

Summary Parallel Session II: Strategies and programmes for managing stress and psychosocial risks at work

Moderator: Francisco Jesús Álvarez Hildalgo

The management of work-related stress is influenced not only by the direct actions of employers and employees in the workplace. Policy-makers, labour inspectors, experts, information providers and social partners all play a role in driving prevention and reducing the costs to Europe's workers, businesses and States. This interactive session considered the different roles and responsibilities of those influencing prevention.

During the course of the session, the following aspects were discussed in more detail:

- Legislation
- Compliance and the role of Labour Inspection
- Sectoral approaches
- Provision of profession support (e.g. by psychologists)
- Motivation of employers to take action.

The panel participants:

Charlotte Demoulin



Charlotte Demoulin works for the Federal Public Service Employment, Labour, and social dialogue (Ministry of Labour), Belgium as a specialist in the prevention of psychosocial risks at work, taking part in the preparation of new Belgian legislation on psychosocial risks.

Lars Lidsmoes



Lars Lidsmoes works at the Danish Working Environment Authority where he is involved in transferring knowledge on the psychosocial working environment into the practice of inspection, compliance, and communication.

Anders Eklund



Anders Eklund is a teacher and also works for the Swedish Teachers Union. He has been active for a decade in the ETUCE projects on stress, violence, and harassment in the education sector.

Stéphane Coigné



Stephane Coigne is a businessman and chair of the Association of Belgian Hairdressers and from next year will be the General Secretary of Coiffure EU, the European Employers group in the hairdressing sector.

Veronika Jakl



Veronika Jakl is an industrial and organisational psychologist in Austria carrying out interventions on work-related stress in private companies and public organisations.

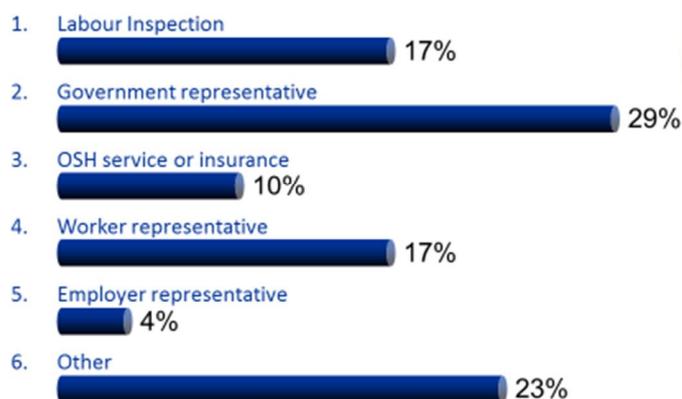
Lukas Weber



Lukas Weber, is a cultural psychologist and head of Product Development at Health Promotion Switzerland. He is specialised in occupational health management and mental health promotion.

Question:

What is your background?



The session opened with a preliminary question to establish the composition of the participating audience. The “others” category included researchers and representatives from professional associations.

Question:

Do we need specific legislation for improving psychosocial risk prevention in companies?



At the core of any prevention system is the legal base. This question asked whether specific legislation was needed. The lead answer from the panel came from **Charlotte Demoulin**:

The answer to the question « Do we need specific legislation for improving psychosocial risk prevention in companies » was obviously YES in Belgium. Indeed, the new legislation on psychosocial risks was a logical evolution on this matter. The previous legislation of 2007 insisted only on harassment at work and procedures to denounce it. Only a few general principles were about psychosocial risks prevention. According to the evaluations of the previous legislation done by the Ministry and the Parliament in 2010-2011 involving all stakeholders and actors, the harassment procedure was used to denounce many others situations like stress at work, conflicts and even organizational problems in the enterprise due to the lack of an appropriate procedure for these issues. The real cases of harassment were in fact not so many.

