



EUROPEAN PANEL CONCLUSIONS FROM THE RESEARCH STAGE



Lifelong Learning Programme



INDEX

1. THE FIT-MANAGERS EUROPEAN PANEL.....	3
1.1. Description and Role.....	3
1.2. Methodology.....	3
2. IDENTIFICATION OF WORK-RELATED STRESS.....	3
2.1. Definition by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work	3
2.2. European legal framework	4
3. ASSESSMENT OF THE FIT-MANAGERS RESEARCH.....	5
3.1. Scope of the project.....	5
3.2. Coaching or training methodology.....	6
Recommended literature.....	7



1. THE FIT-MANAGERS EUROPEAN PANEL

1.1. Description and Role

In the course of the development of the FIT-MANAGERS project, the project partners have thought to ask external experts to review and evaluate their progress. This is the task of the European Panel, which is coordinated by the CEC European Managers.

The European Panel has thus been composed of representatives from the organisations of managers, either associations of trade unions, which are member of the CEC European Managers. The representatives informed about the Research Stage Report cover 6 additional countries: Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Norway and Sweden. Through the dissemination to their affiliates, about 489 000 managers were reached overall.

1.2. Methodology

Presentations on the development of the FIT-MANAGERS project were made to the European Panel during seminars organized by the CEC European Managers. This was an opportunity to exchange on the results of the project. The representatives (12 people) were further handed a questionnaire to assess and comment the contents of the report published by the FIT-MANAGERS project partners on the Research Stage.

In parallel, the CEC European Managers team analyzed the report on the Research Stage in comparison with publications and findings from research on Health and Safety conducted at European level.

This document presents a review based on both sources of information.

2. IDENTIFICATION OF WORK-RELATED STRESS Definition by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

Work-related stress is one of the biggest health and safety challenges that we face in Europe. Nearly one in four workers is affected by it, and studies suggest that between 50% and 60% of all lost working days are related to it.



People experience stress when they perceive that there is an imbalance between the demands made of them and the resources they have available to cope with those demands. Although the experience of stress is psychological, stress also affects people's physical health.

Stress is caused by a poor match between us and our work, poor relationships and presence of psychological or physical violence at a workplace, and by conflicts between our roles at work and outside it.

Reactions to the same circumstances vary between individuals. Some people can cope better with high demands, than others. It is the individual's subjective evaluation of their situation that is important. It is not possible to determine from the situation alone the amount of stress it may cause.

2.2. European legal framework

After the publication in 1999 of "Spice of life or kiss of death", a reference document on work-related stress, the European Commission began consulting the European social partners in 2002. In October 2004, the European social partners signed a Framework agreement on work-related stress as an autonomous agreement. The objective of the agreement was to provide employers and workers with a framework to identify and prevent or manage problems of work-related stress. In 2007, a further Framework agreement on harassment and violence at work was signed.

Social partners recognize that a prolonged exposure to work-related stress may cause ill health, as well as that stress can affect any workplace, and any worker, irrespective of the size of the company, field of activity or form of employment contract or relationship.

Employers have an obligation to manage work-related stress, through the Framework Directive 89/391/EEC, which deals with health and safety in the EU. In 2012, this was further underlined within the European Parliament, through the adoption of the draft report by Spanish MEP Alejandro Cercas, stating that: "Companies shall monitor, on a permanent basis, in co-operation with external bodies and authorities, the psycho-social health of employees affected by restructuring processes, both redundant employees and those staying in the company".



3. ASSESSMENT OF THE FIT-MANAGERS RESEARCH Scope of the project

The assumption of the FIT-MANAGERS project is that work-related stress can be addressed by focusing on the individual. This is a common trend in the field of stress management. However two arguments have been voiced among the European Panel and European literature on stress at work, to consider that this approach was insufficient to address work-related stress:

- 1) By focusing on the individual, one looks at the consequences of stress and tries to soften the effects it has on a single person and possible in specific situations. In this process the causes of stress are generally left aside. Although the individual may have been offered solutions to avoid the problem or reduce its harm, the stress factors will remain and keep affecting him/her on the long-run.
- 2) Recent research also points at the need to preventing the consequences of work-related stress rather than reacting to them once they have occurred. This however, does not lie in the power of the individual, but with the organization and the management of work.

Causes of work stress have been linked to the work itself, e.g. increasing demands, less freedom to control one's work, and also to the person, e.g. insufficient capacity to cope with time pressures, etc. Effective measures in preventing work-related stress include:

- allowing enough time for workers to perform their tasks;
- providing clear job descriptions;
- rewarding workers for good performance;
- enabling workers to make complaints and have them taken seriously;
- giving workers control over their work;
- minimising physical risks;
- allowing workers to take part in decisions that affect them;
- match workloads to the capabilities and resources of each worker;
- designing tasks to be stimulating;
- defining work roles and responsibilities clearly;
- providing opportunities for social interaction, and
- avoiding ambiguity in matters of job security and career development.



3.2. Coaching or training methodology

The European Panel agrees that the FIT-MANAGERS training programme could well be offered to both middle managers and executives.

Regarding the trainer/coacher, the European Panel points out that the selected professional should have experience with managerial life. This is essential in order to be able to provide trainees solutions best adapted to their needs. If possible, they also recommend that a variety of specialists be contacted to support the programme. A trainer/coach may not be able to cover all the aspects of work-related stress, therefore he/she should be assisted for specific matters by physicians, psychologists, sports therapist, sociologists or lawyers for instance.

Regarding eLearning, opinions are divided. An online training would work especially well if the objective is to provide tips and tools. It may offer more flexibility, which managers generally appreciate (a mobile app could even be envisaged). In this perspective, a suggestion was made to use interactive material to present success stories or to illustrate findings, with videos for instance. However, face-to-face sessions, both individually or even in groups, generally provide more results in terms of exchange and learning process.



Recommended literature

"Guidance on work-related stress - Spice of life or kiss of death?", European Communities, 2000 - ISBN92-828-9806-7

This Guidance provides general information on the causes, manifestations and consequences of work-related stress, both for workers and work organisations.

Framework agreement on work-related stress, European social partners, 2004

"Work-related stress", European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007

Study on presenting information from the national monitoring systems about developments in work-related stress evidence on the causes of work-related stress, and examining the effectiveness of stress prevention at work.

The Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ), 2004-2005

<http://www.arbejdsmiljoforskning.dk/en/publikationer/spoergeskemaer/psykisk-arbejdsmiljoe>

This tool was developed in Denmark with the aim of assessing and improving the psychosocial work environment.

Baromètre stress, conditions de travail et « qualité de vie au travail », CFE-CGC, 2012

[http://www.opinion-way.com/pdf/bj8747 - presentation - cfe-cgc - barometre stress conditions de travail et qualite de vie au travail.pdf](http://www.opinion-way.com/pdf/bj8747_-_presentation_-_cfe-cgc_-_barometre_stress_conditions_de_travail_et_qualite_de_vie_au_travail.pdf)

In French only, the results of the last study by the French union of managers measuring stress levels among its affiliates.

