

Managing adjustments - Scenarios (Part 1)

Estimated reading time: 10 minutes 43 seconds

Introduction

Understanding why adjustments are crucial to good management

- The following scenarios aim to show how, as a people manager, your consideration of adjustments has an impact on all areas of managing individuals and teams, from productivity and performance to motivation and career progression.
- The scenarios cover some of the aspects you'll encounter later in the resources in this section.
- They give the context to various situations, the main concerns of the employee and the manager's response.

Scenario 1 – Ken and Maria

Ergonomic equipment

The context

When Ken receives a fit note from Maria, a member of his team signed off with back pain, he remembers noticing that Maria had recently seemed to be in discomfort or pain. Maria frequently flexed her wrists and when standing placed her hand on her back. On her return to work Ken arranges a 'back to work' interview where he asks her if she thinks work had contributed to her back pain.

The initial discussion

Maria tells him her GP has advised her not to work at a computer. As Maria's job is completely computer-based, Ken cannot see what he should do. He asks Maria what she finds most difficult and she tells him she has shooting pains up her right arm when she

uses her mouse and her wrist swells up at night. She also had to stand up frequently because she thought her chair was giving her back and neck ache which had led to migraines at night that stopped her sleeping. Maria is worried that not being able to use a computer will mean she will lose her job.

Ken tells Maria that he needs to speak to others in the organisation and asks for her permission to mention her back and arm problems to the HR and IT teams.

Maria gives her permission and they agree that her work will be restricted to reading reports from home until a solution can be found. Ken talks to HR who help him to organise a workplace assessment for Maria.

The assessment

The assessor talks to Maria about her work and watches her at her desk. Maria tells him her GP has advised her not to work at a computer. The assessor produces a detailed report making various recommendations:

- An adapted keyboard that places less strain on her wrists when she types.
- A different mouse that she doesn't have to clutch so tightly.
- Speech-to-text software and training for Maria so that she can dictate emails.
- A chair adapted to Maria's size and shape that can be raised to the right height for her desk and will support her back and neck properly.
- An adjustable sit-stand desk to allow Maria to stand for periods in the day while working at her computer.

The report also notes that Maria rarely moves from her desk during the working day and usually eats lunch at her desk. It suggests Maria should get up and walk round the office several times a day and that she should leave her desk at lunchtimes to walk outside.

The final outcome

Ken and Maria discuss the report and Ken promises to keep Maria informed about when the equipment is due to arrive. In the meantime they agree that Maria will:

- Continue to read from home.
- Put having a drink and a walk into her online diary which will send her an alert every hour telling her it's time for a break. Ken says he will make sure everyone on the team has a proper lunch break of at least 30 minutes during which they leave their desks.

A month after the equipment has been installed the pain in Maria's neck, back and arms has almost disappeared and she hasn't had a migraine in weeks. She also feels more alert because she is drinking more water and the walk at lunchtime helps clear her head and improve her thinking.

The whole team has reported the benefits of having a proper break and leaving their desks at lunchtime.

Scenario 2 – Carla and Lloyd

Time off for appointments related to a health condition

The context

Carla is concerned about the amount of time off sick Lloyd has been taking in the last few months. She arranges a meeting to talk to Lloyd about his sickness absences and asks him if he is having any problems at work

Lloyd apologises for the time he has taken off and insists that it is nothing to do with work. He seems reluctant to say more and so Carla asks if he will see the occupational health adviser. Lloyd agrees.

Lloyd's concerns

Lloyd tells the occupational health adviser that he discovered a few months ago that he had prostate cancer and the time off sick has been for hospital appointments, treatment and check-ups. The cancer is responding well to treatment but he is embarrassed about being ill and doesn't want Carla or his colleagues to know about it.

The occupational health adviser agrees not to reveal any details about Lloyd's condition to Carla.

He and Lloyd talk through the adjustments Lloyd needs at work which are very simple – Lloyd will need time off work from time to time to attend hospital appointments. Lloyd agrees that the occupational health adviser should write a report for Carla saying Lloyd will need time off for medical appointments. No details of the medical treatment are included in the report.

Carla's response

Carla and Lloyd meet to discuss the report and Carla is happy to be flexible and agrees to record the time off that Lloyd needs as disability leave as Lloyd can tell her in advance when his appointments are.

In the past he had not told anyone and simply called in sick on the day. Knowing when the appointments are makes it easier for Carla to plan around the appointments. Carla doesn't press Lloyd for any more details and the time he needs is accepted by his colleagues without question. Lloyd is relieved not to have to worry about his job and colleagues any longer.

For more information on disability leave, see the resource ['Disability Leave – Time off for treatments or appointments'](#) in this Toolkit.

Scenario 3 – Michelle and Rebecca

Environment and travel to work

The context

Rebecca had been working for university for five years when she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. On her return to work after a relapse she meets her manager Michelle to discuss adjustments she will need to be able to continue working.