The prevention of psychosocial risks had to be developed in the legislation in order to change the mentality within the companies. The system is based on the idea that psychosocial issues are better solved inside the companies, with the help of the specialised psychosocial prevention advisor. Labour inspection, prosecutors and judges refer or base their judgment on the report of this prevention advisor. It is in the companies that things had to be changed. The merit of the new legislation and the new obligations is to have left the strict angle of harassment and to have opened the debate in the companies to all psychosocial risks.

Concretely the new legislation reinforces and integrates psychosocial risks prevention in the global prevention policy of the companies.

Employers have to do a psychosocial risks analysis « a priori » (before any incident) like they have to do it for traditional risks in the enterprise.

It is now possible for one third of the workers representatives or for a member of the hierarchic line to ask to the employer to analyse the risks in a particular work situation when a danger is detected. For example, it means that if they observe in a specific department an important turnover or absenteeism, something goes wrong: it is the opportunity to ask for a risks analysis to the employer.

Individual procedures are also extended to the psychosocial risks at work and not only to harassment and violence at work. Workers can now introduce a request of intervention for psychosocial risks to the specialised prevention advisor (we don't speak about "complaint" anymore). To be juridically usable and to be intelligible for everyone, the psychosocial risks have been defined in the legislation.

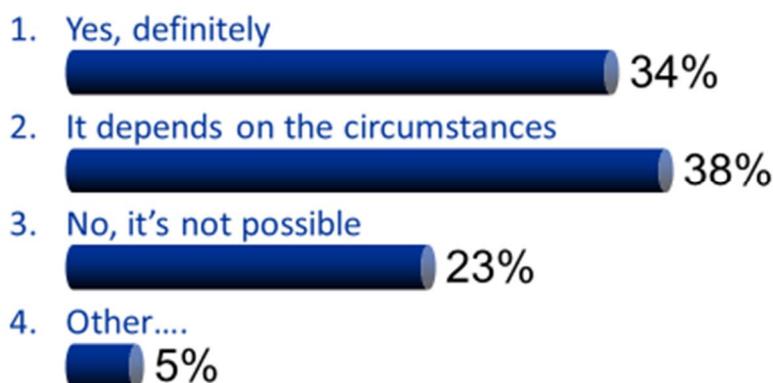
However, violence and harassment at work are still taken into account in the legislation because of the severity of those facts. A special procedure still exists and the victims benefit from specific protection against dismissal.

Questions from the audience and discussions:

- A discussion came up if psychosocial risks can be legally defined and how this was done in Belgium?
Psychosocial risks were defined as being based on the following aspects: Working conditions, Work environment, work organisation and social conditions at work. If the evaluation leads to results detecting an “abnormal situation for the workers affected”, immediate action is required. This definition resulted from a dialogue with stakeholders that came to the conclusion that a definition is needed to protect both, employees and employers.
- Is there any support for companies to comply with the legislation, any guidance tools or similar products in Belgium?
The Division of Promotion of well-being at work in the Ministry has set up a website which gives concrete support, including guidance tools, explanation of legislation etc.

Question:

Is it possible to create a good psychosocial work environment at a working place through inspection and enforcement?



Having a legal base is important, but this question examined whether the inspection and enforcement of legal requirements can make an impact on the psychosocial work environment. The lead answer came from **Lars Lidsmoes**

The answer is: It depends

The provisions in a working environment act and/or the executive orders must address the relevant risk factors directly or indirectly in order to serve as a framework for inspection and set standards for the companies to follow.

PWE is abstract and complex, the rules should be clear and/or clarified in guidance materials.

Inspection of the psychosocial working environment should be accepted and supported politically and by the social parties. It is important that the Working Environment Authority (WEA) is supported by these authorities in order to ensure acceptance and compliance by employers and employees in the company.

