

Tackling absence management

Key issues and how to fix them



The business imperative

Managing absence on a day-to-day basis is often one of the biggest overheads for a business. It's also an area that, addressed effectively, will have a significant positive impact on performance and employee wellbeing.

Part of the challenge for HR teams today is its complexity:

- How do you ensure absence entitlements are calculated accurately, especially if you have part-time workers, or hours change partway through the year?
- What happens if an employee has holiday to carry over, or wants to take time off they've not yet 'earned'?

- How do you manage absences for employees that work overseas and have different entitlements and public holidays?
- Who needs to approve time off?
- How do you avoid a last-minute rush to use up holiday entitlement?

It's not just managing annual leave that gives HR and line managers a headache. Keeping on top of sickness absence is also a major challenge, and one that cannot be ignored.

- How do you identify and manage excessive levels of sickness?
- How do you balance employee needs with those of the business?

Why you need to take control

"Effective absence management is a critical element in running a successful organization. Balancing employee wellbeing with compliance obligations and business needs must be a key concern for HR and business leaders."

Transformation at your fingertips

The good news is that recent years have seen the development of sophisticated, low-cost HR software that dramatically reduces time wasted on administration and makes absence more visible and easier to manage.

With these systems, HR professionals are better equipped to make effective decisions, managers are better informed so can support employees when needed, and everyone benefits from much more transparent and satisfying processes.

This guide covers the key absence management challenges faced by businesses today, how modern HR software solves them and provides links to helpful resources that will help you identify what to look for in an absence management system.

Five key challenges HR technology solves:

1. HR admin overload
2. Legislative compliance
3. Manager disconnect
4. Short termism
5. Employee wellbeing

Challenge 1: Admin overload

Absence management is complex. Even for businesses with just a few hundred employees, the administrative overhead that goes with accurately calculating entitlements to paid time off, approving holiday requests and managing sick leave is huge.

EY estimates that the average cost per data entry is £3.60. With employees booking an average of 6 absence events each year, and the input required from HR and line managers to check and approve them, that could easily add up to thousands of pounds every year.

Without effective HR systems:

- Entitlements are time-consuming to calculate and keep on top of
- Sick leave is impossible to track or address appropriately
- Approvals get missed, or miss-recorded
- No one is sure what information to trust
- Optimal resourcing is almost impossible
- Employees and line managers get frustrated, and stop trusting HR
- HR wastes

An HR system like Cezanne HR solves all these issues. It automates entitlement calculations, streamlines approval processes, simplifies managing sick leave and provides everyone with secure online access to the latest information.

[See what to look for in an HR system in order to dramatically cut absence management admin overheads.](#)

Challenge 2: Legal obligations

With absence management, employers have a number of legal obligations that cannot be ignored.

These range from an overall duty of care to employees to specific rules such as entitlement to paid time off, work adjustments, health and safety reporting, data protection and more.

As an HR professional, it is essential that you have the right processes in place across all of the key areas of compliance.

Record-keeping is also critical. For example, where persistent absence could lead to disciplinary or dismissal processes, or to effectively address health and safety issues.

Legal responsibilities include:

- Providing the correct entitlement to paid time off, including parental leave, carry over etc.
- Making sure employees take their legislative minimum leave
- Allowing employees time off if they have a family crisis
- Paying appropriate sick leave
- Enabling risk assessments and work adjustments if necessary
- Recording Health and Safety incidents and following up as appropriate
- Keeping sensitive data safe in compliance with GDPR
- Fairly managing disciplinary or dismissal relating to sickness and poor attendance

HR software systems help address these responsibilities and more. They can calculate entitlements based on working time patterns, public holidays and company rules; ensure key steps, such as self-certification or return to work interviews aren't missed; and enable accurate record-keeping.

See what to look for in an HR system in order to enable legislative compliance.

Challenge 3: Manager disconnect

Line managers should be at the heart of effective absence management. They make the day-to-day decisions about work allocation and resourcing and are often the first point of contact if a member of their team needs time off to deal with a family crisis or has health and well-being issues.

However, without easy access to the right data and the right technology, it's too easy for line managers to struggle with resourcing or make mistakes in how they deal with individual team members: both of which impact the business.

With all that in mind, it is vitally important that HR take the lead in keeping line managers connected.

Typical problems that line managers experience include:

- Time wasted on unnecessary admin checking and approving requests
- No easy insight into who's off, who has holiday to use up, when staff are booked out training etc.
- No quick way to track sickness absence or identify patterns, so solutions can be found
- Fear of tackling persistent problems because of lack of adequate information
- Over-reliance on, or frustration with, HR teams

HR software systems not only save line managers time, but empower them to make faster, better-informed decisions. Resourcing is easier, potential problems can be dealt with early on, and everyone has a better experience.

See what to look for in an HR system to avoid manager disconnect.

Challenge 4: Short-termism

There's an old adage that you can't fix what you can't measure, and that's very true with absence management.

Without easily accessible, accurate and actionable data, it's too easy to lurch from one crisis to the next.

For example, not knowing in plenty of time who's yet to use up their holiday entitlement may result in staff shortages at crucial times; not having insight into sickness patterns may mean missing the opportunity to identify and address underlying causes before they become a significant issue.

Problems of short-termism include:

- Important deadlines being missed because of insufficient staff to carry the workload
- Escalating overtime costs or TOIL requests
- Excessive use of temporary staff
- Employee and manager burnout
- Last minute rush to get employees to use up holiday entitlements
- Money wasted on badly targeted wellness initiatives or Health and Safety interventions

One of the biggest advantages of centralising absence and people management processes in an HR system is the ability to get the 'big picture'.

Line managers have the information they need to avoid difficult clashes and smooth out resourcing issues. HR have a helicopter view of challenges and opportunities across the whole business, enabling more effective long-term planning.

Discover what features to look for in an HR system to tackle short-termism.

Challenge 5: Employee wellbeing

Today, there is widespread recognition of the vital importance of employee wellbeing to the individual and the business.

Employee wellbeing is much more than just keeping an eye on the sick levels of your staff and ensuring they take appropriate breaks. It's about creating a healthy workplace that helps employees flourish and reach their potential.

With so many more staff likely to continue to work remotely than in the past, and the blurring of the boundary between work and home, HR are faced with a whole new set of challenges.

How does poor absence management undermine employee wellbeing?

- Booking time off is difficult and frustrating, and makes employees feel undervalued
- Poor resourcing decisions result in employees struggling to cope with extra workloads
- Management fails to identify and address high levels of sick leave, stress and other wellness issues
- Inconsistent absence management across teams leads to resentment and friction.
- Employees don't take their full holiday entitlement, so miss the opportunity to recharge.

HR systems support employee wellbeing by putting employees 'in control' of their own data and providing tools that facilitate engagement across and between teams. They can also provide the insight HR and line managers need to better promote a healthy work environment.

[Learn how HR software can help with employee wellbeing and engagement.](#)

What next?

Why not get in touch today and discover just how much easier absence management is with a modern HR solution.

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