

## Development of Healthy Workplaces by Processes and Employee Participation

### About the authority

Bærum is one of the largest local authorities in Norway with approximately 105,000 inhabitants with about 7,000 man-labour years. Bærum is a service organisation based on customer needs. The main sectors are schools and health services with approximately 5,000 man-labour years.

“Keep and recruit employees” is one of the issues in the document of future main activities in Bærum. The health promoting work supports this effort by:

- Giving guidance to managers with a focus on work environment development, inter-personnel relations, communication, handling of conflicts, stress and mastering rapid changes due to organisational alterations.
- Health scheme for occupational groups that are specially disposed to strains and injuries by offering health-promoting measures such as relaxation exercises, training and similar activities during working hours.

### WHP by traffic lights

Bærum Local Authority practises the method of using the colours of the traffic lights to describe the status concerning health, environment and safety (HES). This particular way of using the colours has become quite common within certain fields in Norway.

- Green is used for describing a well-functioning work environment and health-promoting initiatives.

- Red symbolises a working place that is in trouble for various reasons. Red initiatives imply “fire fighting”.
- Yellow describes workplaces at risk level somewhere in between red and green.

Depending on the situation, we work according to the entire colour range. However, we try to make ourselves aware that it is important to set aside enough time for “green” work in order to gradually decrease “yellow” and “red” work. Whatever the level, the effort may be directed towards management, inter-personnel relations, work organisation, physical problems or individual health.

### Fundamental principles for development of work environment

- The development must be desired, implemented and supervised by the manager.
- Thorough planning, together with employee representatives, is required. Some workplaces have established HES groups.
- The group needs to discuss the objective concerning the process.
- A method which stimulates openness and broad participation from all employees must be employed.
- An action plan must be designed, containing deadlines, responsible people, cost calculations etc.
- The action plan must be followed closely and adjusted at regular intervals.
- Documentation of the process should be filed to facilitate evaluation and audit.

#### Contact:

Inga Smaalund  
Phone: +47-67503880  
E-mail: inga.smaalund@baerum.kommune.no  
Sigrid Bjerke  
E-mail: sigrid.bjerke@baerum.kommune.no  
Inger-Merete Skarpaas  
E-mail: inger.merete.skarpaas@baerum.kommune.no



- Evaluation must be at a set time. Has the process led to the desired development of the work environment?
- Incorporation of the process in systematic HES work, in order for it to be a natural part of everyday life.
- Good information to all employees; both verbally and in writing.

## Reports on employees' health and work environment

The Chief Administrative Officer in Bærum will make agreements with leaders. The intention is that leaders are to report activities and results concerning the work environment making the same effort as when reporting on economy and services/production. We believe it is essential in order for the employees to experience their workplaces as health promoting and developing.

### “A good work environment can always be improved!” – an example from primary schools

The example describes work environment development at six schools. None of the processes have been initiated as a result of problems or conflicts. All the processes have been somewhat different, however, they have generally followed the above-mentioned template of “Fundamental principles when the aim is development of the work environment”

### Important elements for implementing WHP

- Broad participation: the entire personnel has been included in the process: teachers, employees working at

the “after school programme”, mercantile personnel, janitor, health visitor etc.

- Open/non-anonymous survey: everyone has written down and spoken frankly about what is on their mind. The groups have been of different sizes according to what has been practical and functional

The staff was asked to comment on the following:

- what makes me look forward to going to work/what do I appreciate at my school
- what are the areas of improvement/ what would I like to change

For practical reasons, posted notes were used to collect the suggestions. Each person said aloud what was written on the paper. Only a single wish/demand was written on each note. In this way, the notes could be shifted around and placed into appropriate groups. This facilitated the discussions that followed. In some cases, small interest groups assembled to form proposals based on some of the more complex problems that were up for discussion.

### Improvement areas

- Professional requirements
- Better organisation of training and in-service training
- Better communication between colleagues and between the management and the employees
- Concrete physical improvements of workplaces

## Evaluation process

Four schools and representatives from the education office and the senior safety representative, attended an evaluation meeting where a number of issues were discussed. All schools had a verbal, qualitative evaluation. Some of the issues that were stressed:

- It had been an educational process, positive that everyone participated; resulting in commitment and responsibility.
- A focus on the positive aspects, needs and requirements, instead of focus on problems.
- The action plan is working and followed up in HES meetings.
- Progress and follow-up made visible by notices or through an internal newspaper.
- Nice to have routines in the work environment work.

### “An appealing workplace – How to keep and recruit good competent staff ?” – an example from a nursing home

This example is from a nursing home with approximately 50 employees. Most staff enjoy their work and are quite happy with their working conditions. However, the days at work are generally dominated by an increasing work load. Combined with lack of professionally educated personnel, this increases the risk of illness and absenteeism due to working conditions. The project described

in this example was initiated and is supervised by the nursing home manager. The project group consists of managers, employee representatives and HES-personnel.

### Systematic needs analyses

All employees were invited to attend a seminar. The aim was to find out: "What is important for the workplace in order for it to be a good place to stay for both residents and staff?" Group-based methods allowing openness and broad participation were used. The result was a list of "house rules". Employees, who for several reasons did not attend the seminar, were divided into groups. Their task was to continue the seminar-work and give more concrete answers to the following questions:

- What is good at our workplace – and why?
- What can be improved – and how?

In addition a representative panel of employees participated in group interviews. An interview guide was used. The method makes it possible to look more deeply into certain issues. HES personnel carried out the interviews. The aim was to experience the employees' own ideas about the most important issues in order to keep and recruit good staff, as well as prevent absenteeism due to work.

### The way from analysis to action

The results from the survey formed the basis for an improvement plan. This plan is part of the local strategic activity plan. Examples of implemented activities are:

- Individual organisation of work and working hours arranged to fit phases of life e.g. for elderly workers and parents with small children.
- A review and update of the HES-system and manual.
- In-company training and education.
- Physical activities together with colleagues during working hours.

### Looking ahead

This project will be evaluated in the autumn of 2002. Qualitative evaluation methods will be used. The experiences so far are evaluated as positive by both management and employees. Verbal comments: This has been an educational process. Broad participation results in more commitment and responsibility. Focus on solutions and needs increases the motivation for doing a good job, which will benefit the residents.

We hope our description of these methods, principles and examples have been an inspiration to the reader. Our experience is that this work is enjoyable and creates good results for the customer. In order to tell each other of our experiences and for further information, please contact us.

(Recommended literature: Richard A. Krueger: "Focus groups – A practical guide for applied research").