Rebecca's concerns

Rebecca finds all the doors in the listed building where she works difficult because they are so heavy and in particular the front door to the building. There are also a couple of steps up to the front door which can get slippery when it is wet or icy. Some days Rebecca has to wait outside until someone else comes along who can help her up the steps and into the building.

Getting to work has also been a problem from time to time. Rebecca's husband drops her at the train station near her house but the station at the other end is a 15-minute walk from where Rebecca works. Rebecca finds this walk very difficult when it is cold or icy underfoot.

Michelle's response

Michelle asks Rebecca to make an application to the Access to Work scheme. After an assessment, Access to Work agrees to pay for Rebecca to take a taxi from the station to work on days when she feels unable to walk.

Michelle talks to her manager and the facilities manager about the other issues. To overcome Rebecca's problems many doors will have to be replaced with ones that open automatically and a handrail installed up to the front door. As the building is listed, however, these changes will have to be approved as being in keeping with the building which will make them more expensive.

The final outcome

A consultation with other staff reveals that:

- Staff who carry files and equipment through the corridors find the heavy doors, which pull open, difficult to manage.
- The catering staff also find the doors a problem as they have to be propped open to allow food and drinks trolleys through.
- The events management team were concerned about the steps during a recent Christmas function for university alumni and donors. Members of staff had to be posted outside all evening to help some older visitors and those with mobility impairments enter and leave the building.

The university decides to commission a full access audit of the building and although the adjustments are likely to be expensive, they will benefit everyone in the long run and so they decide to make them.

Scenario 4 – Peter and Craig

Redeployment to another role

The context

Craig works as a customer service agent for a small merchandising company. His job involves:

- Answering the telephones and responding to emails from customers.
- Selling products and services over the telephone.
- Entering customer information onto a database.
- Handling or escalating complaints.

After returning from a recent holiday, Craig finds that he is experiencing difficulty with his hearing. He is struggling to hear customers on calls, or even his colleagues in conversation. Craig's GP confirms that he has a severe ear infection which is causing his hearing loss, and it is unlikely that his hearing will improve.

Craig's concerns

Craig meets with his manager Peter to discuss possible adjustments. Craig asks that he be taken off the telephones permanently, as he is finding it very difficult to manage calls and provide the level of service that customers expect.

He is sad as he enjoys this aspect of his job but assures Peter that he can still work effectively responding to enquiries and handling complaints over email. Peter is not sure if this adjustment would be practical. Communicating with customers over the telephone is a key part of Craig's role.

Peter is not sure there would be enough work for Craig to do purely over email, and he is worried that taking him off the telephones permanently would negatively impact the rest of the team.

Peter's response

Peter tells Craig he will ask the HR manager for advice on suitable adjustments.

The HR manager agrees that providing a telephone service is a core function of the customer service agent role and removing this aspect of the job would not be practical, and therefore not a reasonable adjustment. Peter and the HR manager agree that Craig will not be able to perform his current role adequately if he is unable to use the telephone.

As a first step, the HR manager suggests Craig has a workplace assessment to see whether technical adjustments can be made. This includes testing a telephone and headset which is able to reach a higher volume. Unfortunately, these adjustments do not prove successful.

Searching for a solution

As there are no adjustments that can enable Craig to perform in his role, the HR manager moves to identify suitable alternative vacancies that Craig could be transferred into. In the meantime, Craig continues to work in his current team responding to enquiries and handling complaints over email, though understands that this is only a temporary arrangement and cannot be continued forever.

Within a few weeks, the HR manager identifies a suitable alternative role for Craig. The company has recently launched a web chat function for sales, enquiries and general customer service. This has proved very popular, and there is now enough work for someone to be dedicated to this function fulltime, without being distracted by telephone calls. The skills required are very similar to Craig's current role.

The final outcome

Peter and the HR manager discuss this new position with Craig, who is very pleased that he will be able to continue in a similar role that matches his skills, and Peter is delighted to have someone with Craig's experience and knowledge of the company's products managing this new and important way for the company to serve its customers.

Summary of key points

- **Look for signs that someone might have a disability that is impacting on their job:** look for changes in behaviour, appearance, routine, performance or attendance and don't assume everyone knows they have a disability.
- Develop a clear understanding of the context: look at what elements of the role are being done well as well as what someone might be struggling with.
- **Focus on identifying and removing the barriers that your staff are facing:** you have a responsibility to explore any underlying issues that you do not know about.
- **Don't worry about trying to understand if someone meets the legal definition of disability:** if someone is struggling, talk to them, find out what would help and make any changes you reasonably can.
- **Get help in understanding if adjustments are reasonable:** talk to HR and/or Occupational Health and seek other sources of help too.
- **Aim for open communication even if it involves potentially difficult conversations:** listen and connect with the issues so you can determine what adjustments, if any, need to be made.

Business Disability Forum has an [Advice Service](#) available for managers working in organisations within our membership. To discuss any disability matters call on +44-(0)20-7403-3020 or email us at advice@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk.

Business Disability Forum also provides a range learning and development offerings. For more information, see our [Learning and Development page](#) or contact our team at training@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk.



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