Absence management

Your ultimate
getaway guide

I think we need a break...

Things have been a bit relentless haven't they? Businesses have a lot to be proud of their resilience and the willingness for their people to remain agile and adaptable in the midst of a global crisis is to be applauded. That being said, we can probably all agree that we deserve a change of scenery.

As the world looks towards returning to a sense of normality, it makes sense that one of the first things on people's minds is naturally, looking at booking that perfect getaway. Now while you may have one eye towards sunning yourself on the beach already, it's important to remember that unfortunately, holiday requests can bring with them an unwanted amount of admin.

HR teams all too often find themselves losing precious hours in their working week chasing anomalies caused by inefficient systems and processes. Many also find themselves working as task bots, fielding constant questions regarding leave allowances and the status of absence requests.

It's not just summer getaways either- unplanned absences from sickness and other factors are still racking up costs of more than £18 billion for the UK economy. With all businesses looking towards the future and a strong post-pandemic recovery, seeing money walk out of the door as a result of unchecked absence will be unacceptable.

We all need a holiday right about now but your HR people also deserve a break from the monotony of absence related admin. Your business also deserves to have the proper oversight of absences, planned or otherwise, in order to give you the information you need to keep your business running smoothly.

What is absence management?

Simply put, absence management is an employer's approach to mitigating the impact of employee absenteeism and to avoid workplace disruption. This is traditionally achieved via policy. Short and long term management or programmes and procedures and allows employers oversight of absence patterns. The usual function of absence management is designed to achieve several goals:

• Reporting and tracking absences
• Identifying sickness absence patterns
• Communication of workplace policy
• Reducing instances of absence
• Mitigating the financial impact of absences

Why is absence management important for your business?

Employee absences, be they planned or otherwise, have the potential to cause multiple issues for organisations and their people teams. A lack of visibility of who is off over what period can lead to disruptions in scheduling, spiralling costs and working hours lost chasing anomalies.

Absence management is an asset to businesses and will play a vital role in ensuring the viability of their business strategies moving forward. Having a clear understanding of absences within your organisation allows you to mitigate the financial impacts of workplace disruption and by monitoring sickness patterns, your HR teams are able to effectively engage with employees regarding sick leave and any difficulties they may be having, effectively demonstrating your company's commitment to employee wellbeing.

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Why is absence management important for your people?

Annual leave is a key benefit for all employees. The ability to step away from the workplace for a week or two and recharge your batteries is vitally important in order to ensure people can remain engaged and productive.

The past year has also brought the importance of employee wellbeing into stark relief for many organisations. External stresses coupled with the typical mental and physical fatigue associated with work have created greater potential for employee burnout. The traditional challenges of dealing with workplace sickness have also been compounded by the global pandemic and the stresses presented by COVID-19 related illness. The health crisis has also seen an understandable upswing in incidences of bereavement or compassionate leave.

As businesses look towards their business strategy moving forward, many leaders will find that the question of health and wellbeing will now have shifted to become a top priority for many of their employees. A report by The CIPD has delved into the question of health and wellbeing in the workplace and has found that the long term success of any wellbeing initiatives relies heavily on business leaders and HR teams making commitments to shifting their business culture to be sympathetic to these goals.

Absence management will form a core element of organisational structure moving forward, offering businesses the all important visibility of employee absence patterns they need in order to effectively identify where their people may be struggling. Armed with this information, HR leaders are able to drive forward conversations with their people around their wellbeing and to offer support where appropriate.

A getaway is a wonderful thing and all employees should be encouraged to make the most of their annual leave allowance. Having proper oversight of absence profiles and allowances allows HR teams to engage with their people and make sure they are taking that all important time to recharge.

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What is an absence management policy?

Simply put, an absence management policy is a combination of resources cultivated by organisations in order to help reduce the impact of employee absence. Effective absence management policies are important in order to provide your employees with clarity surrounding their leave entitlements. Making full use of annual leave should not be vilified and employees should be actively encouraged to take holidays in order to refresh themselves and remain rested and productive.

Clear communication of policy is also crucially important in order set out expectations around sickness absences. No employee should feel forced to work when physically or mentally unwell but it is also vital that organisations are aware of the impact that prolonged periods of absence can have on their business.

Absence management policies aren't designed to punish employees when they take time off work due to illness or even just make use of their annual leave allowance. Effective policy is all about setting out clear expectations around employee absence for both employer and employee in order to ensure they can mitigate the impact of absence.

Effective absence management policies should include:

- **A clear understanding of what an employee needs to do in the event that they can't make it into work.** How is an absence- unplanned or otherwise-communicated to their place of work. Where traditionally a text or a phone call may have sufficed, more and more organisations are leaning on time and attendance systems to provide them with the proper accuracy and visibility needed to log absences.

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- **A clear understanding of how absences are logged and recorded.** Again, time and attendance systems put the power in the hands of the employee, allowing them to have instant visibility of their leave allowances as well as offering them an easy to use platform to communicate instances of unplanned absence to their employer. These systems efficiently pull through the information to a centralised point In order to provide your HR teams with the oversight they need to drive discussion around absence.

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- **Setting out the return to work journey for employees.** What needs to be done from an employer's side after a period of absence? Are there return to work forms or assessments which have to be made?

