

RECOGNISING AND PREVENTING PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS IN A BIOPHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY: EARLY REPORTING AND SUPPORT

1 Overview

Country: Austria.

Name of the measure: FOKUS Psyche.

Company name: Takeda Austria, Vienna site.

Sector: Biopharmaceutical industry.

Size of the company: 2,500 workers in Austria (Vienna) and approximately 50,000 globally.

Year of implementation of the measure: 2023.

Information on interviews conducted: Interviews were conducted with a group of company representatives, including the Head of Occupational Health Management, an occupational health psychologist, a worker representative, the manager of an operational department, a supervisor of an operational department and a worker from an operational department.

2 Description of the case

2.1 Introduction

Takeda is a research-driven biopharmaceutical company headquartered in Japan. The company, which was established in 1781, develops treatments with a focus on gastrointestinal and inflammatory diseases, rare diseases, plasma-derived therapies, oncology, neuroscience and vaccines.

The Vienna site specialises in the production of medicines derived from human blood plasma, which are crucial for treating rare and complex diseases. It supplies patients in more than 100 countries with therapies that address conditions such as haemophilia and primary immunodeficiencies.

Takeda Vienna operates as a multiproduct site with a flexible, campus-like structure that brings together departments such as Manufacturing and Research & Development. It manages the full cycle of plasma product processes, from fractionation to shipping, and also covers biologics and medical devices.

Since 2011, Takeda Vienna has been conducting psychosocial risk (PSR) assessments. It began implementing such assessments even before changes in Austrian law (amendment to the Austrian Safety and Health at Work Act, BGBL I 118/2012) made it mandatory to include PSR assessments in an overall risk assessment. This initiative was recommended by the Head of Occupational Health Management and was supported by both management and staff representatives at Takeda. The PSR assessments were carried out through surveys, internal inspections and workshops organised by the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Team.

To further enhance this approach, the **FOKUS Psyche programme was launched in 2023 as an easy-to-access reporting system** aimed at addressing the consequences of psychosocial risks and complementing the regular PSR assessments. The programme was developed by the OSH Team after recognising that while the regular PSR assessments provided a solid foundation for follow-up, workers also needed a continuously available and simple way to report stressful work situations. The staff representative was involved, approving the programme and supporting its communication.

Currently, FOKUS Psyche is a dedicated model designed to identify stressful work situations at an early stage, allowing for prompt preventive measures to be taken in the workplace. The initiative also offers individual support services to affected workers, promoting both their well-being and organisational resilience.

2.2 Description of measures and actions implemented and actors involved

The central aim of FOKUS Psyche is to foster a culture of openness, where team members can confidently and in confidence raise concerns about psychosocial risks. As the Head of the OSH Team explained in the interview:

'[The aim of the approach is to] identify and address stressful work situations early, based on worker feedback, so that appropriate countermeasures can be taken quickly. It also aims to improve the company's 'speak-up culture', particularly regarding psychosocial factors that could harm workers' well-being.'

At the heart of FOKUS Psyche is a **confidential reporting system**. A special reporting form was structured around the dimensions of PSR assessments. Workers can report risks linked to:

- work tasks;
- work processes and organisation of work;
- work environment; and
- social and organisational climate.

The **forms can be submitted confidentially via email or internal mail** directly to Takeda's internal OSH Team. A dedicated email address was set up specifically for FOKUS Psyche. To ensure complete confidentiality, the OSH service team is required to uphold the same strict data protection standards that apply to medical information. This means that any information shared through the programme is handled at the highest level of privacy and security, safeguarding the identity and details of the individual who has submitted the form.

Once the form is received, the Head of the OSH Team (a medical doctor) or an occupational psychologist confidentially reaches out to the worker to discuss the situation. In this private conversation, they **work together to explore potential solutions**, which may include both organisational measures and individual support options tailored to the worker's needs.

Organisational measures may stem from suggestions made by the worker or recommendations from the OSH expert. They focus on broader improvements, such as reducing work process interruptions, prioritising tasks or implementing ergonomic enhancements. If the worker agrees, the OSH expert discusses these measures with supervisors or managers. However, individual support measures remain strictly confidential. Workers are encouraged to take responsibility for actions they can personally implement, so they are empowered to address the issues themselves.