Inspection activities on PWE should be designed for several purposes:

- Control and enforcement of legal provisions
- The protection of employees
- To supply information and advice to employers and employees on how to comply with the legal provisions *and how to improve the PWE in companies.*
- To make sure that information about legal demands/improvement notices, recommendations and advice etc. can be well understood by the employer as well as the employees or their representatives. Including that they understand the severity of the risk to employees' health and safety.
- *To motivate the companies to continually improve their psychosocial working environment.*

The latter purpose is especially important in regard to PWE: An improvement notice may solve the problem it addresses, but doesn't necessarily improve the working environment outside the scope of the improvement notice and in other sections of the company.

Creating a good PWE or improving a bad PWE is a long term process which has to be driven by employers and employees together. It is important that the company take responsibility for this process after the WEA has left. To create this responsibility Danish inspectors initiate a dialogue with company representatives. In this dialogue the company is offered general guidance and help on how they best strengthen and support their preventive activities. Generally a combination of inspection and support has proven an effective approach in regard to inspecting PWE.

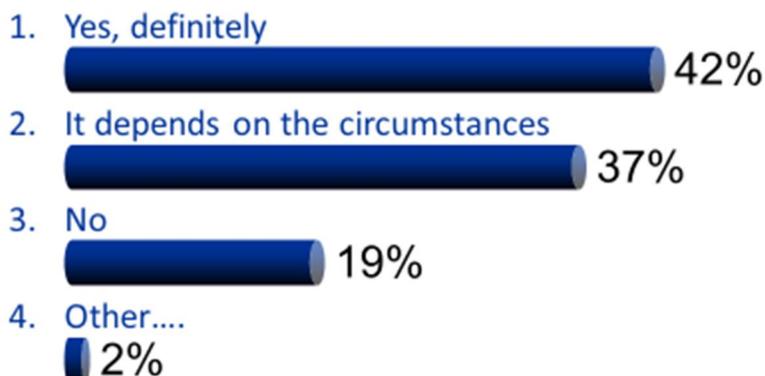
Not all labour inspectors care about inspecting PWE or have the skill set to do it. But the ones that does it must be suitably trained and supported by the WEA organisation: PWE inspectors must have extensive knowledge about psychosocial issues, good observational, communicational, listening and dialogue skills and good preparation to cope with emotionally challenging situations, employees and employers.

Discussions and questions:

In addition to legislation and enforcement it is very important to have tools and guidance helping employers to set up a proper approach to preventing psychosocial risks in the workplace.

Question:

Is a sectoral specific approach the most effective framework for intervention?



Many work issues are dealt with at EU and national level on a sector (branch) basis. This question examined whether this approach was appropriate for interventions relating to psychosocial risks. The lead answers came from **Anders Eklund**, ETUCE and **Stephane Coigné**, from Coiffure EU

Anders Eklund:

If it comes to intervention, it's definitely a specific approach that is needed. School is by itself the largest workplace in Europe. Still the type of work, organization and social life is very specific, when it comes to a learning process. It is up to the teaching profession to handle the learning process, even when and if stakeholders outside want to intervene.

On the other hand these specific actions cannot be done without a legal framework that is general.

The initiatives of the social partners, and the social dialogue in school are the major driving forces to have a less stressful work in school. These actions need a clear vision on a sustainable and healthy school for all.

ETUCE and EFEE are running a project on decent work and education, with case studies in four countries to look at concrete and practical ways to prevent and combat WRS in schools. The aim is to promote healthy workplaces as ground for quality in

education. We have had projects on stress, and violence and harassment the last 8 years that have involved schools in most European countries. We know the major ups and downs.

At local level there are initiatives that ease stressful work locally. The main results towards a sustainable and healthy school are produced locally.

Stéphane Coigné:

The latest European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER-2) shows that Psycho-Social Risks (PSR) have a huge impact on operating expenses. This year, the costs for long-term illnesses will be higher than the costs of unemployment benefits. Laws, regulations, Royal Decrees and Collective Bargaining Agreements are encouraging employers to tackle the issue. It is important to provide the industry with tools to support them.

