

Tekst 6

The Economist, 2010

Business

Schumpeter | Mens sana in corporation sano¹⁾

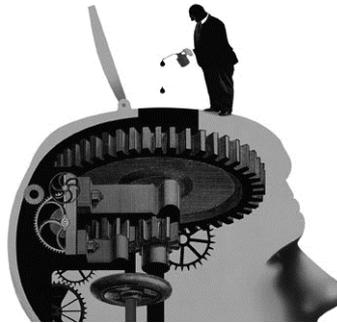
(1) ANNUAL check-ups and company “wellness programmes” have become a familiar part of the corporate landscape. More than half of America’s larger companies offer advice on stopping smoking and fighting flab. More than a third have gyms. Some have rechristened their canteens as “nutrition centres”. IBM is among a growing band of companies that offer workers financial incentives (such as cheaper medical co-payments) to encourage them to lose weight and exercise regularly. AstraZeneca has installed treadmills in its offices so workers can exercise their legs, albeit gently, while holding meetings.

PricewaterhouseCoopers provides massage and yoga sessions.

(2) Companies are now also starting to touch on a potentially troubling area: their employees’ mental health.

Companies as diverse as BT, Rolls-Royce and Grant Thornton have introduced mental-health programmes. These range from training managers to spot problems to rehabilitating those suffering breakdowns. A growing number of boutique consultancies such as Corporate Psychology and Mental Fitness are also offering to improve workers’ mental well-being.

(3) The fashion is being driven by simultaneous developments in two usually distinct areas — health care and management theory. Doctors report that more than a third of the physical problems they encounter have some psychological basis. Management



gurus are also discovering the joys of psychology. Business professors have taken to littering their texts with references to “toxic organisations” and “emotional contagion”. Several psychologists have become influential gurus in their own

right. Daniel Goleman of Rutgers University sings the praises of “emotional intelligence” in the workplace. Steven Berglas, a psychiatrist turned management professor at UCLA, offers advice on how to “reclaim the fire” after burnout. There is even a new business discipline, neuroleadership, that promises to use brain science to improve senior management.

(4) Both doctors and gurus can quote some compelling statistics. The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health estimates that a sixth of the British workforce suffers from depression or stress, and that mental ill-health costs British employers almost \$26 billion a year. American research suggests that “presenteeism” (whereby the wounded turn up to work without contributing) costs twice as much as absenteeism.

(5) So far this trend has been most marked in the upper ranks of firms. Grant Thornton sends its partners on a two-day programme put on by Positive Health Strategies, a London company. Some of this programme deals with familiar things such as exercise and healthy eating. But it also screens people for psychological well-being, and offers advice on “optimising

performance” and “staying positive under pressure”. Focusing on their stars makes sense for companies. The stars not only represent huge investments. They are also most likely to live under stress while maintaining a stiff upper lip. But focusing on stars also makes sense for the mental-wellness movement itself: the best way to insert yourself into a company’s DNA is to seduce its leadership.

(6) What should one make of the corporate world’s new-found interest in promoting mental health? For sure, depression and anxiety can take a serious toll on productivity, and companies bear their share of the blame for promoting stress in the first place. And catching psychological problems early can prevent them from escalating. BT reports that its programmes have reduced levels of sickness absence due to mental-health problems by 30%. This all sounds promising. But there are nevertheless several troubling aspects.

(7) The first worry is that promoting psychological wellness crosses an important line between the public and the private, raising awkward questions. Should companies pry into people’s emotional lives? Can they be trusted with the information they gather? And should psychologically frail workers put their faith in people who work primarily for their employers rather than in their personal doctors? Workers rightly worry that companies will use psychological information in their annual appraisals. And that bosses will see the trend as an excuse for extending their power

over staff — using the veiled threat of somehow being classified as mentally impaired to make them obey, and conform.

(8) A second worry is about the 26 of the mental-wellness movement. A phrase like “mental fitness” is bound to attract charlatans and snake-oil salesmen. Warren Bennis of the University of Southern California has noted that the new “science” of neuroleadership is “filled with banalities”. Other people are less complimentary.

(9) The biggest problem with the movement lies in the assumption that promoting psychological wellness is as axiomatically good as encouraging the physical sort. It is one thing to help people deal with serious problems when they crop up. It is another to try to promote something that cannot easily be defined, let alone managed. Few would doubt that good physical health makes for good productivity; but it is not self-evident that a positive mental attitude is good for a worker or his output: history shows that misfits have contributed far more to creativity than perky optimists have done. 27, curmudgeonliness²⁾ is a rational way to cope with an imperfect world, rather than a sign of mental maladjustment (or so your occasionally curmudgeonly columnist would like to believe). Companies that chase the will-o’-the-wisp of “positive attitudes” may end up damaging themselves as well as sticking their noses where they have no business.

noot 1 “Mens sana in corporation sano” means “a healthy mind in a healthy corporation” and is a pun on the Latin proverb “Mens sana in corpore sano,” which means “a healthy mind in a healthy body”.

noot 2 curmudgeonliness: sikkeneurigheid

Tekst 6 Mens sana in corporation sano

- 1p **21** Which of the following characterises paragraph 2?
- A** It elaborates on the investments of companies in their employees' health.
 - B** It gives more examples of successfully introduced business health programmes.
 - C** It outlines the increasing interest of businesses in their social responsibility.
- 1p **22** Leg uit wat er bedoeld wordt met "The fashion" (begin alinea 3).
- 1p **23** Which of the following is true with regard to paragraph 3?
In this paragraph
- A** the writer's choice of words suggests that he regards his subject with some scepticism.
 - B** the writer's list of references illustrates his neutrality on the phenomenon described.
 - C** the writer supports his opinion by mentioning famous experts in the field.
- 1p **24** Which of the following could be added to "statistics" (paragraph 4)?
- A** on the consequences of employees working too hard
 - B** on the effects of workers' problems
 - C** on the relation between psychological problems and work
 - D** on the risks of employees refusing psychological help
- 1p **25** Which of the following can be concluded from the passage "For sure, ... 30%." (paragraph 6)?
- A** Mental health programmes only pay off in case of work-related problems.
 - B** Mental health programmes would not be needed if people were less ambitious.
 - C** There are good reasons for introducing mental health programmes.
- 1p **26** Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 8?
- A** disreputable past
 - B** enormous costs
 - C** political correctness
 - D** scientific foundation

1p 27 Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 9?

- A Besides
- B In comparison
- C In short
- D Nevertheless
- E Therefore

“Companies that ... damaging themselves” (laatste zin)

1p 28 Waaruit bestaat de schade volgens alinea 9?