Healthy workers, thriving companies — a practical guide to wellbeing at work

Tackling psychosocial risks and musculoskeletal disorders in small businesses

European Agency
for Safety and Health
at Work

Authors

Karina Nielsen, Sheffield University Management School, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom.

Marie Birk Jørgensen, National Research Centre for the Working Environment, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Malgorzata Milczarek, Lorenzo Munar, European Agency for Safety and Health at Work.

This guide was developed based on the following sources:

1. Nielsen, K. & Noblet, A. (2018). Introduction: Organizational interventions: where we are, where we go from here? In K. Nielsen & A. Noblet (2018). Organizational Interventions for health and well-being: A Handbook for evidence-based practice. Routledge.

2. Wåhlin-Jacobsen et al. (2018). Valid and taken seriously? A new approach to evaluating Kaizen-inspired (and other) intervention tools. In K. Nielsen & A. Noblet (2018). Organizational Interventions for health and well-being: A Handbook for evidence-based practice. Routledge.

3. Nielsen, K.M., Nielsen, M.B., Ogbonnaya, C. and Kansala, M. (2017). Workplace resources to improve both employee well-being and performance: A systematic review and meta- analysis. Work & Stress, 31(2) 101-120.

4. European Commission (1996). Guidance on risk assessment at work.
   Available at: https://osha.europa.eu/en/legislation/guidelines/guidance-on-risk-assessment-at-work.pdf

lavorofacile

PREFACE

This guide aims to help micro and small businesses to create a work environment where employees stay healthy and productive, and the business thrives.

In 2017, the European Commission adopted an important Communication on Health and Safety at Work highlighting the importance of preventing psychosocial risks and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). European workers report these two issues as the main causes of work-related ill health. They lead to many lost working days and result in not only individual suffering but also significant financial costs for those affected and the companies they work in.

Small businesses may, however, find it particularly challenging to get to grips with these fairly challenging occupational safety and health topics. This guide provides practical guidance to help micro and small businesses systematically prevent or at least reduce psychosocial risks, work-related stress and MSDs, improving both employee wellbeing and productivity.

The guide is aimed at all sorts of companies, and it is intended primarily for owners and managers, but it can also be used by workers, union representatives, safety and health representatives, and safety and health practitioners working in or with such companies.

Companies will need to carefully consider what the best way to ensure a good work environment is for them. There is no single best solution, and it is important that the owner/manager and the workers agree on how to work together and what changes to make. A collaborative process is more likely to have a successful result.

1. Introduction

1.1 Creating a good work environment matters

DEALING WITH PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS AND MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS

This guide presents a five-step approach to managing two fairly challenging occupational health issues that are common in workplaces: psychosocial risks — factors that can lead to stress and affect workers' mental and physical health — and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). The evidence shows that these issues can be related. As explained in the guide, psychosocial risks are considered one of the factors that can cause MSDs. Conversely, MSDs can contribute to stress and mental overload. Because they are related, a preventive measure put in place to tackle one type of risk can also help to prevent the other. For example, giving workers more control over their work (the chance to take breaks as needed or the opportunity to switch between different tasks during the working day) can prevent or reduce stress, but it can also help workers to adopt good working postures, work at an optimal pace and recover from taxing tasks — so it can also prevent or help manage MSDs.

PREVENTING ABSENCES

The negative effects of psychosocial risks and prolonged work-related stress can include both mental health problems such as burnout or depression and physical illnesses such as heart disease. MSDs can cause a lot of pain and limit workers' ability to function effectively. As a result, workers affected by these problems may go on sick leave or keep working despite not being well. In the latter case, although they are at work, they aren't able to perform at full capacity.

Indeed, the most common reasons for sick leave in Europe are MSDs and stress-related problems. What's more, sick leave for MSDs or stress usually lasts longer than sick leave for other problems. Even leaving aside the avoidable suffering that individuals experience, these issues can cause significant disruption and costs to your business.

ENCOURAGING WELLBEING AT WORK

A good work environment doesn't just prevent workers from getting stressed or ill, it actually improves their wellbeing. 'Wellbeing' refers to a person's general condition of mental and physical health. According to the World Health Organization, good health is not only the absence of ill health, but also a state of wellbeing. Wellbeing is linked to job satisfaction, commitment, engagement, sense of purpose and intention to stay in the company and contribute to its success.

A GOOD WORK ENVIRONMENT MAKES GREAT BUSINESS SENSE

You are likely to be very busy, and you may be focused on how to ensure the economic success or even survival of your business. Improving the work environment can feel like a time-consuming task, and you may have many other things to do that seem more important. However, although it is true that some time needs to be invested to ensure a safe and healthy work environment, this short-term investment has been proven to bring long-term benefits.

Creating a good work environment doesn't have to be costly. The sooner you take action, the sooner you will see the benefits — and the less likely you are to have to deal with health and safety problems. By taking timely action, you can ensure that any new issues are spotted early and addressed before they harm your workers and your business. Changes to how work is done that improve workers' health and wellbeing also improve their engagement and performance.

Workers are less likely to look for another job, saving you time and money that would otherwise be spent on recruiting and training replacements.

ENSURING THAT YOUR WORKPLACE IS A GOOD WORK ENVIRONMENT IS A LEGAL REQUIREMENT

It is the law that you must provide your employees with a safe and healthy work environment. Employers have a legal duty to assess all risks to workers' safety and health in the workplace and then plan and implement measures to prevent those risks. This includes both psychosocial risks and the risks that can lead to musculoskeletal problems.

1.2 Five steps to a better work environment

An efficient, systematic approach to making changes in the workplace can be based on the following five steps:

PREPARATION

- Decide who will lead the process
- Review the available resources
- Decide how and when you will keep workers informed and involved
- Decide what will happen when

ASSESSING RISKS

- Identify psychosocial and MSD risk factors
- Set priorities — what issues should be addressed first?

ACTION PLANNING

- Agree what actions will be taken to eliminate or reduce the risks
- Set up an action plan
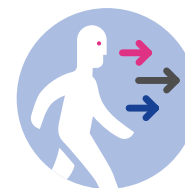
TAKING ACTION

- Implement and monitor the agreed actions

EVALUATION

- Evaluate whether or not you have achieved what you wanted
- Review the whole cycle of assessing risks and planning and implementing actions

Remember that the risk assessment that you carry out must be recorded.
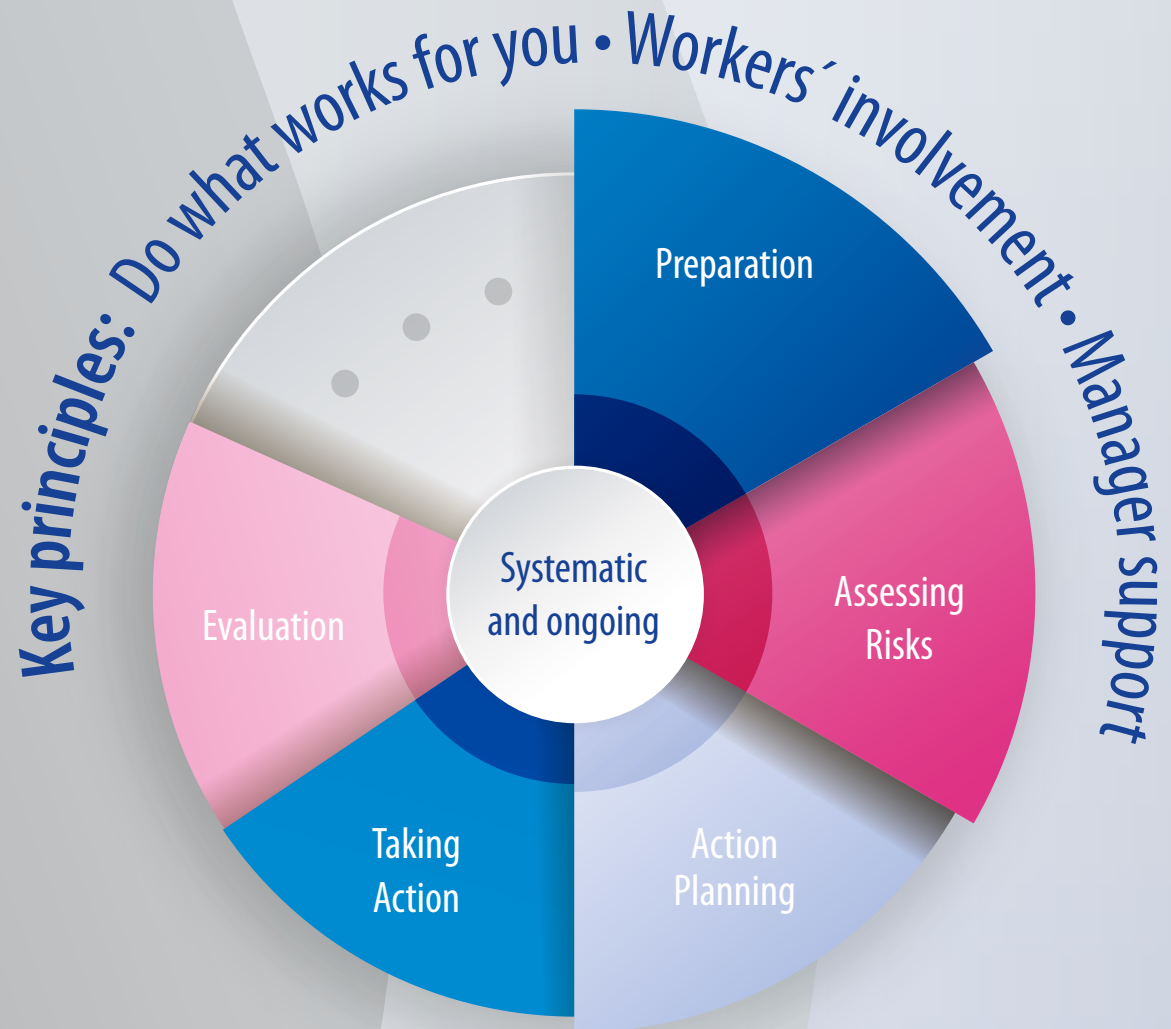
Figure 1: Improving the work environment in five steps

1.3 Key principles

DO WHAT WORKS FOR YOU

It is important that the action you take to improve the work environment fits with the company's overall goals and available resources, such as money, time and staff. This guide is not about you trying to create an ideal workplace. While it is always worth aiming for the best possible results, the action you take needs to be realistic. When making changes to create a better work environment, make sure it becomes a natural part of how you conduct your business; that is, integrate the actions into existing work practices. For example, you do not necessarily need to schedule a special meeting to talk to your workers about the work environment; you can use regular meetings that already take place to talk about those issues and try to improve the way you communicate with each other about health and safety.

WORKERS' INVOLVEMENT

In each phase, it is important to consider how workers can be involved in the process. Involving workers is essential because it will help you to identify and prioritise the most important issues to address. It also creates a sense of ownership of the changes that are being implemented, building commitment and engagement.

MANAGER SUPPORT

It is crucial that you as an owner or a senior manager show your support at each stage. Even if you are not directly responsible for the implementation of certain actions, you are an important role model and you need to show that you are committed to creating a good work environment. It is important that you keep an open mind, engage in open dialogue with workers and remain willing to deal with challenging issues.

In the following chapters, you will find explanations, with practical examples, of how you can implement this five-step process in practice to prevent work-related stress (Chapter 2) and musculoskeletal disorders (Chapter 3).

