Managing Attendance

Introduction

A level of workplace absence (unscheduled leave) is to be expected due to personal illness, injury, caring responsibilities or sometimes because of personal or professional issues. If the cause(s) of ongoing workplace absence (unscheduled leave) by an employee is not resolved, or reasonably managed, the level of accumulated absence across the organisation can increase beyond acceptable limits and impact negatively on organisational productivity and staff morale. Therefore the organisation should be committed to ensuring workplace absence is maintained at an appropriate level by ensuring staff are aware of and have access to reasonable flexible work arrangements, leave entitlements, and internal support and reporting processes to help in times of:

- illness;
- injury;
- caring responsibilities;
- personal or household emergencies.

A manager can be highly influential in identifying attendance barriers and helping to improve attendance levels by using good communication, encouraging mutual obligation, applying workplace flexibility, and encouraging the use of support programs and reporting processes in situations of personal or professional challenges.

Key Principles and Objectives

There are a range of practical applications or guidelines that can be implemented to manage and foster a good attendance culture:

- ensure staff have meaningful, challenging work and training to undertake their core responsibilities;
- improve motivation through better work-related collaboration and regular constructive performance related feedback;
- maintain the highest standards of confidentiality, due process, and ethical behaviour in a performance management process.

Your Role

As a manager you are expected to demonstrate these key principles using positive people management and leadership capabilities. Employees will look to you as a benchmark for standards in attitude and behaviour in the workplace. Therefore you are responsible for clearly articulating the organisational approach to managing attendance.

Managers should develop strong communication and trust within their team and build a positive culture of attendance, supported by a commitment to employee health and well-being. Managers should work in partnership with their team members to achieve the best outcomes for both the organisation and the employee.

As a manager you should be alert to early indicators of potential attendance issues and ensure that unscheduled leave is kept at a reasonable level. You should take note of any concerns and address any increasing or regular absences in your team. High levels of unscheduled leave may indicate workplace issues of which you are unaware, or issues outside work that are impacting on team members’ ability or motivation to be at work.

When excessive workplace absences occur, meeting work outcomes and following staffing plans (like recreation leave or training) for work productivity and effective work-life balance is difficult for you and the team to maintain. The manager/employee relationship is the key to identify or prevent these issues occurring in the first place. It is also important to take prompt steps to manage or resolve any identified issues and challenges.

Key Processes and Issues

At the operational level you need to observe if there are any increasing or regular absences, and any patterns that could help identify barriers or causes for not attending work. There are a range of tools and processes you can use to identify any patterns or higher levels of unscheduled leave such as:

- leave records;
• being aware of any current or emerging workplace resolution issues that may have an impact on attendance;
• being aware of any recent role changes or peaks in work that may have an impact on attendance;
• paying attention to larger organisational processes, such as mid or end cycle performance agreement discussions, team restructuring and how it is affecting the work program or team morale.

Having a professional, open and confidential conversation with an employee is the most effective and important tool to help you work with that person to address the causes of the absences and improve workplace attendance. You may find that the reasons for their unscheduled leave stem from the following broad range of work and/or personal issues such as:

• personal illness/injury;
• caring requirements, ill health of a family or household member;
• bereavement;
• cultural obligations;
• incidents of bullying/harassment or similar;
• workload and time management;
• a loss of confidence and motivation from a lack of training to 'get up to speed' in a new role;
• a loss of motivation without challenging work or purpose;
• a response mechanism to a managing performance process.

What action you undertake from here is dependent on the situation. You and your employee may be able to resolve the matter together. This may include short or longer term flexible working arrangements such as part time, working from home, amended working hours, or supporting the employee in obtaining assistance or other external support.

You should seek advice from relevant areas to make sure that agreed strategies are reasonable, and will work towards reducing unscheduled leave to help you and your area effectively manage the work program for better productivity.

See also the chapter on Health and well-being

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