



HEALTH PROMOTING WORKPLACES – A COMPETENCE PROGRAMME

1. Case metadata

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▪ ***Abstract***

Issue

The aim of a Competence Programme was to inspire public and private companies to initiate health promotion activities and policies for their employees.

Action

This programme was organised by a project group that consisted of researchers and senior advisers from the Nordic School of Public Health, the Norwegian Directorate of Health, and the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority. Fifty public and private companies volunteered to participate in the programme.

Each company appointed three workplace representatives; a trade union delegate, a health and safety representative and the director from the human resource department, who participated in three two-day workshops that aimed at developing tailor-made health promotion activities for each of the participating companies. The three workplace representatives were responsible for implementing the health promotion activities that were developed for their workplace during the competence

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programme and the three workplace representatives were counselled by the project group in this task.

Results

The 50 companies initiated health promotion activities that can be grouped under the following five themes: 1) health promoting initiatives and policies; 2) physical activity; 3) diet and nutrition; 4) smoking cessation; and 5) psychosocial work environment/stress. Overall, these initiatives have resulted in an increased awareness on healthy 'options' regarding physical activity and diet/nutrition, increased employee wellbeing and an improved work environment.

2. Organisations involved

The County of Oppland, Norway (Fig.1)

The County of Buskerud, Norway

Nordic School of Public Health (NHV)

The Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority (Fig. 1)

The Norwegian Directorate of Health

50 Small and medium-sized public and private companies

Figure 1: Logos Competence Programme



County Governor in Buskerud
County Governor in Oppland

Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority



3. Description of the case

3.1. Introduction

A 'Competence Programme: Health Promoting Workplaces' (hereafter referred to as the 'Competence Programme') was established in 2004 by the County Governors in the counties of Oppland and Buskerud and the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority with the assistance of the Nordic School of Public Health and the Health Directorate of Norway. This programme aimed at motivating and helping companies to implement health promotion activities for their employees. The programme actions were jointly funded by the founding members and by the participating companies.

The Norwegian counties of Oppland and Buskerud have been engaged in the Competence Programme since it was established. A variety of small and medium-sized companies (SMEs), both public and private, have participated in the programme, which has sought to facilitate the development of a series of health promoting initiatives and has additionally sought ways to consolidate healthy work practices in the companies. In the autumn of 2008 and the spring of 2009, researchers from the Nordic School of Public Health (NHV) assisted the participating companies in developing the concrete health promoting activities. After the project period expired at the end of spring 2009, the researchers from NHV evaluated the programme by investigating the types of health



promoting activities that were being conducted by the 50 SMEs that were participating in the programme at that time.

The 50 companies voluntarily joined the programme that was advertised by the county of Oppland, the county of Buskerud and the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority. The main incentive for the companies to join was through their interest in promoting the health of their employees and that the programme offered a structured approach to do this.

3.2. *Aims*

The overall aim of the Competence Programme was to support public and private companies to promote a healthy work environment and to promote health among employees thereby also promoting public health in the Norwegian counties of Oppland and Buskerud.

3.3. *What was done, and how?*

In the autumn of 2008, 50 companies, with approximately 48,000 employees, had volunteered to participate in the Competence Programme. The project group asked the participating companies to plan health-promoting activities that fitted into the everyday routine of the companies. The Nordic School of Public Health offered three two-day seminars to advise and support the participating companies in planning their activities. Each company appointed three representatives; a trade union delegate, a health and safety representative and the director from the human resource department from the workplace to participate in the seminars. The seminars were arranged for mutual inspiration and development of workplace health promotion (WHP) initiatives at the participating companies. The seminar was arranged as a mixture of lectures on health promotion, presentations of good practice examples on health promotion activities in the workplace, and workshops for developing health promotion activities in the participating companies. In order to maximise the relevance and utility of the programme, each company individually decided which WHP initiatives they wished to deploy at their (individual) workplaces.

The activities that were planned by the 50 companies included:

- Health promoting initiatives and policies;
- Physical activity;
- Diet and nutrition;
- Tobacco;
- Psychosocial work environment/stress.

Finally, a sum-up seminar was arranged six months after the last two-day seminar for the companies to evaluate their experiences.

After the project period expired, the researchers from the Nordic School of Public Health sent questionnaires to the trade union delegates, health and safety representatives and human resources' directors from the participating companies, to evaluate the programme by investigating the activities that were carried out in the individual companies and the extent to which the employees had participated in the activities.

3.4. *What was achieved?*

In the Competence Programme a variety of health promoting activities were initiated in the participating companies. The main types of WHP activities are summarised below and in Table 1.

