

Healthy Workplaces Good Practice Awards 2020-2022

CASE STUDY



Reducing physically demanding work with technical and organisational adjustments in cleaning services



ORGANISATION/COMPANY

Hago Next

COUNTRY

The Netherlands

SECTOR

Cleaning activities

TASKS

Cleaning/hygiene services such as housekeeping, vacuuming, sweeping, mopping and dusting



Source: Hago Nederland B.V.

Background

Hago Next is a Dutch company that provides both indoor and outdoor cleaning services at offices, schools, hotels, recreational facilities and events. The company employs about 450 cleaning staff.

Cleaning work is physically demanding, involving repetitive movements, maintaining a static posture for a long period of time, and heavy physical loads that can lead to occupational safety and health (OSH) risks. Such work often hinders keeping experienced staff employable

and can lead to high levels of sick leave and absenteeism. These risks are even higher as workers get older. Therefore, it is not only a challenge to retain experienced employees, but also difficult to attract new recruits.

Aims

The company aims to increase sustainable employability of its workers by improving work methods and conditions to reduce physical strain and prevent musculoskeletal disorders.

What was done and how?

The company manages safety and health risks to workers in a systematic way through technical, organisational and individual measures.

The organisation carried out a wide range of measures to reduce physical loads and to improve working conditions according to the hierarchy of controls (TOP-strategy in Dutch).

Technical measures include:

- Tools to make the work lighter
- 'Smart Hygiene' technology allows cleaning on the basis of data, so cleaners can focus on what and where to clean, leading to more efficient cleaning and enabling cleaners to vary tasks, thus reducing workload

Organisational measures include:

- Tools to make the work lighter
- Training coaches in ergonomics (ergocoaches) to develop tailor-made e-learning and to provide coaching in ergonomic work methods to individuals
- In cooperation with a centre for physical labour, all physically demanding activities, such as vacuuming, reaching when cleaning desks, pulling or pushing carts of wastepaper, and bending down to clean toilets, were inventoried and mapped to develop the training and e-learning

Individual measures include:

- The trained ergonomics coaches work with employees on location, teaching them techniques to reduce physical load
- Monthly e-learning sessions raise awareness of an issue across the organisation

Other specific changes to improve productivity and prevent OSH risks in the workplace include the following:

Working with clients to introduce adaptations at client premises:

- Barriers removed at customer sites near workstations
- Fewer waste bins (one per department instead of every desk)

Choosing ergonomic options when new equipment is purchased:

- Attachment for hoover hose
- Back hoover instead of ordinary hoover
- Longer handle for the mop
- Handle for the feather duster
- Hotel sweeper introduced
- Interior mop introduced

Organisational changes:

- Rotating tasks among employees (for example, to avoid vacuuming for two hours without a break)
- Rotating tasks throughout the day

- Assisting each other with heavy tasks (for example, two workers move the scrubber together, instead of one person doing it alone)

Changes in individual working methods:

- Working with two hands instead of one
- Reaching out when working instead of stretching
- Reclining when working low
- Avoiding extreme/end position in the joint, for example, pushing a work trolley rather than pulling it

What was achieved?



Source: Hago Nederland B.V.

Results of the intervention can be seen in terms of individual, social and economic aspects:

- Reduced health complaints
- Increased productivity through the use of less physical effort, ergonomic equipment and smart work organisation
- Working closely with occupational coaches and ergonomists, employees have the opportunity to voice their complaints, ideas, initiatives and improvement proposals
- Improved company reputation, notable in contract awards and an advantage in the tight labour market
- Reduced absenteeism and lower staff turnover

Success factors

- The company's commitment to improving OSH and keeping employees fit to work.
- A systematic approach to OSH based on a hierarchy of prevention.
- On-site training for employees with ergonomic coaches.
- Liaising with clients to reduce risks at their premises.



Source: Hago Nederland B.V.

Transferability

This entire approach could be adopted by similar organisations that provide cleaning services. Certain components of the intervention, such as ergonomics training, rotation of tasks and improving equipment could easily be adapted by a wide variety of organisations in different sectors.

Costs and benefits

The investments are manageable and the organisation is convinced that it is well worth the investment.

- Hago Next has incurred additional costs for training, ICT and materials. Part of the occupational costs were covered in 2019 and 2020 by subsidies and contributions from the health insurer.

The benefits of the approach are more difficult to quantify. Positive effects can be expected on absenteeism, productivity and turnover.

- Productivity gains through the use of less physically taxing work methods, supported by ergonomic materials and through smart organisation.
- Reduction in work-related absenteeism due to physically less stressful work methods and ergonomic aids.
- Reduced staff turnover as a result of good working conditions and coaching.

Key features of good practice example

The company's multifaceted approach includes the following:

- introducing ICT to help organise work tasks;
- working with ergonomists to develop training programmes and customised e-learning;
- selecting and purchasing equipment to reduce workloads;
- on-site training for improved work methods;
- organisational changes, such as rotation of work tasks; and
- adapting client premises to improve workflow.

Further information

Further information can be found at

<https://www.hago.nl/next>

<https://www.hago.nl/next/smart-hygiene>
(video on Smart Hygiene)

The organisation carried out a wide range of measures to reduce physical loads and improve working conditions.