

“BATTLE AGAINST ALCOHOL ABUSE & TOBACCO SMOKING” CAMPAIGN

INCDPM - Romania

1. Case metadata

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Psychosocial work environment (02001C);

Psychological and organisational hazards (45361B);

Questionnaires (25721C);

Social support (02161D);

Stress (51961D);

Tobacco smoking (23281E);



Workplace assessment (28161F).

2. Organizations involved

S.C. HIDROELECTRICA S.A. (Bucharest, Romania)

Local authorities (e.g. local administration, environmental bodies)

NGOs from the environmental area

Schools

National public & private sports authorities and associations

3. Abstract

The issue

Since 2008, S.C. Hidroelectrica S.A. has run the “Sports & nature against alcohol abuse & tobacco smoking” ongoing campaign to enhance workplace health promotion for young workers representing about 30% of the company’s personnel. The campaign received the appropriate human resources, funds and partnerships.

The campaign addressed young workers facing isolated work related risks, high workload and work-related stress. Due to these work conditions, the workers were more likely to consume higher amounts of alcohol and smoke to a greater extent. As such, the campaign aims at providing healthy alternatives for these young workers (healthier lifestyle and improved social behavior) as opposed to alcohol consumption and tobacco smoking.

Actions taken

The campaign involved a three-step approach:

- 1) isolated workplace risk assessment;
- 2) targeted surveys run by occupational health physicians and psychologists; as well as using tests, questionnaires and discussions to assess the young workers’ health condition and psychological profiles. These investigations highlighted reduced physical resistance, decreased concentration capacity, behavioral changes;
- 3) sports activities (swimming, sportive fishing, bridge contests), and environmental protection actions for those workers with less physical aptitudes.

Two major actions were also carried out:

- 1) supporting groups allowing the young workers to share experience on fighting against alcohol abuse and tobacco smoking, success/barriers faced, the changes noticed in their physical condition and psychosocial profile;
- 2) training sessions on workplace health promotion (WHP) held by qualified professionals in the area, including successful cases examples, weak and strong points, with the young workers’ interactive participation and the company’s representatives.

Ongoing and post-campaign detailed evaluations have been carried out.

Results achieved

Alcohol consumption and tobacco smoking were reduced by about 20%.

This campaign’s success mainly resides in the positive changes observed in the young workers e.g. improved medical parameters of their physical and mental condition, increased self-esteem and self-

confidence, openness towards adopting a healthier lifestyle, less work load perception, competitive approach in their professional and private life, increased communication and teamwork capabilities.

4. Description of the case

3.1. Introduction

This case study on health promotion for young workers is related to one of the biggest electric power producers of Romania, S.C. HIDROELECTRICA S.A. with over 5,000 employees.

- The organization's specialized structures e.g. the "Prevention and Protection" department, "Environmental Protection" department, "Quality Management" department, together with adequate funding support the company's commitment and policy on quality, occupational health and safety, and environmental protection. These facilitated a workplace assessment that identified isolated work-related risks at a significant number of hydropower stations located in isolated areas e.g. in the mountains.
- Workplace health promotion (WHP) also constitutes a significant company concern as a step ahead in the company development, beyond meeting OSH (occupational safety and health) requirements.

This is reflected in the organizational structure of the company through distinct departments on WHP such as the "Psychology Structure" and the "Councilors" department. They comprise highly qualified psychologists, industrial psychologists included, and other specialists whose activity is meant to carry out WHP for the workers, to improve the psychosocial work environment and to find adequate solutions for the psychological and organizational hazards. The councilors e.g. sociologists, jurists, etc., ensure supporting actions for all the categories of workers being highly involved in the health promotion campaigns.

- In essence, the WHP for the young workers is mainly the result of a joint approach of the occupational hygienists and health physicians from the "Prevention and Protection" department, and the psychologists and councilors of the WHP related departments mentioned above.

The young workers' needs, in terms of a healthier lifestyle, have been also considered in association with the need to improve prevention of the alcohol and tobacco abuse within several campaigns that have been run since 2007.

