

Managing adjustments - Scenarios (Part 2)

Estimated reading time: 13 minutes 36 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 – Liz and Joanne

Assistive technology

The context

Liz is concerned about Joanne, a member of her team. Joanne has missed three out of four deadlines. She has also produced reports that are poorly structured and contain spelling and grammatical mistakes.

When Liz speaks to Joanne about her work she becomes very upset but reveals that it had been suggested to her at college that she might have dyslexia. Joanne dropped out of college and so has never had an assessment.

The initial discussion

Liz asks Joanne for her suggestions on how to improve her work. Joanne says she is often very tired at the end of the day and she finds it difficult to sleep because she is worrying about deadlines that she knows she is likely to miss.

Her solution is to reduce her hours and work part-time as she thinks this might stop her being so tired. She is concerned about the accompanying cut in salary and asks if Liz could let her know how much her salary will be part-time, to see if she can afford it.

Liz speaks to HR to ask if a dyslexia assessment can be arranged for Joanne and asks Joanne not to make any decisions until they get the assessment report which they can go through together.

The assessment

The assessment takes place and the report states that Joanne does have dyslexia. It recommends that she:

- Uses speech to text software which means she can hear what she has written helping her to spot grammatical mistakes.
- Uses the spelling and grammatical checking software already on her computer.
- Changes the background colour on her desktop from white to yellow, to make it easier to read text.
- Uses the alerts and reminders on her calendar to help her organise her time.
- Work from home for one day a week so she can have quiet time to read and concentrate.
- Have a series of sessions with a dyslexia coach who will help her to understand her dyslexia and develop coping strategies.

The report also suggests that reducing her hours without the above adjustments will not resolve Joanne's difficulties at work and would not be an effective adjustment.

Scenario 2 – Emily and Alan

Redeployment to a different role

The context

Alan works at a care home. He is a residential care worker. He has been off sick for two months during which time he has had medical tests and started taking medication.

On his return to work he meets his manager Emily to discuss the adjustments he needs.

Alan's concerns

Alan tells Emily he has to test himself at the same time every morning and depending on what the test results reveal he might have to go to his clinic for treatment that day. This is

likely to go on for several months until the correct level of medication can be found to stabilise his condition.

He asks for the time off he needs as an adjustment.

Emily's response

Emily tells Alan there should be no problem with him taking time off to go to the clinic but she is concerned about the effect his unplanned absences will have on his colleagues and the running of the home. Everyone in Alan's role works on a seven day rota with two different days off a week. This rota is fixed at least a fortnight in advance.

If Alan cannot come in on a day he is supposed to work Emily has to find someone to cover for him at short notice or be shortstaffed if no one can be found that day.

Emily discusses this with HR.

The outcome

A decision is made that Alan's request is not reasonable because of the nature of his work and the likely disruption to the smooth running of the home. Emily and HR ask Alan to consider a different role where there is currently a vacancy to cover maternity leave. This is an office-based job where Alan's unplanned absences can be more easily accommodated.

Alan is pleased with this outcome and is reassured that he will be given the training he needs for the new role.

When his condition stabilises he may have the option of returning to his old post, as he will only need to go into hospital occasionally on dates he will know in advance.

Scenario 3 – John and Raj

Travel to work

The context

Raj works for a large firm of accountants as an accounting employee. He has always been a quiet but conscientious member of John's team.

Earlier this year plans were announced for the firm to move to a more central location with very limited parking but the new office has good public transport connections. John has heard a number of grumbles from staff unhappy about not being able to drive to work anymore but no one has made any serious complaints.

John is therefore surprised that Raj, of all people, should have asked to see him about the loss of his parking space.

Raj's concerns

At the meeting Raj says he needs to drive to work and have a parking space at the new office. Raj reluctantly tells John he has colitis, a medical condition that means he must be able to access toilet facilities at short notice.

Raj has worked out where he can stop to use a toilet if he drives from his home to the new office. Using buses, local trains and trams is impossible as it will take him longer to get to work and they do not have toilets.

Raj reveals he has had the condition for some time but has been too embarrassed to talk about it and has never needed to before.

John's response

John decides that Raj doesn't need to see an occupational health advisor as he already has a good understanding of the barriers he is facing and adjustments that might help.

John and Raj meet to agree:

- Raj will be allowed to continue to drive to the office and will have a parking space reserved for him. John agrees this with Facilities Management.
- John will ensure Raj is assigned only to clients who can offer parking at their offices so he can drive there.

No one else on the team will be told about Raj's medical condition.

Handling a team reaction

When Raj's colleagues learn that Raj will be allowed to drive to the new offices John receives complaints about the unfairness of this. The clients who can offer parking facilities also tend to have better offices and this too causes resentment as Raj's colleagues often have to work in cramped, uncomfortable client offices.

Raj becomes increasingly uncomfortable around his colleagues' resentment and so he and John agree they should be told Raj needs a parking space as an adjustment for a disability but that they will not be given any details about its nature.

A wider view of adjustments

John decides to speak to each member of his team individually and to ask them if they too have any particular needs the firm should take into consideration. He makes it clear to everyone that he will treat them all fairly and will be as flexible and accommodating as is reasonable.

- One member of the team asks if he can leave the office a few hours early on Friday afternoons if he makes up the time so he can collect his children, who he has at weekends.

- Another asks if she can start and finish work a little later so she can still drop her elderly father at his day centre before catching the bus into work.

