

The suitability of HSE's risk assessment process and management standards for use in SMEs

Prepared by **Vectra Group Ltd**
for the Health and Safety Executive 2007

The suitability of HSE's risk assessment process and management standards for use in SMEs

Liz Gaskell, Ned Hickling & Paul Stephens
Vectra Group Ltd
Europa House
310 Europa Boulevard
Westbrook
Warrington WA5 7YQ

HSE developed Management Standards, a 5-Step Risk Assessment Process and supporting information for tackling high levels of work-related stress in large organisations. This report details the measured acceptability of a trial-specific adaptation of this guidance for Small or Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Distinct elements in HSE guidance were identified and then considered using specific criteria for SME suitability for inclusion into one of three printed volumes: 1) justification and process description, 2) analysis & recording tools, 3) supporting information.

Ten SMEs applied the guidance in a longitudinal study over at least seven months. This used interview administered questionnaires with one respondent from each SME. These measured initial buy-in, then acceptability midway and at the end for each element. Initial ratings of usefulness and acceptability for elements were favourable. These rose further still with familiarity and practical application.

Redundant information reduction and more emphasis on business benefits is recommended to enhance the initial buy-in. Structure and content amendments, the inclusion of personal self-assessment tools and case studies relevant to SMEs, are also recommended. It is concluded that SMEs can successfully apply the materials unaided to conduct a structured risk assessment process and identify improvements that reduce stress and benefit their business.

This report and the work it describes were funded by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Its contents, including any opinions and/or conclusions expressed, are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect HSE policy.

© Crown copyright 2007

First published 2007

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Applications for reproduction should be made in writing to:
Licensing Division, Her Majesty's Stationery Office,
St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ
or by e-mail to hmsolicensing@cabinct-office.x.gsi.gov.uk

