

to businesses of ill health and associated absence, the development of legislation covering workplace health and safety, demographic change (associated with, for example, an ageing workforce) and the shift to a service-dominated industry – developments that have contributed to the creation of a wider set of health, safety and welfare concerns for both employers and employees. Moreover, trends in the management and experience of work – including the greater use of contingent reward, flexible working, work intensification, increased job insecurity and work-related stress – are placing greater pressures on employees and have contributed to a rise in the experience of work-related mental ill health.

This chapter is primarily concerned with this multi-dimensional notion of employee well-being and the rationale for the effective management of well-being. It discusses contemporary trends in workplace health and safety, outlines the UK legal framework governing H&S at work and the means by which well-being can be managed.

DEFINING WELL-BEING

CIPD (2007c) defines the management of well-being at work as being concerned with:

creating an environment to promote a state of contentment which allows an employee to flourish and achieve their full potential for the benefit of themselves and their organization ... well-being is more than an avoidance of becoming physically sick. It represents a broader bio-psycho-social construct that includes physical, mental and social health. (2007c: 4)

This very broad definition reflects the wide range of dimensions to employee well-being (see Table 14.1) and the view that the effective management of well-being involves consideration both of how work itself can affect people and the more specific hazards to physical and mental health in the individual workplace. Therefore, employee well-being represents a wider concern for employees than simply the minimisation of risks to health and the prevention of accidents, injuries and disease that have traditionally been the H&S concerns of employers. The notion of employee well-being stresses both a preventative/proactive approach through the provision of rewarding work, a nurturing work environment, correct fit between worker and job/organisation, the prevention of accidents, injuries and stress, and the promotion of healthy lifestyles, as well as a curative/reactive approach to assist employees in remedying the causes and consequences of accidents or injuries and dealing with mental health issues.

Table 14.1 Five domains of well-being

Domain	Indicative elements
Physical	Physical health, mental health, working environment, physical safety and accommodation
Values	Ethical standards, diversity, psychological contract and 'spiritual expression'
Personal development	Autonomy, career development, lifelong learning and creativity
Emotional	Positive relationships, emotional intelligence and social responsibility
Work/organisation	Change management, work demands, autonomy and job security

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Understood in a broad sense, the notion of well-being at work is constructed both of subjective and objective elements: subjective in that individual physical and mental well-being differs between people, depending on their underlying health, their values, attitudes, expectations, priorities and personal circumstances; and objective in that there are certain baseline features of employee wellness. This perspective stresses that the effective management of employee well-being requires an individual, as well as collective, focus. Moreover, effective management of employee well-being requires consideration of a wide range of organisational characteristics: prevailing culture, management style, line-manager behaviour, work allocation, job design and the use of technology. In summary, employee well-being is concerned with:

- maintaining a safe and stable working environment
- managing effectively risks to physical and mental health
- promoting supportive, trusting, nurturing and respectful relationships and a positive psychological contract
- enabling individual employees to achieve their potential through sympathetic job design and supportive HR policies and practices
- providing intrinsically rewarding, challenging and satisfying work
- encouraging and supporting good physical and mental health both inside and outside of the workplace.

Arguably, there has never been a greater imperative for organisations to address employee well-being, citing three principal sources of pressure to do so:

- 1 The costs of long-term sickness and absence and the damage to organisational productivity, growth, employee retention and brand.

- 2 Increasing demand from employees that their employers help them achieve individual well-being.
- 3 The growing body of legislation and government policy driving employers to recognise their impact on employee health and to assist in getting more of the working population back and active in the workplace.

Nonetheless, CIPD questions whether the apparently greater focus on employee well-being in management discourse constitutes a new phenomenon or just a 'clever re-labelling of traditional absence management, occupational health and good management practice' (CIPD, 2007c: 1).

BOX 14.1 RUNNING CASE

In the Heat of Battle - Employee Well-Being in the Kitchen at the Marin Hotel

Penny, the HR assistant at the Marin hotel, has alerted David to a spate of sickness absence in the kitchen of the hotel's restaurant, as well as a handful of resignations. Since her appointment, the new head chef, Adrienne Nadler, has been getting great reviews and the restaurant is booked for weeks in advance. However, Adrienne is known to have an 'artistic' temperament and perfectionism, which can sometimes lead to strong words and throwing of pans. The hotel general manager calls this the necessary flipside to culinary genius - 'think Gordon Ramsay', she says.

However, after one of the kitchen porters mentions this to David, he feels inclined to speak to Adrienne. She understands his concerns and apologises for 'becoming a little demanding in the heat of a busy service'. David hears nothing more until Penny flags the absenteeism rate, so he asks Penny to find out more about the working environment in the kitchen. She speaks to several members of the kitchen and restaurant teams - chefs, kitchen porters, waiters - and what she finds out is alarming. Adrienne has regularly lost her temper and has done so with most of the kitchen and restaurant staff. In doing so, she's become personally insulting and on one occasion, it's rumoured, she threw a plate that hit the pastry chef (this couldn't be confirmed, however). Even when not losing her temper, Adrienne has reportedly micromanaged her team, checking all their work and often throwing away food that she did not think up to scratch, putting pressure on staff to achieve ever higher standards. Even those that she appears to trust she's put under pressure to work at short notice and, on occasion, to work punishingly long shifts. One such team member is now on long-term sickness absence.