

### Background

The Ministry of Finance is an example of an effective and adequate health policy that is systematic, programmed and focused on all employees. The responsibility for Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) policy is taken very seriously among line managers and is being provided for by professional external suppliers. The monitoring of programmes, employee satisfaction studies, and the following of developments related to occupational health are leading to new initiatives being generated by a group of enthusiastic employees. They are definitely contributing to the organization's "feel good – be fit" culture that the WHP policy has proclaimed as being one of its main thrusts.

### About the authority

Every ministry needs money to implement its tasks. The Tax Department within the Ministry of Finance collects taxes and ensures that the money is transferred to the national treasury. The Ministry of Finance not only makes sure that sufficient money comes in but also keeps track of government spending.

The ministry's key location at Korte Voorhout 7 in The Hague accommodates many policymakers who deal with a wide array of topics. These include fiscal and non-fiscal legislation, drawing up the Budget Memorandum, and the introduction of the joint European currency in 2002. The Ministry of Finance is composed not only of the Tax Department but also the State Property Department that manages state property.

There are about 1500 employees working at the Ministry of Finance in The Hague, 36% of whom are women. When we compare the age distribution in this ministry with that of financial institutions and the national government, this ministry occupies an average position. This means that the Ministry of Finance has a high percentage of young (ages 25-34) university graduates.

### Working conditions policy and WHP

The working conditions service for the Ministry of Finance are supplied by the Arbo Management Groep (AMG). The ministry has developed a wide range of activities related to working conditions management, absenteeism policy, the promotion of occupational health, and reintegration.

The working conditions agreement for national government employees is a major factor in the fact that more attention is being devoted to WHP than was done some years ago. Currently, preventive medical testing of employees is being paid for as well as (medically supervised) fitness programmes. There has been a definite switch from predominantly curative efforts alone to a good combination of curative and preventive measures. The Ministry of Finance is also providing additional resources for this purpose.

The fact that a "healthy" company culture is simply taken for granted within this ministry is very noticeable: it is considered quite normal to go running or engage in other sports with your colleagues either before working hours,

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during the lunch hour or after work and to use the bicycle for commuting whenever possible. (There is even a competition among the ministries in which this ministry usually winds up in the lead.) In addition, employees can make use of the various sports facilities offered in the ministry's fitness room.

### **A supportive structure**

The working conditions coordinators, the industrial medical officer and Human Resources (both the decentralized operations offices and the central management for Personnel and Organization) play an important role and have joint working conditions consultative meetings. The employees' council is not involved in these consultative meetings but receives feedback through the working conditions coordinators. The Ministry of Finance is served by two WHP suppliers (Fitform and Active Living) that focus on implementing an exercise policy. The arrangements for this are coordinated by the ministry's Fitness Support Committee.

There is a great deal of attention within the ministry devoted to working conditions policy and to the reduction of absenteeism. This is also established in writing. The Personnel and Organization Department has drawn up a WHP policy document (i.e. an intended policy) for application throughout the ministry which has been approved by the board of governors.

### **Integration of WHP into management policy**

There is attention being devoted to WHP policy at all levels within the organization: within the Social Medical Team (SMT), at the directorate-general level, at the department level and at the division level. WHP policy is thus effectively integrated.

### **Related topics and their objectives**

The ministry is devoting much attention to RSI prevention and to stimulating exercise. Objectives have been formulated for such topics as RSI, burnout, smoking, pregnancy, the occupationally disabled, short and long-term absence, and reintegration. In cases of burnout, for example, the first step in the reintegration process often involves participating in medically supervised fitness. A proposal has also been developed especially for "extremely inactive" employees that involves easily accepted initial fitness courses, walking programmes, massage and relaxation. Also being investigated is how the theme of good nutrition can be brought to everyone's attention.

### **Establishment of co-operation and communication structures**

During the introductory morning for new employees, the working conditions service provides information about workstation organization, and each new employee is later visited at his/her workstation. Health is also discussed during the working conditions interview.