- **OiRA (Online interactive Risk Assessment)**

We all know that risk assessments are the start of any good prevention policy, but we also know that there is room for improvement in terms of execution (an average of 1 out of 3 companies carries out a RA). The industry has scope for actively promoting this tool and it can encourage active hairdressers to fill in the RA, in partnership with education settings and external bodies, such as external health and safety departments, for example by organising information sessions and workshops for students and active hairdressers (WG+W). Support tools certainly provide added value, as the concept of risk assessment could deter the target group (they may be afraid of the unknown). In Belgium, we have developed a procedure and a manual (digital and paper) to facilitate its use and clarify its contents, using practical tips and best practices.

It is important to also involve education settings, because the risk assessment applies to trainees as well. It is the students (future hairdressers) who inform their employers and encourage them to draw up the analysis.

- **Employee involvement**

We need to change the mentality of both employers and employees (or their equivalent such as trainees): all parties need to realise that a good prevention policy is not an extra cost, but constitutes a win-win, which will benefit everyone over time. Employers will notice that involving staff in completing the RA, incorporating points of attention and complying with the prevention measures will result in less absenteeism over time.

- **Labour differentiation & flexibility**

Talking to employers and giving them the opportunity to reflect on the internal organisation of the work in their hairdressing salon can increase awareness about “doing things differently”. By giving them the opportunity to review their working environment, they will be more inclined to address certain situations as they are approached on the basis of their personal living and working space. Are they operating in balance with their working environment? Are tasks equally

distributed? Do they work together well with their team? Is the work-life balance respected?

The industry provides them with tools to work on a balanced and healthy workload (job rotation, more autonomy and flexible working times) together with their staff and as part of the job commitments (on-the-job training, part-time, fulltime worker).

- Career coaching

Hairdressers not only require the basic supplies needed to run their salon, they also need to have the means to improve working quality and employee engagement. Information and training sessions can help to achieve this goal. This includes orientation of new staff, dealing with difficult clients/employee diversity, developing mentorship programmes and training managers to manage diverse teams.

In Belgium (Flanders), hairdressers-employers can take action (with 50% co-funding) to bolster their HR policy, with the support of regional economic consultation committees (RESOC) and in consultation with the industry.

Questions and discussions:

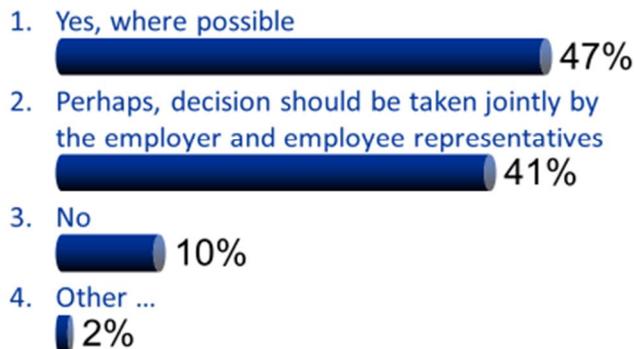
- How is OiRA taking psychosocial risks into account?

OiRA is a sector-based tool for carrying out a general risk assessment micro and small enterprises. It is not a specific tool for carrying out a psychosocial risk evaluation, but OiRA can be used to point out the most important issues.

Different OiRA tools take different approaches with regard to psychosocial risks. The standard approach is that the tools highlight that companies have to have a strategy on how to prevent stress and psychosocial risks. Certain tools, e.g. the hairdressing tool, go into more detail and highlight especially certain aspects to have in mind, as for example the importance of mental health and well-being, the variety of work tasks, and the prevention of harassment, etc.

Question:

Should there be greater provision of professional support by psychologists?



This question examined the role of psychologists in the prevention process, following on a finding from ESENER II that there is a 4-60% variance in use of psychologist for psychosocial risk prevention for the different Member States. The lead answer came from **Veronika Jaki**

A lot of people (employers and employees) have a strange and one-sided idea of what a "psycho-professional" does in such a project. Often I'm confronted with fear when people hear that a psychologist will make an evaluation or set an intervention. Employees are afraid of being analysed and that there is no anonymity when talking to me. And employers are afraid that I will insist on realizing every absurd wish of the staff like a garage parking space for everyone.