This case study focuses on the 2009 campaign, "Sports & Nature Against Alcohol Abuse & Tobacco Smoking". It concentrates on the young workers of the company who work in isolated working points and face isolated work risks, high work load and thus experience work-related stress. High alcohol consumption and tobacco smoking have been reported in this category of workers due to the high levels of stress induced by working in isolation.

3.2. Aims

The 2009 campaign is meant to provide healthy alternatives for young workers in terms of lifestyle and social behavior, as an alternative to alcohol abuse and tobacco smoking. It aims at increasing their self-confidence and self-esteem both within the work environment e.g. hierarchical staff, colleagues and in relation with their families and friends.

3.3. What was done, and how?

The campaign implies a three-step approach i.e.:

- Workplace assessment and identification of the isolated work related risks at several locations of hydropower stations in the mountains e.g. Mariselu dam in Belis.

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- Targeted surveys run by a team conducted by the occupational health physicians of the company in close collaboration with e.g. occupational hygienists and psychologists, sociologists, thereby covering aspects of psychosocial factors at the workplace and home life.
- Actions carried out:
 - Running of general sports & environmental protection activities at the company level for all the categories of workers;
 - Setting up support groups of discussions for the young workers investigated;
 - Training sessions on WHP with the interactive participation of the young workers identified in the above mentioned targeted surveys.

Psychosocial evaluations have been further conducted to determine the evolution in terms of alcohol abuse and tobacco smoking incidences, the positive changes as regards the working and social behavior for the category of young workers considered.

Workplace related risk assessment

- Concomitantly, the workplace assessments carried out by the OSH team of the company under the coordination of the OSH responsible identified the work-related risks at these power stations located in isolated areas. Isolated work, high risk equipment and work situations, the need of a quick decision making process in dangerous working situations contributed to a higher workload, especially for young workers doing these jobs.
- Less experienced, unfamiliar with the job task they have to fulfill, physical and mental immaturity made the young workers resent the high burden related to their work, especially when they work in isolation. The burden of making wrong decisions at high-risk installations without the possibility of consulting more experienced personnel in emergency situations was also reported.
- Alcohol abuse and tobacco smoking were identified as responses to work-related stress.
- Finally, the young workers resented the isolation, and this was further aggravated by the lack of family support, due to them working at a distance from their homes. .

Targeted psychosocial surveys

- Targeted surveys were carried out to establish the connection between the high alcohol consumption and incidence of tobacco smoking, and the isolated work related stress. Initially, they were run for all categories of workers, irrespective of their age while later, during 2007, 2008 and 2009, they focused on young workers representing about 30% of the total number of the company's employees.
- The occupational physicians and occupational psychologists of the company checked the health condition and the psychological profile of these workers through periodical medical and psychological tests. They highlighted decreased attention and concentration capacity, reduced physical resistance to efforts, behavioral changes in the social relationships and communication capability for an increased number of young workers, especially the young workers from isolated work stations.
- The psychological examination is carried out yearly but, for certain categories of employees, it is more frequently performed e.g. every six months, depending on the workplace related risks. A battery of psychological tests, questionnaires and discussions. is commonly used for this purpose.
- The above surveys also included anonymous questionnaires on alcohol and tobacco consumption, social relationships and communication capability, work load.

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- Job-related expectancies and current versus past (i.e. start of employment) satisfaction levels have been also investigated by anonymous questionnaires and through open discussions with the company's occupational psychologists.
- The young workers initial expectations when first employed were compared against their present professional, social and financial status. Families' and friends' reports on these issues were also considered to get more detailed information.