All supervisors have participated in a "supervising as a coach" training activity. This activity devotes a lot of attention to communication and spends a great deal of time discussing what happens at the emotional level. Supervisors are also important role models in this regard.

Communication about WHP activities is effectively organized. They are frequently mentioned on the intranet and in the staff magazine, "Wij van Financiën", and the operating offices are easily accessible and well informed.

### **Systematic needs analysis**

Attention is devoted to health during performance reviews, assessment interviews and career interviews. This means that work pressure can easily be discussed during progress discussions and performance reviews.

Matters such as RSI problems and being bothered by cigarette smoke that get mentioned during these personal interviews are then investigated on a larger scale. Employee satisfaction studies are conducted on a frequent basis. In addition to formal studies, signals indicating such problems as unbalances within a department are picked up on so that measures can be taken before a situation worsens.

All employees in the Ministry of Finance are offered a preventive medical examination (PMO).

### Implementing WHP

There are various training activities being offered (both within a certain division or for all employees) and people can participate not only in training activities that apply to their own professional area but also in training activities devoted to developing personal skills. The ministry offers enough possibilities for training and development that take into consideration the wishes of employees.

There are many possibilities for coordinating the time spent at work and at home: parental leave, part-time work, flexible work hours, childcare, and working from home. In addition to these official regulations, individual agreements and customized solutions are also arrived at with employees. The ministry has ongoing WHP activities related to RSI, exercise incentives, work pressure and burnout, pregnancy, the occupationally disabled, and short and long-term absence.

### Evaluation of instruments and design

The effect of the extra efforts being devoted to WHP is being assessed by monitoring RSI activities, conducting surveys among key figures, and investigations conducted during the Periodic Occupational Health Surveys (PAGO).

### Employee satisfaction

Employees are very much satisfied with the WHP policy, especially in regard to the company fitness facilities. Of the ministry's 1500 employees, about a third

make use of the company fitness facilities on the average of more than once a week.

### Has health improved?

Absenteeism percentages and the frequency of illness reports during 2001 show that the employees of the Ministry of Finance were less often ill and ill for shorter periods than in previous years (a decrease from 5.1% to 4.9%). This makes Finance one of the departments with the lowest absenteeism rates. When comparing employees in private industry with employees of the national government, Finance is the only organization that has displayed such a dramatic drop. Improvements in the communication skills of supervisors has also played a role in this.

### Looking for further improvements

Climate control within the building is a problem. The air is very dry, and smoke fumes can penetrate the ceilings. It is for these reasons that the building will soon be renovated. A project known as "Eigentijds Werken" has been launched for the purpose of making an inventory of what it is possible (and not possible) to do with this building in order to make it a workplace that meets all the requirements. Aspects relating to working conditions are playing an important role in the organization of the future workplace. In spite of the fact that a smoking policy has already been started, smoking is still being done in many workspaces. For cleaner air, one would think it necessary to get at this problem at its source, and smoking is one of the sources of air pollution in the building.

This is clearly a point requiring improvement.

There are plans for "extremely inactive" employees that involve easily accessible initial fitness courses, walking programmes, massage and relaxation. In addition to an effective smoking policy, healthy nutrition is another theme soon to be addressed.

### Drawing conclusions

There is a consistent line, continuous attention and good communication in regard to WHP as well as a good partnership with the external WHP suppliers (company fitness facility, lifestyle study, working conditions service). What is questionable, however, is whether the Ministry of Finance actually devotes more money and attention to WHP than other ministries. People directly involved would deny this, but it is clear that there is a "feel good - be fit" culture at this ministry. Devoting attention to WHP has its rewards, and there is an enthusiastic network that is willing to share a lot of information. In this regard, the price-quality ratio is very good and experts know how to tap into this. In addition, policy has not been subjected from above but has emerged much more from a grass-roots level. The Dutch Centre for WHP would be very pleased to present the Ministry of Finance as "Model of Good Practice" in the public sector within the framework of the third European Conference on Workplace Health Promotion to be held in Barcelona in June.