2. Tackling psychosocial risks and work-related stress

2.1 What are psychosocial risks in the workplace?

Your workers can be exposed to various risks of a psychosocial nature, which can have a serious impact on their mental and physical health, on their ability to work effectively and also on the functioning of your company. The more frequent work-related psychosocial risks include stress, burnout and any form of violence, including psychological harassment (also called bullying or mobbing), as well as sexual harassment and third-party violence.

Some examples of working conditions leading to psychosocial risks are:

- Excessive workload, poor work-life balance

- Lack of involvement in making decisions that affect the worker

- Lack of autonomy and influence over the way the job is done

- Lack of role clarity, conflicting demands

- Poor communication about changes that are being introduced to the workplace, job insecurity

- Lack of support from management or colleagues, poor social relationships

- Working with difficult clients, patients, pupils, students or customers

To protect workers' mental and physical health, all these situations must be tackled.

2.2 What is stress?

Some people use the word 'stress' to refer to the demands and challenges they face; however, this might more correctly be called 'pressure'. Pressure is a natural part of life and can be a positive thing. Pressure can come from many sources and it can take different forms, for example self-generated (e.g. wanting to do a good job) or external (e.g. deadlines imposed by others).

Stress, however, is never a positive experience; we become stressed when we are under excessive pressure and perceive that we do not have physical and mental resources to cope with all the demands on us. These resources could be as simple as having enough time to do all the work required or having the support we need to deal with an emotionally challenging job. Preventing stress is about creating an environment where workers have the right resources to deal with their daily tasks.

IS STRESS DANGEROUS?

Stress can affect how we feel, think or behave. Some people might feel anxious about not being able to cope. Others might find it hard to concentrate or think straight. Some might feel constantly tired and, despite this, be unable to relax or sleep properly — making them feel even more tired. Others might become withdrawn and less talkative. Although stress is not an illness, if someone is under stress for a long time it may make them ill. This could take the form of mental health problems, such as burnout or depression, or of physical illnesses, for example musculoskeletal or cardiovascular problems or illnesses resulting from a weakened immune system (causing the person to catch infections easily). This is why it is essential to recognise early signs of stress and implement corrective measures in the workplace.

IT'S NOT ALWAYS THE JOB

Of course, not all stress or lack of wellbeing is due to the work environment. Workers may experience problems outside work, such as relationship break-up or financial problems. These sources of stress are beyond your control. You may also employ workers who have mental health problems, such as anxiety or depression. If you are concerned, you should recommend that the worker goes to see their general practitioner. However, it is important to remember that people who experience mental health problems are able to continue to work successfully if they receive enough support outside work and are employed in a workplace with a good work environment.

SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

• Feeling overwhelmed, worried, irritated

• Withdrawing from social interactions, neglecting one's appearance, abusing alcohol or drugs

• Difficulty in concentrating, making decisions or finishing tasks

• Difficulty in sleeping, feeling exhausted

• Back pain, headaches

• Catching infections easily

• Cardiovascular problems

• Burnout, depression, anxiety

WHAT IS THE EFFECT ON THE BUSINESS?

Studies suggests that:

• About half of workplace absences can be linked to stress

• Reduced performance at work due to stress may cost twice that of absence

• Stress at work may lead to more accidents

• High staff turnover may be related to stress at work

• Absences caused by stress last much longer than those caused by other factors

2.3 Creating a good psychosocial work environment — the five-step process

Psychosocial risks are important in workplaces in all sectors and of all sizes. They affect all workers, no matter their position or what particular tasks they carry out in the company. Preventing psychosocial risks requires looking at how work is organised and managed and how people interact with each other in the context of work.

It is important to remember that, depending on how it is managed, the work environment can either boost workers' wellbeing — and, as a result, the whole business — or lead to stress, hindering good performance and damaging the business's chances of success. Workers who experience good psychosocial working conditions are more motivated and have greater job satisfaction; they are also more productive, effective and innovative (see further explanations in 'Step 2', page 24).

In the following sections, you will find practical tips on how to create a good psychosocial work environment. The actions suggested are based on the five-step process presented in Section 1.2; taking one step at a time, we explain what you should consider and suggest tools you may find useful.

It is important to note that the tips and specific methods recommended in this guide are by no means mandatory — it is up to you to decide what will work the best in your company.

STEP 1

PREPARATION

Depending on the nature of your company, you will have different priorities and challenges. How you go about improving the work environment needs to fit your current situation. There are several important decisions to be made at this first stage, but it is good to start by reflecting on what you want to achieve in terms of the psychosocial work environment. What kind of workplace do you want to create?

Then you will need to:

1. Decide who will lead the process

2. Review the available resources

3. Decide how and when you will keep workers informed and involved

4. Decide what will happen when

1.   DECIDE WHO WILL LEAD THE PROCESS

If the five-step process is going to be effective and efficient, someone will need to have an overview of all the activities involved. It could be you as a manager, another worker or — especially in a company with more than 10 workers — a small group (which might be made up of representatives of the managers and the workers).

2. REVIEW THE AVAILABLE RESOURCES

The person (or people) who will be leading the process needs a good understanding of what a good psychosocial work environment is. If you need further information, see Chapter 5 'Resources'. You could also consider if there is any material that you've used in your company in the past that could be useful. There may be free brochures — perhaps even focusing specifically on your sector — and other practical material such as checklists available from your local or national labour inspectorate, other institutions dealing with workplace health and safety or sectoral associations in your country. Free material available in your language may also be available for download from the EU-OSHA website (see Chapter 5 'Resources').

You'll want to decide before you start the process if you can afford to spend money (and if so how much) on improving the work environment. Check to see if you can apply for funding from national or regional funds, for example to pay for an external expert or training — the Website of the Labour Inspectorate or EU-OSHA's Focal Point in your country may be helpful in obtaining this information (see Chapter 5 'Resources'). Being aware of the resources that you can use is important to get a realistic idea of what can be achieved. However, bear in mind that good psychosocial working conditions can be created in a small company based on very limited resources and without external help. You don't need to be a trained psychologist to identify positive changes that can be made. Often, very effective changes can be made for free, for example improving communication between you and your workers.

3. DECIDE HOW AND WHEN YOU WILL KEEP WORKERS INFORMED AND INVOLVED

It is crucial that you involve your workers. At the beginning, it is important that you are clear about what 'work-related stress' means to make sure workers have a clear understanding of your intentions and what you want to achieve.

Once this understanding is established, you will need to tell workers about the planned activities, for example when you want to complete the risk assessment of the psychosocial work environment, how it will be done and how workers will be involved.

At an early stage, it is also important to decide how you will keep workers informed as the process unfolds. Can you use staff meetings or send updates by email? What will work best in your company?

4. DECIDE WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN

Decide on a basic timeline for your activities. For example, when will you begin the risk assessment? Integrating the planned activities into your company's existing work practices is crucial; for example, do you have regular meetings that already take place in which you can discuss the issues? It is also important that the activities do not clash with the company's core tasks. For example, avoid planning activities at the end of the financial year.

TOOLBOX

GETTING STARTED:
INITIATE DIALOGUE AND BUILD TRUST

Getting started can seem like a difficult task, and you may not know where to begin. A good starting point is simply to talk to your workers. It is important to start discussing what you mean when you talk about stress or other psychosocial issues, to make sure you understand each other. It is important that improving the psychosocial work environment becomes something that you and your workers do together. Although you as the owner/manager are responsible for making things happen, workers will need to implement the agreed changes in their work practices to make sure that the work environment improves. To ensure that this happens, you will need to develop your workers' trust in you — that you do care about the effect of the work environment on them and that you see them as valued and important players in creating a good work environment. If you can implement a simple solution, for example, agree a time

during a day (e.g. 'between 11 and 12') when workers can come to you with any issue, do not hesitate to implement this immediately ('from tomorrow') — this will prove your good will and commitment.

Listening to your workers' concerns and taking them seriously, even if it is not possible to find an immediate solution, will also be a good place to start in building this trust. Acknowledge and show understanding of how your workers see and experience working in your company, even if your perspective is different. Showing understanding does not necessarily mean agreeing to everything that is suggested, but it is a sign of respect and encourages open dialogue and cooperation.

Resources in terms of money, time or health and safety expertise may be scarce in your company. When dealing with psychosocial issues, it is also likely that you will encounter some resistance to talking about them openly. You should discuss these obstacles with your workers, starting a conversation about what can be done to make sure that they don't hinder efforts to improve the work environment. Do the issues seem too complicated? Do you suspect that workers are finding it difficult to voice their concerns openly? Do you think it might be difficult to find the time to develop an action plan? What can you do to minimise these problems?

Playing devil's advocate might be one way to explore obstacles and come up with solutions:

Invite everybody in the company to write one to three Post-its expressing their concerns about what might prevent you and your workers from achieving improvements. Then have one person read aloud these concerns and, as a group, discuss how these issues might be overcome. An obstacle could be, for example, resistance to talking openly about stress in the workplace because of fear of being blamed, considered 'weak' or even fired. A solution could be to agree that information on factors leading to stress would be collected anonymously and to emphasise to workers that their honest opinions will be needed to make a positive change. Some workers may not believe that anything will change for the better. Confirming your commitment and highlighting that improving the work environment requires everyone's involvement may help to overcome this barrier.

STEP 2
ASSESSING RISKS

The risk assessment phase — carrying out a review of the psychosocial work environment — is crucial, because it is during this phase that you identify what needs to change. By conducting this assessment, you are also fulfilling the legal requirement to assess the risks workers are exposed to at work.

At this stage, you will:

1. Identify psychosocial risks in your workplace

2. Set priorities — what issues should be addressed first?

IDENTIFY PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS
1. IN YOUR WORKPLACE

During the review, you should identify the positive aspects of your workplace ('strengths'), as well as the problems ('stressors'), as this will provide you with a comprehensive view of the conditions for your workers. This can also help in finding effective solutions to the problems. For example, if workers feel that they are left alone when facing difficult issues at work, but at the same time the relationships between workers are assessed as very good, it then becomes clear that the root of the problem is less likely to be that workers are unwilling to help each other and more likely to be work-overload and time pressure experienced by everyone.

More effective monitoring of workloads and setting clearer priorities may be an efficient solution in this case.

The strengths can also be used to mitigate the stressors that cannot be eliminated. For example, it may be difficult or even impossible to eliminate stressors such as emotionally draining situations in health care, but support from a colleague or manager can help reduce the negative impact of these stressors. It is therefore important to identify both the stressors and the strengths in your workplace and

use them as a basis for creating a work environment that is healthy and productive.

Here we describe a few methods that you may find useful when identifying the stressors and the strengths. You may want to discuss with all or some members of your company what is likely to work best for you. However, no matter what method you choose, it will be important that everyone in the company has a chance to get involved in discussing and agreeing on what the biggest problems are.

Encourage workers to be as open and honest as possible while at the same time being mindful of how their comments may affect others. Criticising or blaming each other rarely proves constructive; make sure the aim of the exercise — looking for areas that need to be improved to make the work environment better for everybody — is kept in sight. Everyone should be given a chance to express their views and you should make it clear that no one should fear repercussions from you or any other manager for coming forward with their concerns. It is vital that you respect workers' opinions and that you set a good tone during discussions.

