

Wellness Map© Tackles Workplace Stress ahead of new HSE Management Standard

Is your organisation well enough to comply with new HSE workplace stress standards? ‘Emotional mismanagement’ is the greatest cause of poor performance in many companies, according to a recent organisation wellness survey carried out across a range of major organisations in the United Kingdom by the Corporate Heart consultancy. No surprise, therefore, that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is due to release, this November, management standards for work related stress.

The standard will identify six problem areas, all of which can be tackled with the Wellness Map©, an organisation ‘wellness’ diagnostic developed by Corporate Heart. The Wellness Map© relates an organisation’s performance to the physical, mental and emotional wellness of staff and the absence of damaging behaviours such as workplace bullying or poor communication.

The six key areas identified by the HSE are the demands made on staff, the degree of control they have over their work and environment, how organisations handle change, relationships between stakeholders, how well people understand their role at work and the support they receive from colleagues. These are all covered by the Wellness Map©, which also links them to issues such as work/life balance and the ability to cope when the organisation itself is under pressure.

The Corporate Heart organisation wellness survey showed that even in work communities where people are high achievers, they can be physically unhealthy and lacking direction and resilience, and will under-perform or burn out quicker if the stress factor, core to the anticipated HSE’s standards, is neglected.

In May this year Elizabeth Gyngell, Better Working Environment Division, HSE wrote: “How do people set about tackling work-related stress? We know it is a problem, but working out what to do about it is the key to a more productive and healthy workforce. The Health and Safety Commission have asked us to formulate an approach that is pragmatic and based on guidance not new rules. And people wanted a yardstick to measure how well they are doing at tackling this difficult issue.”

“You have to look at the total wellness of an organisation and create ways to improve overall performance,” said Pauline Crawford, managing director, Corporate Heart. She added that while the HSE has warned that levels of stress, depression and anxiety are rising, it also complained that only one in five stress management interventions attempt to improve things at an organisational level.¹

“You have to deal with stress at work in the round,” she emphasised. “Your staff may go to the gym twice a week but if they come to work and perceive that their colleagues are depressed or lacking focus, you simply will not get the best out of them and it will show in your bottom line. Wellness applies equally to individuals and organisations as a whole body of people. It goes beyond health and safety but both areas include emotional and psychological factors that employers ignore at their peril.”

Rather than managing stress, Corporate Heart works with organisations to create well communities that survive, thrive and grow better results through a more energised, healthy and productive workforce. The Organisation Wellness Diagnostic provides a platform for change, establishing ‘wellness’ as a fundamental asset to success. It measures people’s perceptions about their work culture. It delivers a fast and reliable snapshot of current behaviour at work, indicators of key areas for action, pointers towards key development areas, a deep insight into motivators and key levers for successful culture transformation.

“With the HSE already inspecting stress levels within organisations and issuing improvement notices in some case, the risk of compensation claims against companies with ‘unwell’ cultures will increase,” predicts Pauline Crawford. This is likely to become more of an issue for corporate disclosures by chairmen and their companies in annual reports. “The money that a company now has to set aside for stress counselling or fighting claims would be better invested in building a well community at work,” she said. “As awareness of the value of corporate social responsibility grows, shareholders will increasingly look to management to use approaches like the Wellness Map©.”

For more information on the Wellness Map© and the recent Organisational Wellness Survey go to www.corporate-heart.co.uk or telephone Pauline Crawford 020 8998 7032.

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Editor’s Notes:

¹ The HSE refers to an article in issue 38 of The Australian Psychologist titled: The UK Perspective: A Review of Organisational Stress Management Interventions.

Sociologist Pauline Crawford and her team launched Corporate Heart in 2001 to help human resources professionals tackle wellness issues from a new, holistic perspective using tools such as the Wellness Map©.

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