Campaign related sports & environmental protection actions

Sports events

- During the campaign, sports activities and contests have been developed within the company's sports associations e.g. "PROMETEU" Federation of Sports Associations of Hidroelectrica including 15 sports associations e.g. "Aqua Forte" Bucharest Association, "Energetica" Portile de Fier Association, a.s.o. The company has also made investments in the building and arrangement of several leisure and sports bases since 2002-2003.
- The campaign took advantage of these pre-existent facilities and the qualified personnel in charge with the sports activities.
- It also provides transportation to the facilities that host various sports events and ensures the necessary equipment to the participants to avoid any financial constraints the young workers may face in purchasing expensive sports outfits.
- The winning teams or individuals were awarded trophies with the financial support of the company, but also through the participation of local authorities and/or private associations e.g. County Local Councils, the Ministry of Education, the Territorial Labour Inspectorates.
- In 2008-2009, the activities for the young workers (between 18 to 35 years old) but also for personnel up to 67 years old, include: swimming contests, sportive fishing contests, rowing, chess, bridge contests.

Environmental protection actions

- Environmental protection actions have been provided within this campaign as an alternative to outdoor activities for those workers less endowed with physical aptitudes towards practicing sports and/or that prefer environmental actions rather than sports contests. These actions also increased their knowledge and concerns on environmental protection values and principles and on the significance of their work within a "green power" generating system.
- These environmental approaches held in nature found their place within this campaign on WHP for young workers as a support for improving both their physical and mental condition and providing healthier alternatives for their spare time.
- The support of both public and private partnership in ensuring healthier working conditions and promoting environmental protection through the young generation should be mentioned..

Ongoing and post-campaign evaluations

- Targeted surveys have been constantly carried out to investigate if positive changes have occurred in terms of alcohol consumption and tobacco smoking, and also, related to the general psychosocial behavioral habits investigated at the start of these campaigns.
- Those targeted consisted of the previously evaluated young workers even if the campaign actions involved almost all categories of the company personnel. Detailed records were kept of these periodical evaluations.

Setting up of supporting groups

- These support groups consisted of young workers only, to allow them to share experiences, examine the causes of alcohol abuse and tobacco smoking, the danger these represent for

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their physical and mental health, the barriers they induce in their professional and social further development and the obstacles they create within their own families and social relationships.

- Within these support groups, the young workers from the campaign have learned to express freely and openly their concerns related to alcohol consumptions and tobacco smoking, to assume the lack of self-confidence in overcoming these aspects of their behavior, to improve the communication capacity within the work environment and their families as well.

Training sessions on WHP

- Concomitantly, regular i.e. monthly training sessions have been also held on the Workplace Health Promotion concept. The training has been conducted by the specialists from the company with the participation of various external specialists of different areas such as physicians of the public and private health system; psychologists specialized in fighting alcohol addiction, sociologists and jurists. Particular situations from outside the company have been investigated as examples of successful methods to be used.
- Company management representatives have been also invited to assume these aspects as a challenge to be faced and to reinforce the company's commitment in promoting a constant WHP policy for the young workers, and to provide adequate measures and funding.
- The young workers have an interactive participation in these training sessions as they are encouraged to present their own evaluations on the work environment's strong and weak points, to highlight the problems faced including the communication with the hierarchical staff, to propose solutions.
- These training sessions contributed to raising young workers' awareness of a healthier lifestyle to be considered in day-to-day life, both at the workplace and outside the work environment. This enabled the consolidation of the positive results obtained in fighting alcohol consumption and tobacco smoking and the increase in their self-confidence to control their lives even when they work in isolation without the support of a team and family.

Future developments

- Follow-up of the campaigns ran during 2007-2008, and a 2009 campaign mainly on WHP for the young workers facing isolated work stress was envisaged. So, health screening will be periodically performed, and alcohol consumption and tobacco smoking inquiries will be made to see if the positive behavioral changes reached can be maintained when considering the same workplace related risks.
- Secondly, the surveys shall be extended as regards other particular behavioral aspects influencing a healthy lifestyle of the young workers e.g.:
 - a healthy diet adapted to their physical and mental needs;
 - sexual life;
 - family planning;
 - psychosocial relationships;
 - professional and lifestyle improvement;
 - a conscious attitude towards sports & environmental activities as a long lasting support of their physical and mental health.