John is able to accommodate both of these requests and the rest of the team appreciate this flexibility.

Scenario 4 – Tamika and Mark

Flexible working or adjusted hours

The context

Mark has worked as a kitchen assistant for nearly a year. He has a good working relationship with his manager Tamika, so when he receives a diagnosis of HIV he decides to let her know.

He is worried about being able to keep his job as he works with knives and isn't sure about the health and safety implications for his colleagues or customers.

Tamika's response

Tamika isn't sure about the health and safety implications either, but she knows that HIV is covered as a disability under the Equality Act.

Tamika shares Mark's worry, but thinks they need to find out more information first. She asks if Mark needs anything in work and if he will see the organisation's occupational health adviser for advice on adjustments. She tells Mark that they can also advise on health and safety.

Mark agrees and goes for an occupational health assessment.

An occupational health assessment

The occupational health adviser confirms that Mark is in good health but may experience side effects from medication. They recommend a few adjustments:

- Flexibility around shift patterns to help manage side-effects.
- Breaks to take medication.
- A quiet space to rest if possible.
- Access to water.
- A private place to store medication.
- Time off for medical appointments.

The occupational health adviser also coordinates a health and safety risk assessment with Tamika, Mark and the health and safety manager.

A health and safety risk assessment

The health and safety assessment identifies the potential hazards in the kitchen and looks at the impact of Mark's condition and the level of associated risk.

They find that although there are potential risks, these can all be managed if Mark and his colleagues follow proper health and safety precautions and practice good hygiene. Mark already wears knife gloves while working and practices good kitchen safety.

The risk assessment also covers first aid, and the health and safety manager assures Tamika and Mark that the first aiders would always ensure safe first aid practices, as they wouldn't necessarily know if someone they were treating carried an infection.

First aid training covers blood borne infections, and the first aiders in the kitchen know that they should use appropriate equipment and tend to their own open wounds before treating others. The chances of transmitting HIV now that Mark is receiving treatment are very low anyway, and after doing some research the health and safety manager hasn't been able to find any incidents of it happening in first aid situations.

The outcome

Tamika asks Mark if he wants anyone to know about his condition, and he asks that it be kept between them, the occupational health adviser and the health and safety manager.

Tamika respects his request for confidentiality, as there is no reason for the other members of the team to know. Tamika puts the recommended adjustments in place for Mark and lets the rest of the team know that she can be flexible if they have any particular needs in work.

Scenario 5 – Tony and Jessica

Assistive technology and travel to work

The context

Jessica works as a press officer for a small charity. Her job is to write press releases, speak to journalists and to attend functions and meetings, often in the evenings. Jessica also has to be on call in the evenings and weekends on a rota with other people in the team and so she must always be able to respond to calls and emails, which she does via her company phone.

At her last meeting with her manager, Tony, Jessica told him she has been slowly losing her vision in both eyes. She has decided to say something now because she is finding it more and more difficult to use her company phone as the text is too small or badly lit for her to read.

Jessica's concerns

Apart from the difficulty using the work phone, Jessica is also becoming more nervous about travelling at night to functions as she can see less well in the dark. She has been trying to avoid the evening events, especially as it is now getting dark earlier, but thinks her colleagues have begun to notice and resent this.

She doesn't want to be viewed as not pulling her weight but is so worried about getting to the event and home again that she doesn't feel she does a good job when she is there.

Tony's response

Tony reassures Jessica and suggests getting expert advice. After talking to HR, Tony gives Jessica information about the Government's Access to Work scheme. Jessica calls Access to Work to speak to an adviser.

The adviser reassures her that practical solutions are possible and advises Jessica to complete an Access to Work application. After submitting her application, Jessica is contacted by an Access to Work Adviser who arranges an assessment with her and her manager to discuss her needs and recommend support.

While waiting for the assessment Tony ensures that Jessica is assigned to meetings and functions taking place during the day whenever possible and tries to call her rather than email her out of office hours.

Access to Work

The Access to Work adviser tells them of equipment options to support her role.

- An upgrade to a smartphone with magnification options and speech to text software.
- Speech to text software for her laptop.
- Advice on how to change her desktop and layout so it is easier for her to use.
- Access to Work will not contribute to the cost of a smartphone, as this is standard business equipment. It will, however, pay the difference in cost if the smartphone is more expensive than Jessica's current phone, which is likely to be the case.

The cost of the software for the laptop will be covered entirely, as Jessica works for a small organisation that employs fewer than 50 people.

Access to Work also agrees to pay for taxis to evening work meetings and functions that Jessica needs to attend. Jessica needs to estimate the number of journeys and distances for them to create a yearly profile which can be reviewed, keep her receipts from an agreed taxi firm and claim back the fares.

The Access to Work adviser meets Jessica in the office and talks through the requirements of Jessica's job with her and Tony.

The outcome

The Access to Work adviser sends Tony a letter outlining everything that has been agreed and Tony ensures the recommended equipment is bought and the software installed as well as claiming the approved costs back from Access to Work. With the new equipment, and the reassurance of knowing she can get taxis to and from evening functions, Jessica's confidence is restored and she feels she is contributing fully to the team again.

Tony and Jessica agree, however, that they will keep this part of her job under review because Jessica is worried that as her vision deteriorates she will be unable to recognise people, read name badges and network effectively.

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.

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