

STEERING GROUPS

This document has been updated to reflect HSE's learning from working with organisations, whilst they have undertaken the Management Standards risk assessment process. It is not an exhaustive document but intended to act as a prompt and offer structure and suggestions to setting up focus groups.

Purpose of a Steering Group

One of the first steps in undertaking a risk assessment for work related stress in a medium or large sized organisation is to establish a steering group. The purpose of a steering group is to oversee and facilitate the implementation of the Management Standards in the form of a project. It is important that a steering group has both authority and credibility; therefore, attention should be given to its composition.

Composition of a Steering Group

The composition of a steering group will depend upon an organisation's size and structure. Some organisations have one steering group whilst larger organisations have one main steering group and then a separate steering group for each of their departments. Some organisations have initially formed a steering group for the first cycle and then given responsibility for further cycles to an existing committee. Others added the role of the steering group to the remit of an existing committee from the beginning. This approach helps to keep the size of the committee to a manageable number - usually around eight but also ensures all key stakeholders including employees are represented. It is vital everybody on the steering group is clear about their role and responsibilities.

Typical membership of the steering group includes:

- Senior management
- Line management
- Trade unions, staff associations or other employee representatives
- Human resources
- Health & safety manager
- Occupational health professionals
- Other

As with any risk assessment, the Management Standards approach is designed to be a 'partnership' approach; that is, all employee groups should be involved in the process. By doing this you increase the probability that the project will deliver real improvements and lead to a culture change within the organisation. Experience has shown that the process has a greater chance of success when there is co-operation between groups.

Whilst it is important to have a 'partnership approach', it is also important to have individuals within the group who have the right mix of knowledge, experience, skills and abilities.

The knowledge, skills and abilities required are:

- Comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the management standards approach and the associated risk assessment approach
- Knowledge of existing organisational policies, systems and structures which relate to work related stress
- An individual with project management skills
- An individual with skills in data collection, analysis and interpretation
- An individual with expertise in communications

Some individuals can be virtual members or ad hoc members of the steering group. These members need not attend every meeting but are included when their expertise is required.

These skills are not unique to the Management Standards approach and are transferable skills, which can be utilised in other projects.

Key Roles

There are two essential roles to fulfil within the steering group.

Project Champion

- Represents the project at Board level
- Updates the Board on progress
- Ensures the project is adequately resourced

Day-to-day Champion

- Takes the role of project manager
- Organises and facilitates meetings
- Documents decisions to provide an audit trail
- Keeps the project on schedule and on budget

Responsibilities of a Steering Group

The steering group is not solely an advisory or consultative group but a working group, which produces actions. Its effectiveness depends on its members' active participation and commitment. Key responsibilities include:

- Project naming
- Planning the whole project
- Securing resources
- Managing communication
- Monitoring progress

Key activities of steering group

Project Naming

This is an important aspect to consider as it vital that the project has 'buy in' from all employees within the organisation. The name of the project will depend the organisations structure and culture. Some aspects to consider are:

- Whether to use the term stress
- An alternative name if the organisation does not want to use the term stress e.g. well being

Securing resources

It is essential that the steering group members are fully briefed in the Management Standards approach, so they are able to drive the initiative. The members of the steering groups must have the capacity and willingness to make a contribution. In order to ensure this capacity senior and line managers need to be properly briefed in order to obtain their support and commitment to the initiative and their support to allocating resources.

- Senior Management – A full understanding and support of senior managers is vital. Support needs to be secured at the start of the project and made both visible and tangible to the rest of the organisation throughout the process. (See securing senior management commitment for more information)
- Line Managers – It is important to obtain the 'buy in' from line managers as their actions/behaviour can affect the quality and impact of the risk assessment. They play a pivotal role in the success of the project. They have to communicate the project to employees, motivate and encourage them to participate in surveys, focus groups and other actions linked to the risk assessment process.

Establishing a Project Plan

Experience has shown that project preparation is vital to the successful implementation of risk management. Organisations with no project plan have experienced difficulties in maintaining momentum and ensuring availability of resources. In particular it ensures that senior managers are committed to act upon the results of the Management Standards risk assessment. A well-developed project plan ties senior management into an ongoing commitment. A project plan includes activities, assigned responsibilities and timelines to help in

- Identifying whose input is needed and when resources can be allocated.
- Enabling managers to release time for their employees to attend focus groups or complete surveys
- Maintaining momentum
- Managing senior management and staff expectations as to outcomes
- Identifying other initiatives that can be linked

Progress

The steering group monitors and approves the progress of the assessment and any actions arising from the risk assessment: See Step 5 for further information.

Communication

Communication throughout the process

Effective communication with employees throughout the Management Standards is a key component in the success of the approach. The steering group members should work together to develop a communication strategy. Effective communication should be two-way and employ multiple channels with feedback given to employees on all steps of the process. Information can be provided by a variety of means,

- Printed (memos, articles in company magazines or newsletters, notices etc)
- Electronic (e-mails, bulletin boards, web pages, etc.)
- Active and participatory exercises – meetings and discussions

Briefing

It is important that all those involved in the risk assessment within the organisation understand the true nature of the exercise, and how it relates to them. It is necessary to facilitate understanding, build trust, and shape appropriate expectations of what can and cannot be achieved. Employees need to be briefed to encourage them to give their time to participate.