

TRAINING HOTEL SERVICE WORKERS AS PREVENTION COORDINATORS TO WORK WITH COLLEAGUES TO PREVENT MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS

General information

Country: France

Sector: Hotels and similar types of accommodation

Type of organisation: Hotel

Size of organisation: Medium

Location: Urban

Job/tasks: Hotel cleaners, linen keepers, catering staff

Workplace and task characteristics: Awkward movements, posture and loads involved in pushing and pulling heavy linen trolleys, bending to make beds, and using shoulders and wrists to clean mirrors and tiles. Many of the hotel staff were classified as having a musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) due to their work.

Workplace participation measures:

- Prevention coordinators selected by the workers and then trained.
- Prevention coordinators discuss problems with the co-workers.
- Staff surveys and other communication methods used with all the workers.

The action

Background

The work of hotel cleaners, linen staff and catering staff involves awkward movements and posture, repetitive movements and moving heavy loads. Many of the hotel's staff suffered from MSD because of their work, and there was an urgent need for preventive action.

The new hotel director already had prior experience from another hotel in implementing a working group that allowed hotel cleaners to participate in a critical analysis of their daily tasks and to make proposals for improving working conditions. He decided to do the same at his new workplace. The hotel director contacted the Regional Health Insurance Fund for support. The insurance fund proposed a method of training worker volunteers as prevention coordinators who would then involve other workers in prevention. The insurance fund's aim was to provide businesses with internal competencies, relying only on themselves to diagnose and analyse risky situations and find the most appropriate solutions.

Participants and stakeholders

The intervention involved the Regional Health Insurance Fund as training provider. Volunteers were chosen by the workers to become prevention coordinators and then they involved the whole workforce.

Participatory approaches, methods and tools

Roles and training of the prevention coordinators

Six staff members (hotel cleaners, linen keepers, catering staff) were selected by the workers to serve as prevention coordinators. Following training, they undertook a group project to examine the work of hotel cleaners, linen keepers and catering staff.

The volunteers completed two days of method training led by the Regional Health Insurance Fund. They then observed and analysed real-life working conditions, followed by a day dedicated to producing a feedback report. They studied the work circumstances and considered how appropriate the solutions being applied are.

The group's task was also to communicate information on safety and health at work to the other hotel workers. The training did not include a specific focus on communication with co-workers, but it provided tools for them to raise awareness among co-workers. The six workers chosen to undertake training were mainly workers who had already been trained as in-house trainers.

The prevention coordinators were very familiar with the jobs they were examining and were in a position to make relevant remarks on potential solutions. By looking at the work from a different perspective through observation and exchange of information with co-workers, they analysed problematic day-to-day activities to find useful solutions.

Time was set aside during the working day for the prevention coordinators to observe the work circumstances and to discuss them with co-workers. They were also able to film or take photos to illustrate their observations. They were provided with resources (a room, IT equipment, cameras to film working situations), as well as time off from their other duties (six and a half days during the intervention year, apart from training).

A report was produced that made several proposals. The human resources (HR) department followed up on these proposals according to the time needed to implement them.

Involving other workers

To inform the 240 employees, the HR department used the following channels:

- internal communication tools (including memos to staff, poster campaigns, a newsletter and a staff forum four times a year);
- creation and dissemination of specific tools for employees (prevention booklets);
- training for workers, initiated by the company, on stress prevention and development of wellbeing at work (intended for all workers), or on preventing risks from manually handling loads risk and manually handling loads;
- opportunity for workers to provide information or comments in the annual work satisfaction survey.

What was achieved

Hotel cleaners

Following the feedback given by the hotel cleaners, telescopic dusters and raised beds were installed in two test rooms at the hotel to make their work easier. A housekeeping manager and prevention coordinator were sent to the director's previous hotel where such equipment was already in use to compare the teams' experiences. On each floor, a network of workers was formed and cooperation among the cleaners was encouraged. The exchanges were productive. If these tests proved positive, the plan was to install the equipment in other rooms, following any adaptations if necessary.

