

Using targeted analysis to achieve an “ErgoPlus” industrial workplace

Organisation

Alois Pöttinger Maschinenfabrik Ges.m.b.H, in cooperation with Haslinger, Ergonomics in the workplace

Introduction

Pöttinger are a family firm working in the area of agricultural machinery production, disposal technology, metal processing, coating technology and electronics in agricultural technology. It is one of the largest manufacturers of agricultural machinery, with more than 800 workers, production plants in Austria, Germany and the Czech Republic, and worldwide sales outlets.

Healthy, motivated and productive workers provide the potential and constitute the precondition for economic success. It is a matter of great concern to Pöttinger to show its esteem to its workers as people and not to regard them as a cost factor.

To ensure quality in ergonomic measures, a group was appointed within the company in 2004 to implement ergonomics. This group, the “Ergogroup”, comprises five internal members and one external member:

- equipment design engineer;
- simultaneous engineering technical expert;
- industrial engineering technical expert;
- safety specialist;
- occupational health practitioner;
- ErgoPhysConsult member (external).

The Ergogroup ascertains defects in the area of ergonomics by means of an in-house analysis sheet, draws up solution plans and releases these for implementation. Once the measures have been implemented, the workplace is analysed once more.



Figure 1 A worker before changes were made

Aims

Pöttinger wanted to ascertain the ergonomics defects by means of a very effective and economically meaningful analysis and, by means of a catalogue of measures that can be drawn up quickly using a points system and verbal assessment along with proposed solutions, to keep workers in their working life at the company for a longer period of time and in better health and to ensure that young workers start out healthily and safely.

Generally, the management endeavours to increase the number of “ErgoPlus” workplaces by means of a catalogue of measures, using technical and focused operational workshops geared towards the result of the analysis.

What was done, and how

This Ergogroup ascertains defects in the area of ergonomics, by means of an in-house analysis sheet, draws up solution plans and releases these for implementation. The solution plans contain technical measures, measures related to the workplace, operational measures and measures which are dependent on movement.

The Ergogroup meets once a month in order to discuss the ongoing projects and take up new projects. It includes the works council, the relevant managers and foremen, and the workers concerned in all its activities. The group sets great store by non-bureaucratic communication outside its meetings as well. It is a matter of concern to the members of the group to offer swift support to the people affected and to take up proposals for improvement as effectively as possible.

An analysis sheet compiled in the Ergogroup (in accordance with European standards such as the Key Indicator Method (KIM), Finnish workplace clarification etc.) for the ErgoPlus industrial workplace is used to ascertain the defects on site and to rate them on one of three levels using a points result. In the form, the individual levels are indicated in colour using the traffic light system:

- level 1: ErgoPlus industrial workplace;
- level 2: ergonomic industrial workplace;
- level 3: workplace which is causing strain.

Increasing unit numbers and a wide range of version forced the company to modernise the assembly of loading trailers. The planning for the new assembly line incorporated an ergonomic concept that was drawn up using the latest technical resources and installation standards.

Once the production belt had been completed, the entire production belt was analysed using an analysis sheet drawn up within the Ergogroup and a written analysis result concerning the ergonomic defects, any strains that might arise

and proposed solutions was presented to the management team. The team prioritised the problems and then began implementing the improvements.

What was achieved

The ergonomics programme has been growing constantly. It began with the setting up of the Ergogroup in 2005, and in 2006 the analysis sheet for the ErgoPlus industrial workplace, which made it possible to create complete, electronically supported documentation, was followed by the creation of an analysis instrument that has now proved its worth.

Following the analysis, however, it is also possible for managers, as well as production and office workers, to follow concrete, individual solutions in order to establish an all-round ergonomically optimum workplace (covering everything from lighting to posture).

It is not yet possible to explain the results of these changes in figures, but positive feedback has been given by workers with respect to physical and psychological well-being and by managers with respect to profitability.

The analysis enabled Pöttinger:

- to arouse even greater interest in the area of ergonomics among the management level and to consolidate acceptance;
- to demonstrate to workers that the company values them a great deal;
- to relieve physical strain on workers without reducing productivity;
- to raise awareness among workers of their health and safety and to make it possible for them to look after these matters;
- to build a bridge between the planning office and the production hall;
- to make a contribution in the field of evaluation.



Figure 2 Mobile stools protect manufacturing workers from prolonged kneeling



Figure 3 Workplaces adjustable in height and with flexible parts bins help to reduce strain



Figure 4 Analysis and advice at the workplace

Further information

Company

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Transferability

The example of Pöttinger can be seen as good practice in the sense of participation of in-house stakeholders in the process of assessing workplace and improving ergonomics. Workers, workers' council, management, engineers and consultants have been involved. The ergonomic analyses of production workplaces can be also be done in manufacturing industry and all kind of production lines.