



*The firm employs 20 people and was set up in 1983 by a group of highly skilled and experienced computer consultants. The founder looks after the public relations, marketing and contracts side of the business and his wife, who is the vice-president, organises the internal workings of the company. She is jointly responsible for safety with a safety representative elected from staff members.*

### ***Workplace assessment of psychosocial strain***

No structured health and safety plan operated in the company, and the work that was carried out only focused on physical and ergonomic issues such as improved office lighting and more comfortable furniture.

reactions that management felt unequal to coping with.

During the interviews staff were asked if they had any suggestions for improving the situation and reducing stress – many proposals for better work organisation and communication were put forward.

### ***Making adjustments***

The most frequent problems encountered by staff included the following:

- n Failure by managers to listen to employees
- n Lack of co-operation
- n Enormous workload
- n A heavy burden of responsibility
- n Lonely working arrangements
- n Poor communication and a lack of information.

When the safety representative received the information about workplace assessment from his union, he discussed these new legislative requirements with the vice-president and they set things in motion on an ad hoc basis. Their idea was to try things out, assess the results, and adjust their plans accordingly.

A questionnaire revealed that staff were experiencing problems with the psychosocial environment at the workplace and that many of these problems were shared by all or most people. As a result, individual interviews were carried out with all staff to get a better understanding of the problems facing them. This method was chosen over an open meeting as there was a fear that an open forum would provoke angry

Some of the suggestions put forward to tackle the above problems included:

- n Regular meetings attended by everyone in the company for discussion of current and future projects
- n At least two people working on every project
- n Management interviews with each employee

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- n More social activities
- n Hiring an external consultant.

As a result of the workplace assessment employees enjoy a much better psychosocial working environment. They do not work alone as often as they did, they get help from colleagues when they need it, the flow of information has improved and problems are discussed at open meetings, employees also feel able to contact the safety representatives when they are anxious about something.

Most of the employee proposals were implemented. Over and above these suggestions, a trip to Sweden for staff and their families was organised, partly to improve social relationships and partly to develop a team spirit.

### ***A positive outcome***

Workplace assessment pushed the company into dealing with psychosocial issues. To start off with they regarded stress as a personal problem, but came to understand that poor work organisation and communication can have a profound effect on staff.

Initially the company was reluctant to throw resources at workplace assessment too, particularly as some of the staff felt uncomfortable with the project. Now it is seen as an effective tool for developing the organisation.

Interestingly, the company has adapted workplace assessment to suit itself. This is an important factor, as small companies need to have a method that works for their particular organisation.