



Small, Healthy and Competitive

New Strategies for Improved Health in
Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Criteria and Models of good Practice

**for Workplace Health Promotion
in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)**



Preface

The European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP) is an association of state occupational health and safety institutions and public health service bodies from all Member States of the European Union and the European Economic Area. The Network is one of a number of health promotion initiatives backed by the European Commission as part of the 'Programme of Community Action on Health Promotion, Information, Education and Training' (645/96/EC).

With the passing of the 'Luxembourg Declaration on Workplace Health Promotion' at the end of 1997, the Network agreed on a common understanding of workplace health promotion (WHP). According to this Declaration, WHP is viewed as a comprehensive approach which necessitates a common strategy for all players inside and outside the enterprise.

In a two-year project carried out by the ENWHP, models of good practice in workplace health promotion in (mainly) large companies were identified and publicised on the basis of jointly developed quality criteria for WHP throughout Europe. Early in 1999 the Network's second joint initiative was launched with the participation of 21 countries. For two years this project focused on occupational health and safety and workplace health promotion in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs):

- The workplace health promotion situation in SMEs in the participating countries was identified and assessed (see brochure: "Report on the Current Status of Workplace Health Promotion in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises").
- ENWHP members jointly developed criteria for good workplace health promotion practice in SMEs. On the basis of the criteria, appropriate models of good practice were identified and documented (see brochure: "Criteria and Models of Good Practice for Workplace Health Promotion in SMEs").
- Under the umbrella of this project "Recommendations to Improve the General Conditions for Workplace Health Promotion in SMEs" were also formulated and made available to the European Commission, other European Institutions and the offices responsible at national level.

This brochure contains 48 models of good practice in workplace health promotion from a total of 16 countries as well as the "good practice criteria" on which their selection was based. At this point special thanks should be extended to all those who participated. Particular thanks should go to those responsible for the project at the enterprises themselves and at the organisations which looked after the projects, for their productive and successful co-operation.

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Dr. Gregor Breucker
National Contact Office of the ENWHP/Germany

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Background

Significance of SMEs in Europe's economy

Health and well-being at the workplace are important enablers for creating economic efficiency in businesses. Healthy working conditions can therefore have a positive impact on economic and social development in the Member States of the European Union. However, these are rarely rated as a top priority in corporate objectives where commercial criteria still predominate. This applies particularly to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and consequently affects the majority of employees in the EU.

Enterprise size category:	No. of employees:
SMEs	< 250
Medium-sized enterprises	50 - 250
Small enterprises	10 - 50
Micro-enterprises	< 10

Fig. 1: Definition of enterprise size categories according to the European Commission

So far, little attention has been paid (especially in small enterprises), to questions of safety, occupational health and workplace health promotion. This not only applies to actual practice but corresponds equally to research and development. There are plenty of indications, however, that measures relating to occupational health and safety (OHS) and workplace health promotion can lead to a lasting improvement in the efficiency and competitiveness of SMEs.

In recent years increasing attention has been paid to SMEs at Community level and within the Member States in view of their economic and social significance. SMEs play a major part in solving Europe's unemployment problem. Interest is focused particularly on innovative SMEs who owe their flexibility and adaptability to their small or medium size.

Obstacles preventing better health

The 'Council Directive of 12 June 1989 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the health and safety of employees' ('Framework Directive', 89/391/EEC) and its transposition into national law have so far met with little acceptance from SMEs. This is probably due to inadequate orientation of European legislation to business processes. SMEs have great difficulty in putting these regulations into practice. Smaller businesses are often only motivated to fulfil statutory requirements by the threat of punitive action. Therefore, the political goal behind the Framework Directive, i.e. to promote preventative action in these enterprises, has hardly been achieved at all.

For occupational health and safety and for public health policy the question is therefore raised as to how economic development in the SME sector – including the creation of jobs - can be linked to the promotion of healthy working conditions and the implementation of reasonable social and protective standards.

As SMEs differ in many respects from large enterprises, the latter's experience cannot simply be transferred to smaller enterprises. Here, specific policies and strategies must be developed. The European Network for Workplace Health Promotion has therefore concentrated on small enterprises in its second joint initiative. Here in particular there is a great need for practicable approaches to improving health and well-being at the workplace.

