

EMPLOYERS MOTIVATION TO CARRY OUT WORKPLACE HEALTH PROMOTION: A SUMMARY OF A LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Workplace health promotion (WHP) is the combined efforts of employers, workers and society to improve the health and wellbeing of people at work. This can be achieved by: improving work organisation and the work environment; promoting the active participation of all stakeholders in the process; and encouraging personal development. It is important to note that WHP aims to be a complementary support for, but not a replacement of, workplace risk management. Proper risk management is an essential foundation for a successful WHP programme. Developing and sustaining a healthy work environment and workforce has clear benefits for companies and employees, but can also lead to an improvement in social and economic development at local, regional, national and European level. The report that this factsheet summarises presents the findings of a literature review that aims to identify the key reasons, arguments and motivations for employers to carry out workplace health promotion initiatives, and discusses some of the associated challenges and obstacles. This knowledge can be used to encourage and motivate the employers to start WHP.

Motivation for employers to carry out WHP

The motivations were classified as internal factors (those inside the organisation) and external factors (those outside the organisation). The main findings of the literature review were as follows:

Internal motivating factors

- There is evidence to indicate that WHP programmes and measures can have a real and significant impact on increasing productivity rates and production.
- WHP programmes have been associated with decreasing absenteeism and associated sickness disability costs.
- WHP programmes have been demonstrated to have a positive impact on presenteeism.
- Enhancing workers' health and wellbeing through WHP promotion programmes may result in enhanced levels of job satisfaction and organisational commitment among workers.
- One benefit of investing in well-structured health promotion programmes is the reduction of staff turnover and an improvement in recruitment of new workers. There may also be an improvement in staff morale, which can also indirectly have an impact on the employee turnover rate.
- There is growing evidence, and awareness, that poor employee health and wellbeing are linked to the increased likelihood of industrial accidents and injuries. Therefore, workplace initiatives to promote workers' health may have a beneficial indirect impact by reducing the costs incurred by companies due to occupational accidents and injuries.
- There is a growing body of evidence to indicate that many health promotion initiatives and strategies implemented in the workplace can lead to real and significant cost savings for organisations.

External motivating factors

- Research indicates that WHP, and with it enhanced employee wellbeing, may have the indirect benefit of improving customer service and, in turn, customer loyalty.
- Companies providing WHP for their employees are seen as attractive and responsible employers. An additional benefit of enhanced corporate image is the increased visibility to potential future employees.

- Support through local and governmental initiatives may be especially important for small and medium-sized enterprises that have limited resources and in-house expertise to design and implement such programmes.
- Support programmes by insurance companies and/ or other forms of external incentive have been observed to be a useful strategy to encourage employers to implement and, moreover, to invest in the promotion of workplace health.

Barriers and challenges

The review of the literature identified a number of factors that may have an impact on employers' engagement in WHP. These include:

Barriers

- A lack of occupational safety and health infrastructure.
- A negative perception of occupational health requirements and benefits.
- A lack of relevant skills and qualifications.
- Inadequate cooperation between key stakeholders in the process.
- Bureaucratic requirements.
- The perceived need for major financial investment in a programme.
- The misperception by employers and organisations that WHP has limited or no benefits for the company, is too time-consuming, and is not their responsibility.

WHP and the size of organisations

The size of an enterprise can influence its implementation of WHP, with smaller enterprises being less likely to implement such actions. In general, small workplaces – particularly micro firms – are widely acknowledged as a particular challenge for health promotion, due to a number of difficulties faced by such enterprises such as lack of resources and expertise. However, smaller enterprises also provide a highly advantageous context for the promotion of employee health in view of their unique social, organisational and environmental characteristics (such as approachable top management and easier communication with employees), which can be capitalised on in order to carry out successful WHP programmes.



In contrast, large organisations might have to design several different programmes in order to meet the needs of their large and diverse workforce. It is a challenge to the designer of the programme(s) to accurately determine the relative priorities for a large and diverse workforce, which can often be affected by the limits on the human, financial, spatial and time resources that are available to the organisation. In addition, the large number of employees in bigger organisations also makes it challenging to obtain strong support among all levels of employees, which is critical to the success of WHP programmes.

WHP in the public versus private sector

A growing number of studies highlight the different needs and priorities of various occupational sectors, and, in turn, the varying approaches to WHP used in the private versus the public sector. It is vital to conduct a thorough analysis of the needs and properties in each individual occupational sector (and to each organisation within it), and to tailor health promotion policies, practices and initiatives to the identified needs and priorities.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations aimed at policymakers on how to encourage and motivate employers to invest in and carry out WHP programmes:

- Raise awareness among employers that WHP is a valuable complement to occupational health and safety.
- Continue to highlight the business case for workplace health initiatives to the business community as health promotion is based on voluntary action on both sides.
- Provide free and readily accessible tools and toolkits to help businesses to implement WHP programmes. This may be particularly important in encouraging smaller and medium-sized companies to carry out such programmes, as they may have limited resources and relevant in-house expertise.
- Start to build the fundamental skills, qualifications and knowledge base among business leaders in relation to the promotion of workplace health.
- Support programmes by local and national government may be useful in encouraging smaller companies to carry out WHP.
- Incentives provided by insurance companies may be useful in encouraging organisations to invest in WHP programmes and actions.

More information on **workplace health promotion** is available at: <http://osha.europa.eu/en/topics/whp>

A literature review on the motivation for employers to carry out workplace health promotion is available at:

http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/literature_reviews/motivation-for-employers-to-carry-out-workplace-health-promotion/view