

Why do employees come to work when ill?

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A hidden problem.....



Many employers
regularly monitor and
record data on sickness
absence

.....BUT do you know
how many of your
employees come to work
when unwell?

Key questions

- Why are employees coming into work when unwell?
 - Organisational
 - Managerial
 - Employee } characteristics
- How does coming to work when unwell relate to...
 - Individual performance
 - Levels of sickness absence
 - Psychological wellbeing



"Your department is running three weeks, behind, Ferguson – these heart attacks have got to stop!"

Multi-method approach

- In-depth interviews 25 employees in total
 - 3 teams with different levels of absence
 - Line manager also interviewed
- Online survey 510 employees
 - 68% female
 - 20 – 69 years (36 years)
- Survey responses matched with line manager assessed performance data and recorded absence data

Key findings

- Sickness presence was *more* prevalent than sickness absence
 - **45%** 1 + days of sickness presence
 - **18%** 1 + days sickness absence over same 4 week period
- Sickness presence and sickness absence were positively related



Higher levels of
sickness
presence



Higher levels of
sickness
absence

Key findings



- Higher levels of sickness presence was significantly related to...



Lower levels of self-reported psychological wellbeing and higher anxiety











Lower levels of manager assessed performance

Predicting sickness presence

- Work-related stress
 - ↑ work-related stress ↑ sickness presence
- Pressure from managers and colleagues to attend work when unwell
 - ↑ workplace pressure ↑ sickness presence
- Experiencing personal financial difficulties
 - ↑ financial difficulties ↑ sickness presence



Predicting perceived performance when working unwell

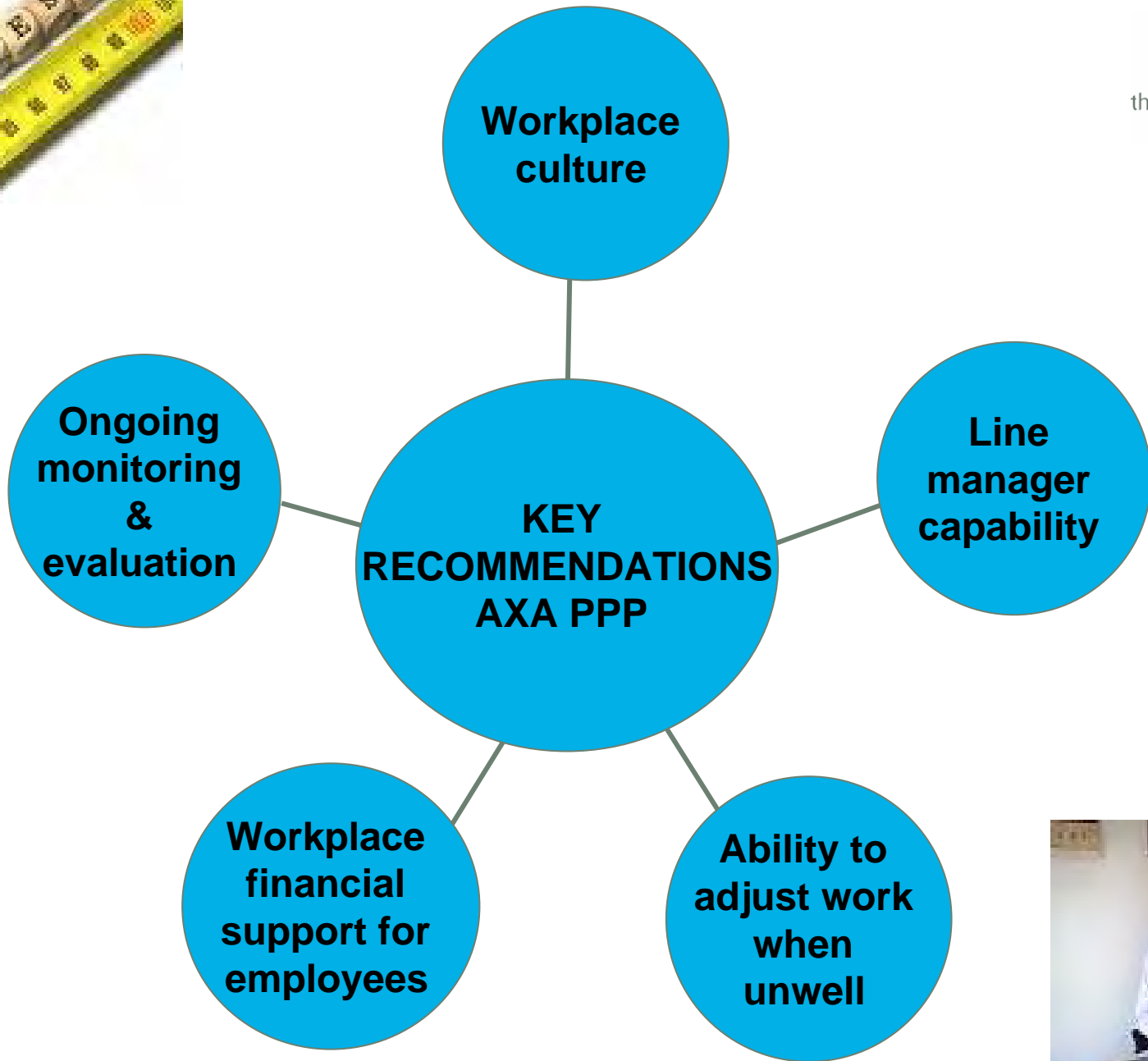
- Ability to adjust work around health problem
 -  adjust work health  performance
- Pressure from managers and colleagues to attend work when unwell
 -  workplace pressure  performance
- Self pressure to attend work
 -  self pressure  performance
- Gender
 -  women  performance



Key implications

- Sickness presence can act as an important signaller to employers of employee health and wellbeing
- Like sickness absence, sickness presence can be a symptom of underlying issues. Identifying and tackling the causes of these symptoms is crucial
- Employers may be at risk of underestimating employee ill health and missing warning signals by focusing on absence alone





Recommendations for employers

1. Recognise that sickness presence can be an indicator of employee health and wellbeing
2. Find ways to monitor sickness presence and how it is impairing employees (i) ability to work and (ii) health and wellbeing
3. Collect data – explore issues underlying sickness presence and sickness absence
4. Address underlying causes of poor employee health and wellbeing especially those that are work-related

THANK YOU