Development stages of the project

One of the aims of the project was to analyse and document the level of workplace health promotion in SMEs in participating countries. For this purpose guidelines were prepared prior to selected experts writing up analysis reports. Criteria were developed for the later selection and documentation of models of good practice. Experts from Austria, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland helped to produce these guidelines and criteria.

In addition to preparing these analysis reports, another major task was to find and document three models of good practice in each participating country on the basis of the criteria. The aim was to obtain presentation material showing how exemplary workplace health promotion activities can be achieved.

The country reports and models of good practice were then discussed in detail in various committees attended by a variety of experts. Two questions were of particular interest: what strategies can be utilised to improve health and well-being at the workplace in the future? What criteria characterise and clarify exemplary practice in this area?

The results of this intensive discussion process were incorporated into the "Recommendations for Improving General Conditions for Workplace Health Promotion in SMEs" drawn up by a group of experts from the Network. These results were also used to refine the "good practice criteria".

ENWHP's joint project on workplace health promotion in SMEs ended with the "ENWHP Second European Conference" in Lisbon (18-19 June 2001). Under the heading "Small, Healthy and Competitive – New Strategies for Improved Health in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises", the project and the results were presented for the first time to a broad international audience.

Criteria and models of good practice – applications and functions

The good practice criteria were developed to provide those reporting on SMEs with a uniform and consistent orientation framework. The reporters applied these criteria when selecting and documenting the models of good practice. A checklist facilitated the collation of relevant information. Different weightings were made according to levels of national development of OHS and WHP and depending on the subjective standpoint of the reporter.

This documentation does not claim to be a collection of verifiable (in the sense of measurable) models of good practice. The differences that exist between various European regions and the different levels of understanding of good practice preclude such a claim.

However, this documentation does provide valuable practical information which can encourage others to emulate the results or support improvements in activities already under way. Owing to their undoubted "feasibility" the models of good practice provide a sound argument for all those who want to advocate workplace health promotion at an enterprise or political/strategic level.

The good practice criteria reflect a discussion and development process conducted over a period of several years and are therefore to be understood as an interim result in a continuous common learning process.

Criteria of Good Practice for Workplace Health Promotion in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Characteristics of Workplace Health Promotion in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

The working and production conditions in small and micro-enterprises differ in many respects from those in larger organisations. The formal organisational structures are simpler, there is a greater level of direct communication and in many cases family-like social relationships exist between the owners and employees. Workplace health is not organised separately from work but is incorporated directly into everyday working life.

These and other differences make it necessary to develop independent good practice criteria for workplace health promotion in SMEs in addition to the "Quality Criteria for Workplace Health Promotion" already published by the ENWHP in 1999. Workplace health promotion in SMEs has been divided into three closely linked areas of action (cf. Fig. 1):

- Statutory occupational health and safety and environmental protection measures
- Measures relating to healthy work organisation and for supporting a healthy lifestyle which go beyond statutory requirements and are geared to improving working conditions and/or promoting a healthier lifestyle
- Measures relating to the social responsibility of SMEs
 - Welfare or social services for employees with special needs (e.g. programmes for single parents, severely disabled or those in debt, for example)
 - Measures to support health-related initiatives in the community or region (e.g. to integrate social fringe groups or to create additional vocational training places in SMEs).



Fig. 1: Areas of action for WHP in SMEs

Health Promotion in

Good practice demands that not only are the statutory requirements fulfilled but that measures are introduced in the other two action areas. ENWHP's 'criteria for SMEs' was developed using the following sources of information:

- a comparative evaluation of existing project reports on WHP in SMEs,
- evaluation of literature on health, ergonomics and work organisation.

In the development of the criteria and the selection and documentation of the examples, a differentiation was deliberately made between the "single-enterprise level" and the "intermediary level". Projects at the single-enterprise level are implemented either independently (by the enterprise itself) or with the help of external service-providers. Projects at intermediary level, on the other hand, are connected with the development of a time-limited or lasting infrastructure to support major SME sectors (regional or branch-oriented). The organisers of such projects are intermediary organisations which already perform other important functions for small and medium-sized enterprises, e.g. chambers of trade or commerce, guilds, accident and health insurance funds or occupational health and safety authorities.

