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Why does REP Group do what we do?

There is no short answer to that. We obviously believe in our approach our method and our ability to guide individuals and organisations to help themselves. But let us walk your through the rational and why we can help you more than other wellbeing solutions, by taking you through a sequence of queries.

The first question is to ask whether companies just ticking the 'Social' box in ESG?' To answer this, it is important to begin by quantifying the challenge.

One of the fastest growing markets in the world recently has been the wellness industry, which is currently valued at US$4.2 Trillion. A growing sector of this market is 'corporate wellbeing', which has been stated to have reached US$47.5 Billion in spend globally, driven predominantly by three factors: the need to demonstrate employer obligations to protect mental health of employees, as well as their physical health; this need in part having ascended the key actions rankings due to COVID; which has in turn elevated stakeholder scrutiny over how companies handle the inhouse 'social' element of their ESG credentials, in part as a result of the boom in home and hybrid working.

So why has global business been so slow in addressing the 'social' agenda? Why did it take a pandemic to jump start the action, when 'environmental' commitments have been firmly on corporate reports for over a decade now? One reason is that it is easier to measure 'environmental' impact, so it is easier to demonstrate it is being appropriately managed and thereby pass audits and receive accolades from stakeholders. However, as a result of the rise in mental health awareness, assessing an employer's commitment to a social agenda is becoming a brand of its own. A brand that some leaders are beginning to realise is worth pursuing, and not just because of the kudos. Across the UK, current figures indicate that 57% of all lost work days are related to poor mental health, costing the country £120 billion (circa US$153 billion) in lost revenues. So there is a tangible value proposition.

So in acknowledging the scale of the problem, how do we build an effective solution? Where do companies start? There are so many service providers out there. If you consider mental wellness Apps on their own, there are currently over 20,000 available, offering a range of tools, with limited performance validation data to stand behind them. So where do business leaders begin to find the right support for their employees on a budget they can afford?

No matter what the project, defining what to include within it is the first task and establishing an 'S' agenda is no exception. Once the elements are identified, business then needs to ensure they are appropriately aligned to the business values and purpose, then they can be prioritised to allow a credible social agenda to be developed. If the business is at the head of its game, then a deployment strategy will evolve that ensures

successful change across the whole business can be delivered, led by senior management who are held to account for implementation. Now employee mental wellbeing is not going to be the only element of the social action plan, but it can be the element that unites a company in evolving a common supportive and proactive culture. A culture that offers psychological safety, builds trust, ignites innovation and enhances stakeholder relationships, internal and external, thereby allowing the business to capture those lost revenue opportunities.

Easier said than done I hear many people say. To which we would respond by saying two things. First, there are methods of community engagement that can quickly demonstrate to all levels of an organisation the leaderships commitment to collaborate for an improved corporate wellness. But more of that later. And secondly, everything can appear insurmountable before you begin. Starting the process is the most important step to take.

We have all heard on countless occasions that 'employees are our greatest asset'. We think now is the time for business leaders to really demonstrate it and many have started by introducing an EAP. But where does an EAP fit within the 'S' agenda for employee mental wellbeing?

There are two additional questions to ask before assessing whether EAP's fit into or contribute to delivery of the social agenda. First, are EAP's just a governance 'tick box' exercise in supporting employee mental well-being for leaders. And secondly, are they the right tool or just part of a solution? To start answering this, we need to take a little time to consider data. Specifically data related to EAP usage/availability, performance and cost.

EAP Usage/Availability
In the UK only 10% of employees with access to an EAP have accessed it or used its resources; with only 5% actually engaging with the relevant call centre. Let us give these statistics further context – only 88% of UK employers offer an EAP – but to give that further context, from a national workforce of 33 million people, only 13.8 million (41.8%) are covered by an EAP. With this in mind, while no data for verification exists, it is highly probable that where EAP's are available, they are targeted at the 'white collar' workforce. It is further proposed, with evidential support (NCBI), that increased risk of mental distress is most prevalent within the 'blue collar' workforce. In summary, usage levels are low, but this may well be because the tool is mis-targeted towards those that need it less. And the availability of the tool to those who truly need help, we hypothesis, is limited.

While the above paragraph addresses usage from a deployment perspective, it would be remise to ignore the human element of usage. The barriers that individuals experience in deciding whether to engage. For this surveys have detailed several such barriers. Common barriers cited are: EAP's only offer reactive not proactive care: they are considered only available during work time: there's a stigma associated to needing help: there's a fear of who we may end up talking to: there are delays on call-backs and even longer delays on getting appointments, making it feel as if it is hard to get support: there maybe prior mental health issue loopholes in the policy/service that excluded support for these issues from the programme: and the health care professional finally available, may not be the best match for the person. So many deterrents that can preclude first engagement or may lead to a bad experience that deters repeat engagement.

