

ESTABLISHING A HEALTH PROMOTION TEAM AT DOMEL: SLOVENIA

1. Organisations involved

- Domel Holding d.d.

2. Description of the case

2.1. Introduction

Domel Holding d.d. was founded in 1946 and is today one of the world's largest producers of electric motors and suction units. It employs 952 workers with an average age of 40 years (as of 2010). It is the biggest employee-owned company in Slovenia.

Employees' health is a priority for the company. Managers are aware that the nature of the work requires continuous improvements in ergonomics and occupational health. Domel established a Health Promotion Team in 1998 to take responsibility for occupational health and safety (OSH) and health promotion. The team's current project, 'Improving our Lifestyle and Staying Healthy', aims to promote health at work and outside the workplace.

2.2. Aims

The Health Promotion Team aims to reduce sickness absence and improve employees' health. To this end, its activities are of two distinct types: prevention of work-related ill-health, based on a thorough investigation of causes of sick leave, and workplace health promotion, to encourage healthy lifestyles and improve employees' wellbeing.

The activities of the Health Promotion Team target all workers, with a view to ensuring safer and healthier working conditions across the organisation and a more sustainable return to work following sick leave. In addition, broadening the scope of health literacy beyond the narrow work situation (that is through the health promotion approach) is especially relevant, as the employees are growing older and more vulnerable to the development of chronic illnesses.

2.3. What was done, and how?

In 1998, the management of Domel d.d. established a working group, called Health Promotion Team (*Tim za promocijo zdravja*), to examine the causes of sick leave among employees.

The Health Promotion Team is currently composed of 17 or 18 people, who are management representatives, heads of divisions, line managers, human resource (HR) staff, the OSH representatives, trade union and worker representatives, and external partners (medical doctors). The activities of the Health Promotion Team are integrated into the company's strategy and annual operational plan. These activities have also become part of the formal company procedures.

In 2009, to strengthen the expertise of the Health Promotion Team, the OSH representative attended training at the Clinical Institute of Occupational, Traffic, and Sports Medicine (CIOTSM) to become a workplace health promotion adviser. The team's activities are planned on a yearly basis and they are continuously monitored and evaluated. The team regularly reports back to the company management.

2.3.1. Prevention of work-related ill-health based on an investigation of the causes of sick leave

Since 1998, the team has regularly investigated the causes of sickness absence through individual discussions with employees who are absent frequently. The team identifies the reasons for their

absence and determines whether or not it was due to the nature of their work or their working environment. Special attention is given to employees who have already experienced health problems – mainly musculoskeletal disorders but also, more recently, mental health issues. Since 2008, the team has asked supervisors to talk informally with every employee who comes back to work after sick leave.

The HR team analyses this absence from work in terms of share of absence due to specific kinds of illnesses, the number of working hours not performed due to absence from work and the direct cost (in euros) of sick leave. The main segments analysed are ergonomics, injuries, contaminants and several psychosocial aspects (such as bullying).

Based on the outcomes of the analysis, the team puts in place an action plan to address and solve the problems identified.

- *Disease prevention:* The team consults with medical doctors to determine the best prevention measures to address the issues identified. Examples of current measures include regular health checks to prevent musculoskeletal and other disorders, and regular monitoring of the working environment for noise levels and emissions of harmful substances.
- *Injury prevention:* Each injury at work is examined by a group composed of a safety engineer, insurance representative, head of division and line manager, who consider both the incidence and main causes of injury. In response to the injury, the group prepares and proposes (technical) measures for improvement and protection. The most common injuries at work are cuts on the fingers and hands. This mechanism has resulted in a reduced number of injuries at work in recent years.

These measures and their impacts are evaluated and discussed during the next working session of the team.

Four or five times a year, the team communicates the results of the analysis, and the problems detected, to the employees.

2.3.2. From health protection to health promotion

The team also has a health promotion brief. In 2008, the ‘Improving Our Lifestyle and Staying Healthy’ (*Izboljšajmo način življenja in ostanimo zdravi*) project began to focus on the individual employee, addressing his/her health and personal development in the company. This project is still ongoing.

The project aims to empower individuals to take care of their own health, including the early identification of health problems, and to increase their knowledge of healthy lifestyles. Activities within the project include awareness-raising, training and subsidised activities to promote physical activity. Employees are encouraged to educate themselves and are provided with access to a variety of literature and online sources to increase their knowledge of health and healthy lifestyles. Seminars are also organised in which employees have the opportunity to share their knowledge and experience. The team has also put in place a number of activities to increase mental health awareness among line managers and supervisors, enabling them to build trusting interpersonal relationships with their employees. People with mental health issues are also given the opportunity to talk to a specialist in private.

The project has mainly been financed by the company, but in 2013 it received funding from the Health Insurance Institute.

In 2013, the project led to the adoption of new ‘Procedures on Health Promotion’ in the company’s general policy, to further promote the health and wellbeing of employees.

In 2014, the team prepared a detailed programme for the project, featuring 23 different activities, each with a designated service provider, implementation phase, estimated number of participants, persons responsible, planned costs and data on realisation of objectives. Some of these activities include empowerment of workers with a disability to maintain or improve their health and work ability, ergonomic planning of work places, awareness-raising and physical activities, and other specific services such as the rental of a sports centre and the provision of holiday facilities for the employees.

2.4. What was achieved?

To date, the following improvements have been identified:

- increased knowledge about the employees' health and reasons for sick leave;
- reduced incidence of musculoskeletal disorders among women;
- reduced incidence of injuries among all workers;
- increased employee awareness about the importance of their own health (with up-to-date advice on how to prevent and overcome diseases and how to retain health);
- increased awareness of the importance of the ergonomic aspects of the production lines (through training of production line constructors).

2.5. Success factors and challenges

The following factors contributed to the success of the activities in Domel:

- *Stakeholder coordination:* The Health Promotion Team is composed of different workplace actors, ensuring engagement across all levels of the business.
- *Communication:* The Health Promotion Team regularly communicates the results of its activities. It also encourages informal communication between employees and their supervisors on health issues.
- *Analysis:* An analysis of the causes of sick leave in the company and various aspects of employees' health condition (such as the nature of the disease and injuries/accidents at work) is carried out prior to implementing any prevention measures. The measures are therefore well adapted to the employees' needs.
- *Holistic approach:* A holistic approach is used in Domel:
 - All workers are targeted by the activities of the Health Promotion Team.
 - Health promotion measures are put in place to complement prevention measures.
 - The activities of the Health Promotion Team are fully integrated into the company OSH and HR policy.
- *Monitoring and evaluation:* The activities are continually improved over time through regular monitoring and evaluation exercises.

The main challenge of this project was the relatively slow pace of the whole process, from the start of the initiative in 1998 until the first promising results. The company is aware that there are still some areas linked to comprehensive employee healthcare that have not yet been properly tackled. However, the management is planning to address this in the future.

2.6. Transferability

The project and its activities could be transferred to other enterprises easily, although they would need to be adjusted to the specifics of the company's working environment.

2.7. Further information

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3. References and resources

- Interview with Janja Kozjek, HR Department
- Website of Domel (in English): <http://www.domel.com/en>

- ENWHP (European Network of Workplace Health Promotion) (n.d.), Work in tune with life – Template model of good practice. Retrieved 07/11/2015, from: http://www.enwhp.org/fileadmin/downloads/8th_Initiative/Models_of_good_Practice/Slovenia_Domel.pdf