

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH (OSH) FOR NON-OSH PROFESSIONALS IN GERMANY: SUPPORTING OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH COMPLIANCE (CASE DE5)

Introduction

Promotion of effective occupational safety and health (OSH) practices is a key element of safer and healthier workplaces. Improving arrangements and practices for managing OSH across a whole range of industry sectors and firm sizes — large, medium and small — is stimulated, supported and sustained by a range of institutional actors and processes both internal and external to firms. Scientific research highlights, among others, the critical role that state regulators for OSH, such as labour inspectorates but also prevention services, can play (EU-OSHA 2021). This case study is part of a research project¹ conducted in Germany to provide further insight into this topic.

The ‘Offensive Mittelstand’ (OM)² is an independent network of intermediary organisations at federal level involving, among others, social partners, social insurances and chambers of industry and commerce, central research institutes, federal ministries, and professional and specialist associations. A very broad range of advisors including, for instance, tax advisors, management consultants, energy consultants, occupational safety specialists, occupational physicians and so on are involved in the OM initiative.

The OM brings together the most important players in the SMEs landscape and discusses how they can work together to reach and support SMEs more effectively on the topic of safety and health, among other things.

The OM offers companies ‘OM checks’ to access regional networks and advice from experts providing a broad range of expertise. The OM partners represent around 230,000 advisors for 3 million SMEs (representing around 70% of the labour market in Germany). Within the framework of its ‘Safety and Health at Work’ campaign, the OM offers various instruments to support companies in the field of OSH, such as the ‘OSH for non-OSH professionals’.

Description of the case

The OM offers advisors an online qualification in ‘OSH for non-OSH professionals’ after having completed an internal authorisation workshop. This four-hour online qualification workshop covers the following topics:

- OSH legal basis.
- How can I help the SME to find contact persons providing OSH professional consulting?
- Understanding of the scope and limitations of their advisory role in terms of OSH (because they are not OSH professionals).
- Use of existing OM-OSH tools:
 - One-Pager:³ Discussion guide and general introduction to the topic of OSH (see screenshot in Figure 1).

¹ The full report is available at: <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/germanys-approach-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance-role-labour-inspectorate-and-prevention-services>

² See: <https://www.offensive-mittelstand.de>

³ More information is available at: <https://www.offensive-mittelstand.de/om-tools/one-pager/one-pager-arbeitsschutz>

- Fact-Sheet:⁴ This presents the necessary background knowledge on OSH as well as the possibilities and limits of providing OSH advice to non-OSH advisors.
- Practice standard GDA-ORGcheck:⁵ The GDA-ORGcheck enables SMEs to check and improve their OSH organisation in an easy manner.
- OM-mark:⁶ The OM mark for OSH is awarded to companies that have completed the GDA-ORGcheck and have defined 10 individual measures to improve OSH in their company.
- Other OM-tools.
- Four implementation steps in the company:
 - Inform: OM-OSH tools (One-Pager, GDA-ORGcheck) are presented and further information is provided to the company.
 - Communicate: The arguments within the tools can be used to talk about the benefits of OSH and to point out the advantages of the OM-mark.
 - Support: Accompany the companies in the processing of the One-Pager/GDA-ORGcheck, but do not offer technical support, as the OSH issues must be answered in accordance with the law.
 - 'Pilots/Navigators': If necessary, referrals are made to OSH experts and contacts and research opportunities are provided.

Figure 1: Screenshot One-Pager OSH for non-OSH professionals

OFFENSIVE MITTELSTAND
GUT FÜR DEUTSCHLAND

OM-One-Pager 3_2022-12

Attraktiv für Beschäftigte, Kunden und Kundinnen

Sicherheit und Gesundheit bei der Arbeit für den Unternehmenserfolg nutzen

Unser Erfolg als kleines Unternehmen basiert auf gutem Personal, attraktiven Produkten und Dienstleistungen sowie Zuverlässigkeit, auf einem guten Image bei unseren Kund*innen bzw. bei unserer Bank. Ein weiterer Erfolgsfaktor ist Sicherheit und Gesundheit bei der Arbeit. Er macht uns konkurrenzfähig und zukunftsfest. WARUM ist das so und WIE soll das gehen? Dieses Blatt gibt Antworten darauf und bietet einen ersten Einstieg ins Thema.

Warum nutzt uns Sicherheit und Gesundheit bei der Arbeit?!

Wir haben wirtschaftliche Vorteile, weil

- wir sicher und störungsfrei arbeiten und geringe Fehlzeiten haben
- wir unserer Bank darstellen können, dass wir auch Risiken im Bereich Sicherheit und Gesundheit im Griff haben

Wir arbeiten zuverlässiger und effizienter, weil

- unsere Arbeitsabläufe klar organisiert sind, wir sichere und passende Arbeitsmittel sowie Materialien einsetzen und Unterstützung bei Problemen anbieten
- wir uns um leistungsfördernde Arbeitsbedingungen sowie ein angenehmes Betriebsklima kümmern und unsere Beschäftigten deswegen gerne und leistungstark bei uns arbeiten

Wir sind attraktiver für unsere Beschäftigten und für neue Fachkräfte, weil

- wir durch unser Engagement in die Sicherheit und Gesundheit unserer Beschäftigten deutlich zeigen, dass wir sie schätzen
- wir Wünsche und Bedürfnisse unserer Beschäftigten z. B. zur Arbeitszeit berücksichtigen und sie gerne bei uns arbeiten, ohne dass sie überlastet oder unterfordert sind

Wir haben ein besseres Image bei Kund*innen, weil

- unser Team zuverlässig, motiviert und leistungsfähig arbeitet
- unsere Arbeitsprozesse reibungslos laufen und wir Termine nicht wegen Störungen, Krankheit oder Ausfall kurzfristig absagen müssen

Und deshalb stimmt die Qualität unserer Produkte und Dienstleistungen.