EAP Performance
There are more than 800 EAP providers globally, all with variations in their offering. Looking at performance from a traditional business perspective, of those UK companies offering an EAP to some of their workforce, 31% have never assessed the quality or impact of the system; and only 9% are measuring the ROI from its

deployment. That said, under a credible 'S' agenda, we should really also be considering performance from a user perspective – for that I would have to suggest the statistics are equally disappointing. 60% of calls from an employee to an EAP provider are signposted to self-help resources, 20% of callers are signposted to a national charity (at no cost to the EAP), and for the last 20% that may need counselling, it is left in employees hands to contact the counsellor. So it can be hypothesised that performance at both business and individual level remains a question.

EAP Cost
There are no standard pricings to consider here, with structures being presented on a system usage, per call or per employee basis; and unfortunately, statistics can, as they frequently do, play their usual subterfuge in conveying a 'perceived truth'. Let me explain.

The blanket answer to the question of cost is between 40p and £1.25 per employee, per month, depending on organisational size, but irrespective of pricing model (ie per usage, call, employee) used, this is generally just the base costs for making an EAP system available – the admin fee. It can frequently exclude extended costs such as health care professional time. If these are included, then costs closer to double the figures above can be delivered. Still £2.50 per employee per month may not seem too bad. But is it real? Or more importantly, does it add value?

Back under 'usage' we presented a case to indicate that the prevalence of mental health affected employees are 'blue collared' workers, and it is these individuals who are generally not offered EAP access. Now EAP's are an average cost service, whichever model of usage, call or person is used. As such, the costs reflect the needs of that user group. If the usage is low, then average costs can be low. But what would happen if pricing models had to expand to meet everyone's needs? I would suggest that the 22% of UK employers who choose not to offer an EAP due to cost, would swell.

Other considerations
So with low usage rates, below par availability, unknown or unverified performance, and costs still considered a deterrent – it may be easy to veer toward a judgment of 'tick box' social governance. So why provide EAP's at all? Well that is because of those who measure performance, it is cited that a ROI of £8 is delivered per £1 spent on them. But does that still make them the right tool?

Before addressing that question, I want to raise some additional facts. Facts that would fall under scrutiny within a PESTLE macro-environment analysis – a fact that of the individuals across the UK requiring health care professional support, only 25% managed to secure a first appointment in 2021, and for those fortunate few, the average waiting time for that appointment was 26 weeks. The reasons for these poor metrics are simple. Mental health nurse vacancies currently represent one third of all nursing vacancies and these workforce shortages are affecting staff workload, wellbeing, morale and the ability for staff to provide good quality of care. Recruitment into psychiatric specialties remains a key challenge with many psychiatric specialties facing under-recruitment year on year. In total, approximately 1.5 million people in England are currently waiting for HCP support/treatment for their mental health and the total number of individuals with mental health issues is forecast to increase by >2 million by 2025. A pretty dire backdrop to an expanding challenge.

So back to the helicopter question of whether EAP's the right tool for employers? There are two ways this needs to be considered. First to ask in light of the above information, are they fit for purpose? And second, are we appropriately enabling their use?

The evidence above would suggest that it may be too early to ascertain if EAP's are fit for purpose and it would certainly be wholly unjust to make such a blanket statement to cover all 800 or so provider offerings. Every tool though has the ability to be deployed incorrectly. However, I do wholeheartedly believe that with the growing backdrop of health care resource constraints, there may need to be a significant shift in think over what employers want to see captured within an EAP or what other/additional systems could compliment their deployment.

Regarding enabling use, I firmly believe that leaders have an obligation to provide tools for their business, to ensure they are the right tools being deployed and to ensure they are and can be used properly, and to best effect. I would propose here is where 'S' governance is largely lacking and thereby by default, the benefits of an EAP are largely unrealised. This statement should not be read as a judgement of the current state of affairs, but as a foundation observation to inspire improvement.

In summary, EAP's can be a solution, but they need to be assessed to be the right tool, and they need to deployed to best affect. For that we would advocate three attributes. Find a solution that can be made available to every employee at a sensible price. Find a solution that gives a framework to yield tangible performance improvements. And when you embed that solution in to you 'social' strategy, make sure it is part of an integrated strategy that has ambassadors for deployment and inherently demonstrates that as a leadership body – you take your employee mental wellbeing seriously. That you employees really do come first!

But what is the fundamental building block that demonstrates the leaderships commitment to its employees? Our view is that it is ultimately trust and transparency that are the foundations of a sustainable 'social' strategy.

