

Caring no less for their work

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In the UK, with its ageing population, employees with additional roles as family carers, are becoming an employed segment of many companies that need to be officially catered for.

One charity calculates that this group performs unpaid caring work each year, valued at \$40 billion (Dh146.8 billion) and the government has implemented a National Carers Strategy to help the estimated three million people who are trying to juggle their paid employment with their caring duties. The only certainty is that it will also happen here in the UAE.

Employers facing the issue for the first time may not immediately see why this situation need be a corporate responsibility - which superficially looks just like another tax and a drain on resources.

But with prestige names like British Telecom and PWC international accountants adding their weight to the flexible-working movement, they might note the recent finding that employers can boost productivity by upto 20% by supporting adult carers in the workplace.

The most obvious saving is in the reduced turnover and hiring of new staff, when an estimated one in five employees has given up work in order to care for a dependant, full-time.

Stress reduction

Reduction in employee stress and sick-leave is another; in one case stress related absence was reduced by 26%. BT's customers report that the quality of service has risen by 5% since flexible working was introduced.

But as always, the statistics are only part of the picture. Focusing closer and viewing the cases individually, we find other kinds of advantage that cannot easily be quantified.

One of them is morale. Your employee is going to feel more able to concentrate on the tasks at hand, without being distracted into wondering and worrying about the person they're meant to be caring for, possibly with guilt-feelings adding further negativity.

Another is gratitude. Employees who have been granted this privilege - which undoubtedly benefits them more than it penalises the employer - are going to feel favourably disposed towards their employer organisation and are unlikely to want to change jobs in a hurry. A trust-based relationship is worth its weight in gold.

Finally, consider the type of person who volunteers for the caring role in the first place, remembering that they will probably tend to be at their productive mid-career peak.

Surely this is the most responsible kind of individual, unwilling to shirk responsibilities, someone with a sense of what is fit and right, who wants to see a difficult situation managed with efficiency and fairness. In other words, the perfect team-player and perhaps team-leader.

To lose such a person might turn out to be disastrous if it produces a steady decline in morale and performance that is difficult to reverse.

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