

Integrated Workplace Assessment Denmark



This is a systematic approach to the development of preventive practices in small workplaces produced in consultation with selected experts and with the co-operation of companies in a similar line of business. Elements such as productivity, quality control, company analysis and workshops are also brought in.

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Background

Since 1994 companies in Denmark have been obliged to prepare a written workplace assessment. The law was implemented in stages, starting with companies in a variety of high risk industries and concluding with micro-enterprises (companies with 1-4 employees), who were required to carry out a workplace assessment before the end of 2000.

The workplace assessment must include the following:

- n Identification of the type and range of problems within the organisation
- n Evaluation of these problems
- n Prioritise an action plan for dealing with these issues
- n Follow-up activities.

Companies are given a broad scope to sort out their difficulties in a way that suits them.

Getting owners on board

The occupational health service in Denmark has been active in developing workplace assessment for small businesses. However, it has often been difficult to convince owners of such organisations that they can benefit from workplace assessment. Essentially they think it's a meaningless bureaucratic undertaking. Small enterprises have other priorities to contend with, formalised management systems such as ISO 14001 and EMAS, ISO 9000, which deal with the external environment and quality control, for example. Even though productivity and efficiency should also be priority issues, owners often neglect these elements, perhaps because they are lacking simple formalised systems.

In order to combine all these elements into one integrated method, the occupational health service in Sorø has worked with a private consultant to develop the 'integrated workplace assessment'. The aim is to integrate preventive working environment activities with quality control, productivity and external environment activities. The integrated workplace assessment is developed and adapted especially for small businesses, taking into account the culture within such organisations and the owners' per-



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sonal perception of the working environment.

Developing effective methods

The method links together the traditional workplace assessment with an evaluation of productivity, quality control and the external environment. The idea is to connect and explore the whole potential of the enterprise, at the same time as developing competitiveness and increasing profit. The method is made up of three elements: A "toolbox" (the integrated workplace assessment), a series of workshops involving similar small businesses and two consultants, followed by individual work carried out by the participating enterprises.

1. The "toolbox" (integrated workplace assessment) contains specially developed material (questionnaires etc.), guiding the user point by point to a number of links between working environment (health promotion), productivity, quality control and the external environment.

2. Workshops are a very effective tool. Attended by a number of small businesses, they are usually run in a series of four. Participants are introduced to specially developed material and are given the opportunity to share experiences.

3. In between workshops individual companies use the "toolbox" to deal with the problems that head their priority list. Advice from the occupational health service in Soroe and independent management consultants is provided when needed. The consultants also help by coming up with ideas for possible solutions, drawing up a timetable and an action plan.

A successful response

Pilot programmes have been carried out in four small companies (fewer than 20 employees) and in one medium-sized company. Evaluation shows that the integrated approach has worked. Participating companies feel positive towards the programme and have not found its demands excessive. Another positive outcome is that the owners of small businesses have started to show an interest in health promotion. This method brings management and employees together and improves dialogue between them. Working together they can look at work processes and production.

How to carry out an integrated workplace assessment

- n Two consultants visit the business and draw up a company profile.
- n A group of 4-5 small enterprises is set up according to profile and preferences.
- n Consultants organise a series of four workshops over a two-month period with a follow-up meeting some months later.
- n Each small business appoints a management representative and a safety representative (an employee).
- n Consultants pay follow-up visits to participating businesses in between workshops.
- n The work carried out by the companies on their own is discussed at the 2nd, 3rd and 4th meetings as well as at the follow-up meeting.
- n The workshops provide a forum for exchanging experiences, and consultants raise relevant issues for debate.
- n Throughout the process the two consultants and other specialists

are available for individual consultation at any time.

- n Once the workshops are over the company will have defined its focus areas, drawn up a plan of action and complied with the statutory requirements relating to workplace assessment and through that, health promotion.

Companies are invited to continue their activities and BST-Sorø will – if requested – provide consultancy and advice.

Case study

A small steel company completed the workplace assessment and identified heavy lifting as a major problem. Difficulties with newly recruited employees were also highlighted. The action plan included the purchase of a crane costing approximately 20,000 €. The crane solved the problem of lifting and released one worker from the workstation. Steps have also been taken to train new workers properly. The owner expects to reduce staff turnover. He estimates that training new workers will cost approximately 8,000-9,000 €, but that the cost of staff turnover is higher.

Any drawbacks?

There is a tendency for companies to revert to haphazard methods of dealing with problems. Therefore the integrated workplace assessment needs further development. There are plans to organise a new pilot programme and to develop more effective measures. There will also be greater focus on ensuring that the action plan is followed through and that improvements are sustainable.