

MEASURES TO RETAIN EXPERIENCED WORKERS AT ISS FACILITY SERVICES – SPAIN

1. Organisations involved

- ISS Facility Services Spain

2. Description of the case

2.1. Introduction

ISS Facility Services Spain is the Spanish branch of an international company dedicated to providing facility services such as facility and property management, cleaning, security, gardening, catering and other support services. It works with diverse sectors including industry, manufacturing, retail, information technology, hospitality and healthcare. The company employs 29,835 employees, of whom 1,834 are entitled to benefits for older workers. Seventy-five per cent of these employees opt to use these benefits.

Cleaning and security services can require physically and mentally demanding work from the employees. Health surveillance therefore forms a central part of the company's occupational safety and health (OSH) policy, aiming to prevent occupational injuries and diseases, such as musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and mental health problems.

In 2009 a collective agreement was negotiated with the trade unions to promote workplace health, and prevent MSDs, work-related stress and work accidents among older workers. Changes were made in the areas of work schedules, working hours, work-life balance and financial benefits for temporary disability. These measures are integrated in the general OSH policy of the company and were renegotiated in 2013.

2.2. Aims

The company aimed to retain experienced workers with long service, improve the working environment and reduce the costs associated with ill-health. The measures were mainly focused on administration and building-maintenance staff.

2.3. What was done, and how?

An initial age structure analysis was undertaken by the company management to determine the number of older workers, the positions they occupy and the tasks they are most likely to perform. The results of this analysis were used to establish the possible health needs for this group.

Following the age-structure analysis, the management, the human resources department, health and safety representatives and employees' representatives together designed a series of measures to address workers' health needs. These initiatives were funded by the company and implemented by the management.

The measures implemented include:

- *High-quality voluntary medical tests:* Workers over 55 years old are entitled to certain medical tests, such as tests related to musculoskeletal conditions, vision fatigue, lung and heart conditions and psychosocial and environmental risks.

- *Workplace adaptations:* If the medical examination finds a worker unsuitable for his/her position, efforts are made to adapt working conditions and tasks, or to transfer the worker to a different position which does not pose a health risk to him/her. For example, if a cleaning or gardening worker who performs a task with a lot of awkward postures is found to be developing an MSD, the company may move him/her to a less physically demanding position, such as office work.
- *Preferential rights of older workers:* Older workers are given priority for flexible work arrangements, such as flexible working time. They are also given preference during periods of redundancy or relocation.
- *Promotions according to experience:* Older workers with more experience may gain positions with more responsibility in the company. These bring greater status and higher financial benefits.

A number of tools were used to implement the measures, including the following:

- Compulsory training in occupational health was provided for all workers and managers, with a specific training session called 'Ageing and Work' for workers over 55 and their managers. The training session covers stress management, ergonomics, physical activity according to age, diet and nutritional education, prevention of occupational risks, adjustment of working positions for workers over 55 years old, etc.
- Workers' needs are identified and addressed.
- Introduction of leadership coaching is planned for the near future.
- Wider communication about the programme is also planned to take place.

2.4. What was achieved?

External service providers (including psychologists and management consultants) assisted with the development and analysis of a work environment survey. This survey was designed to evaluate the occupational health activities and tools and to establish if they had achieved the intended results with regard to the work environment and employee satisfaction.

The evaluation survey showed an improvement in staff performance. It also highlighted higher staff loyalty and a reduction in sick leave.

Challenges were experienced in implementing the measures described. The main barrier was resistance to change from workers and managers. In addition, as most ISS employees work externally, in the facilities of ISS's client companies, it was difficult to ensure the implementation of the new measures for such ISS employees. For instance, recommendations that an older employee working in awkward postures take more frequent breaks to prevent MSDs were not necessarily taken into account by the external client manager.

A final challenge was the limited consultation and involvement of the workers in the design and implementation of the activities.

2.5. Success factors

A number of success factors contributed to the success of the measures implemented at ISS Facility Services Spain, including:

- *Involvement of top management:* Design and implementation of the programme was driven by the top management of the company, including the executive president, ensuring it was given the necessary resources and visibility.
- *Coordination of stakeholders:* The collective agreement ensured the involvement of all key actors including management, the human resources department, health and safety representatives and employees' representatives.
- *Focus on behaviour change combined with workplace adaptations:* Compulsory training for all employees, coupled with workplace adaptations and subsequent supervision, ensured that practical recommendations could be implemented.

- *Diversity of measures:* The systematic approach involved measures to change individual working environments as well as company culture through the prioritising of older workers' rights.
- *External support:* External help was used to design and evaluate the activity.

2.6. Transferability

Companies characterised by physically demanding work could find many elements of this programme suitable for transfer. The health surveillance approach is straightforward and systematic and would be applicable to companies of all sizes. Companies in which there are substantial numbers of older workers could adopt the measure described here to prioritise older workers with respect to promotions, flexible working and redundancy.

2.7. Further information

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3. References and resources

- Interview with Ricardo Villasante, HR Director
- Internal documents from human resources department
- Villasante, R. (2012), El envejecimiento de la plantilla, empleabilidad, movilidad y gestión. Retrieved 07/11/2015, from: <http://www.edad-vida.org/fitxers/jornades/932ISS.pdf>