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- **Health promoting initiatives and policies:** Within the field of health promoting initiatives and policies, results from the programme showed that in 88 per cent of the companies, the management explicitly supported the planning of health promoting initiatives at the workplace. In the participating companies, the main motives for engaging in health promotion were: employee wellbeing (70 per cent), improved work environment (56 per cent), reduced sickness absence (56 per cent), and staff retention (38 per cent). A majority of the companies (70 per cent) stated that the health promotion programmes have had the desired effect, but also stated that it takes time to change workplace cultures and that explicit support from the management is crucial.
- **Physical activity:** About 65 per cent of the participating companies reported to have schemes for increasing everyday physical activity of employees. Almost 70 per cent of the companies stated that they offer financial support/incentives for employees who wanted to be physically more active. These measures include reduced fares on sport courses and sport club memberships, offering free sessions of different physical activities like Nordic walking, yoga, etc. The types of physical activities that were most frequently offered by the companies were: participation in jogging arrangements, 'take the bike or walk to work' arrangement, collaboration with fitness centres, step-counter competitions, recommendations to use the stairs, and physical exercise during breaks.
- About 50 per cent of the companies reported that fewer than one-fifth of the employees participated in physical activity programmes and about one-third reported that one third of the employees took part in physical activity programmes at work. Finally, the companies reported that the most prevalent effects of physical activity programmes are: increased wellbeing among employees, increased awareness on the benefits of physical activities, improved work environment, and fewer musculoskeletal complaints among staff.
- **Diet and nutrition:** Seventy-two per cent of the companies provide food in staff canteens. Of those companies, 80 per cent offer fresh vegetables, salads, fish/lean meat, low-fat dairy products. A bit less than 50 per cent offer actual low-fat diets. Half of the companies offer subsidised or free fruit/vegetables.
- The companies' evaluations suggest that dietary and nutrition programmes had an impact on employee wellbeing, the 'work climate', and an increased awareness of healthy food among staff.
- **Tobacco:** More than half of the participating companies have formal policies on tobacco smoking. One out of every four companies report offering smoking cessation courses themselves or link to external providers of smoking cessation. Almost 10 per cent of the companies even offer economic support for nicotine substitutions, such as chewing gum etc.
- Such initiatives appear to contribute to help employees quit smoking. Furthermore, experiences show that initiatives directed towards smoking cessation also seem to lessen conflicts between smokers and non-smokers.
- **Psychosocial work environment/stress:** Initiatives regarding the psychosocial work environment and job stress among employees appear to be prioritised in the participating companies. More than half of the companies assess psychosocial work environment and job stress in their work environment assessments. Furthermore, another 40 per cent of the companies state that they have psychosocial work environment and job stress as recurrent themes in their annual conversations with the employees regarding employee wellbeing. Almost one-third of the companies report that psychosocial work environment and job stress are prioritised issues for the company's management and a bit more than 20 per cent offer counselling and advise on issues regarding psychosocial work environment and job stress.

According to the evaluation, the participating companies experienced that initiatives regarding psychosocial work environment and job stress had an impact on the work environment, employee wellbeing, a reduction in sickness absence and increased productivity.

Table 1: Main types of work health promotion activities in the companies participating in the Competence programme

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Type of WHP activity	Company participation rate (%)	Examples of concrete WHP activities
Health promoting initiatives and policies	88	Wellbeing, staff retention and sickness absence reduction programmes
Physical activity	65	Collaboration with fitness centres, step-counter competitions, and physical exercise during breaks.
Diet and nutrition	72	Low-fat diets and provision of healthy food in staff canteens.
Tobacco	26	Smoking cessation courses.
Psychosocial work environment / stress	52	Work environment assessments, staff interviews and stress management programmes.

While the project was successful it also faced some obstacles and problems:

- Not all companies were successful in motivating all employees to participate in the health promotion programmes. One reason for this was that it was difficult for employees to fit their participation in concrete activities into their work schedule.
- The support from the managerial staff was important in terms of anchoring the health promotion initiatives in the workplaces. The managerial layer explicitly supported the activities in 83 per cent of the workplaces, which implies that there was no explicit managerial support in the remaining 17 per cent of the companies.

3.5. Success factors

It can be concluded that the high level of participation of the individual companies and the activities within the individual companies suggest that the Competence Programme has been successful in promoting healthy work in the participating companies and in enhancing the capacity of the companies in sustaining healthy practices.

3.6. Further information

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3.7. Transferability

This programme was undertaken in a variety of companies; public and private, small and medium-sized companies, and the experiences regarding the development and implementation of health promotion activities have generally been positive. It can therefore be concluded that this type of WHP programme is transferable to a variety of organisations.

4. References, resources:

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A report: 'Helsefremmende arbeidsplass 2008-2009. En undersøkelse av helsefremmende tiltak og helsefremmende politikk i 50 virksomheter i Norge' ('Health promoting workplace 2008-2009. An investigation of health promoting initiatives and health promoting policies in 50 companies in Norway') has been published in Norwegian and is available at www.fylkesmannen.no/oppland direct link: http://www.helsedirektoratet.no/vp/multimedia/archive/00329/Helsefremmende_arbe_329249a.pdf

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http://www.helsedirektoratet.no/ernaering/vilje_til_satsing_p_helsefremmende_arbeidsplasser_795764