An effective review must cover all the most important psychosocial aspects of the work environment — the following sections provide descriptions of such aspects.
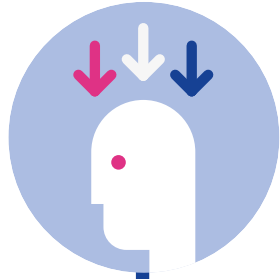
DEMANDS

Demands are the physical, mental and emotional requirements of work.

STRESS AND LOWER PRODUCTIVITY

Examples

- Excessive physical or mental workload: not enough time to do the job, too much work, permanent time pressure, long working hours

- Tasks do not match workers' skills: they are too difficult or too easy

- Tasks are monotonous and repetitive; workers have no opportunities to feel a sense of ownership of any tasks

- Workers are required to be constantly available, e.g. to respond to emails and phone calls outside working hours

- Many physical risks are present in the workplace, with no preventive measures

WELLBEING AND BETTER PRODUCTIVITY

Examples

- There is enough time to do the job, workload is regularly monitored and extra resources are provided during 'peak' times

- Tasks allow workers to make use of and develop their skills and competencies

- Tasks are challenging and interesting; workers feel a sense of ownership of their work

- Workers' need for a good work-life balance is respected, there is enough time outside work to recover and recharge

- There is a good physical work environment, with protective measures implemented to tackle risks
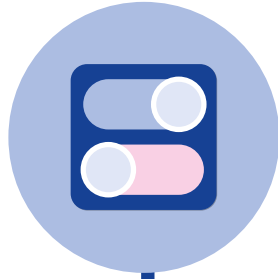
AUTONOMY

Autonomy is about how much say people have at work concerning the way they do their jobs.

STRESS AND LOWER PRODUCTIVITY

Examples

- Workers do not feel they have a say over how they do the job (and they feel the job could be done more efficiently)

- Work schedules, tasks or changes in the workplace that directly affect workers are introduced without consulting them (when it would be appropriate to do so)

- Workers feel they are not able to make independent decisions at work

WELLBEING AND BETTER PRODUCTIVITY

Examples

- Workers can use their skills to decide how they do the job

- Workers have a say in decisions that are made concerning their jobs, for example with regard to changes in working methods or equipment

- Workers are encouraged to make independent decisions at work
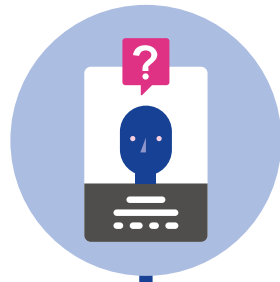
ROLE CLARITY

Role clarity is about whether workers know what it is expected of them at work.

STRESS AND LOWER PRODUCTIVITY

Examples

- Requirements change every day without an obvious reason; it is never clear to workers what they are expected to do

- Workers receive conflicting orders from different people

- Workers spend significant amounts of their time trying to figure out what they are expected to do, e.g. what tasks they should prioritise

WELLBEING AND BETTER PRODUCTIVITY

Examples

- Workers have clear job descriptions and know what is expected from them every day and in general

- Workers are clear whose orders they need to follow

- Workers are clear about the authority they have to make their own decisions, e.g. to prioritise tasks
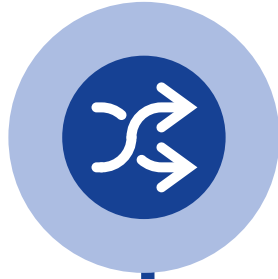
CHANGE

Change is commonplace in most companies. New products, technologies and organisational changes are continually being introduced, and they influence how we do our jobs. Sometimes a change is imposed by external pressures. Any change, even when it is perceived as desirable, can cause feelings of insecurity.

STRESS AND LOWER PRODUCTIVITY

Examples

• Workers fear or know that some changes are being planned, but there has been no official communication about this

• Workers spend a lot of time worrying, gossiping and trying to guess what is going to happen

• No explanation is given of why a change is to be introduced or how it will affect current jobs

WELLBEING AND BETTER PRODUCTIVITY

Examples

• Change is communicated well in advance, including information about timing and how it will (or will not) affect workers' jobs

• Workers are clear about why a change is being implemented and why it is necessary

• If possible and if appropriate, workers are consulted and can influence the changes, e.g. in relation to new working methods, work equipment or software

WORKERS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH MANAGERS

The attitudes and behaviours of their manager significantly influence workers' wellbeing and stress levels. The manager also sets an example (positive or negative) in terms of the quality of social interactions in the company; the manager's behaviour can encourage or discourage cooperation, support and fairness.

STRESS AND LOWER PRODUCTIVITY

Examples

- Manager is never available or is not approachable; workers are left alone with any problems they have at work

- Manager doesn't provide any feedback to workers on their performance

- Workers feel that they have much more work than their colleagues

- Workers feel that their efforts are not appreciated or adequately rewarded

WELLBEING AND BETTER PRODUCTIVITY

Examples

- Manager is available; workers feel that they are able to get support or advice from their manager when they need it

- Manager provides encouraging feedback concerning workers' performance

- Manager makes sure that workload is distributed fairly among workers

- Manager shows appreciation and rewards good job

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN WORKERS

The social atmosphere in the workplace significantly affects the way we feel and perform.

STRESS AND LOWER PRODUCTIVITY

Examples

- Workers who are unsure about what to do in their jobs are left alone without any advice and support from their colleagues

- There are many conflicts, arguments and cliques at work

- Some workers are isolated or not treated as equal

WELLBEING AND BETTER PRODUCTIVITY

Examples

- Workers feel that they can turn to their colleagues for support and advice

- Workers generally get along; they take breaks together and they engage in discussions about how to do their jobs

- All workers feel they are part of the group

WORKING WITH PEOPLE OUTSIDE THE ORGANISATION

Workers have a right to be treated with respect by everyone they work with, or for, including clients, patients, pupils, students and customers.

STRESS AND LOWER PRODUCTIVITY

Examples

- Workers are subjected to verbal violence: disrespectful, abusive comments or threats

- Workers are threatened with or experience violent behaviour by intoxicated or ill people

- Workers are subjected to sexual harassment at work

- There is a high possibility of a robbery, e.g. in remote premises or in a pharmacy, but no preventive measures have been implemented

WELLBEING AND BETTER PRODUCTIVITY

Examples

- There is a policy of zero tolerance for violent behaviour (including verbal aggression) and sexual harassment and it has been communicated to the clients

- Workers' complaints are treated seriously and promptly addressed by management

- Working alone is avoided, if possible

- Amount of cash kept at premises is limited, measures such as a 'panic button' or security cameras are installed

DIGNITY AND RESPECT

Dignity and respect should be the underlying values linked to the aspects previously described. Being treated with respect is everybody's right and it is crucial for our wellbeing and work performance. A lack of respect and fair treatment based on someone's gender, age, nationality or any other personal characteristic is highly detrimental to their wellbeing, as is psychological or sexual harassment.

Psychological harassment

Psychological harassment describes repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker by a colleague or a group of colleagues, a supervisor or a subordinate, intended to victimise, humiliate, undermine or threaten him or her. Some examples of such behaviour include shouting; using offensive or sarcastic language; engaging in name-calling; constantly criticising the worker; excluding the worker from social events or coffee breaks; withholding important information; allocating the worker too many tasks and/or tasks that are too difficult; or allocating the worker tasks that are degrading or too easy.

Psychological harassment should be distinguished from disagreements or two people not getting along with other because of a 'personality clash'. Conflicts happen in every workplace and they can be constructively solved. Harassment, however, must never be tolerated.

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment refers to conduct of a sexual nature that is unwanted by the person at whom it is directed and has the purpose or effect of offending that person, creating an intimidating, hostile, offensive or disturbing work environment. Examples of sexual harassment include unwanted invitations to engage in

a relationship of a sexual nature (once a person shows a lack of interest), making inappropriate comments, gestures, proposals or jokes, asking intrusive questions about someone's relationships or sending inappropriate pictures, emails, etc.

Sexual harassment often jeopardises the psychological health, career, etc., of a person who is in a vulnerable position (because of their gender, age, social status, etc.). Examples of such behaviours include suggesting that contract extension or promotion is conditional on engaging in sexual behaviour, or making advances to a person who is not in a position to say no because they fear they could lose their job.

While some forms of sexual harassment — such as making sexual jokes or comments — are clearly not socially acceptable, the inappropriateness of other behaviours may not be so obvious. It can sometimes be surprising what people find offensive, especially when working with colleagues from different cultural or social backgrounds. However, everyone should feel that they can say that they find a certain type of behaviour offensive and expect the other person to respect this. Behaviour that offends someone unintentionally can be quickly corrected and will not cause harm. The idea is to create a work culture where everybody feels heard and respected.

GATHERING WORKERS' VIEWS ON SENSITIVE ISSUES

Some problems, such as serious relationship problems or harassment, are not likely to be discussed during a meeting or a workshop (see Toolbox 'Identifying stressors and strengths'). Encourage workers to talk directly to you or someone they trust if they feel that they are being harassed. A good option could also be creating a short questionnaire to be filled in by workers. This can be done using free software offering anonymity to respondents.

TOOLBOX

IDENTIFYING STRESSORS AND STRENGTHS

Psychosocial aspects of work are interrelated, so it is very important to look at the work environment as a whole.

One method that can be used to identify stressors and strengths is to hold a workshop to create a visual map of the psychosocial work environment *(see Figure 2)*. If possible, everyone should be involved in this exercise, including both workers and managers.

You can base your visual map on the template provided in Annex 1. Feel free to adapt it as you see fit for your company (or indeed to develop your own map). Another option is to draw a similar 'map' on a flipchart that can be used at future meetings with workers. You will also need two different colours of Post-it notes (e.g. red and green). The visual map works best with around 10 people. In companies with more than 10 people, you

should consider running several workshops over a few weeks. Ideally people who work together, for example in units or work groups, should attend the same workshop.

Explore working conditions

First, you or the person appointed to lead the exercise prints, photocopies or draws a large version of the visual map available in Annex 1 and posts it up in a meeting room. Then, during the workshop, the group discusses each aspect of the psychosocial work environment. For example, do workers receive sufficient support? What about the allocation of roles and responsibilities, does everyone know what is expected of them? Do different people within the organisation have different views on who should do what?

Someone should be appointed to facilitate the discussion. First, the facilitator should encourage workers to discuss stressors. They (or the facilitator) should note down on red Post-its the stressors identified (e.g. 'Unclear role: workers receive conflicting requests from different people'). Then the exercise should be repeated for strengths in this area, and they should be noted on green Post-its (e.g. 'Clear division of tasks: everyone knows what their responsibilities are'). Before the discussion moves on to the next aspect, the Post-its should be stuck to the relevant area of the map.

Good questions to ask when trying to identify stressors are:

- What are the things about work that make you feel tired and worn out at the end of the day?

- What are the things that annoy you and make you feel agitated?

- Does anything make you dread coming to work in the morning?

Good questions to ask when trying to identify strengths are:

- What makes you want to come to work in the morning?

- What engages you with your work and what are the things about your work that make you proud?

- What are the things about work that make it meaningful?

If it is difficult to find a time when everyone can meet, another option is to have a map available in a communal area; the exercise can be explained by email or in team meetings and employees can stick the red and green Post-its to the map over, for example, a two-week period, whenever it suits them.

Discuss the results

Once the map is finished, the group should try to look at the overall picture of the various psychosocial aspects of work. A discussion may help bring important issues to the fore.

Make notes

Make a list of both sets of items (stressors and strengths). You will need it to agree further action. It is enough to name a problem or an aspect of work that is appreciated; there is no need for long explanations.

