

Successfully organising health and work - The Netherlands

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Work and health are closely related. This poster looks at three organisations with an integrated health policy and studies the added value of an external consultant in setting up this policy: the 'Work & Organisation' professional.

The 'Work & Organisation' policy is a unique discipline in the Netherlands. Over the past ten years, this professional has been one of the four compulsory disciplines for employers to consult in accordance to the Dutch Working Conditions Act. In promoting health at the workplace, the 'Work & Organisation' professional plays an important and central role. The 'Work & Organisation' professional supports employers in successfully organising health and work in such a way that the policy is supported by both management and employees.

The three organisations presented are a selection of a Dutch publication. The title of this publication has been translated as 'Successfully organising health and work. The balance of ten year's Work & Organisation'. The book was part of a project to mark the tenth anniversary of the 'Work & Organisation' professional and the professional association BA&O. More than 100 experts participated at this project.

From mobbing to personal skills

The atmosphere on the work floor of the sweepers in Amsterdam was not the most favourable: mobbing and discrimination were not unknown to the workers. Some sweepers did not want to work together. The rate of absenteeism was high. Together with the management and the staff manager, two 'Work & Organisation' professionals started to change the working culture.

The aim was to start discussions about good working standards and values and have a plan for action within 7 months. This proved to be too ambitious. The plan was amended: the starting point was no longer mobbing and discrimination, but the job profiles. The professionals noticed that job profiles were not an item at meetings, but a hot item on the work floor. The tasks, responsibilities and the role of the employees, and particularly those of the middle management, were not clear. This created an atmosphere of distrust.

Veegdienst Amsterdam Sweepers



Satisfied staff and residents

The initial results were positive. Mobbing was reduced, and when it did happen it was open to discussion. Compared to the 3 or 4 incidents which regularly occurred during previous years, none took place in 2004. A job satisfaction survey revealed that the sweepers enjoyed their work more than before. Absenteeism declined from 11% (2001) to 7% (in 2004). And last but not least: residents were also more satisfied with the tidiness of their neighbourhood.

The attributed value of the 'Work & Organisation' professional was a way of working that suited the sweepers: 'not talking, but doing'. They spoke the language of the workers and they managed to translate difficult themes such as standards, values, culture and competences in a concrete approach that worked out well in this setting. The key element in the approach was creating clear profiles for each job. By providing clarity, distrust was removed and sweepers were more able to address colleagues on working behaviour. The focus for the next steps will be on personal development.

Sound education

The environment of adult and vocational education is dynamic. Economic, social and cultural developments highly influence the work. Combined with the introduction of ICT and new didactic methods, the work results in a high risk for sickness and incapacity for work. For this reason, this sector is part of the Dutch soft law initiative to reduce absenteeism, incapacity for work and promote rehabilitation of sick employees.

The model applied is called Partituur. The main reason for using the Partituur is to understand problems on the work floor and create a structure for discussing items such as absenteeism, risk factors, the role of the organisation and the individual and stimulating agreements with respect to both management and employees.

BVE - Council for adult and vocational education



Individual attention

The project resulted in a sense of urgency and motivation for changing the working conditions and absenteeism policy in the 70 organisations which used the Partituur, based on the individual and not the system. One example of an action taken is initiating personal contact with employees about their motivation and their commitment to the organisation. With regard to managers, it concerned taking responsibility for being the first contact person for sick employees.

Together with the 'Work & Organisation' professional, the institutes drew up their own action plan: the professional is the 'composer', while management and teachers are the 'conductors' of the Partituur. The next step is to implement these plans into action, and to evaluate the results of the various projects in the institutes.

Well-being and productivity

The vision of Dow, an international chemical industry company, is that well-being, motivation and productivity are in line with each other: healthy employees mean a healthy company. To implement this vision, Dow Benelux uses the well-being stress prevention programme.

The well-being of the employees is surveyed by a questionnaire with 24 items, such as motivation and job satisfaction. The results are presented in a box plot at unit and at organisation level. It acts as a dashboard for the management: at a glance, managers have insight in the health of their people. Managers are assessed on the well-being of their people: when well-being falls beneath the 60% standard, managers are called to account and required to take action on this.

The Works Council at Dow plays an important role in this programme and is closely involved in actions taken by the management.

Dow Benelux



Management support

The 'Work & Organisation' professional at Dow's OSH (occupational safety and health) department is the leading man of this well being programme. He supports the management by providing information and advising which actions to implement in order to improve the well-being at the workplace. He translates individual well-being and results at unit level into corporate policy.

In supporting the management, he works closely together with other disciplines such as the HR manager, the occupational doctor, the occupational nurse and the safety manager.

The main result at Dow is greater focus on well-being as part of the business policy, resulting in motivated employees, a low absenteeism rate (over the past six years lower than 4% on average) and a good business. In this policy, the 'Work & Organisation' Professional act as a link between management, employee and other professionals.

Summary and conclusions

The 'Work & Organisation' professional can have an added value for organisations by successfully organising work and health, from sickness analysis, mobbing, personal development plans to a vision on prevention and management support. The key elements of the contribution of the 'Work & Organisation' professional lie in:

- focus on work from a health perspective
- translating individual needs into a corporate health policy
- being a counterpart for management in setting up health policy
- a systematic approach to work and health
- a participative approach by asking commitment of management and employees
- being the link between the various disciplines in the field of work and health

For the future, we need more insight into the cost-benefits of the contribution of the 'Work & Organisation' professional. The best result is that management and employees adopt the activities and the policy as their own, and not as the work of an external professional. Than again, this makes it difficult to abstract the added values of the 'Work & Organisation' professional.

For more information about the 'Work & Organisation' professional:

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For more information about health management, models of good practice:

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