So it's very important that employers, who are the purchasers, and also employees, who are often involved with a survey, an interview or a workshop, have a good feeling to work with a psychologist.

But professional support is a great opportunity to get an objective view on work places. With this support it's easier for employers to focus of psychosocial working conditions (and not on individual complaints) and set condition focused measures. Otherwise there is the risk that no one addresses the problems which are known but nothing the staff wants to talk about. That's easier for an external professional to talk openly about every stress factor.

Since the Austrian law changed in 2013 and has now explicitly psychosocial risks included, a lot of professions also get basic training in psychosocial risk prevention like occupational health doctors and safety officers. This is also a good way to get the knowledge into the companies because these professionals are often permanently integrated into the OSH-process.

I also understand that not every employer wants to buy a psychologists service if there is no clear trigger or obvious problem. But after every project I did in companies

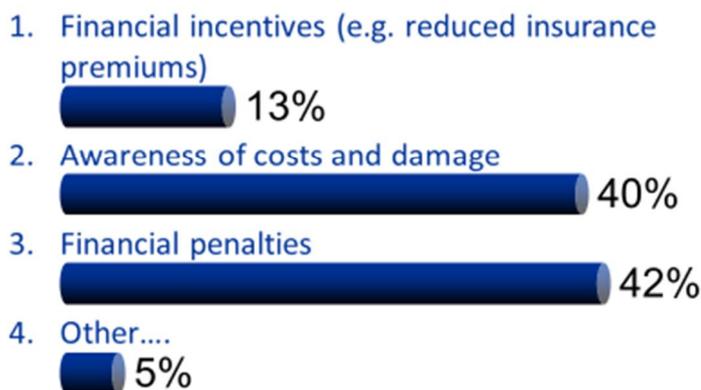
or organizations the managers told me that the psychosocial risk prevention gave them a very deep insight into their own organization and cleared where stress factors are or have been.

Questions and discussions:

- The question was raised on how managers/employers can best be persuaded to use psychosocial services.
Quite often the first motivation of calling in an external psychologist is when coming across internal problems and looking for help. Sometimes this action is also triggered by visits from the labour inspectorate.
- Can you give examples of interventions you implement in companies?
Often interventions are rather easy to implement and cost almost nothing or nothing. Most interventions are related to the organisation of work. Normally by changing aspects of work organisation, the most pressing stress factors can already be addressed and companies are often surprised about how easy and straight forward these changes are.

Question:

What motivates employers to take action with regard to psychosocial risk prevention?



The final question considered the motivation for employers to take action with regard to psychosocial risk prevention. Traditionally, occupational safety and health has relied on negative incentives (e.g. fines from the Labour Inspectorate) but are there other approaches? The lead answer was from **Lukas Weber**:

It is important to show employers that stress is a relevant financial factor. Health Promotion Switzerland focuses on the economic potential of stress prevention programs. We show employers what effects stress prevention has on resources and stressors, on wellbeing and on costs of stress.

We do yearly a representative survey on stress in Switzerland to measure the Job-Stress-Index. The Job-Stress-Index represents the relationship between stressors and resources of employees in a single figure. In 2014, 24.8% of employees in Switzerland were working in critical working conditions according to the Job-Stress-Index.

High scores in the Job-Stress-Index are significantly related to high scores on exhaustion (measured with the Demerouti-scale). The correlation is 0.5. In the same way the JSI correlates with health, psychosomatic disorders and sleeping problems. Most importantly for employers – and this is a very good argument for stress prevention – it correlates with job satisfaction, commitment to the organisation, turnover intention and enthusiasm at work.