Figure 2: An example of a visual map

1. Demands

2. Autonomy

7. Working with people outside the organisation

3. Role clarity

6. Relationships between workers

4. Change

5. Workers' relationships with managers

2. SET PRIORITIES — WHAT ISSUES SHOULD BE ADDRESSED FIRST?

Once the strengths and stressors have been identified, you need to prioritise the aspects of the psychosocial work environment that need to be improved most urgently.

As a general principle, problems that are likely to cause significant stress in many workers should be addressed first. Furthermore, if workers are already suffering from symptoms of stress, action to address the causes should be taken immediately. Such issues may become clear during the review of working conditions and they should be given high priority. In addition, and particularly when there are a number of problems and all of them seem equally important, it can be beneficial to involve workers in deciding on priorities.

TOOLBOX

AGREEING PRIORITIES

You can use the visual map you have created to prioritise issues to be tackled. Give workers three small stickers, for example gold stars, and ask them to glue those stickers to the map next to the aspects they feel need to change most urgently. The number of stickers can then be counted, and the results will indicate which aspects should be the initial focus of improvement actions. Keep a note of all the problems identified, for your records and for future discussion; those that are not seen as top priority now may become more important. It is useful to allocate each of the problems identified to one of three categories, high priority, medium priority and low priority.

STEP 3
ACTION PLANNING

At this stage, you will:

1. Agree what actions will be taken to eliminate or reduce the risks

2. Set up an action plan

1.   AGREE WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN

When discussing and agreeing actions, it is important to follow the general principles of prevention.

- **Avoid stressors**
  Make sure that the way work is organised and managed contributes to a good social climate, wellbeing and good performance.

- **Combat stress at its source**
  Address the causes not the symptoms of stress. If stress is caused by, for example, constant time pressure, start monitoring workloads and consider how realistic the deadlines you set are.

- **Adapt the work to the individual**
  Make sure work matches workers' skills. As far as possible, allow workers to make decisions about their working methods, breaks and day-to-day priorities.

- **Implement collective measures first**
  Measures to protect workers from stress should always aim first of all to improve work organisation and management. This is not only in line with the rules set up in the legislation, but also more effective and brings lasting benefits. For example, collective measures might include implementing a procedure for dealing with violent clients, patients, etc. (so that the 'zero-tolerance policy' is communicated to the public and workers know how to ask for support, and whom to ask, when experiencing violence or harassment).

- **Give training to workers**
  Practical training for workers, aside from training to develop their core professional skills, could cover assertiveness, dealing with high emotional burdens, de-escalating conflicts or self-defence. Remember, however, that focusing solely on how individual workers deal with stress is not only an inappropriate approach, but also inefficient, and it won't result in a long-term reduction in stress or improved wellbeing and performance.

The solutions you implement don't have to cost a lot of money or result in extensive changes. However, even a small improvement should be planned (Who will do what and when?) and then monitored (Has the action been implemented as planned?) and evaluated (Did it bring about the intended results?), as described in the following sections. Otherwise, you may spend time and resources without achieving the desired effect. Small but effective improvements are better than big, ambitious plans that are abandoned without being properly implemented. Table 1 gives some examples of simple actions that can be taken.

Involve staff in looking for the best solutions. You may be surprised how many good ideas your workers are able to generate that will help them work better and, in the end, benefit the whole company.

TOOLBOX

IDENTIFYING ACTIONS — BRAINSTORMING

Dedicate time in a regular meeting or organise a special, separate meeting to engage workers in suggesting actions that would address the identified stressors. One way of structuring the brainstorming session would be to ask workers to suggest actions and activities in five levels: work organisation (demands, autonomy, role clarity and change), working with a manager, working in a group, working as an individual and working with people outside the organisation (customers, clients, patients, pupils, etc.). Note down all ideas. If it is difficult to get everyone together to do this, workers can note down their ideas on Post-its and put them in a designated place (e.g. in an anonymous box) over an agreed period.

Next, discuss all the ideas collected and agree on which are to be implemented and which should be put aside, perhaps for future consideration.

Table 1: Examples of actions to reduce stress

Work organisation	**Problem:** Workers feel that they are expected to be available on their mobile phones outside working hours.	**Solution:** Agree clear rules for workers about when they are expected to be available and when they have a right to 'switch off'.
	Problem: Although email communication about changes in the workplace is perceived to be useful, workers feel they are not given a chance to ask questions or share concerns or ideas.	**Solution:** After an email about a change is sent out, the change is discussed at the next staff meeting.
Working with a manager	**Problem:** Workers appreciate the support they receive from a manager, but they find him or her hard to pin down as he or she is too busy.	**Solution:** Introduce 'office hours' during which workers know they can approach the manager with questions. Agree on issues that require an urgent response outside those hours.
	Problem: A manager feels that he or she needs to authorise every decision that is taken in the company. The review of working conditions showed that workers often feel 'paralysed' and tend to ask this manager about everything, as they are afraid to make their own decisions.	**Solution:** Agree with workers when they have the freedom to decide how to do their work and when it is necessary to consult the manager.
Working in a group	**Problem:** Relationships between workers are good, but it is difficult to reach colleagues for advice, as they travel all over the country and are rarely in the same place.	**Solution:** Create a contacts list and ensure that all workers have their colleagues' mobile phone numbers programmed into their mobile phones. Agree times when workers should be available to answer calls. Create and distribute an overview of the particular expertise of each worker to avoid misdirected calls.
	Problem: A manager has become aware that some recently employed workers feel isolated or excluded from the work group.	**Solution:** Plan a social event to help people get to know one another better.

Working as an individual	**Problem:** Some workers are having a lot of problems with new software that has been introduced; they are frustrated with how long it is taking to learn to use it.	**Solution:** Provide one-on-one training for each worker with a more experienced colleague or a program administrator.
	Problem: Less experienced workers feel very stressed and afraid of making a mistake.	**Solution:** Implement a 'buddy system', with a more experienced worker assisting a new recruit during his or her first two weeks in the job.
Working with people outside the organisation	**Problem:** Workers report that the product is often not ready on time because they are overloaded, but customers become frustrated and angry when they do not get the product on time.	**Solution:** A manager (or another employee) reviews deadlines to check if they are realistic and make changes if necessary. A consistent way of communicating delays to customers is agreed (e.g. a text message with an apology and a new suggested deadline).
	Problem: Workers feel intimidated by customers becoming aggressive when they work the night shift in a small shop.	**Solution:** Install video surveillance and limit the amount of cash kept on the premises. Make sure workers have emergency phone numbers to hand.

DEALING WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Dealing with psychological or sexual harassment requires different approaches from those previously suggested (e.g. the brainstorming exercise would not be an appropriate way of deciding what should be done). However, as a manager you are responsible for managing these issues too.

What you can do is:

• Create a work culture based on mutual respect; set a good example and require respectful attitudes and behaviours of your workers

• Address conflicts between workers at an early stage. Conflicts are natural and, when approached in the right way, they can be successfully resolved. Unresolved conflicts may, however, lead to harassment

• Make it clear — including to people outside the organisation (customers, clients, patients, pupils, etc.) — that psychological and sexual harassment are not acceptable in your workplace

• Make it clear how and to whom any cases of psychological or sexual harassment should be reported

• Treat any complaints seriously and provide support for those affected

• Ask for external help if necessary (OSH services, occupational doctor)

Free information and advice on violence and psychological and sexual harassment are likely to be available from labour inspectorates, other safety and health bodies or national sectoral associations.

2.   SET UP AN ACTION PLAN

The challenge is to develop an action plan that is specific enough that everyone is clear about what their role is and what will happen when. It should state who is responsible for implementing the agreed solutions and how you and your workers will know that the solutions have brought about the intended outcomes. In Annex 3 you will find a template for an action plan that you can use as a guide. Make sure that you keep this document safe and up to date, for future reference and as evidence of the action you have taken in your company to prevent stress.

A good plan sets out:

• Problem — description

• The priority given to this issue

• Solutions — what will be done

• Responsibility — who will lead the actions

• Resources — in terms of money, time, etc.

• Timeline — what will be done when

• Evaluation — how will you know whether the solutions implemented were effective

See Table 2 for an example. In reality, one action plan is likely to include several problems and solutions (following the priorities agreed earlier). It is important that each solution is briefly described (in terms of the person responsible, the resources available, the planned timeline and the method of evaluation).

Table 2: An example of an action plan

Problem	Priority	Solutions	Responsibility	Resources	Timeline	Evaluation
There is never time for workers to raise important issues. Monthly meetings are seen as ineffective.	High	Improve meeting structure. Introduce a meeting agenda with time allocated to the issues that need to be discussed and named people responsible for each item. Send out the agenda one-two days before the meeting.	Manager, with input from workers concerning the issues to discuss.	Time for the manager to prepare the agenda and time for workers to prepare for the meeting.	Introduce the agenda at the next meeting.	Collect feedback from workers after three months.

STEP 4
TAKING ACTION

At this stage, you will implement and monitor the agreed actions. All solutions should be implemented following the agreed action plan. As mentioned earlier, it is important that implementation of the agreed improvement actions is considered part of daily business. Supervise and support the people responsible for implementing the solutions as necessary. Ensure that workers are involved and engaged as planned.

To make sure that the actions taken result in long-term effects, it is important that you monitor progress. For most actions, it will be a good idea to review progress at regular meetings. It is recommended that the whole action plan be reviewed every few months. Remember to involve workers when reviewing progress; they are in the best position to assess the implementation and the effects of changes to their work. Workers may also have valuable suggestions about how to do things better and increase the positive effects.

You may find the following questions helpful:

☑ Has the action plan been implemented as agreed?

☑ Have you encountered challenges in implementing the agreed solutions? How can they be addressed?

☑ Who is taking responsibility for implementing the action plan? The person/people originally appointed? Should someone else be appointed?

☑ Have the actions been integrated into everyday work? For example, if a special time when workers can come and see their manager was agreed, are they taking advantage of it? Or perhaps the manager's work makes him or her unavailable during this time most days, or some workers work at clients' premises and never have a chance to see the manager during the agreed hours. If this is the case, a different, more practical, solution needs to be found.

☑ Are all workers well informed about the agreed solutions?

☑ Has anything happened to create a new and important problem that isn't addressed by any of our agreed solutions? What can be done about it?

It is important to keep notes or update the action plan to ensure that any changes are recorded, for example if you decide that someone different should be responsible for implementing a certain solution.

STEP 5
EVALUATION

The aim here is to get an overview of what has been achieved and how you can use what you have learned in the future. It is recommended that you review all the actions taken several months (or about a year) after the initial review of the working conditions.

At this stage, you will:

1. Evaluate whether or not you have achieved what you wanted

2. Review the whole cycle of assessing risks and planning and implementing actions

1. EVALUATE WHETHER OR NOT YOU HAVE ACHIEVED WHAT YOU WANTED

To evaluate whether or not the implemented solutions had the intended effects, reflect on the questions below and discuss them with your workers, for example during meetings or through a short online or paper questionnaire (which could be anonymous if you think this would work better for your business):

☑ What solutions worked well and successfully improved the work environment?

☑ Do workers feel that the level of their work-related stress has decreased?

☑ Were there any unintended effects of the action plan — positive or negative?

☑ Did the solutions work equally well for all workers?

☑ Was the time frame realistic and sufficient to achieve the desired effects?

☑ What made some solutions more effective than others?

