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TAKE-AWAYS FROM

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING AT THE WORKPLACE

STRATEGIC CONCEPTS AND PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

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MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING AT THE WORKPLACE

According to the WHO, globally, an estimated 264 million people suffer from depression, one of the leading causes of disability, with many of these people also suffering from symptoms of anxiety. Depression and anxiety disorders are estimated to cost the global economy US\$ 1 trillion each year in lost productivity. In the European Union, stress, depression, and anxiety are the 2nd most common types of work-related health problems with nearly 45% of workers facing risk factors for their mental wellbeing at work (EU Labour Force Survey, 2020).

Mental health can affect both businesses and their employees due to its influence on wellbeing, job performance, and productivity. While a negative working environment may lead to physical and mental health problems, absenteeism, and lost productivity, workplaces that promote mental health and support people with mental disorders are more likely to reduce absenteeism, increase productivity, and benefit from associated economic gains.

There are in other words strong human and economic reasons for businesses to focus more on mental health programmes and to create a culture of safety, health, and wellbeing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated already existing mental health issues that are being further amplified by the transition back to work. However, it has also helped to raise awareness about the importance of mental health and wellbeing at the workplace and provides strong incentives to redesign work organisation, to increase flexibility, and to offer support through mental health and wellbeing programmes.

The Seminar held in Copenhagen 13-14 September addressed mental health and wellbeing at work from two perspectives:

In Part 1, European and Danish experts presented strategic approaches to address mental health, and in Part 2, OSH- and HR-managers from renowned companies shared practical mental health and wellbeing solutions at company level.

Based on the group discussions, the following recommendations can be drawn up:

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING MANAGEMENT: Call for a closer cooperation between OSH and HR

- » Strong relations and a close collaboration between HR and OSH departments and -managers are of critical importance for the successful management of mental health and wellbeing, as both parts have essential competences and tools to offer.
- » A systematic collaboration approach should be based on a common policy framework outlining the initiatives required for developing and implementing a comprehensive wellbeing strategy.
- » To establish this framework, it is necessary to establish a common understanding of the situation and trends as regards employee-wellbeing in the organisation via surveys and by sharing relevant data held by the two departments respectively.

- » Developing this holistic approach, however, takes time, and differences in the management, organisation, and operation of the two departments must be taken into account and respected.
- » One practical step to promote a better understanding of the two departments and to ensure coordinated and efficient actions to manage wellbeing challenges would be to be mutually represented in the company's OSH and HR committees
- » The overall goal should be to develop the best possible synergies between OSH and HR, both when promoting mental health and wellbeing, and when developing and implementing collective and individual prevention measures to protect safety and health at work – and beyond.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING MANAGEMENT:

A common approach across international operations?

- » As a general rule, a global framework approach to safety, health, and wellbeing should be taken as a key company value and clearly and consistently communicated as such by management across its international operations.
- » However, this framework should – where appropriate – be adapted locally to cultural differences, for example adding information and training measures to overcome stigma as regards mental health and wellbeing.
- » Awareness raising and training as regards mental health and wellbeing at all levels, and in particular for management, are paramount to ensure a consistent approach across international operations.

- » In many geographical regions and industries, the main focus in prevention is still on safety and accident prevention. It is therefore critical to integrate mental health and wellbeing in prevention activities and to bring it up to a similar level in the organisation, including by using prevention concepts and tools similar to those used to promote safe behaviour.
- » Importantly, mental health and wellbeing should therefore be included in the (mandatory) risk assessment process and in the resulting prevention plans and initiatives.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING MANAGEMENT:

A way to strengthen top-management engagement in OSH?

- » Traditionally, top-management focus has been mainly on the company's safety performance, i.e. accident figures. Important now to raise awareness at top-management level about health and wellbeing related performance by providing data about sickness absence, staff turnover, motivation, and productivity.
- » As diversity and inclusion issues are gaining increased attention not only in society but also in companies, including in employer ratings and recruitment, wellbeing is expected to become a central topic for top-management.
- » It is, in other words, important to highlight – in positive terms – the strategic importance of a safe and healthy work environment for sustainable value creation.

- » This includes finances, as a rapidly increasing commitment by the major financial institutions to the principles of responsible investment, requires management to provide (positive) data about a company's ESG (environmental, social and governance) -performance, which includes safety, health, and wellbeing.
- » In order to successfully reach all parts of the organisation and in particular the different layers of management, it is, however, crucial that company-wide performance goals for safety, health, and wellbeing are established, communicated, and measured.
- » Performance data for safety, health, and wellbeing should also form part of regular reporting at management and the company board meetings and be monitored and evaluated in the same way as the financial data.



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