When multiple reports emerge from the same department or team, the OSH Team consolidates the issues and contacts the relevant supervisor, keeping the identities of the individuals who submitted the reports confidential. The OSH expert then discusses and recommends measures to the supervisors and managers. This approach is designed to drive structural improvements within the department. **Supervisors are expected to respond in a timely manner to the concerns raised, an approach backed up by Takeda's management.** This ensures that both individual issues (addressed with the worker) and systemic issues (addressed with the supervisor) are managed effectively.

Managers and supervisors are kept constantly informed about the programme and their responsibility to act on reported risks. They are given detailed information about the nature of the reported psychosocial risks, their potential impacts and the steps they can take to improve the situation. If needed, the Head of the OSH Team offers guidance to supervisors on how to address the issues. The level of support and consultation varies depending on the nature of the reported risks. Risks that cannot be resolved at team or department level are escalated to the next hierarchical level for further action.

The **OSH Team also prepares quarterly reports on perceived risks and the corresponding measures** taken, which are presented to the management team as part of regular reviews. The goal is to ensure that management and supervisors learn from staff feedback and adapt organisational practices as needed. The programme also ensures that all departments are involved in the assessment process.

Training and support services

In addition to FOKUS Psyche, Takeda Vienna has increased its commitment to psychological safety by offering various **training and support services**. Workers can access the worker assistance programme, stress management workshops and conflict resolution coaching, which further encourages a supportive and safe work environment.

Supervisors in particular receive substantial training to ensure they take a proactive role in supporting psychological safety ¹. One-day training sessions, called 'Lead with Trust and Respect', were organised to help supervisors recognise psychosocial risks and understand their responsibility in ensuring the psychological well-being of their teams. These sessions, recommended by the Head of the OSH Team and management, had high levels of participation.

The primary goal of the training sessions, largely led by the Head of the OSH Team, was to emphasise the importance of maintaining a healthy, safe work environment. The sessions aimed to strengthen the role of supervisors in promoting psychological safety by providing them with the tools to identify psychosocial risks, understand their potential impact on mental health and learn how to prevent or address them. The training also included information about FOKUS Psyche to ensure that the initiative became part of daily management practices.

Raising awareness and promoting participation

Raising awareness of FOKUS Psyche was another key focus. The company initiated a range of actions to promote the initiative, including regular announcements on the intranet, features in newsletters and ongoing training sessions. A particularly significant outreach activity took place during the annual Safety Parade in Vienna, where flyers about FOKUS Psyche were distributed to encourage greater staff participation.

The Safety Parade in Vienna is an annual event that attracts around 500 participants from various companies and institutions. This event is an opportunity to engage with the community and raise awareness about workplace safety and health issues, covering a broad range of topics related to occupational safety and well-being. Participating in such events allows Takeda Vienna to promote initiatives such as FOKUS Psyche to a broader audience, fostering a culture of openness, increasing awareness and empowering workers to address psychosocial risks and seek assistance when needed. By engaging with the wider community through events such as the Safety Parade, Takeda Vienna can increase the visibility of FOKUS Psyche, encouraging more workers to participate and use the resources available.

2.3 What was achieved

Today, FOKUS Psyche provides workers with a platform to confidentially report psychosocial risks to the OSH Team and receive timely support. Since its launch, FOKUS Psyche has delivered results at both individual and organisational levels. In its first year, the programme proved effective, with 15 feedback reports submitted in 2023 and around 20 in 2024. The OSH Team consistently responded to

¹ In this context, the phrase 'psychological safety' refers to a concept that the company actively promotes. It means creating an environment where workers feel safe enough to express their thoughts, concerns and ideas without fear of negative consequences. The company prioritises psychological safety as part of its organisational culture, encouraging open communication, trust and support for workers' mental well-being.

workers within one to two days, to discuss their situations in detail and determine the next steps, including involving managers to implement organisational-level measures.

Quarterly feedback reports are reviewed in management meetings, ensuring that staff input directly influences organisational practices. The OSH Team tries to keep the process efficient, from feedback collection to decision-making and full implementation. The general approach and the follow-up steps are possible because of Takeda's management's commitment to addressing psychosocial risks quickly and responsibly.