In parallel, hotel cleaners were offered the opportunity to gain a professional qualification certificate that included training in professional risk prevention and a briefing on managing pain at work. This training was made available to all hotel cleaners, not just the prevention coordinators. The training improved the hotel cleaners' employability. This is important because they do a difficult job that does not offer many opportunities for career advancement.

External catering staff

Catering staff from external providers often work in the hotel. In collaboration with the suppliers, the hotel provided training for the external providers. The training included an exercise aimed at listening to workers and anticipating potential problems.

Linen keepers

Furthermore, hotel management considered improving working conditions for linen keepers who have a physically demanding job. They were encouraged to speak freely about their problems, and the obstacles and difficulties they face. One issue was the linen trolleys. Even when not very busy, the linen staff completed 16 trips a day with the trolleys. At peak times, that number tripled. Pushing a trolley full of damp linen at arm's length is heavy work, so much so that the wheels have difficulty moving on the carpet.

Equipment from another establishment to make pushing the linen trolleys easier was adapted by the supplier specifically for the hotel.

A customised single part links the linen trolley to the bar used to push it. All that is necessary to attach it to the trolley is to centre it. Staff received one hour of training on how to use the equipment. This is important because, before the

training, the linen staff tended to pull the trolley, even though the simple push of a button would make it move forward.

Even in awkward corridors, the adapted trolley became manoeuvrable. The new equipment made the job much easier. The participative nature of the process helped introduce the equipment and achieve staff satisfaction.

Impact on MSDs

In the year following the intervention, there was a 7% decrease in the number of working days lost. The project created a forum for sharing problems and simple methods to improve working conditions. It changed the perspectives on work and the way it was organised. An improvement in communication within the organisation was observed, and the prevention coordinator approach was extended to other services, such as baggage and dishwashing. The staff felt that they had a voice and their problems and ideas were acknowledged.

There are plans to involve the prevention coordinators in broader organisational activities, including a planned renovation.

The hotel won an award for MSD prevention from the Regional Health Insurance Fund.

Case extracts

Hotel management considered staff health and safety as important as guest comfort.

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The expertise and support of the Regional Health Insurance Fund were crucial. The insurance fund proposed a method of training worker volunteers as prevention coordinators who would then involve other workers in prevention. The fund's aim was to provide businesses with internal competencies, relying only on themselves to diagnose and analyse risky situations and find the most appropriate solutions.

Resources, costs and benefits

Support for training was offered by the Regional Health Insurance Fund. The volunteers received time off work for the training. The hotel also provided some training to external providers to engage them as well. The subsequent intervention took place during working hours. The hotel financed the purchase of new equipment, including a customised linen trolley. Improvements in sickness absence outweighed the costs in terms of staff time and new equipment.

Analysis

Barriers

No major problems were encountered.

Facilitators

- Staff health and safety is considered as important as guest comfort.
- The involvement of all workers in prevention is freely encouraged. They feel that they have a voice and their problems and ideas are acknowledged.
- The prevention coordinators got their colleagues involved. They required training in this specific role, and were provided with training, time off and resources.
- The approach of using prevention coordinators who then work with their colleagues makes it easier to involve workers. In particular, it enables workers to raise problems and propose solutions, which can then be discussed among the colleagues and the prevention coordinator.
- The improved linen trolley showed the importance of not only having the right equipment, but also training workers in its use.
- The expertise and support of the Regional Health Insurance Fund were crucial.

The MSD intervention was part of a wider commitment to staff participation in safety and health and the hotel's commitment to staff, such as involving them in a renovation project and offering career training for hotel cleaners.

Lessons learned

- Training key workers that know the job and who then inform fellow workers can be an effective way of involving the entire workforce.
- Training key workers in analysing risk and identifying solutions can reduce the organisation's need to use external consultants.
- The involvement of all workers can improve communication overall in an organisation.

Transferability

This approach is transferable to other services, hotels and sectors. However, the organisation would likely need assistance from a prevention organisation to train prevention coordinators and support them in their examination, as well as to apply the prevention solutions. In smaller organisations, it would be possible to have just one or two workers trained in the coordinator role.

References and further information

The information on this case was compiled by EU-OSHA. No additional written material is available.