

Sweden

The Ministry of Finance – Workplace Health Promotion is an Important Part of Occupational Safety and Health Work

The Government Offices (G.O.'s) are a central government authority that works for the Swedish government. The Ministry of Finance is one of ten departments.

The mandate of the Ministry of Finance is to strive for the fulfilment of the economic policy objectives established by the government and the Swedish Parliament. In working to improve the ministry as a workplace, the focus is on internal policy issues.

The Ministry of Finance as a workplace

Some 400 people work at the Ministry of Finance, of which only 3 are employed part-time. 55% of the employees are women. The average age is about 40.

Work at the Ministry of Finance is characterised by short-termism and often handled in an ad hoc manner with narrow time margins. The demands for flexibility are great, the take-out of work hours is high in certain units and stress is commonplace.

A change programme has been initiated at the Ministry of Finance to improve the ministry as a workplace.

The four goals for the ministry as a workplace are:

- A common culture – a common value system
- A suited-to-purpose organisation and effective work forms
- Well functioning communication
- Plan for promoting competence

Developing the Ministry of Finance as a health-promoting workplace

In developing the Ministry of Finance as a health-promoting workplace, work with the work environment (occupational safety and health, OSH) and work with workplace health promotion (WHP) are integrated.

The goal of occupational safety and health (OSH) work is for the Ministry of Finance to be an attractive workplace where great importance is attached to the health and well-being of staff members. To this end, the ministry should work on a long-term basis to create a work environment where the main focus is on co-workers.

There are several documents and tools in the OSH work such as, the work environment policy, guidelines and action programme for OSH, a plan for promoting competence, the attitude survey and personal development discussions.

The organisation of and key persons in the OSH work includes the work environment committee, the administrative directors, the personnel unit, an external occupational health service, and an active sport association (RIF).

The Ministry of Finance chose, as the first ministry at the G.O.'s, to employ a WHP consultant in 1999. The WHP consultant comes under the supervision of the personnel unit.

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WHP at the Ministry of Finance

WHP at the Ministry of Finance began in 1998 in the form of a WHP project. The WHP consultant was, at that time, employed in the budget unit and worked with WHP as 30% of her ordinary assistant position. The choice of WHP activities was based on a questionnaire that all co-workers were asked to respond to. The findings of the evaluation formed the basis for establishing a position for a WHP consultant on a full-time basis for the entire ministry in April 1999.

The goal of the WHP work

The goal of the WHP work is 'the desire of the employer to inspire co-workers to learn good health habits and increased health awareness by offering WHP. This ambition is to be encouraged by administrative directors and involve other co-workers as well.'

Guidelines and action programme for WHP

The G.O.'s working environment policy stipulates, among other things, that WHP is to be regarded as an important part of the work environment of the G.O.'s.

The 'Guidelines for WHP at the G.O.'s' are complementary to the working environment policy. The WHP work at the Ministry of Finance is based on the G.O.'s common guidelines for WHP. Furthermore, each ministry is responsible for discussing and calling attention

to health issues within its organisation. WHP should also be included in the action programmes of work environment issues.

In the action plan for 2001 and 2002, the aims are for the WHP programme to continue to work towards counteracting the effects of harmful stress and the ergonomic design of the workplace.

The job of the WHP consultant

The job of the health promotion consultant is to spur co-workers to take active responsibility in maintaining their health and to ensure that health issues permeate the work of the ministry. It is important to point out the individual responsibility and the important role of each co-worker in creating a health-promoting work environment.

WHP assumes that it is when co-workers get along well and enjoy their work that there are profits to be made for the ministry on both financial and human levels. The WHP consultant works on organisational, group and individual level.

Prerequisites for WHP

- A well trained WHP consultant
- Facilities: There are joint exercise facilities available to all at the G.O.'s, with a wide choice of activities. The WHP consultant has a separate room at the personnel unit for certain kinds of care, like massage and individual relaxation.
- Budget: The budget allowance for WHP for the year 2002 is 15,000 EURO.
- Information: An important task of the administrative directors is to distribute information to employees. Information

to newly recruited personnel is made available continuously. WHP has its own page on Intranet, where the latest information on the choice of activities, etc is available.

The WHP programme

The WHP programme at the Ministry of Finance is primarily aimed at counteracting the effects of harmful stress, which is done through activities like courses in stress management and relaxation/mental training but also through an intensified ergonomics plan.

Furthermore employees are offered the opportunity to get a health profile or fitness test and follow-up, instructions in weight training, join a weight watchers group or take organised walks, have massage, join a quit-smoking support group, work to strengthen their backs or take exercise breaks.

There is also a selection of joint WHP activities for the G.O.'s, including exercise classes (14 sessions/week), weight training, squash, floorball, basketball, volleyball, meditation, running, jazz dance and salsa, yoga, qigong, water exercising, a dance section and 'boxercising.'

A workplace health promotion week is arranged every year by the joint G.O.'s WHP- consultants and other parties who work with WHP at the ministries.

Number of participants

In 2001 RIF had a total of 1,300 members. At the Ministry of Finance 195 of the co-workers are members and the number of members is increasing steadily.

Fees for activities

An annual membership fee of 7 euros must be paid to use the facilities and to take part in the activities offered by RIF. The fee includes free access to squash, weight training, floorball, volleyball and basketball. For an additional 15 euros/term exercise classes are included and for 35 euros/term all other activities are included.

A small fee has recently been charged for the course in relaxation and mental training at the Ministry of Finance.

Development of the WHP programme

Unit meetings on stress management:
The WHP consultant has introduced a new work method for dealing with stress at the ministry. The subject of stress is discussed at the meetings with the unit, attended by the administrative director and including a discussion of the conditions that lead to well-being among co-workers and how to keep healthy. This work will be expanded in 2002.

Ergonomic exercise break programme:
An interactive computer programme for ergonomic work breaks will be available for everyone at the ministry. The implementation is planned for the spring of 2002.

Documentation and evaluation: All work on WHP has been documented and is evaluated continuously so as to improve and revise the courses. These evaluations will form the basis of future work.

Results and conclusions

The goal for the year 2000 was to reach 40% of the employees with various WHP activities, which was achieved by a good margin.

The latest study, made in November 2001, showed that there is less stress at the Ministry of Finance. It cannot be conclusively proven, however, that it was the courses in stress, relaxation or mental training that were the direct reason behind the decrease.

Learning lessons for the future

Commitment, leadership and organisational culture: Success of the WHP programmes and how prominent a role it has depends to a great extent on the commitment of the administrative directors and their co-workers. It is a question of leadership, both in terms of needing a committed leader to succeed in WHP, to lead the way and in needing a group of staff members that works well together. In planning and implementing WHP activities, it is therefore important to take organisational culture into consideration.

Goal-consciousness, systematics and long-term planning: To carry out successful WHP, one needs to work in a goal-conscious and systematic manner. Long-term planning is also required, since change processes take time.

Charge a fee: Participation in the WHP activities increased when a symbolic sum was imposed on the activities.