☑ If solutions were implemented that did not have the intended effects, why was that? Were they not implemented well? Did they fail to address the problem properly?

To evaluate the effects of the actions, you can also repeat the review you conducted with your workers in Step 2. Compare the previous and the new results: are the same stressors still a problem? What has changed? Are there any new stressors identified?

2. REVIEW THE WHOLE CYCLE

Once you have reviewed whether or not the psychosocial work environment has improved in your company, it is important to review the whole cycle of planning and implementing actions. You could invite your staff again to spend a few minutes at a meeting discussing the following questions:

☑ What went well and what needs to be done differently in the future?

☑ What could you have done differently at each stage to make the process work better?

☑ Did the risk assessment method capture the most important issues?

☑ Did workers feel involved and feel ownership throughout the process?

☑ What can be done in the future to ensure that workers continue to feel informed and involved?

☑ Did you as a manager support the actions in the best possible way?

☑ How can we make sure that the positive effects of our actions last?

It is very important to engage in these discussions so that you get an opportunity to learn from the mistakes that have occurred and the challenges that have presented themselves. If you haven't achieved what you set out to achieve, don't despair; see it as a learning opportunity. It doesn't matter how small the success is, the important thing is that you got started, and next time you will know how to do better. It is important that you look at creating a good psychosocial work environment as an ongoing process.

There may be changes or external pressures that affect your business and your workers, and you need to check periodically, for example by repeating the exercises suggested in this guide, if working conditions should be adjusted to take into account new circumstances.

You should demonstrate that you appreciate your workers' engagement in creating a good work environment. Express your appreciation when talking to workers, during meetings or in emails, thanking them directly for their effort and engagement. This will create motivation to do more and make your workers feel that their efforts have been recognised.

3. Tackling musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs)

# 3.1 What are we talking about when we talk about MSDs?

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are conditions affecting the muscles, tendons, ligaments, nerves or joints of the neck, upper limbs, back or lower limbs.

Symptoms include pain, swelling, tingling and numbness, and MSDs may result in limitation of motion (when motion causes pain) and difficulties in keeping a body position (e.g. sitting position) for long (or not so long) periods of time. They can also result in disability, and sufferers may even have to give up work altogether. An MSD may be a condition with a specific medical diagnosis, but in some cases there is pain without a specific diagnosis. Here we list various types of MSDs that your workers may experience:

Back or neck pain (these are some of the most common conditions).
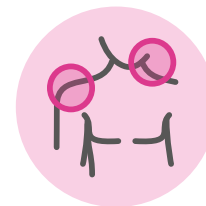
Muscle injuries can be caused by strenuous or repetitive activities. They typically occur in the lower arm, upper arm, thighs, calves, buttocks, shoulder, back or neck. Such activities can also cause pain in the joints in the wrist, elbow, shoulders or knees.

Joint conditions can be caused by wear and tear or disease and are typically seen in the hips, knees or shoulders. However, they can also be the result of injury.

Bone conditions typically result from an injury such as a broken leg.

Figure 3 shows the body parts that can be affected by MSDs.

Neck

Shoulders

Upper Back

Elbows

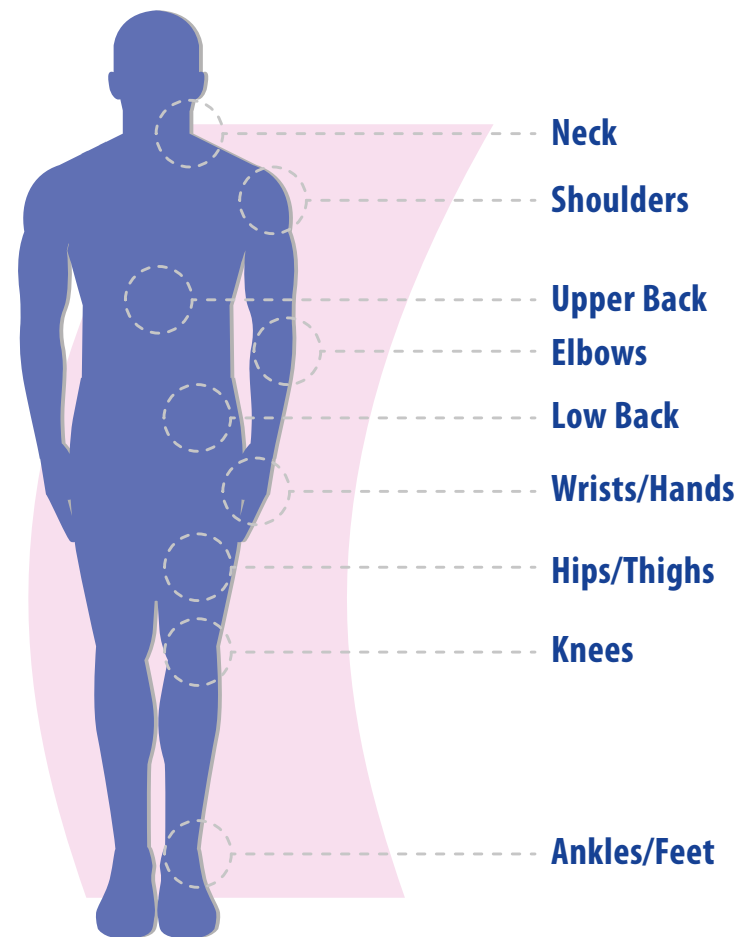Low Back

Wrists/Hands

Hips/Thighs

Knees

Ankles/Feet

Figure 3

3.2 Why should you address this issue?

MDSs are the most common work-related problem in Europe. They cost employers and national economies billions of euros. The economic consequences for employers are mainly reduced efficiency due to loss of productivity and sickness absences. For society as a whole, worker compensation and medical and administrative costs are huge.

MSDs also have serious consequences for individual workers, who may experience loss of self-belief as a result of not being able to do their jobs properly, or other physical and mental health problems caused by not being able to be physically or socially active because of pain. Sufferers may have to face significant financial consequences if they have to stop working because of an MSD.

MSDs are widespread in all sectors, so if they are not already a problem for some of your workers they probably will be at some point. That's why it is so important that you prevent and manage MSDs. Improving the work environment can be challenging — especially for small businesses — because of limited money, time or expertise. However, there are many examples of small companies managing MSDs successfully for the benefit of the workers and the business itself, so it can be done. Your in-depth knowledge of your organisation and the direct communication that you can have with your staff are strengths that you can build on.

THE IMPACT OF MSDs ON BUSINESS

Absenteeism

It is not uncommon for a worker to suffer so badly from an MSD that he or she needs to be off sick for several days or weeks. Absenteeism caused by MSDs could be a serious issue for your business.

Sick workers at work

Imagine a situation where a worker suffers from pain every day as a result of an MSD. He or she does not raise the problem with you or his or her colleagues, but the MSD takes up some of the worker's resources, so that he or she cannot perform work tasks as well as usual. In this situation, the MSD is aggravated and the worker's performance and productivity suffer on a daily basis. In fact, the loss of productivity due to workers being present at work while hampered by MSDs may be even greater than that which results from absenteeism caused by MSDs.

Early or forced retirement

A worker suffering from an MSD may need to leave the workplace completely, either following an acute injury after many years of exposure to risk or because of an MSD experience that continues to hamper his or her work performance.

3.3 MSDs and the work environment

MSDs can be caused by various factors, often working in combination. Most MSDs are caused by repeated exposure to risk factors, but they can also be caused by injuries such as bone fractures. A number of work characteristics can contribute to MSDs, and often the problem is caused by a cocktail of different characteristics working together, combining to create poor working conditions.

Therefore, an effective review of work characteristics that contribute to MSDs needs to detect not only a risky work task (e.g. lifting a heavy object) but also the circumstances under which the work task is performed (e.g. being busy while lifting the heavy object). MSDs can be caused or aggravated by:

Physical (also known as biomechanical or ergonomic) factors: work postures and movements can be harmful as a result of repetition, duration or effort. For instance, the following are risk factors: heavy physical work (forceful exertion), heavy lifting, awkward postures, prolonged work tasks, prolonged sitting or standing, and work tasks that have to be performed repeatedly or with great precision.
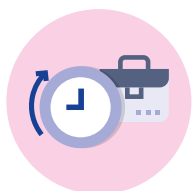
Organisational factors: the way work is organised in terms of number of consecutive working hours, opportunities for breaks, the pace of the work and the variation of work tasks all affect how burdensome physical work tasks are.

Psychosocial factors: excessive workload and high work intensity can both increase workers' stress levels, which in turn can increase their muscular tension and their sensitivity to feeling pain. Furthermore, lack of control over work tasks or over how or the pace at which tasks are performed, as well as a lack of support from colleagues or management, can also increase the risk of MSDs. This is because workers won't take the proper precautions or adopt safe working postures if they feel under too much pressure at work, and thus psychosocial factors become risk factors for MSDs.

Workers' characteristics, such as age, gender, height, arm length, condition of health (if they already suffer from an MSD or have done so in the past) and lack of knowledge of work techniques and safety procedures can also be MSD risk factors if risks aren't managed properly.

3.4 Preventing and managing MSDs — the five-step process

If you want to **prevent** MSDs, you have to assess the risks in your workplace and try to remove them. Although you're unlikely to be able to completely eliminate every risk, you will be able to take effective action to reduce and manage the MSD risk factors that your workers are exposed to.

Effective management of MSDs means **early intervention**. That means committing to managing MSDs as soon as you become aware of a problem (a worker informing you about musculoskeletal problems). This will allow you to take control of the situation and ensure that the problem doesn't worsen; left unmanaged, it could affect the health of your workers and the productivity of your business. If one or more of your workers have already taken sick leave because of MSDs, your role in managing **return to work** is

very important. Often, simple workplace changes, adjustments and support mechanisms can help workers who have chronic and painful musculoskeletal conditions to continue in work and ensure that work does not make those conditions worse.

In the following sections, we set out a five-step process for managing MSDs in the workplace, based on that presented in Section 1.2. Each step is described in turn, with suggestions about the issues that you might want to consider and some useful tools. It's important to note that these are just suggestions; you'll need to make improvements in a way that works for you and your workers. However, the following guidelines offer some inspiration and help in identifying the main elements that you will need to bear in mind when making changes to prevent and manage MSDs.

STEP 1
PREPARATION

At this first stage, you need to carefully decide how you are going to approach assessing the MSD-related risks in your company and taking the measures necessary to protect the health and safety of your workers. You will need to:

1. Decide who will lead the process

2. Review the available resources

3. Decide how and when you will keep workers informed and involved

4. Decide what will happen when

1. DECIDE WHO WILL LEAD THE PROCESS

It is up to you, as the employer, to decide who is going to take the lead in assessing and managing MSD risks. It could be you, a worker designated by you or a health and safety expert, such as an ergonomist.

2. REVIEW THE AVAILABLE RESOURCES

When preparing to carry out the risk assessment, you will need to gather some information, such as the following:

- A list or description of work activities/tasks involving MSD risk carried out in your company (see the 'Work tasks that can contribute to MSDs', pp. 68-76)

- Any information on MSDs already available in your company: accident and ill-health records, complaints (from workers or worker representatives), absenteeism statistics, etc.

- Guidance on MSDs from national competent bodies (ministries, national health and safety institutes or equivalent)

- Guides, checklists or manuals produced by your industry (e.g. trade associations) and dealing with the specific occupational risks (including MSDs) in your sector

- Occupational safety and health websites dealing with risk assessment in general and more specifically with MSDs (see Chapter 5 'Resources')

It is also important to provide the necessary information, training and support to all those involved in the process.