What is important here: a higher stress-level is also related to higher absence-rates and to productivity losses. This is economically relevant.

Our study of 2014 showed that if all employees had a positive Job-Stress-Index, the Swiss economy would save 5.58 milliards Swiss francs.

We know a lot about stress, but we should know much more about interventions against stress. What is effective? What is economically worth implementing?

Employers should learn which factors are relevant and how to change them in order to reduce stress and at the same time enhance productivity.

The first thing is to measure stress. To this end we have developed a stress-survey tool called the S-Tool. With the S-Tool employers can measure their Job-Stress-Index. We know that an improvement of one single point in the Index is worth about 400 Swiss Francs. This is a relevant argument for employers: If you improve the working conditions with regards to stress, you will save money!

Health Promotion Switzerland undertook another project in collaboration with 8 Swiss companies with a total of 5000 employees to better understand the benefits of interventions. In the SWiNG project we used S-Tool to measure stress and implemented interventions for stress prevention based on those results. After 2.5 years we measured the effects of the interventions. We calculated the full costs of interventions and calculated the economic gains. We were able to show scientifically that there is a positive relationship between them. The return on investment was 192 francs per employee and year.

There is one other thing I want to point out. It is not only about the costs of stress. I think we should also talk about the potential of mental health. Engaged, motivated employees who are feeling good, are a lot more productive. We show employers that it is not only about the reduction of absences, but also about the increase in productivity.

Questions and discussion:

- It was discussed how to take into account workers bringing home-stress/private stress into work? In Health Promotion Switzerland data collection and respective analysis allowed to separate private factors from work stressors. This was

encouraged on requests from employers asking how to figure out the impact work stress has on their employees.

Summary & wrap-up

Jesus Francisco Alvarez Hidalgo, from DG Employment, European Commission who was moderating the discussion closed the session with a short summary.

- Legislation should be focused on prevention and employers and workers need support in terms of tools and guidance for implementation.
- Duty-holders have to be able to implement legislation and inspectorates have to be able to enforce it consistently. The law has to reflect the national needs, system, and culture. Duty-holders and enforcing authorities have to have access to the information and support they need.
- Measurement of inspection impact is difficult. Psychosocial work environment depends on much more than inspection but improvement notices and repeated visits in combination with appropriate guidance helps.
- Inspectorates are having to face up to competing priorities in times of limited resources, but they can make focused interventions to address psychosocial risks in “high-risk” workplaces and can make use of existing guidance documents for support.
- Sector interventions are helpful and raise performance above the baseline, no matter whether the intervention is tools, publications or trainings.
- Especially in certain sectors with specific challenges, as e.g. the educational sector, there is a need to support the sectoral approach on top of a national approach.
- Specific sectors may have specific problems, and those operating in the sectors are most aware of the challenges they face and their needs. Targeted tools, training, and other interventions can be very effective at sector level, but always there is the greatest effectiveness when there is social dialogue at workplace as well as societal level.
- Support of a psychologist helps to find the right measures. Mostly measure focus on organisational interventions and often don't go along with costs.
- Regardless of the source of stress, it costs business. And the more chronic the stress, the greater the costs. Showing such costs can motivate employers.
- ESENER shows that a range of motivators drive action in Europe's workplaces, with variation by sector and Member State. Motivation can be both positive (carrot) or negative (stick) and there is no single solution that will work for every workplace. It's important to pick enterprises and workers up where they stand, have a targeted approach to their needs, their understanding and their available resources.
- There are measures and approaches available that are not going along with great investments and expensive measures, sometimes small changes, supported by management and the workforce can make a big difference. And it's our joint responsibility to point these out, to make enterprises, stakeholders and politicians aware. Because only a motivated and healthy workforce will be able to cope with the challenges we face in this changing world of work.

- Across Europe there are many initiatives on psychosocial risks – from legislation to inspection campaigns and provision of tools to motivational approaches. Stakeholders can and hopefully will learn and be inspired by each other.