3.4. What was achieved?

- A reduced incidence of alcohol consumption and tobacco smoking of approximately 20 %. Despite a relatively small outcome in terms of statistics, more significant changes have been reported as regards an increased interest in outdoor sports at the young workers investigated, a visible competitive attitude instead of the passivity and lack of interest previously reported.

- Increased self-confidence and self-esteem expressed through a greater interest in attending various training courses for their professional progress as compared to the lack of trust in their own capabilities of professional and social perspectives.
- Increased communication and teamwork capabilities at the workplace both with the hierarchical authorities and their work mates. Families also reported improved communication and less alcohol consumption and tobacco smoking during the young workers' spare time.
- Less work load perception and increased confidence as regards the solving of various work situations based on their own professional knowledge and expertise.
- Improved medical parameters related to the physical and mental condition of the young workers investigated e.g. better attention and concentration capacity, improved resistance at physical efforts, less reluctance in adopting practical solutions to improve their lifestyle as regards adequate diet, practicing physical activities, and competitive approach in the professional and private life.
- Finally, a progress was obviously noticed in terms of young workers' awareness regarding the perception on the quality of their lives e.g. healthy physical and mental condition, higher working environment requirements, increased openness to discuss freely with their colleagues and with the company's specialists, too, on the problems they are facing. Alcohol consumption and tobacco smoking are thus perceived as a serious threat for their life and a consistent barrier for socio-professional progress.
- Self-confidence in terms of their capability to bring in positive changes both at the workplace level and in their private life was also reported as compared to a mostly defensive approach that was previously noticed.

3.5. Success factors

- The company's commitment in adopting and implementing WHP related approaches for young workers e.g. through running campaigns and ensuring the availability of organizational and financial support as part of its constant development strategy.
- The qualification of the specialists involved at all the levels of these campaigns e.g. occupational physicians and psychologists from inside the company who were familiar with the workplaces related hazards, the various categories of workers and the problems they are facing at work and in their social environment. As they are the company's employees, they could better survey workers' physical and mental health evolution continuously and since the state of their employment.
- The interactive participation of the young workers especially within the support groups through free and open discussions.
- Local authorities support in various sports and environmental actions.
- The public-private partnership in ensuring campaigns' success in terms of organizational and financial capacity.

3.6. Further information

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3.7. Transferability

- Given the general nature of these campaigns consisting of practicing common sports and environmental actions, the fact that, at present, most of the Romanian companies have implemented the integrated management system and CSR (corporate social responsibility) policy. there should not be major obstacles in transferring this type of WHP approach to many other undertakings in similar areas or others sectors of activity.

The barriers would consist of the following:

- For some of the undertakings, these goals are rather declarative and formal than genuine development directions:
- The lack of funds may be a potential cause discouraging the employers to develop such campaigns while focusing to ensure wages, employment opportunities, further investments;
- Not all the companies consist of adequate organizational structures such as a department of occupational physicians, industrial psychologists, occupational hygienists, sociologists, integrated within the company's structure. In many situations, the companies have contractual agreements with occupational health medical services performing periodical medical checking as required by the law and other medical services as stipulated in the contracts of services. This implies a lower capacity of surveying more detailed behavioral profiles of the employees;
- The lack of enough information on WHP which is often assimilated in terms of OSH requirements even if the companies have the necessary funds and appropriately qualified personnel;
- Actions focused on young workers' health and lifestyles are often neglected, while more concerns are manifested for the ageing population that face significant health problems. The consequences of a negative lifestyle upon the young workers' physical and mental health on long term, and its consequences upon the quality of their work and social prestige on short and medium term should be considered within companies' policies and cost-benefit analysis.

4. References, resources:

- http://www.hidroelectrica.ro/index_en.html
- Interviews with Mr. Florin TRIPOVICI, OSH responsible at S.C. HIDROELECTRICA S.A. and campaign co-ordinator, during August & September 2009,
- Interview by phone with Mr. Juliuss NEMTEANU. He was also once consulted by phone in August 2009 regarding the role he and other sportsmen played in the campaign.