

The business value of health management

by Gerard Zwetsloot¹

Abstract

Economic success and corporate competitiveness are of prime importance both for the enterprise and its workforce. For organizational development that is future-oriented, enterprises increasingly need qualified, motivated and efficient workers who are able and willing to contribute actively to technical and organizational innovations. Customers and consumers are increasingly interested in healthy products and services. Health has become a (potential) business value of strategic importance.

Health is a basic human value, relevant for all company people and stakeholders. The wording “healthy organizations” expresses the link with the quality of the organization. Strategic health management is not only focussing on reducing the costs of sickness absence and working disability, but also on the increase of productivity and the vitality of the company and its employees. This brings the company direct economic benefits.

It is of prime interest for employees to have employment. It is in their interest that the employer creates conditions that allow them to take their own responsibility for remaining physically and mentally healthy and employable; this is especially relevant with an ageing population.

In society at large there is a struggle with the sharply rising cost of the health care system and related social security systems. From this perspective, the workplace is an important setting where health promotion can take place, and prevention can be realised.

The business value of health management requires strategic argumentation to invest in health management (or not). This requires linking health objectives to the organisation’s strategy for business and organizational development, against the background of the knowledge economy, where creativity, innovation and corporate responsibility are key. Health can be regarded as a company asset that is vital for human and intellectual capital.

Though there are good reasons for companies to see and consciously manage the business value of health, this is still far from self-evident. A shift in mind-set is needed. This is a development from:

- a focus on the problematic aspects of health, to seeing it as a resource
- a medical to a business perspective on health
- attention for people who have health problems to care for all personnel
- health as a cost factor to a sound investment.

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