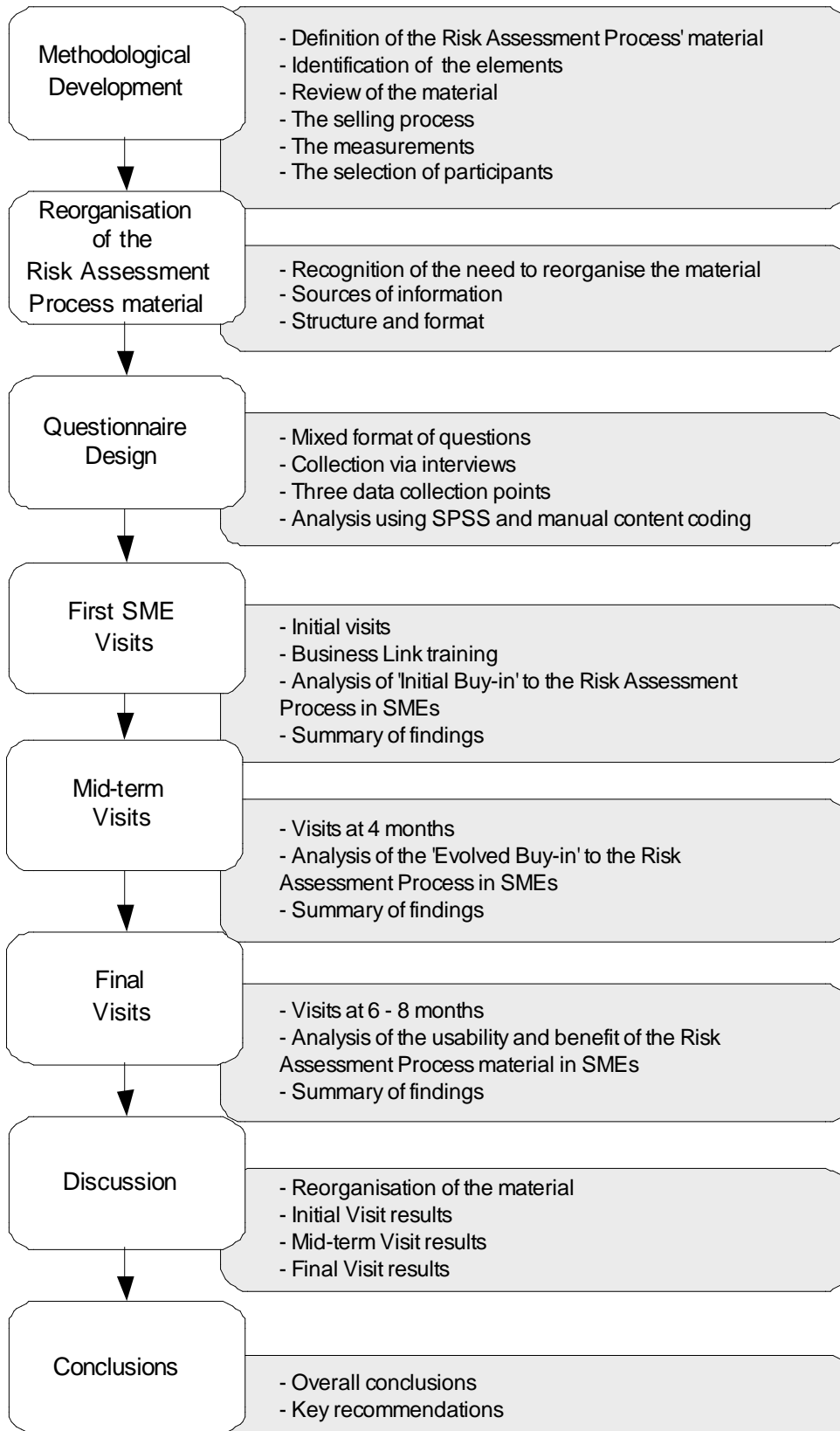


Figure 1: The structure of the methods and of this report

Table 1: Proposed structure of the Risk Assessment Process materials

Step	Objective	Sell	Process/activity	Supporting Information	Completion criteria
Step 0: Obtaining buy-in to actively manage stress	Management & workforce commitment.	Importance of stress: health, legal costs productivity.	Emphasise /sell importance of stress by direct contact.	Case studies.	Commitment to try a process for addressing stress.
Step 1: Identify the Hazards	To understand the factors that can cause stress.	The validity and relevance of the Risk Assessment Process and Management Standards.	Understand information that describes the Risk Assessment Process and Management Standards.	Simple succinct descriptions of the factors and explanatory examples of their manifestation.	Be familiar with the six Management Standards and accept that these are indicators for stress.
Step 2: Decide who Might be Harmed and How	To focus effort on people at risk.	Importance of surveying to obtain hidden or distorted information.	A survey – questionnaire, meetings, interviews, walk-round focus groups etc.	How to do chosen method mechanisms & safeguards.	Stress risk accounted for all members of workforce.
Step 3a: Evaluate the Risk	To establish where the organisation is against where it ought to be.	Accepting the process and criteria as valid.	Comparing survey outcomes with Management Standards as targets and identify unacceptable outcomes and ones that meet or exceed the standards criterion.	A criterion in the Management Standards that can be interpreted whatever the format of the data.	Identification of all unacceptable outcomes for stress and proportion of the total that is unacceptable.

Table 1: Proposed structure of the Risk Assessment Process materials

Step	Objective	Sell	Process/activity	Supporting Information	Completion criteria
Step 3b: Decide plan and record what needs to be done	To identify interventions that will bring about the desired level of risk reduction.	Effort is required to attain the Management Standards' criterion where there is a shortfall. Intervention can make a worthwhile difference.	Suggest actions obtain management & workforce buy in record and assign actions.	Case studies illustrating implementations of solutions. For each Management Standard statement, sufficient illustrations of solution to identify a shortfall.	Agreed, published and assigned action plan.
Step 4: Implement and monitor progress of plan	To ensure that required effort is sustained.	Alienation if expectations for change are not met. Squandered investment of earlier effort if actions not completed.	Many and varied according to identified needs	Example case studies	Action plan completed – if ever.
Step 5: Monitor effectiveness	To ensure that implemented changes actually reduce stress as part of a continuous improvement process.	The fact that interventions do not always work as expected.	Repeat measurement tool (see Step 3a above).	Case studies where later insights showed earlier interventions ineffective or backsliding.	Never –continuous improvement should be the goal.