This brochure distinguishes between three different categories of supportive structures and networks under the term "intermediary level":

- 1) time-limited projects which are conducted by one intermediary organisation for one group of SMEs,
- 2) time-limited projects which are conducted by several intermediary organisations (networks),
- 3) sustainable infrastructures which are established by intermediary organisations either independently or in co-operation with other intermediary organisations or networks.

Concrete examples are found in practice for all three categories. Particular importance is attached to the last category in terms of sustainability and the provision of effective services.



Criteria enterprise level

The criteria can be subdivided into three categories (cf. Fig. 2). Enabling factors for a health-promoting SME include the integration of health issues into daily managerial practice and business processes. Criteria were also formulated for the results obtained.

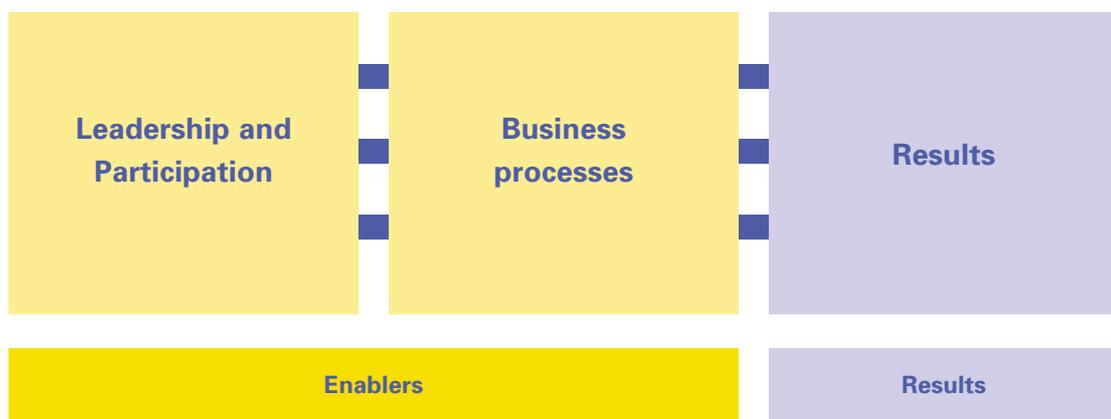


Fig. 2: Good practice criteria for WHP in SMEs

Criteria

enterprise level

1

Leadership and participation

The major enablers for the success of workplace health promotion in SMEs are the owners of the enterprise and/or the senior executive staff reporting directly to him. They must integrate workplace health issues into their daily managerial practices.

All employees are involved to the greatest possible degree in the enterprises planning and decision-making processes, especially in matters of work organisation, time schedules, working conditions and workflow.

Exemplary leadership behaviour – e.g. recognition of good performance, willingness to accept criticism from staff, appropriate behaviour in conflicts – ensures a good working atmosphere.

Where there is improvement potential – especially relating to work organisation – improvement measures are initiated and their implementation monitored.

Criteria

enterprise level

2 Business processes

The healthy organisation of business processes is based on the following three elements:

That statutory requirements relating to occupational health and safety and environmental protection are observed.

In addition to the statutory requirements, steps are taken, as and when required, to create a healthy working environment and measures introduced to support a healthier lifestyle for employees.

The enterprise acts in a socially responsible manner – both towards its own employees and towards the region in which it is located.

Criteria

enterprise level

3 Results

Management practice based on the criteria described above ensures appropriately designed business processes and contributes to the following results:



Employee satisfaction with working conditions and workflow



Increased customer satisfaction



Improvement in employee health (measured by key figures for accidents and absenteeism due to illness)



Better business results.

Criteria intermediary level

Projects at intermediary level help develop supportive structures, e.g. in the form of local or regional networks, or as co-operation projects in which SME-relevant self-administration and service organisations participate. The criteria for the intermediary level are subdivided into four categories, three of which provide the basis for a health-promoting supportive structure at intermediary level. The fourth category relates to the project results (see Fig. 3).