There are few community environments in the world where trust and transparency may not be considered the basic building blocks of sustainable success. But despite that acknowledgement, history repeatedly shows that delivery of that utopian state is hard won. And in workplace communities it can be much harder than in many other environments, because it requires unity of leadership, a clearly understood frame of reference (actions and goals), matched with the will and desire of all within the community to engage absent of deceit, malice or negativity, but instead with self-less goodwill.

In my career I have witnessed the extremes of this challenge. From board rooms where the confident assertions and political agendas of less than ten individuals can refuse to align. Through to companywide organisation change programmes where I have been informed more than once, that the only certainty with organisational change initiatives, is that the leaders and their programmes will keep changing, but the blue collared workforce will remain. These two extreme illustrations offer up arrogance juxtaposed to ambivalence; articulating succinctly the magnitude of the issue!

So in such environment, how do we create the basis for communitywide positive sustainable mental wellbeing? The answer is to create 'credible' psychological safety.

Before discussing how to attain psychological safety, let's define it. Psychological safety in a team is a shared belief that it is ok to express ideas, concerns, worries and errors – without fear of negative consequences. And at a personal level, this psychological safety should empower an individual to feel they can be candid with a colleague about their mental wellbeing, absent of any fear of judgement.

You may question why I highlight the definition at both an individual level and a team level. Well that is because when it comes to mental wellbeing, you can't support one without having addressed the other. Helping a person to work through their issues would be futile, if they are repeatedly immersed into an unsupportive community. The negative impacts on the individual with regard stress, anxiety, burnout….. from

an absence of team psychological safety have been well researched and validated. So the question is, what can be done to better foster psychological safety? How do we create such a utopian environment?

Much like any health and safety programme, there are many communication, training and education pathways that leaders may choose to try and build a trusting and transparent environment, but what is the sustainability of them?

There is the old adage that we remember 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see, 50% of what we see and hear, 70% of what we discuss with others, 80% of what we personally experience, 95% or what we teach others. With many traditional organisational methods for communications, training and education programs being founded on the read and hear – change can be slow and cumbersome, affecting the ability to keep it fresh in employees minds. Affecting their engagement. I believe there is a supportive and integrated pathway for stimulating and maintaining workplace wellness, that can substantially increase knowledge assimilation.

For us it begins with written communication by individuals. The written word affords the opportunity for better consideration of choice of words and phraseology, more than in the moment verbal communications. Well-structured written narratives allow deeper understanding, from which multi-layered tangible education plans can be deployed. Credible, integrated, feedback to action led communication plans that use real-world information to deploy verbal (shift briefings, supervisor coaching/training), visual (roll play, pamphlets) and mass (townhalls, single point lessons) strategies to accelerate a belief in transparency. Without a belief in transparency, there can be little trust. Our 'Re-Engage and Perspectives' programme and platform supports delivery of this.

So how can we deliver a measurable social impact all stakeholders can believe in. Earlier we questioned and commented on three core questions in relation to workplace wellbeing. Namely:
- Is business just ticking the box of social compliance?
- Where do EAP's support the mental wellbeing agenda of 'social governance?
- How does trust and transparency become a common emotional currency of business culture?

In response to these questions we require a cascade of needs to be successful. This cascade comprising the following:

- Ask what the issues are.
- Prioritise and establish objectives.
- Develop integrated and iterative action and communications plans.
- Ensure system is available to those who need it, not just white collared workforce.
- Measure and monitor inputs and outputs.
- Present periodic multi-format feedback.
- Ensure wellness program is an evolution, that can survive any leader.

'Re-Engage and Perspectives' ("REP") is a tool that can help enable this cascade. Our structured interface allows individuals to work through and provide their experiential narratives with full security, anonymity and in a format that can allow the seedlings of psychological safety to be nurtured.

In the same way that ensuring physical stability is to have three points of contact, our programme uses a three separate points for wellbeing assessment, allowing a consolidated quantitative and qualitative analysis to be produced, along with the foundation recommendations for a tailored action and communication plan. When repeating the cycle, this framework can support tangible measurement of 'social' improvement across the community.

Job agnostic is a central element to our approach. We have ensured that REP can be provided securely and safely to all employees on a flexible basis, such that the full cost of delivering it to the full workforce do not have to be absorbed.

In all we enable, we aid our clients to repeatedly close the loop on communications. Give feedback. Make it clear the business has listened. Make it equally clear that workplace wellness, as for individuals, is a journey, but it is one you will take together. Make you social programme have an organisational identify, one that is not attributed to any individual. Detach it from personal incentives and agenda. Give it the chance to thrive and survive. Give it the chance to become 'just what we do here'.

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