



Sickness Absence Management (SAM)

John and Lucy: Sales Managers, Insurance company

As Sales Managers for a south-east insurance company, John is responsible for running a telesales operation employing 150 and Lucy is responsible for a department of 31, reporting to John.

Although sickness absence is a key issue for them, before they introduced AXA ICAS's Sickness Absence Management (SAM) system, John and Lucy had no access to an individual's sickness record and had to rely on memory to track the more frequent absentees. They had no data to show the absence trends in the department – the information was available but not on a day by day basis. Employees called their team leader to report their sickness, so although each team leader was aware of who was absent, John could only tell if there were more empty desks than usual. This meant it was impossible to gauge the impact of sickness absence on the performance of the department.

Now, with SAM in place, John and Lucy have access to accurate, up-to-the-minute information that enables them to see exactly which employees are available, and when. Absences are notified by both email and text messaging alerts, so even when John and Lucy are out of the office they still have the information they need to make any workload management decisions instantly.

Since then, John's seen a 50% reduction in absence, down from 6% to just 3%. "That gives me back around 100 productive working hours a week," says John, "time that represents potential sales revenues of around £17,000."

Because his absence information is available on line, John can now access it whenever he wants to. He can now instantly:

- See how many individuals are away at any one time.
- Understand where the problems are – whether this is one or two individuals, or by comparing one team to the others.
- Track employees returning to work so that he can personally welcome them back. This also reinforces the fact that employees know he is aware of their recent absence.
- Gauge how well each team and team leader is performing.
- Discuss absence levels and individual absentees with each team leader so that he can ensure that focus is maintained.

"Before SAM was introduced we had an uncertain view of our absence performance," he explains. Employees had to report to their managers, who filled in a form, that went to HR and we eventually got a report back. As with any manual system, it was unreliable at best and misleading at worst. Now we have definite information that we can act upon for everyone's benefit." For example, SAM revealed that two of John's seven teams had particularly high levels of absence. Closer examination revealed

a conflict between the shift patterns for those particular teams and the lifestyle demands of individuals in them. "We were able to move some people to new teams and re-allocate shifts, which has almost totally solved the problem," John explains.

John can also spot recurring problems early and address them proactively. "If we notice that someone's been off three or four times with migraine or back problems, for example, it prompts us to take a closer look at their screen protection or seating," he explains. At an appropriate time employees are referred to a confidential occupational health service that offers health and lifestyle advice and support.

As well as reducing absence, SAM helps John manage its operational impacts when it does occur. "Individuals can call in their absence at their convenience – usually when they wake up in the morning feeling rotten – rather than having to wait till they can get their line manager on the phone. That means we have a pretty good view, at the beginning of the business day, of what our staffing challenges will be and can address them accordingly."

Lucy has one frequent absentee and one long term absentee within her department. Lucy says 'When I discuss my team's performance with John, it is terribly useful to have my teams data available. We can discuss the issues based on facts just as we do for any other aspect of business performance. I can't tell you how much more proactive I feel since SAM has been in place.'

Since the implementation of SAM, Lucy has been able to:

- See who is absent and when they are likely to return.
- Understand if a frequent absentee needs to undergo a formal caution or worse.
- Consider whether an employee would benefit from occupational health support.
- Ensure a consistent approach, as SAM:
 - Notifies absence
 - Prompts when an absentee should have returned to work
 - Reminds that a return to work interview is required.

The management information also gives John and Lucy an excellent opportunity to see how an employee is feeling when they return from a period of sick leave. They have always known that showing a personal interest in their employees' wellbeing is important, however, prompted by the email advising of the return to work, they are now consistent in their approach to all employees which has had a very positive effect on morale and building motivation. And, of course, knowing that John and Lucy always conduct a return to work interview, can make employees think twice before taking unwarranted sick leave.

SAM gives John and Lucy all the tools they need to manage sickness absence more effectively and they have seen a significant reduction in employee absences since its introduction.

**For further information on SAM, please call
AXA ICAS on 0800 17 0800**

www.axa-icas.com



ICAS WELLBEING