Supervisors who have received these reports indicate their willingness to act to improve challenging situations. They recognise that the reports are not intended to blame them but rather to support them in finding effective solutions. The Head of the OSH Team highlighted the fact that **supervisors are increasingly open to consultations with the OSH Team or external experts**, which has encouraged a collaborative approach to addressing psychosocial risks.

This shift in mindset has **contributed to strengthening the company's 'speak-up culture'**. Workers now feel more confident in raising concerns about psychosocial risks, knowing they will receive support rather than negative consequences. This cultural change has helped create a more open environment where workers feel empowered to speak up and seek assistance when needed.

According to interviewees, concrete organisational changes have already been observed, such as clearer task divisions within teams, task prioritisation, regular weekly discussions between supervisors and their teams, technical improvements and the testing of new equipment. Both workers and managers have recognised these improvements. For instance, one worker noted that task prioritisation helped her plan her work more effectively, while a supervisor reported improved collaboration with other departments.

Individual measures, regarding either mental or physical health, such as coaching or providing better-fitting protective equipment, were also promptly put in place when needed.

Through its various components, the programme has also **raised awareness of psychosocial risks among both leaders and staff**. Interviewees agreed that the combination of regular PSR assessments and the FOKUS Psyche programme, alongside additional support measures, has played a significant role in increasing this awareness across the organisation.

Looking ahead, a planned 2026 PSR assessment will provide an opportunity to evaluate the long-term effects of the programme. The Head of the OSH Team is optimistic that the results will reflect positive changes in the areas where FOKUS Psyche cases were previously reported and addressed. Notably, no new FOKUS Psyche cases were reported in 2025 from departments that had raised concerns in the past, suggesting that the measures taken to address these issues were effective in mitigating the challenges that had been previously identified.

2.4 Success factors and challenges

Several key factors have contributed to its effectiveness of the FOKUS Psyche initiative in addressing psychosocial risks and improving the workplace environment at Takeda.

First and foremost, **management's openness to the process and its continuous support** have been crucial. This openness has facilitated an environment where issues can be raised and tackled without fear of retaliation. Additionally, the openness of supervisors and leaders in dealing with anonymously reported stress situations has helped ensure that workers feel safe and supported when raising concerns. By focusing on **developing solutions rather than placing blame on supervisors, this approach has created a more constructive and positive atmosphere** for addressing issues.

By providing workers with a safe and accessible platform to share concerns, management has demonstrated a genuine commitment to addressing issues, encouraging more people to voice their

opinions. Weekly supervisor-team discussions have further promoted open conversations about work-related psychosocial risks, while transparent communication about actions taken has strengthened trust. This has created a more collaborative atmosphere where workers feel supported, valued and empowered to contribute ideas.

The strong **trust that workers have in the OSH Team has been crucial** in encouraging participation in the FOKUS Psyche programme. This trust has developed over several years of consistent support from the OSH Team. As a result, workers make proactive use not only of FOKUS Psyche but also of other available support services, such as individual psychological support or part-time reintegration after a long sick leave. The staff representative who was involved in the design and launch of FOKUS Psyche has supported the programme from the beginning, playing a key role in nurturing this trust. Additionally, the trust that management places in the OSH Team has been instrumental in ensuring the programme's successful implementation. This trust allows the programme to benefit both workers and the organisation, as it enables open communication and psychosocial risks to be effectively addressed.

A key factor in the success of FOKUS Psyche has been its **focus on developing collective measures that benefit the entire organisation, rather than just addressing individual concerns**. The initiative highlights that giving workers the ongoing opportunity to raise concerns and provide feedback can lead to broader organisational changes, such as weekly team discussions focusing on PSRs, which complement the more systematic PSR assessments that take place every three to four years. The OSH Team's ongoing monitoring and quarterly reporting to management and the staff representative ensure that immediate concerns are addressed, while also driving long-term improvements across the organisation. This balance of quick action and strategic planning has been essential in creating a healthier, more responsive work environment.