- **Pay whilst absent.** Especially important during periods of prolonged absence is the ability to effectively communicate to an employee what your responsibilities are financially towards that individual and how extended leave might impact pay.

What challenges does absence bring?

Whilst it is important to make sure that the idea of employee absence doesn't become a taboo within your organisation, it still makes sense to be honest and aware of the impacts that absence- even those from planned holiday breaks can have on businesses.

- **Lack of visibility.** Older, more manual forms of recording absences and leave allowances can lead to a muddying of the waters and a lot of confusion both for employees and their HR teams. It is all too easy for more analogue input processes to become lost in the shuffle, leading to a breakdown in communication. More and more businesses are looking at digital platforms for handling absence profiles as they provide an instantaneous, up to date overview of employee absence and any allowances remaining.

- **Issues around staffing and resourcing.** Of course, work doesn't stop for everybody when one colleague goes on holiday. Ineffective oversight of absences within an organisation can lead to some businesses finding themselves caught out and scrambling to find appropriate cover for the absent employee.

- **Financial impacts** - As well as safeguarding the wellbeing of your employees, having oversight of employee absence can also help in greatly reducing the impact that sick leave can have on businesses financially. With sickness absence costing UK firms £77 billion annually, it's clear that effective oversight of sick leave will be vital in mitigating costs that come from a disruption to the workforce.

- **Payroll accuracy.** Losing sight of hours work and employee absences can lead to spiralling errors when calculating payroll. This can have a knock on effect as HR and payroll teams can find themselves losing hours of their working week chasing anomalies. Comprehensive time and attendance systems should work in lockstep with

- **Presenteeism.** Ineffective communication around absences and employee expectations can have a knock on effect on employees. If absence is seen as a taboo within an organisation, this can lead to a culture of presenteeism where employees feel pressured to be at work more than necessary, never making use of their leave allowances in order to rest and reset themselves. An exhausted workforce will inevitably find themselves increasingly disengaged and less productive.

What steps can you take?

As we've touched upon briefly, the responsibility of absence management traditionally falls at the feet of business leaders and HR teams. The typical pitfalls around monitoring sickness absences normally come about as a result of systems and processes being seen as draconian and designed solely to punish or micro manage employees. This means that valuable data is unavailable to people teams and prolonged sickness leads to organisations haemorrhaging money needlessly.

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[The CIPD](#) have found that companies with the greatest success in introducing absence management strategies are those in which business leaders and HR professionals act as role models and actively champion initiatives around health and wellbeing.

In short, this means that absence management should be folded into wider discussions around employee wellbeing and used as a tool to ensure employees remain happy, engaged and comfortable with work, rather than being foremost, a system seeking to punish people.

Having an overview of sickness absence within your workplace allows you a greater level of appreciation of the contributing factors and the conditions that lead to people taking time off in your workplace. This information is invaluable in readjusting your workplace strategies as well as allowing you to develop and communicate policy around sick leave.

You would be hard pressed to find any business leaders who would disagree that a healthy and happy workforce is more productive. Absence management tools are designed first and foremost to facilitate a supportive working environment, not to punish people when they understandably need time away from work, but in order to make sure that their employers are never left in the dark about their needs and able to support them whenever they need.

Organisations will need to consider the steps they need to take in order to foster a supportive and proactive approach to absence management:

- **Set out clear expectations around absences and policies.** Let your people know that absences are an accepted and normal part of working life. Ensure you have the agility in your set up to account for everyday occurrences of absence, be they planned or otherwise.

- **Be empathetic and empower your HR people to drive discussions with employees around the causes of absence.** One of the key contributing factors to employee absence is stress. As organisations begin to reconcile themselves with a largely hybrid workforce, it is important that their HR systems and processes are robust enough to enable them to effectively engage with employees and head off potential pain points before they spiral into long term absence.

- **Free your HR people from holiday admin.** Comprehensive time and attendance software solutions now give the power to the individual employee to have visibility of their own leave allowances and empower them to push through their own requests. Self service functionality is an increasingly popular demand for organisations looking to take some of the burden away from their people teams.

- **Time and attendance systems offer you the information you need in real time.** This means never being caught out by absences and ensuring that you can gather together the staff and resources you need to guarantee productivity even when the most key employees are taking a break and to guarantee accurate pay.

"A happy and refreshed workforce is inevitably a more productive one."

Conclusion

It's clear that time away from work is good for everybody. A happy and refreshed workforce is inevitably a more productive one and organisations need to ensure that their people are taking full advantage of leave allowances offered to them, in order to recharge their batteries.

As important as it is to remove the stigma around taking time off, businesses need to be aware of the need to remain agile and able to adapt to instances of absence.

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At Advanced, we believe in the power of technology to help empower your people to achieve more. Our Time and attendance solution is designed by experts in the industry to provide your organisation with the visibility and oversight you need to be able to drive forward productivity.

We all need a break right about now but we also understand that your business doesn't take holidays. If you'd like to find out more about how Advanced can help you tackle absences within your organisation, Get in touch with one of our friendly team members today.

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Hopefully this was a helpful insight into Absence management software.
If you'd like to find out more about how our solutions can help your business
and ensure you are ready to meet the future, get in touch with us today.

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