Ein weiterer Pluspunkt:
Sicherheit und Gesundheit bei der Arbeit sind zudem zentrale Bedingungen für die Erfüllung gesetzlicher Anforderungen durch das Unternehmen -> siehe das Arbeitsschutzgesetz ArbSchG - nichtamtliches Inhaltsverzeichnis (www.gesetze-im-internet.de).

➔ Ansatzpunkte und Anlässe, wie Sie Sicherheit und Gesundheit bei der Arbeit erfolgreich angehen können, finden Sie auf der Rückseite.

⁴ More information is available at: <https://www.offensive-mittelstand.de/om-tools/factsheets/factsheet-arbeitsschutz-fuer-nicht-arbeitsschuetzer>

⁵ More information is available at: <https://www.gda-orgcheck.de/daten/gda/index.htm>

⁶ More information is available at: <https://www.om-zeichen.de>

After the online qualification, the advisors can already apply their newly acquired knowledge in the companies they work with.

The authorisation workshops and online qualifications are carried out with an above-average proportion of tax advisors. This is explained by the fact that tax advisors see this as an opportunity to build on existing advisory services and by the fact that the Federal Chamber of Tax Advisors has an interest in opening up another promising field of consulting for its profession.

SMEs should be made aware of OSH. Existing advisory contacts can build a bridge between companies and OSH. For example, tax advisors are trustworthy contacts for SMEs and have access to internal information such as absenteeism, accidents, damage to work equipment and so on. This enables them to identify OSH-related problems. OM advisors, for instance tax advisors, do not become active themselves, as they are not specifically trained occupational safety experts, but use their contacts to open up companies to the topic of OSH and to refer them to / facilitate the contact with OSH experts if necessary.

Aims

Freelance external advisors are given the opportunity and the tools to raise the issue of OSH with their clients, get involved in the topic and to support companies to better manage OSH. The aim is, in a first instance, to increase OSH awareness among SMEs and then make them more active in managing OSH. In a second instance, it is to facilitate the involvement of OSH experts in supporting SMEs. This is done by involving the advisors, who are not OSH professionals but have access to the companies and enjoy their trust. As is well known, SMEs and especially MSEs are difficult to reach, that's why it is so important to involve key people, in this case advisors they already trust.

Target group

The OM-tool 'OSH for non-OSH professionals' is tailored to external freelance advisors working with SMEs and opens up a new field of business for them. In order to be allowed to work for the OM as an advisor, an internal authorisation workshop must be completed (the authorisation is valid for two years), in which the various instruments of the OM are presented. The workshop also emphasises the importance of cooperation between advisors for a holistic understanding of advisory services for companies. Currently, there are about 500 active authorised advisors in the OM, who form a network.

What was done, and how?

The OM regularly offers authorisation workshops so that advisors are trained in the use of OM-tools. So far, four OM-designed workshops on 'OSH for non-OSH professionals' have been conducted.

This initiative was launched in 2023 with four workshops. There is no validated data on the extent and effectiveness of the OSH consulting. Advisors recognise the importance of OSH through the workshops and the number of clicks to the OM homepage on OSH increase.

Degree of innovation

In addition to other freelance advisors, the focus is primarily on tax advisors, who speak particularly in favour of a sustainable and practicable practice of OSH advice for two reasons. Firstly, tax consultancy is undergoing a transformation process towards new business areas, as the traditional field is increasingly falling victim to digitalisation. Secondly, the continuous and regular contact also provides long-term and sustainable attention to OSH.

Consulting is also possible online. The OM-tools and the GDA-ORGcheck are a digital offer that can be accessed at any time.

Approach

'OSH for non-OSH professionals' is accessible to all advisors after the OM qualification workshop.

The Federal Chamber of Tax Advisors and the German Association of Tax Advisors are very committed to involving tax advisors in OSH consulting. The professional association for training, consulting and coaching organises the contact between the professional associations and the OM through its own events, information material and newsletters. The networking of the OM with the chambers of industry

and commerce and professional and trade associations is also evidenced by the benefits conference held twice a year with the respective executive boards.

Important OM practical resources will be translated into English and made accessible online worldwide in the future. The GDA-ORGCheck is such an easy service that it can also be implemented in other European countries. The advisors can work throughout Germany and at the companies' foreign suppliers.

What was achieved?

Except for the increasing number of participants (especially tax advisors) in the workshops, no effect can be confirmed at this point.

Success factors and challenges

The qualification and awareness of advisors on OSH is of great importance in order to be able to credibly develop the field of OSH for SMEs. The advisors can only lay the entry path and must know the limits of their expertise in the field of OSH. When it comes to safety and occupational health issues, the advisors must consult an occupational safety specialist or a company doctor.

The companies make use of the OSH advice provided by the OM advisors in addition to the usual services. The time required for the consultation is less (especially in the case of SMEs) because the advisors are already familiar with the company's internal information.

Another success factor is the existing relationship of trust between SMEs and tax advisors. They have access to internal information such as absenteeism, accidents, damage to work equipment and so on and can therefore identify OSH-related problems.

Transferability to other EU Member States

'OSH for non-OSH professionals' can be implemented by any (tax) advisor working in the EU. The interest already shown by the Hanseatic Parliament⁷ (an association of more than 50 chambers of commerce around the Baltic Sea region with the common goal of strengthening SMEs) in this initiative is evidence of implementation outside Germany.

Further information

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⁷ See: <https://www.hanse-parlament.eu/>

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