

Dubbed the 'new Absenteeism', Presenteeism tends to occur when employees push themselves to go into the office, even when they feel unwell or are suffering mental health issues.

Rather than call in sick they will "soldier on", which means although they are physically present they are not functioning at their full potential.

Presenteeism is a very real problem with 45% of UK workers having admitted they have experienced it in 2019, which is an increase of almost one third from 2014 (29%).^[1]

Now with more people working remotely due to Covid-19, there has also been a rise in virtual Presenteeism, as people feel they always have to be online and available.

While some managers may think Presenteeism is good for organisational efficiency due to a decreased rate of absenteeism, it is more likely to be doing serious damage to the overall health of the organisation.

Below we look at how Presenteeism negatively impacts organisations and offer solutions to help tackle the problem.

Presenteeism costs billions in lost productivity

Analysis by [Deloitte](#) in January 2020 found that Presenteeism costs the UK up to £29 billion.^[2]

Compared to Absenteeism, one survey estimated that the impact of Presenteeism on productivity is 12 times higher.^[3]

These costs come from decreased productivity and increased work errors.

If your people are coming in when they need to be recuperating their recovery will be lengthier and their capacity will be reduced for longer.

This prolonged dip in performance can ultimately end up being costlier than having people taking their sick leave.

If working while feeling impaired, employees are more likely to make mistakes or become injured, which will cost you more to fix.

More worryingly, if your people are putting their health on the back burner they could be overlooking more serious underlying health problems.

Employee wellbeing is at risk

Presenteeism can quickly demoralise your people, not only the person who is unwell but also the people around them.

Seeing your co-workers struggling at work and going about their day visibly unwell is not conducive to a happy workplace.

When Presenteeism is seen to be endorsed by leadership it reinforces this type of behaviour and encourages others to mimic it.

People who are made to feel their health doesn't matter will not feel valued by their company and will quickly become disengaged.

These negative vibes can quickly turn a work culture toxic, which is linked to higher employee dissatisfaction, lower retention rates and poor employee wellbeing.

Don't let infections “do the rounds”

As recent events have emphasised, when you are ill with a virus you should stay home to limit the risk of infecting others.

Having a virus “do the rounds” in your office will see a spike in lost productivity and absences.

Furthermore, as an employer you could be potentially held liable if you fail to take measures to adequately protect your people's health from virulent viruses such as Covid-19.

Encouraging people to come into work when infectious will not only put your people and profits at risk, it could also do major damage to your organisation's reputation.

A culture problem

The prevalence of Presenteeism within a company can be a major red flag that something is wrong with its culture.

As an employer or manager you need to pause and consider why your people are unwilling to take sick leave.

Presenteeism is often related to work anxiety and research has shown that Presenteeism is worse during periods of tough economic times when there is more insecurity about jobs.^[4]

Often, people are worried that being off ill will negatively impact their work reputation and that their number of sick days will be used as a metric against them.

The belief that being seen is a proxy for how committed someone is to the organisation needs to be addressed to discourage the practice.

How to deal with Presenteeism

Presenteeism is an unhealthy behaviour that has to be addressed if your organisation wants to create a healthy work environment.

A survey by the [CIPD](#) found that just under a third of organisations are taking steps to address the issues related to Presenteeism. [\[5\]](#)

Allowing the practice to persist will undermine any supportive policies you put in place.

To tackle the problem requires a culture shift within the organisation so that your people can feel comfortable when speaking up about health problems.

Only if your people can safely flag issues will you be able to support them and thereby reduce Presenteeism.

A culture change has to come from the top, and leadership needs to be authentically committed to curing the root issue that causes Presenteeism.

Research has shown that smaller early interventions can have a much larger impact and have a higher return on investment. [\[6\]](#)

A recent workplace study found that 75% of organisations reported that such initiatives have had a positive impact on their people's health. [\[7\]](#)

How Trickle can help

A dynamic interactive platform like [Trickle](#) can help support open direct dialogue in real-time, which is vital to building a positive work culture.

[Trickle](#) enables you to reinforce the positive habits that are needed to champion a more [psychologically safe](#) environment.

The Confide offering within Trickle allows your people to quickly and anonymously raise issues, which you can then follow up on a more one-to-one basis.

Fist Bumps and Shout Abouts are features in Trickle that allow you to quickly and easily show praise, spread good news, raise company awareness, and encourage peer-to-peer appreciation and support.

It is precisely these types of positive engagements that will help you to shape a work environment where Presenteeism cannot thrive.

If you'd like to learn more about how [Trickle](#) can benefit your organisation or to [request a demo](#) of Trickle's employee engagement, wellbeing, and recognition tools please get in touch with us for more information.

[1]
https://www.vitality.co.uk/media-online/britains-healthiest-workplace/pdf/2019/health-at-work-2019_uk.pdf?la=en&hash=E87840347CDEF8A86C144EDF16C6053243F490AA

[2]
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<https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/press-releases/articles/poor-mental-health-costs-uk-employers-up-to-pound-45-billion-a-year.html#>

[3]
https://www.vitality.co.uk/media-online/britains-healthiest-workplace/pdf/2019/health-at-work-2019_uk.pdf?la=en&hash=E87840347CDEF8A86C144EDF16C6053243F490AA

[4] <https://hbr.org/2004/10/presenteeism-at-work-but-out-of-it>

[5] <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/health-well-being-work>

[6]
<https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/consulting/articles/mental-health-and-employers-refreshing-the-case-for-investment.html>

[7]
https://www.vitality.co.uk/media-online/britains-healthiest-workplace/pdf/2019/health-at-work-2019_uk.pdf?la=en&hash=E87840347CDEF8A86C144EDF16C6053243F490AA