Lavorofacile

3. DECIDE HOW AND WHEN YOU WILL KEEP WORKERS INFORMED AND INVOLVED

The participation and engagement of workers is crucial to preventing workplace health and safety problems. Workers should be involved throughout the process (from the risk assessment to the monitoring and evaluation of what has been done). Worker participation can contribute to the development of a health and safety culture in the company, which is important if you want to create lasting improvements. In relation to MSDs, this should also contribute to a more open conversation about the problems in the workplace, enabling you to address the issue in a more systematic and structured way.

4. DECIDE WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN

Everybody in your company has to understand that addressing the problem of MSDs in the workplace will take time, that objectives and a plan (including different steps, as described in this guide or similar) have to be decided on and that resources will have to be allocated to the project.

Show your commitment to the process by deciding on and communicating a basic timeline for the next steps. Be realistic about how quickly the business will be able to work through the process, but make sure that everyone understands that the time to address this issue is now.

TO CHECK IF YOU'RE READY TO MOVE ON TO THE NEXT STEP, GO THROUGH THE CHECKLIST BELOW:

☑ Do you have a good understanding of MSDs, or do you need to look for more information?

☑ Do you think you can deal with the issue in-house, or will you need to look for some external advice or support?

☑ Do you and your staff recognise the importance of dealing with MSDs in a more systematic and structured way?

☑ Do you have a good understanding of all the tasks/ activities involved in your business, or do you need to look into the various work processes?

☑ Do you know how you will involve your workers?

☑ Have you checked if someone from your industry has developed targeted guidelines or checklists for your sector?

STEP 2
ASSESSING RISKS

The risk assessment phase — carrying out a review of the work environment in relation to MSD risks — is crucial, because it is during this phase that you identify what needs to change. By conducting this assessment, you are also fulfilling the legal requirement to assess the risks workers are exposed to at work.

At this stage, you will:

1. Identify MSD risk factors in your workplace

2. Set priorities — what issues should be addressed first?

IDENTIFY MSD RISK FACTORS
1. IN YOUR WORKPLACE

It is important to take a systematic approach and make sure that all relevant risks and problems are identified. Specific risk assessment tools may have been developed for your sector in your country. Make sure you look for these before you start — they can be very helpful.

The following is a list of typical contributors to MSDs to get you started. Two suggested tools, described in the Toolboxes on pages 77 and 78, can help you to get workers involved in the process.

WORK TASKS THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO MSDs

As part of your risk assessment exercise, you could aim to identify work tasks that have some of the characteristics listed below, which typically contribute to MSDs.

PHYSICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Do workers have to handle heavy items and at the same time bend or twist their back?

Heavy lifting or frequent lifting constitute a risk to your workers. It is important to note how heavy loads that need to be lifted are and how often they need to be lifted and to make sure that workers know about good lifting practice. However, even when good lifting practice is followed, loads can be too heavy or need to be lifted too often, thus contributing to MSDs.

Do workers have to use force or localised pressure?

Having to use high levels of force or pressure (e.g. pushing or pulling something heavy or having to press hard on buttons, boxes or tools) is a characteristic of work that can contribute to MSDs. Therefore, it is important to note how often such a task needs to be

performed, if there are good handles or surfaces to optimise the use of force and if workers have a good technique for the forceful movements.

Do workers have to perform certain tasks repetitively?

Even low-force movements may contribute to MSDs when performed repetitively. Having to do a certain task over and over again can be a problem (e.g. entering data using a keyboard). Therefore, it is important that tasks that are performed repeatedly are optimised as far as possible to the situation (i.e. tasks are performed effectively) and give room for adjustment according to the workers' capacities and body characteristics (e.g. small or big hands, tall or short, etc.).

Do workers have to stand or sit in awkward or static working postures?

Holding even an ergonomically correct posture statically for many hours can contribute to MSDs. Holding an awkward posture for a long time can be a serious threat to musculoskeletal health. Consider tasks that require static postures and see if it is possible to introduce variation in posture or to optimise the body's position during the task (e.g. by providing support for unsupported arms).

Are workers exposed to vibration, for example when working with tools or sitting or standing on vibrating surfaces?

Vibration can over-exert and overstimulate the muscles and joints and contribute to MSDs. Therefore, those who work with vibrating tools need to have opportunities to take breaks from the vibration and to spend time doing other work tasks that do not involve vibration. Remember that driving a vehicle may generate vibration through the body and also requires breaks.

Do workers work in poor lighting, low temperature or high humidity?

Poor lighting increases demands on the eyes, which can contribute to MSDs in the neck and shoulders. That's why good lighting conditions in the workplace are so important. Low temperature makes the muscles cold, which hampers work techniques and therefore contributes to errors, reduced productivity and MSDs. Proper clothing (for temperature control) or curtains (to avoid a cold draught from a door that's in constant use)

could solve the problem. High humidity makes sweat evaporate more slowly, which can be detrimental to musculoskeletal functioning and other important body functions; this can be addressed by providing workers with water and opportunities for breaks.

Do workers need to perform tasks in cramped spaces with insufficient room to carry out the activity or carry it out safely?
Performing even a task that would not create problems under normal circumstances can become a problem if it is done in a cramped space. For example, carrying a box down a narrow hallway, drilling in a narrow space or sitting in a cramped space can contribute to a risk of injuries or MSDs. It may be possible to organise the workspace in such a way that space constraints are avoided.

What are the characteristics of the work surfaces and seating?
Working on a slippery or bulky surface can put the worker at risk of injury; it also affects productivity and places high demands on muscles and joints to control movement. Therefore, it can contribute to MSDs. Making the surface more suitable for the task, acquiring better equipment (e.g. better shoes or seats) or finding new ways of working to avoid the risky surface are potential solutions to this problem.

What are the characteristics of the objects handled? Are they large, unwieldy or sharp?
Objects that need to be handled (e.g. drills, scissors, boxes, steering wheels, laces, etc.) may contribute to MSDs because of their shape or size. The identification of such objects can be done by asking workers if they

associate any objects they handle with aching in their bodies. Possible ways to address this issue include new or more ergonomic equipment; organising work so that the object does not need to be handled as often; using assistive devices (e.g. anti-slip gloves); and adjusting the position of the object when it needs to be handled. The solution will very much depend on the object, the workers and the situation.

What about the weight and weight distribution of objects or people that need to be handled? Are some objects heavy, unstable or unpredictable?
Carrying, pushing or pulling objects or people can be a problem if they are very heavy or if their weight is poorly distributed (e.g. lifting a waste bin), unstable (e.g. carrying a bucket of water) or unpredictable (e.g. carrying a child or moving a patient).

What is the nature of containers, tools and equipment handles? For example, are they difficult to grasp or intrinsically harmful (e.g. sharp or hot)?
If a worker needs to be particularly careful in handling or carrying something, for example if the object is toxic, highly expensive or fragile (e.g. in the case of a person), it requires more muscle control on the part of the worker, and therefore can contribute to MSDs.
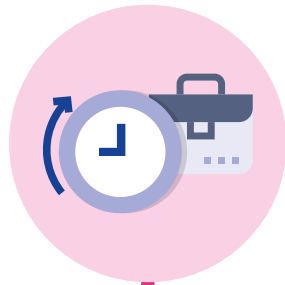
ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS

Are there days or other periods when work intensity is very high (when tasks have to be performed at high speed or working to tight deadlines)?

Almost regardless of the task being performed, working to tight deadlines intensifies muscle use in workers. However, many work tasks also become more dangerous when performed at high speed, and in addition work techniques may become poorer and workers may forget to take breaks or avoid taking them.

Are there long working days with limited opportunities for taking breaks?

Some work tasks are harmless if performed with sufficient time for recovery. However, several consecutive long working days with limited opportunities for taking breaks and recovering physically and mentally can compromise the musculoskeletal health of workers even when they are carrying out these otherwise harmless tasks.

Are workers' tasks sufficiently varied?

Often, businesses miss opportunities to qualify their workers for different types of work tasks. However, in addition to gaining an advantage by having more workers qualified to do a range of tasks, a business that takes this opportunity will also create new opportunities to distribute work tasks more widely and create a varied working day for its workers, which usually reduces the risk of developing an MSD.

Do your workers sit or stand in the same position for prolonged periods?

Sitting or standing in the same position for many hours can contribute to MSDs. Introducing opportunities for breaks (even very short breaks) or for changing position (e.g. alternating work in sitting and standing positions) over the working day can help to prevent or reduce MSD risk.

PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS
(SEE ALSO CHAPTER 2 'TACKLING PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS AND WORK-RELATED STRESS')

The psychosocial factors described in Chapter 2, such as high demands (excessive physical or mental workload), lack of control over the work (work schedules, tasks, etc.) and low variability (monotonous and repetitive tasks), can cause or aggravate MSDs. Some of those factors are linked to the 'organisational factors' described in the previous section, and in the following section a few additional psychosocial issues are mentioned. However, we invite you to read Chapter 2 for a more comprehensive overview. By tackling psychosocial risks, you are also helping to prevent MSDs.

It is likely that a stressed worker will alter the way the work is performed, for example increasing the pace of the work or carrying heavier loads to finish faster. Stress can also increase the tone in muscles, causing muscles to become fatigued, and it can increase the duration of muscle activity and reduce the likelihood of recovery. Stress can also intensify the perception of pain, or undermine the mechanisms used to cope with pain.

Are there workers who lack control over tasks or workload?

People have a good sense of their own capabilities and, therefore, workers who have control over their working day and tasks can prioritise lifting tasks, choose when to take breaks and vary their work in a healthy way, if they have the necessary knowledge. However, lack of control contributes to MSDs in that workers may work beyond their capacity in terms of loads lifted, time without a break or the frequency with which a task is performed.

Is there a heavy mental workload?

A heavy mental workload can in itself contribute to MSDs, as it increases muscle tension, but it can also worsen an existing MSD. For example, a work task that requires a high level of concentration for many hours (e.g. operating a machine or serving many demanding people in a long queue) may have an impact on the perception of pain.
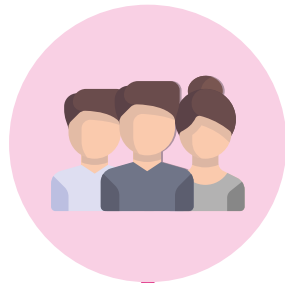
INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

Are certain tasks a better fit with some workers' height, age, health condition, etc., than those of others?

It is important that work tasks are adjusted to fit the worker who performs them (i.e. adapted to workers' capacity or body characteristics, for example tall or short, 100% fit or with a chronic disease). For example, standing work at a given height may be too high for some workers and too low for other workers. It may also be that some workers have a chronic disease that requires some accommodation.

Are the work tasks adjusted to the workers' professional competences?

Performing a work task that is too easy or too hard can contribute to MSDs. If workers perform a task that is too hard, poor work posture or increased muscle tension can contribute to MSDs. If workers perfom a task that is too easy, they may lose concentration and forget about work techniques, which may contribute to MSDs.

TOOLBOX

BODY MAPPING

One way to start a discussion around MSDs would be to print and hang a poster of a body on a whiteboard or wall *(see Annex 2)*. Next to the poster, provide a marker for the workers to use to place crosses on the body parts where they have experienced pain or other MSD symptoms in the past week or month. Each worker can also make a mark at the bottom of the poster to indicate that they have contributed. When there is the same number of marks at the bottom as the number of workers, or it's been established that everyone who wants to contribute has done so, the patterns that emerge from the poster can be used for a discussion and brainstorming session.