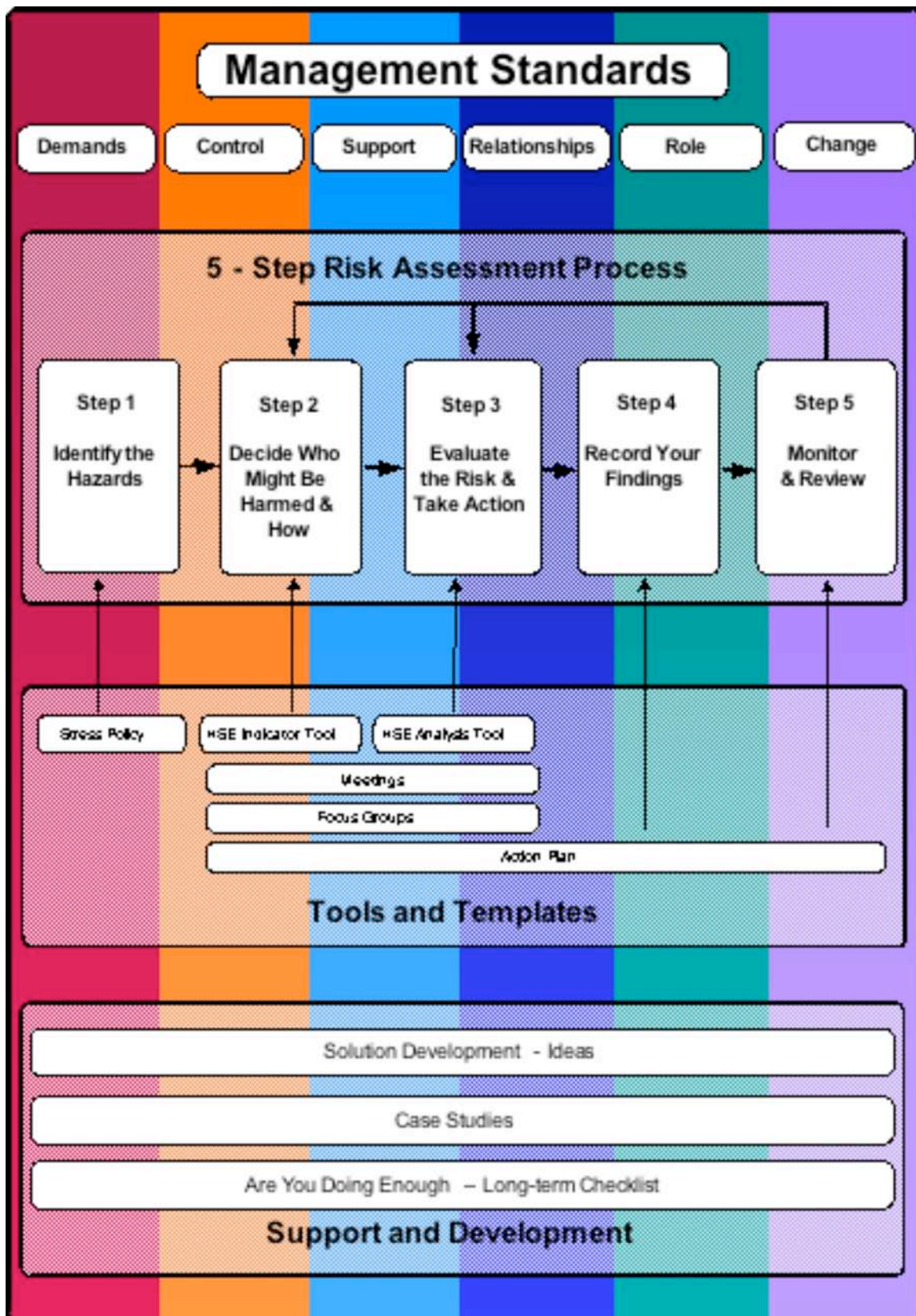


Figure 2 Overview sheet developed to aid buy-in of the Risk Assessment Process