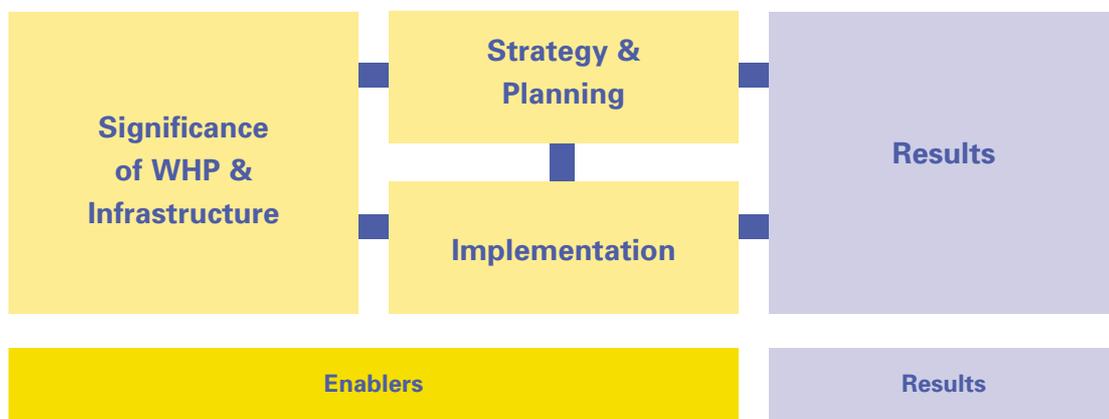


Fig. 3: Good practice criteria for the intermediary level

Criteria

intermediary level

1

Integration of WHP in the policies and actions of the intermediary organisations of supportive structures

The intermediary organisations involved support the furthering of workplace health promotion in SMEs. They are committed to a philosophy which supports WHP in such enterprises and provide support to SMEs and all local and regional self-administration and self-help organisations affected as well as occupational health and safety institutions:

- WHP is specifically outlined in the intermediary organisations' strategic documents (e.g. annual reports, presentations).
- The intermediary organisations play an active role in supporting WHP in SMEs, for example, by providing staff and/or funds, or by holding events.

The existing institutional links between SMEs and local and/or regional self-administration and self-help organisations as well as occupational health and safety institutions are taken into account:

- The institutional links are taken into account when agreements are negotiated on the sponsorship of projects.
- The institutions are involved in an advisory capacity (advisory board and similar).
- The institutions are involved in the implementation of measures.

The intermediary organisations develop a sustainable infrastructure for the appropriate provision of supportive services relating to workplace health promotion in SMEs.

Criteria

intermediary level

2 Strategy and planning

Workplace health promotion measures in SMEs are based on a careful needs assessment. This includes the following elements:

- Interests and needs of SMEs
- Interests and needs of intermediary organisations
- Health situation and job demands (objective and subjective)
- Economic situation of the enterprises.

A steering committee is established for the implementation of WHP measures. It supports the development of suitable co-operation and communication structures (committees, information, media etc.) in which all those involved participate. The definition of problems and action are agreed by consensus. Regular meetings are held so that the project steering committee, intermediary organisations and SMEs can monitor the projects.

All measures are agreed on the basis of specific objectives which can be monitored.

Criteria

intermediary level

3 Implementation

The measures support the improvement of workplace health in all three areas of action:

- the statutory requirements placed on occupational health and safety and environmental protection
- measures relating to the healthy organisation of work and lifestyle
- measures relating to social responsibility.

All measures are systematically evaluated and continuously improved.

Criteria

intermediary level

4 Results

The intermediary organisations evaluate the results positively and are encouraged by a successful outcome to support and strengthen their commitment to workplace health promotion.

The SMEs are satisfied with the results. Their willingness to invest in employee health increases. Consequently, intermediary organisations can report a considerable rise in demand for WHP services.

The results provide proof of improvements in health indicators.

The results confirm that an improvement in employee health has a positive effect on the economic situation in SMEs.

The intermediary organisations involved create sustainable structures to support SMEs and provide appropriate resources.