

Psychosocial Risk Management - European Framework: Enterprise Level

Keywords: psychosocial risk management, work-related stress, workplace violence, harassment, bullying

Introduction

The European framework for psychosocial risk management at the workplace (PRIMA-EF) aims at providing a framework to promote policy and practice at national and enterprise level within the European Union (EU). The need for such a framework is particularly pressing due to recent EU data indicating the high prevalence of psychosocial risks to workers health and an increase of problems such as work-related stress and workplace violence, harassment and bullying. Work-related psychosocial risks concern aspects of the design and management of work and its social and organisational contexts that have the potential for causing psychological or physical harm. Work-related stress is among the most commonly reported causes of illness by workers, affecting more than 40 million individuals across the EU (European Foundation, 2007). The same survey showed that 6% of the workforce had been exposed to threats of physical violence, 4% to violence by other people and 5% to bullying and/or harassment at work over the past 12 months.

Aim

PRIMA-EF at the enterprise level identifies key aspects and stages in psychosocial risk management at work. It can be used by EU enterprises, experts and workers representatives as the basis for the development of relevant policies, indicators and action plans to prevent and manage work-related stress and workplace violence, harassment and bullying. This guidance sheet is supplemented by additional PRIMA-EF guidance sheets (available at www.prima-ef.org).

Regulatory Framework

Psychosocial risk management (PRIMA) is among employers' obligations to assess and manage all types of risk to workers' health as stipulated in the European Council Framework Directive on the Introduction of Meas-



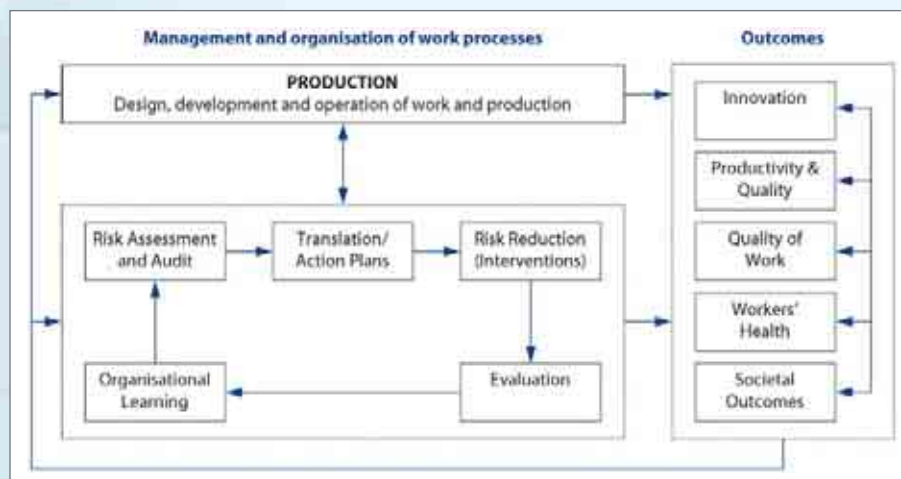
ures to Encourage Improvements in the Safety and Health of Workers at Work, 89/391/EEC. Two agreements that have been concluded by the European social partners are also relevant: the framework agreement on work-related stress (2004) and the framework agreement on harassment and violence at work (2007).

Key Aspects of PRIMA (see also guidance sheet 01)

- Good PRIMA is good business
- PRIMA should be a continuous process, part of normal business operations
- There should be ownership of the PRIMA process by all stakeholders
- Tailoring to the particular enterprise context should underpin the PRIMA process
- PRIMA should be based on evidence-informed practice
- PRIMA should be a participative approach based on social dialogue
- PRIMA should include different levels of interventions with focus on measures at source
- PRIMA is part of organisations' ethical and corporate social responsibility
- Capabilities at enterprise and macro level should be considered for the PRIMA process

PRIMA Key Elements and Model

1. Declared focus on a defined work population, workplace or set of operations
2. Assessment of risks to understand the nature of the problem and their underlying causes
3. Design and implementation of actions designed to remove or reduce risks
4. Evaluation of those actions and learning from them
5. Active and careful management of the process



PRIMA Stages

Risk assessment

Risk assessment is a central element of the risk management process. It has been defined by the EC as 'a systematic examination of the work undertaken to consider what could cause injury or harm, whether the hazards could be eliminated, and if not what preventive or protective measures are, or should be, in place to control the risks'. Risk assessment provides information on the nature and severity of the problem, psychosocial hazards and the way they might affect the health of those exposed to them and the healthiness of their organisation (in terms of issues such as absence, commitment to the organisation, worker satisfaction and intention to leave, productivity). A well-conducted risk assessment does not only identify challenges in the work environment but also

positive aspects of the work environment that should be promoted and enhanced. The purpose of the risk assessment is to inform, guide and support subsequent risk reduction: it is not an aim in itself. Risk assessment should:

