



## **NEW OSH ERA**

**Call on psychosocial risks at work**

**Research themes**

## **Theme I**

### **Leadership and company culture in relation to worker's psychological well being/health**

*How do leadership, management strategies and company culture affect the psychosocial working environment of a company? What negative and positive consequences (including bullying, harassment, performance and well-being) can be the result of leadership and company culture? What are effective interventions and strategies to change leadership and/ or company culture to stimulate psychosocial well-being?*

1. **Relevance:** New evidence suggests that leadership has a significant impact on the employee's health. Company culture, related to for instance values, assumptions and social interaction between workers in an organisation, can stimulate or hinder psychosocial well-being. The psychosocial climate refers to things like senior management commitment, worker interaction, perceived fairness, trust, participation, pro-active behaviour of workers and consultation in relation to stress prevention within organizations.
2. **Approach:** Conduct a review of the literature on a well defined research question concerning this field of interest. Based on that review develop intervention strategies to change leadership or company culture in order to stimulate psychological wellbeing, The intervention may be based on an inventory of existing stress research in relation to leadership (both behaviour and strategy) or company culture. The intervention may also focus on specific elements such as reduction of violence at work, bullying and harassment or specific subgroups.
  - Show how the intervention affects well-being.
  - Give special consideration to different National and cultural backgrounds and differences in branches.
  - Evaluate the intervention in a valid and feasible way
3. **Novelty and originality:** The relationship between leadership styles has not been enough researched with regard to health impact in connection with work-related stress and psychosocial environment. In addition, research on changing company culture aiming at psychological well being is in its infancy and interventions for reducing bullying and harassment have been applied quite often but few effect evaluations have taken place.
4. **Impact:** Improve the communication between leaders and workers by increasing problem and risk awareness about the consequences for psychological well being of leaderships. Dissemination of the results to the target groups will improve the impact.
5. **Links to relevant National/European programs:** European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks, ESENER (<http://osha.europa.eu/en/riskobservatory/enterprise-survey/enterprise-survey-esener>), PRIMA-EF (<http://prima-ef.org/default.aspx>)
6. **European added value:** To contribute to European exchange of experiences, get more insight in regional and cultural differences and learn from these, exchange good practice examples.

## **Theme II**

### **Restructuring and changes in the world of work in relation to worker's psychological wellbeing/ health**

*What are the consequences of restructuring and changes in the world of work in relation to workers' health, in particular their psychological well being? This theme includes the effects of new types of work (e.g. precarious work and temporary work), new trends in work and changes in the workforce (e.g. demography and diversity).*

1. **Relevance:** In light of the current economic recession, many organizations are forced to close, downsize or reorganize work to gain competitive advantage. However, even without the current crisis restructuring has become a common place feature in today's workplaces. Both forms of restructuring may have important implications for the psychosocial work environment and psychological well-being of workers. New and emerging trends in work are, for instance atypical work, precarious work, temporary employment, flexible contracts, subcontracting and outsourcing. Also changes in the workforce occur like an increase of migrant workers, older workers and self employed workers. These simultaneous changes in both the work and the workforce increase the risk of health problems.
2. **Approach:** The approach can be:
  - a study aiming at increased insight into the effect of different types of restructuring (both 'crisis' types of restructuring and more continuous types resulting in new types of work on psychological well being of workers
  - determining effective preventive actions and practical strategies to minimize negative effects on psychological well being of restructuring and other changes in the world of work.
  - the study may give special attention to specific groups of the changing workforce that maybe particularly affected, e.g. older workers.
3. **Novelty and originality:** The novelty lies in revealing causal pathways through which restructuring affects health, and consequently, developing and evaluating proactive and preventive strategies addressing the changing world of work.
4. **Impact:** These changes are happening in all type of companies and sectors and in all Member States. Social partners need these data to implement restructuring without adverse effects on psychological well being.
5. **Links to relevant national/European programmes:** European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks, ESENER (<http://osha.europa.eu/en/riskobservatory/enterprise-survey/enterprise-survey-esener>), Health in restructuring, HIRES ([http://www.ipg.uni-bremen.de/research/hires/final\\_report.php](http://www.ipg.uni-bremen.de/research/hires/final_report.php)).
6. **European added value:** The European Commission strategy asked for research on this area. In addition the project may lead to transfer of knowledge between Member States that are at different stages of implementing changes in world of work.



### **Theme III**

#### **Work-related psychosocial factors and health disorders**

*To what extent may the psycho-social working environment play a role in the pathogenesis of muscular-skeletal disorders (MSDs), cardiovascular diseases, depression and other illnesses?*

1. **Relevance:** Many large scale studies have shown that job stress may lead to different disorders. Long term psychosocial stress at work may even lead to premature mortality, particularly from cardiovascular illness. Job stress may induce psychological disorders, in particular depression. Recently the WHO indicated that major depressive episodes may become the number one disease to be faced in Western countries. Further there is increasing evidence that psychosocial factors (i.e. job demands combined with decreased resources) may lead to mental health problems and eventually to psychological illnesses. There is also some evidence that the depression after prolonged job stress may be less severe, but more prolonged and less responsive to conventional antidepressant treatment than classical major depression. In addition there is also quite some scientific literature that relates psychosocial factors and (job) stress to musculoskeletal disorders, both low back pain and pain in neck, shoulder and arm regions.
2. **Approach:** It may not be feasible to conduct large scale epidemiologic studies that add new data to the already available evidence, within the given timeframe and budget of this call. Therefore the proposal should focus on prevention and/or return to work interventions and, if possible, epidemiological studies based on existing data. Some examples of promising interventions are available (i.e. peer-support groups in prevention of stress and burnout). In addition current interventions that may foster an early recovery including return to work after work loss from work stress or psychological illness are rare and have not been sufficiently evaluated. The interventions often do not include work aspects. Adding information on costs and benefits is relevant. Furthermore aspects of (private) lifestyle are a causing factor and also a factor for recovery. This should be considered in the study.
3. **Novelty and originality:** Although a large amount of data is available on these themes some issues are still unresolved and preventive and return to work/ rehabilitation interventions with a focus on work aspects have not been studied in great extent. It remains unclear what interventions are promising for which specific groups of workers and why.
4. **Impact:** These illnesses are quite prevalent and effective prevention and return to work has a large impact on reduction of both personal suffering and societal and company costs.
5. **Links to relevant National/European programs:** Whitehall II Study (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/whitehallII/>)
6. **European added value:** Prevention of MSD and psychological illness has high priority in the EU.