanding the causes of illness and the benefits of drinking water and eating appropriate nutrition, regular exercise, employees can take an active role in both their own health and that of their families. Similarly seminars need to educate simple exercises that can be shown to enhance brain activity, clear toxins, increase 'good feeling' endorphins to flow even before leaving home. All these help to create a better home environment, dramatically reducing home-work stress levels.

By enhanced education Corporate helps to clear the 'blame the job'

IS CORPORATE HEALTH A WORTHWHILE INVESTMENT?

- Research from the USA states that for every \$1 invested in employee's health and well-being, \$4 is returned in increased productivity.
- Prudential Insurance Company reports that the company's major medical costs dropped from \$574 to \$312 for each participant in its wellness program.
- Pacific Bell's FitWorks programme decreased absent days 0.8% to save \$2 million in one year. FitWorks members also spent 3.3 days less on short-term disability for an additional saving of \$4.7 Million.
- In financial terms the estimated cost of sickness absence to the UK as a whole is around £12 billion a year.

**THE FACTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES;
IT IS A CATEGORICAL YES!**

culture that exists in some organisation while gaining clear benefits including:

- Employee commitment to work
- Staff performance and productivity
- Staff turnover or intention to leave
- Staff recruitment and retention
- Customer satisfaction
- Organisational image and reputation.

The shift is happening.

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