If you want, you can provide different colours of marker for different types of problems. For example, you could use a red marker for psychosocial problems and a green marker for physical problems.

TOOLBOX
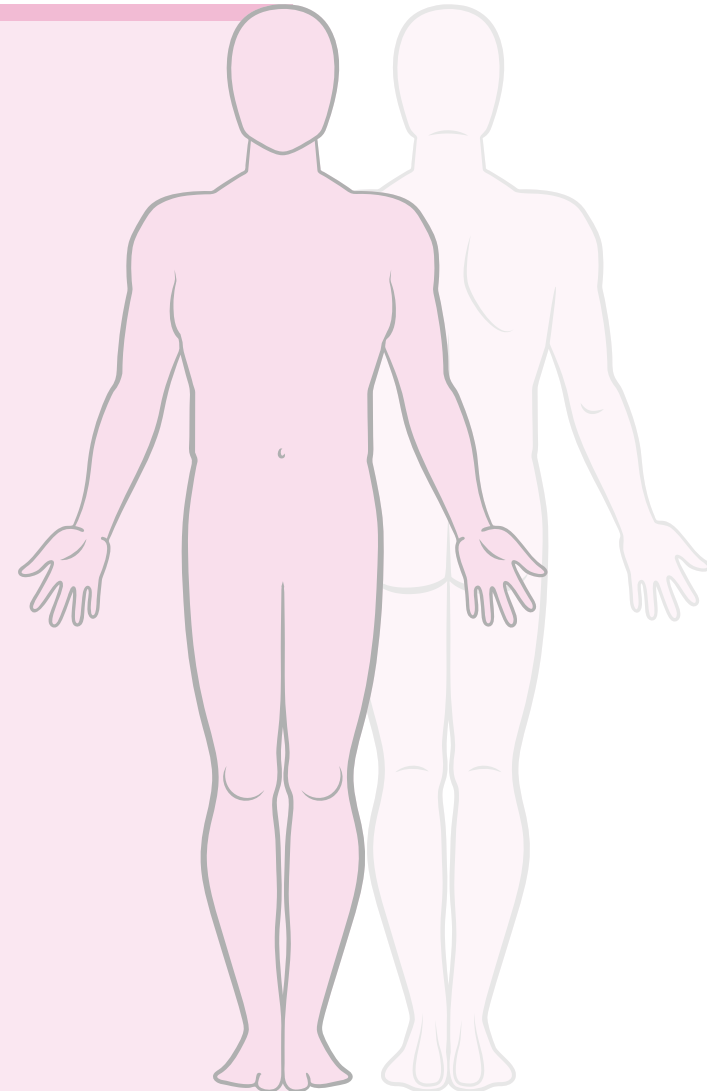
ORGANISING A PHOTO SAFARI

One way to identify the factors that contribute to MSDs in your workplace is to ask workers to take photos using their mobile phones over a two-week period. Each person (workers and managers) should take two or three photos of something that they perceive as risky or that they find triggers MSD symptoms at work. They can also take pictures of work situations or equipment that they perceive as helping to prevent MSDs. The quality of the photos doesn't matter and they don't have to be self-explanatory. In fact, each worker or manager should provide brief explanations of their photos.

To give an example of a photo of a risk, it might show the height of the hole in a rubbish container into which bins need to be emptied (which requires force and an awkward body position for workers to prevent the rubbish falling back on them from the bin). An example of a picture of something that helps to prevent MSDs might be a photo of colleagues helping each other during a pressured time.

Each person can print out their photos and glue them to a board (e.g. in a lunchroom or meeting room). Once the safari is over, the person leading the project arranges a workshop at which all the photos are on display and the topics raised can be discussed. The aim is to establish a shared understanding of what the photos represent. After that, the photos should be grouped according to theme (e.g. positive and negative aspects of assistive devices, protective equipment, body positions, task variation, etc.).

One photo safari workshop works well in companies with up to 10 workers. If you have more than 10 workers, you should consider running several workshops.

2. SET PRIORITIES — WHAT ISSUES SHOULD BE ADDRESSED FIRST?

It is essential that the actions to be taken to prevent or minimise MSDs are prioritised. There are many ways of prioritising and many things to consider when doing so. In general, the prioritisation should take account of the severity of the risk, the likely outcome of an incident arising from it, the number of workers who might be affected and the time needed to take preventive measures.

It is important that workers are involved in prioritising the problems to tackle first; their input on which tasks and situations are most likely to contribute to MSDs will be valuable.

STEP 3

ACTION PLANNING

At this stage, you will:

1. Agree what actions will be taken to eliminate or reduce the risks

2. Set up an action plan

1.   AGREE WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN

When discussing and agreeing actions, it is important to follow the general principles of prevention:

- **Avoid MSD risks**, e.g.:
  - automate lifting and transport operations

- **Combat MSD risks at their source**, e.g.:
  - change the height that objects need to be lifted to
  - improve pavements for a better standing surface

- **Adapt the work to the individual**, e.g.:
  - design the workplace so that there is enough room to adopt the correct postures
  - choose adjustable chairs and desks
  - implement job rotation to alleviate repetitive or monotonous work, or introduce regular breaks to allow workers to recover from efforts

- **Adapt to technological progress**, e.g.:
  - keep up to date with new assistive devices and more ergonomic devices, tools, equipment, etc.
  - keep workers up to date with technological progress, so they keep feeling competent

- **Replace the dangerous with the non-dangerous or less dangerous**, e.g.:
  - replace manual handling of loads with mechanical handling

- **Develop a coherent overall prevention policy** that covers technology, organisation of work, working conditions, social relationships and the influence of factors related to the work environment

- **Implement collective measures first**, e.g.:
  - prioritise good grip on handles over anti-slip gloves, prioritise lower loads per lift over back belts (lumbar support) or wrist splints, prioritise fewer tasks that require workers to squat or kneel over knee protectors

- **Give appropriate instructions and training to workers**, e.g.:
  - provide practical training and information on the correct use of work equipment (lifting devices, chairs, furniture); how to organise work and the workstation in an ergonomic way; safe working postures (sitting, standing); etc.

Table 3: Example of interventions to tackle MSDs

As mentioned previously, MSDs can be caused by physical, work organisation, psychosocial and individual factors — and most of the time these interact with each other. Because of these multiple causes, the best way to tackle MSDs is through a combined approach.
Table 3 presents examples of interventions targeting different MSD risk factors. Actions addressing one risk factor in isolation will probably be less effective than a combination of actions targeting several factors.

Type of intervention	Possible actions	Examples
Targeting the workplace layout/equipment	• Actions focusing on modifying the workplace layout	• Adapt position, height and layout of the workspace to improve working postures • Provide adjustable chairs, use platforms, etc.
	• Actions focusing on the physical environment	• Ensure good lighting, avoid reflections on screens • Ensure temperature control
	• Actions targeting work equipment	• Make sure equipment is ergonomically designed and suitable for the task • Maintain equipment regularly • Favour lightweight tools, reduce the weight of items used in work tasks
Targeting work organisation	• Actions targeting work organisation/work processes	• Plan work to avoid repetitive work or prolonged work in poor postures • Introduce short, frequent breaks from riskier activities (not necessarily a rest) • Rotate jobs or reallocate work • Change staffing levels and/or work cycle frequencies
	• Actions targeting working conditions	• Limit the duration of certain tasks under specific circumstances (cold, humidity, etc.)

Type of intervention	Possible actions	Examples
Targeting psychosocial factors and stress	• Actions to minimise stress factors	• Allow variation in how work tasks are performed • Allow breaks • Show your interest in workers' tasks and their health, and ask for their opinions regularly
	• Actions to ensure worker control over work situation	• Ensure proper training among the workers, so they feel competent in their tasks • Make sure workers have sufficient influence on the way in which and the pace at which work tasks are performed, so that they can make the adjustments required by their bodies • Encourage and foster good collegial support
Targeting workers	• Actions to raise awareness	• Make available to workers practical information about how to protect and promote their musculoskeletal health at work • Share the experiences of workers who have developed MSDs
	• Training	• Train workers in the use of equipment, correct postures, etc. • Train workers in how to maintain a healthy musculoskeletal system at work
	• Personal protective equipment	• Put at workers' disposal the required protective equipment
	• Return-to-work protocols	• Put in place procedures for reintegrating workers who have been absent because of MSDs

When deciding what action to take, it can be helpful to consider what (if anything) the company has done in the past to address the issues raised. What has worked well in the past and what hasn't? What could be done differently this time? Can you build on previous activities that have been successful in the past?

It is important to keep in mind what is possible in terms, for example, of financial resources, and not to agree on actions that in practice may not be feasible. Establish what resources can be made available to support the implementation of the actions. For example, what budget is there for buying new ergonomic equipment? Even if financial resources are very limited, changes that cost little or nothing, in relation to the timing of tasks, priorities of tasks and work organisation, can be made.

TOOLBOX

BRAINSTORMING FOR IDEAS FOR ACTIONS

A brainstorming session where everyone comes forward with ideas for actions and activities to address the prioritised issues would be a good way of involving workers in the process. One way of structuring the session would be to ask workers to suggest actions targeting the workplace layout, the equipment, the work organisation, psychosocial factors or the workers. You could then consider as a group whether actions are required at all these levels or not. Some issues might require a combination of actions targeting several factors, whereas others could be addressed with only one minor change.

2.   SET UP AN ACTION PLAN

The challenge is to develop an action plan that is specific enough that everyone is clear about what their role is and what will happen when. It should state who is responsible for implementing the agreed solutions and how you and your workers will know that the solutions have brought about the intended outcomes.

In Annex 3, you will find a template for an action plan that you can use as a guide (you can of course adapt it to your needs). Make sure that you keep this document safe and up to date, for future reference and as evidence of the action you have taken in your company to prevent MSDs.
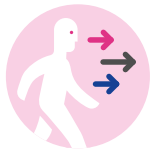
Effective implementation involves the development of an action plan. Good action plans include:

- Problem — description

- The priority given to this issue

- Solutions — what will be done

- Responsibility — who will lead the actions

- Resources — in terms of money, time, etc.

- Timeline — what will be done when

- Evaluation — how will you know whether the implemented solutions were effective

See Table 4 for an example. In reality, one action plan is likely to include several problems and their solutions (following the priorities agreed earlier). It is important that each solution is briefly described (in terms of the person responsible, the resources available, the planned timeline and the method of evaluation).

Table 4: Example of an action plan to reduce MSDs related to sedentary work (sitting)

Problem	Priority	Solutions	Responsibility	Resources	Timeline	Evaluation
Sedentary work: prolonged periods of sitting while carrying out office work and computer-based tasks.	High	Targeting the workplace • Use ergonomic work furniture (adjustable, appropriate for different visual display unit tasks and individual differences) • Use standing desks (to break up and reduce sedentary time by alternating sitting and standing postures)	Owner/manager	Time for owner/manager to: • assess and decide on work furniture to be bought • assess and decide along with workers on the changes to be introduced in work organisation to address sedentary work • provide training Monetary resources needed: • to replace chairs and tables with new ergonomic furniture • to involve a health and safety expert/ergonomist	End Quarter 2	Gather feedback on how the implementation is progressing at every monthly meeting. Evaluation after six months from completion (Do workers feel/perceive improvements? Is there a reduction in sickness absence because of MSDs?)
		Targeting work organisation to reduce prolonged sitting • Organise the work so that breaks are possible • Ensure task variation with the aim of alternating sitting and standing postures	Owner/manager		End Quarter 3	
		Targeting psychosocial factors • Foster work autonomy (workers should be able to exercise some control over their work, to allow breaks, to alternate/vary standing and sitting postures)	Owner/manager		End Quarter 3	
		Targeting workers • Increase awareness about health outcomes related to sedentary work • Training workers on correct techniques to adjust work furniture; use of mouse and keyboard or other data input devices; use of work surface to ensure a comfortable, neutral work posture • Encourage the use of breaks to stretch fingers, hands, arms and legs	Owner/manager, workers		End Quarter 1	

STEP 4
TAKING ACTION

At this stage, you will implement and monitor the agreed actions.