The Head of the OSH Team and the occupational psychologist also emphasised the **importance of individual responsibility in the process**, which refers specifically to **workers making use of the structures in place to report PSRs**. In their discussions with workers, they not only focused on addressing reported risks but also aimed to empower them, encouraging them to take action to improve their situations by speaking up. It is important to notice that this does not mean that workers are the responsible for organisational measures, but they are encouraged to address risks directly, highlight issues and contribute to the joint search for systematic solutions.

As one interviewee explained, the goal is to ensure that workers understand that they are not powerless and can positively contribute to improving their work environment. However the responsibility for solving the identified issues still lies with the employer.

Aside from the listed successes, **the initiative has also faced some challenges**. The key challenge was determining whether confidential, individual reporting could lead to improvements that would address the concerns and needs of the wider workforce. While individual cases were handled confidentially, it was important to ensure that the broader context of workplace stress was not overlooked. The initiative tackled this by distinguishing between individual needs and those related to the wider working environment, ensuring that both were addressed through tailored solutions.

2.5 Lesson learned and transferability

FOKUS Psyche offers valuable lessons in creating effective, low-threshold reporting systems that complement regular PSR assessments, providing swift feedback and support in flexible and dynamic work environments. One of the key takeaways from the initiative is the importance of **low-barrier reporting mechanisms** that make it easy for workers to report their exposure to PSR without fear of stigma or retaliation. This approach allows workers to highlight stressful conditions and receive support, along with quick solutions to address any issues.

As already discussed, a critical factor in the success of FOKUS Psyche has been the **strong management support**, which has helped ensure the programme's effective implementation. Top management's openness to the initiative set the tone for the entire organisation, creating a culture

where stressful work situations are addressed proactively. This support trickled down to middle management and team leaders, who were more prepared to react to reported issues and take appropriate action.

One of the critical lessons learned is the importance of **effective, systematic and repeated communication** to ensure that the programme reaches workers at all levels of the organisation. By using multiple communication channels, the programme has been able to engage supervisors through training sessions and management meetings, while reaching workers on the shop floor through avenues such as the Safety Parade, newsletters and appointments with the OSH Team. Additionally, the staff representative, who was involved in the programme from the beginning, has played a key role in engaging workers by communicating directly about the programme and its benefits to encourage widespread awareness and participation.

Another key insight is that communicating the improvements made as a result of worker feedback has reinforced transparency within the organisation. It has shown workers that their concerns are being heard and acted upon, which has not only built trust but also demonstrated that their feedback can lead to tangible changes. This **transparency has played a significant role in encouraging continued participation and fostering a culture of openness**, where workers feel their voices are heard.

FOKUS Psyche also **demonstrates how individual reports can drive broader organisational changes**. By addressing specific issues raised by workers, the initiative has led to improvements in work processes (such as task prioritisation processes and fewer work interruptions), communication structures (such as encouraging direct 'speak-up' practices and better communication across departments) and team dynamics (such as using FOKUS Psyche within teams to address psychosocial risks or to support team development).

Overall, organisations looking to adopt a similar approach should ensure they have strong leadership support, effective communication channels, a commitment to transparency and an ongoing focus on continuous organisational improvement. These elements are crucial to the success of a programme like this. The flexibility and responsiveness of the FOKUS Psyche model make it **adaptable to various work environments, from large corporations with many workers to smaller, more agile organisations**.

For smaller companies, FOKUS Psyche provides a practical and efficient way to quickly and directly gather information on perceived psychosocial risks, such as workload issues, unclear roles or interpersonal conflicts. Unlike traditional risk assessments, which often occur at long intervals, FOKUS Psyche allows for real-time feedback. This helps companies address concerns promptly rather than waiting for the next scheduled assessment.

In smaller companies, workers often fulfil several roles at the same time. Traditional risk assessments, such as surveys, often fail to adequately capture the risks associated with less-common roles. Therefore, alternative assessment approaches are required to ensure that all roles are properly considered.

By using a system such as FOKUS Psyche, these workers have an opportunity to directly raise concerns and participate in the improvement process, so that their voices are heard and that their unique needs are addressed. This inclusivity helps psychosocial risks affecting all workers, regardless of their role or department size, to be properly identified and managed. It is, however, important to consider that the guaranteed anonymity at Takeda cannot be guaranteed in a much smaller company. In such cases, other ways of improving trust and opening communication might have to be considered to make sure that the process works well.

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