

A comprehensive programme for the prevention of psychosocial risks in government administration

COMMENDED

Public Administration HR Office, Office of the Prime Minister, Malta

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The issue

Problems observed in a number of departments included increased sickness absence, increased staff turnover, high workload and work demands. It emerged that few risk assessments or interventions for psychosocial risks were being carried out.

Action taken

The Public Administration of Malta addressed psychosocial risks at all levels of the organisation, from management to workers.

The personnel department developed a well-structured employee support service programme with the aim of identifying psychosocial risks and developing and implementing appropriate control measures to address these risks. The programme, which uses a preventive approach to psychosocial risks, covers the provision of risk assessments, the implementation of specific control measures, training courses, seminars, information services and counselling services. It highlighted the necessity of focusing on primary levels of intervention including the introduction of policies on work-related stress, bullying and harassment, and addressed both secondary (training and awareness sessions) and tertiary levels of intervention (individual support).

First, psychosocial risk assessments were carried out across all ministries in order to collect data about psychosocial risks and their effects on employees' wellbeing. This included formal questionnaires as well as semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups.

Next, training initiatives were organised. These included an initial 32-hour training course for senior management on psychosocial risks, which was also used to present and discuss the results from the primary risk assessments. Ten general information sessions and a launch conference were organised for management to introduce the new



programme and services, followed by 33 awareness-raising sessions for middle management and over 300 sessions for employees addressing issues of work-related stress, mental health and other psychosocial risks.

Finally, a counselling service was developed for employees whose work performance was being affected by work-related and/or personal issues, including stress. Awareness sessions and a leaflet were used to promote the use of this service.



Results achieved

It is clear that there is increased awareness of psychosocial risks at work as well as of work-related stress among both employees and management. This cannot be quantified, but it can be felt through the number of requests for assistance from different departments as well as from employees in relation to psychosocial risks at work.

In an evaluation of training, the majority of participants stated that they were satisfied with the initiatives and suggested that ongoing awareness sessions should be organised. The majority of employees also stated that they were very satisfied with the counselling service and would recommend it to a colleague.

Psychosocial risk assessments were carried out across all ministries in order to collect data about general wellbeing among employees and develop preventive measures.