This step is closely linked to action planning, and is meant to ensure that the responsible people implement the agreed preventive and protective measures. For this, it is important to:

• Ensure that responsibility for implementing the various agreed interventions and actions is clearly established

• Hold regular meetings with the people involved or talk about the action plan during meetings that already take place regularly

• In these meetings, look at each of the measures in turn and ask for progress and barriers

• Ensure that workers are involved and engaged, and that efforts are being made to make sure that the implementation of the measures is well received by the workers affected

• Encourage suggestions for changes to interventions based on workers' experiences of their implementation

Continuous monitoring is also part of this step. A typical problem is that efforts and focus on the implementation of the changes fall away as time passes. Therefore, to make sure that there are long-term effects, it is important that you monitor the progress. The questions below should help you in this:

☑ Has the implementation been carried out as intended? Look at the action plan and ask yourself, 'Has everything been done?'

☑ Have barriers arisen from the implementation process that you need to take care of?

☑ How is the implementation going in relation to various types of activities, for example:
  - Do the workers actually use any new ergonomic equipment and do they use it correctly?
  - Have any agreed changes to the workplace layout been implemented?
  - Have any agreed changes to workers' behaviour taken place?
  - Are any new policies being followed?
  - Has the speed of work tasks been adjusted and have breaks been introduced?

STEP 5
EVALUATION

The aim here is to get an overview of what has been achieved and how you can use what you have learned in the future. It is recommended that you review all the actions taken several months (or about a year) after the initial review of the working conditions.

At this stage, you will:

1. Evaluate whether or not you have achieved what you wanted

2. Review the whole cycle of assessing risks and planning and implementing actions

1. EVALUATE WHETHER OR NOT YOU HAVE ACHIEVED WHAT YOU WANTED

To evaluate whether or not the implemented actions had the intended effects, reflect on the questions below and discuss them with your workers, for example during meetings or through a short online or paper questionnaire (which could be anonymous if you think this would work better for your business):

☑ Has the number of workers experiencing MSDs been affected (decreased or increased) by the measures implemented?

☑ Has workers' perception of pain (or MSD severity) been affected (decreased or increased) by the measures implemented?

☑ Rerun the body map exercise (if you used it initially): does the new map look different from the one created before the action plan was implemented?

☑ Has the action plan increased the ability of workers with existing MSDs to work in a way that does not exacerbate their MSDs?

☑ Did the solutions work equally well for all workers?

☑ Did some elements of the action plan work better than others?

☑ Do workers now feel less tired after a day's work?

☑ Has the action plan had any undesirable effects (e.g. has it introduced (over)loading of body parts other than those that were under strain before)? The following are some examples of undesirable effects and solutions:

- New assistive equipment may make a task easier and thus increase the pace of work, which may introduce new problems in terms of strain on the muscles or joints
- Assistive devices may slow down a task and have consequences for how much a worker can do in a certain time. Therefore, to avoid too much pressure, it may be necessary to communicate clearly how tasks should be prioritised

- A change in work routine may generate new loads on the body. Changes may need to be introduced gradually to avoid over-exerting workers
- Protecting one worker from a task that over-exerts him or her may cause frustration and/or overload of the other workers who take over the task.
- New work routines, methods or machines can cause confusion and insecurity among workers if they don't feel well trained. As a result, they may avoid using the new routine, method or machine
- Any change in equipment, routines or work organisation can have an effect on the worker experience. However, it should be possible to avoid negative consequences as long as workers are properly informed about the changes and the reasons behind them
- Massage is generally perceived as a big worker benefit. However, it doesn't deal with the causes and triggers of MSDs and, therefore, improvements in MSDs shouldn't be expected; if workers expect improvements, they will be disappointed

2. REVIEW THE WHOLE CYCLE

It is important to write notes for yourself on the evaluation so that you can revisit them next time you need to implement or review efforts to prevent and manage MSDs.

You could invite your staff again to spend a few minutes at a meeting discussing the following questions:

- ☑ What went well and what needs to be done differently in the future?
- ☑ What could you have done differently at each stage to make the process work better?
- ☑ Was the risk assessment method effective?
- ☑ Did workers feel involved and feel ownership throughout the process?
- ☑ What can be done in the future to ensure that workers continue to feel informed and involved?

☑ Did you as a manager support the actions in the best possible way?

☑ How can we make sure that the positive effects of our actions last?

Your risk assessment has to be reviewed regularly, for a number of reasons, including:

- Changes in the work process (use of different machines or tools, changes in the tasks carried out)
- If the preventive and protective measures currently in place are insufficient or no longer adequate
- Accidents or work-related diseases resulting in injury or ill health may reveal the need for changes to prevent similar incidents in future

Risk assessment is not a once-and-for-all activity.

« **4. What are the legal obligations?** »

LEGAL POSITION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The EU Framework Directive (89/391) creates a legal obligation on employers to protect their workers by avoiding, evaluating and combating risks to their safety and health (without mentioning specific risks). This includes the psychosocial factors in the workplace which can cause or contribute to stress or mental and physical health problems and the MSD risk factors. The Directive also includes a general duty on workers to comply with protective measures determined by their employer.

LEGAL POSITION IN YOUR COUNTRY

For information about the safety and health legislation in your country refer to the national Labour Inspectorate or to the EU-OSHA national Focal Points (consult **https://osha.europa.eu/en/about-eu-osha/national-focal-points** for contact details of the focal point in your country).

5. Resources

STRESS AND PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES

EU-OSHA website: **https://osha.europa.eu/en/themes/psychosocial-risks-and-stress**

OSHwiki, 'Psychosocial issues': **https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Psychosocial_issues**

European Commission (2014). Promoting mental health in the workplace. Guidance to implementing a comprehensive approach.
Available at: **https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=716&langId=en&moreDocuments=yes**

European Commission (2014). Interpretative Document of the Implementation of Council Directive 89/391/EEC in relation to Mental Health in the Workplace.
Available at: **https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=716&langId=en&moreDocuments=yes**

MSDs

EU-OSHA website: **https://osha.europa.eu/en/themes/ musculoskeletal-disorders**

OSHwiki, articles on musculoskeletal disorders: **https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/Category:Musculoskeletal_disorders**

GENERAL

European Commission (1996). Guidance on risk assessment at work.
Available at: **https://osha.europa.eu/en/legislation/guidelines/guidance-on-risk-assessment-at-work.pdf**

European Commission (2017). Health and safety at work is everybody's business: Practical guidance for employers.
Available at: **http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=16893&langId=en**

European Commission (2017). Communication — Safer and Healthier Work for All — Modernisation of the EU Occupational Safety and Health Legislation and Policy.
Available at: **http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=2709**

NATIONAL RESOURCES

For information about resources available in your country refer to the national Labour Inspectorate or to the EU-OSHA national Focal Points
(consult **https://osha.europa.eu/en/about-eu-osha/national-focal-points** for contact details of the focal point in your country).

❪ Annexes ❫

ANNEX 1

VISUAL MAP — PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES

1. **Demands**

2. **Autonomy**

7. **Working with people outside the organisation**

3. **Role clarity**

6. **Relationships between workers**

4. **Change**

5. **Workers' relationships with managers**

ANNEX 2

BODY MAPS

Use a marker to indicate the body parts where you have experienced pain or other MSD symptoms
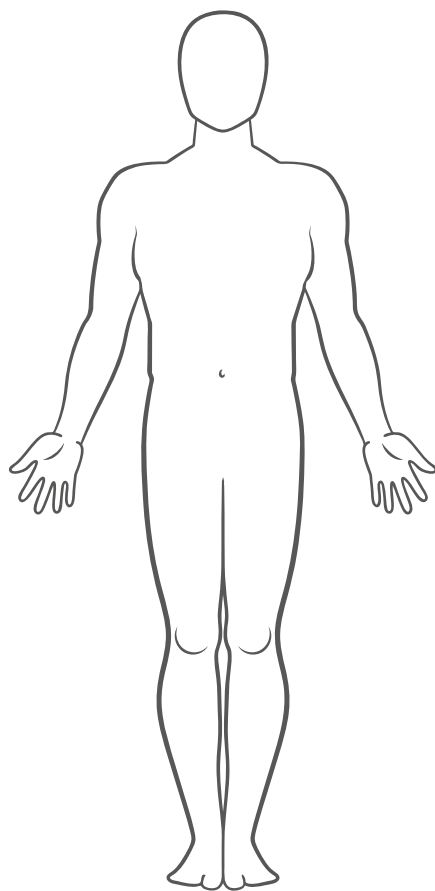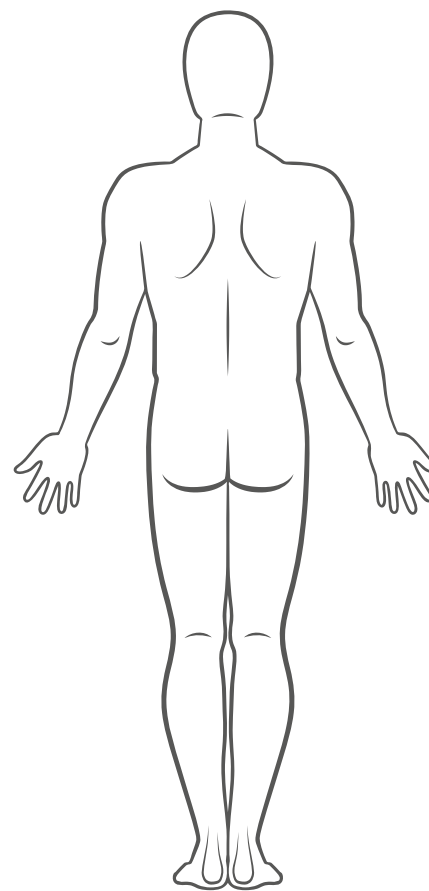
Front   Back

ANNEX 3

ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE which can be used to document problems and risks identified

Hazard/Risk / Problem	Priority	Actions/Solutions	Responsibility / Those involved	Budget/ Resources	Deadline/ Timeline	Evaluation

The **European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA)** contributes to making Europe a safer, healthier and more productive place to work. The Agency researches, develops, and distributes reliable, balanced, and impartial safety and health information and organises pan-European awareness raising campaigns. Set up by the European Union in 1994 and based in Bilbao, Spain, the Agency brings together representatives from the European Commission, Member State governments, employers' and workers' organisations, as well as leading experts in each of the EU Member States and beyond.

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

Santiago de Compostela 12,
E-48003 Bilbao, Spain
Tel. +34 944358400
Fax +34 944358401
E-mail: information@osha.europa.eu

http://osha.europa.eu

Publications Office