- be based on data collected through tools such as surveys, individual or group discussions or observation methods
- take into consideration diversity issues and should not ignore the wider context, such as occupational sector characteristics or socioeconomic and cultural variations across member states
- recognise and make use of the knowledge and expertise of working people in relation to their jobs
- treat information at the group level (not catalogue individual views about work) and measure consensus in expert judgments on working conditions.

In PRIMA-EF, psychosocial hazards also include violence, bullying and harassment at work. Risk assessment of physical customer violence needs to take into account the physical work environment, e.g. workplace design and safety devices as enabling factors of violent attacks. Bullying at work is a multiform phenomenon: to become bullied is a psychosocial risk situation causing psychological harm. On the other hand, bullying at work should be regarded and discussed as a consequence of a poor psychosocial work environment. Leadership styles are particularly important in relation to bullying and should be considered.

Bringing together the information on psychosocial hazards and their possible health effects allows the identification of likely risk factors. These risk factors can be prioritised in terms of the nature of the hazard or the harm it causes, the strength of the relationship between hazard and harm, or the size of the group affected.

Audits of existing practices and support

Before action can be sensibly planned, it is necessary to analyse what measures, if any, are already in place to deal with psychosocial hazards and their effects on the individual or the organisation. This analysis requires an audit (review, analysis and critical evaluation) of existing management practices and employee support. This information from the audit together with the risk assessment information feeds forward to the process of translation: discussing and exploring the risk assessment data to allow the development of an action plan for risk reduction.

Development of an action plan

When the nature of the problems and their causes are sufficiently understood, a reasonable and practical action plan to reduce risk (solutions) can be developed. That involves deciding on: what is being targeted, how and by whom, who else needs to be involved, what the time schedule will be, what resources will be required, what will be the expected (health and business) benefits and how they can be measured, and how the action plan will be evaluated. Risk reduction interventions should give priority to modifying psychosocial risk factors at source focusing on the organisation or groups within it. Worker-directed measures can complement other actions and are an important support for those employees who are already suffering from the negative effects of exposure to risk factors.

Risk reduction (implementation of action plan)

Implementation of measures and interventions is the crucial step in reducing risks. The implementation of the action plan for risk reduction needs to be carefully and thoughtfully managed. The progress of the action plan must be systematically monitored, recorded and discussed to identify where necessary corrective action should be taken, as well as provision made for its evaluation. Ownership and participation of managers and workers are essential for the implementation process and increase the probability of success (i.e. reduction of risk).

Evaluation of action plan

It is essential for any action plan to be evaluated to determine how well and in what respects it has worked. The process of implementation as well as the outcomes of the action plan must be evaluated. Evaluation must consider a variety of types of information and draw it from a number of relevant perspectives (e.g. staff, management, stakeholders).

Organisational learning

The organisation should use the evaluation for continuous improvement and also as the basis for sharing (discussing and communicating) learning points that may be of use in future risk management, but also in the (re)design of work organisation and workplaces as part of the normal organisational development process. A long-term orientation is essential and should be adopted by organisations. Lessons learned should be discussed and, if necessary redefined, in existing work meetings and as part of the social dialogue process within the firm. They should be communicated to a wider company audience. Finally they should be used as input for the "next cycle" of the psychosocial risk management process.

Outcomes of the PRIMA process

Knowledge on the outcomes of the risk management process is an important input for the continuous risk assessment process. A healthy organisation is defined as one with values and practices facilitating good employee health and well-being as well as improved organisational productivity and performance. PRIMA can contribute to:

- a reduction of the cost of absence or mistakes and accidents and hence an associated increase of production
- a reduction in the cost of medical treatment and associated insurance premiums and liabilities
- the improvement of work processes and communication and promotion of work effectiveness and efficiency
- the attractiveness of the organisation as being a good employer and one that is highly valued by its staff and its customers
- the development of an innovative, responsible, future-orientated corporate culture
- the promotion of health in the wider community setting.

Best practice in relation to psychosocial risk management essentially reflects best practice in terms of organisational management, learning and development, social responsibility and the promotion of quality of working life.

More Information

www.prima-ef.org

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