

CONSULTATION OF WORKERS AS A MEASURE FOR IMPROVEMENT THE OH&S MANAGEMENT SYSTEM. CASE STUDY AT THE „VASILE ALECSANDRI” UNIVERSITY OF BACAU

MARIA-CRINA RADU^{1*}

¹*“Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacau, Calea Marasesti 157, Bacau, 600115, Romania*

Abstract: Identifying and assessing occupational health and safety risks and implementing measures to prevent accidents at work and occupational diseases are legal obligations and the implementation and certification of an occupational health and safety (OH&S) management system may help organization to achieve these goals, being also a credible evidence of its commitment to protect life and health of its interested parties. Consultation and participation of workers at all applicable levels and functions is part of the system; workers involved in daily activities and those most at risk can provide a broad perspective on potential problems and the decisions made with these workers are likely to be more effective for system improvement. The paper presents the results of a study on consulting workers of the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau on occupational health and safety issues.

Keywords: occupational health and safety, workers consultation

1. INTRODUCTION

Human resource is the most important resource of any organization, on which all the other resources stand and thrive. Without the effective presence of people who know what, when and how to do it, it would be impossible for organizations to achieve their goals. Focusing the managerial concept on human resources is the best solution for achieving performance, regardless of the field of activity [1]. Therefore, assuring safe and healthy workplaces for workers should be the main concern of organizations. It leads to enhanced performance, increased motivation and effectiveness of workers which, in turn, improves quality of products, increases productivity and reduces costs, all these generating high long-term income for the organization and prosperity for the entire society [2, 3]. On the other hand, good working condition can provide social protection, personal development opportunities and protection from physical and psychosocial hazards. They can also improve social relations and self-esteem of workers and lead to positive health effects [4].

At the international level there is a growing concern for occupational health and safety (OHS) issues, especially now, at the dawn of the 4th industrial revolution, which, due to its technical, economic and social-cultural implications, can lead to large-scale or new forms of accidents and diseases [5]. Work-related health problems results in high economic costs to individuals, employers and society, costly early retirement, loss of skilled staff, absenteeism and/or presenteeism as well as high medical costs and insurance premiums (about 70% of workers do not have insurance to compensate eventually occupational diseases and injuries) [4, 6]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), work-related health problems result in an economic loss of 4–6% of global

* Corresponding author, email: caxinte@ub.ro

gross domestic product (GDP) for most countries [4]. In Europe, in the most EU28 countries, the main part of work-related costs is due to cancer, followed by musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) (Figure 1) [7].

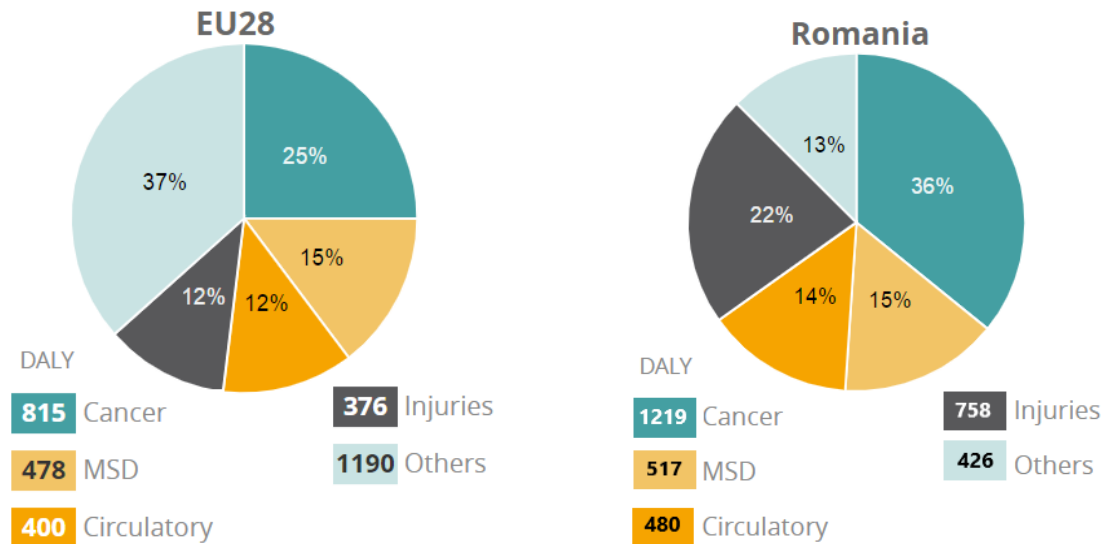


Fig. 1. Main work-related illnesses and DALY (years of life lost and lived with disability) per 100000 workers [2].

Identifying and assessing occupational health and safety risks and implementing measures to prevent accidents at work and occupational illnesses are legal obligations and the implementation and certification of an occupational health and safety (OH&S) management system may help organization to achieve these goals, being also a credible evidence of its commitment to protect life and health of its interested parties [8]. World Health Organization states that preventive and proactive workplace health initiatives can reduce health-care costs for companies by 26% and sick leave absenteeism by 27% [4].

The implementation of an OH&S management system within an organization indicates that it applies a risk management strategy to protect its workers, by complying with a set of obligations in the field of occupational health and safety [9]. Currently, according to the ISO 45001:2018, the health and safety management is no longer treated as independent but must be a part of a unique management system, which integrates everything in the perspective of sustainable development.

Implementing a OH&S management system is a strategic and operational decision for an organization. The success of the management system depends on the leadership, commitment and participation of all hierarchical levels and all functions within the organization. It is compulsory for the organization to establish, implement and maintain processes for consultation and participation of workers at all applicable levels and functions, in the development, planning, implementation, performance evaluation and actions for improvement of the OH&S management system [10]. The workers involved in daily activities and those most at risk can provide a broad perspective on potential problems and the decisions made with these workers are likely to be more effective [11].

The paper presents the results of a study on consulting workers of the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau on occupational health and safety issues.

2. METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

2.1. Methodology

"Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacau is a public university that opted for the documentation, implementation, and certification of an Integrated Management System (IMS): Quality, Environment, Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) and Social Responsibility, to fulfill its mission under performance conditions. Acting in this way, the top management's vision was to integrate all the university's processes into a unified system, so that

putting them in line with the operational objectives to achieve the strategic goals and assure performance through ever-changing contexts.

Because the success of any organization depends on the human resource, even more so, the university, whose human resource is the "foundation stone" for the formation of other human resources, must control its own risks and improve its performance in terms of occupational health and safety for its workers.

In view of this, a consultation of workers was organized for the period 14-31 October 2019, with the aim of:

- determining the workers' degree of satisfaction with their working conditions;
- determining the needs and expectations of workers related to the OH&S issues;
- determining the needs for training on OH&S aspects;
- identifying risks and opportunities for improvement relating to a range of OH&S issues.

The used working tool was a 5 (five) items questionnaire, conceived in Google Forms application and emailed to the university's workers.

2.2. Results of the study

The workers' answers to the questionnaire items are presented in this section.

Item no. 1 (Figure 1)

Do you consider that you are sufficiently informed about the following occupational health and safety issues?

- the risks you are exposed to;*
- the effects that risk factors can have in short/long term;*
- technical possibilities to reduce the level of risks;*
- the rights of pregnant women and people with disabilities;*
- your role and position in the management system.*

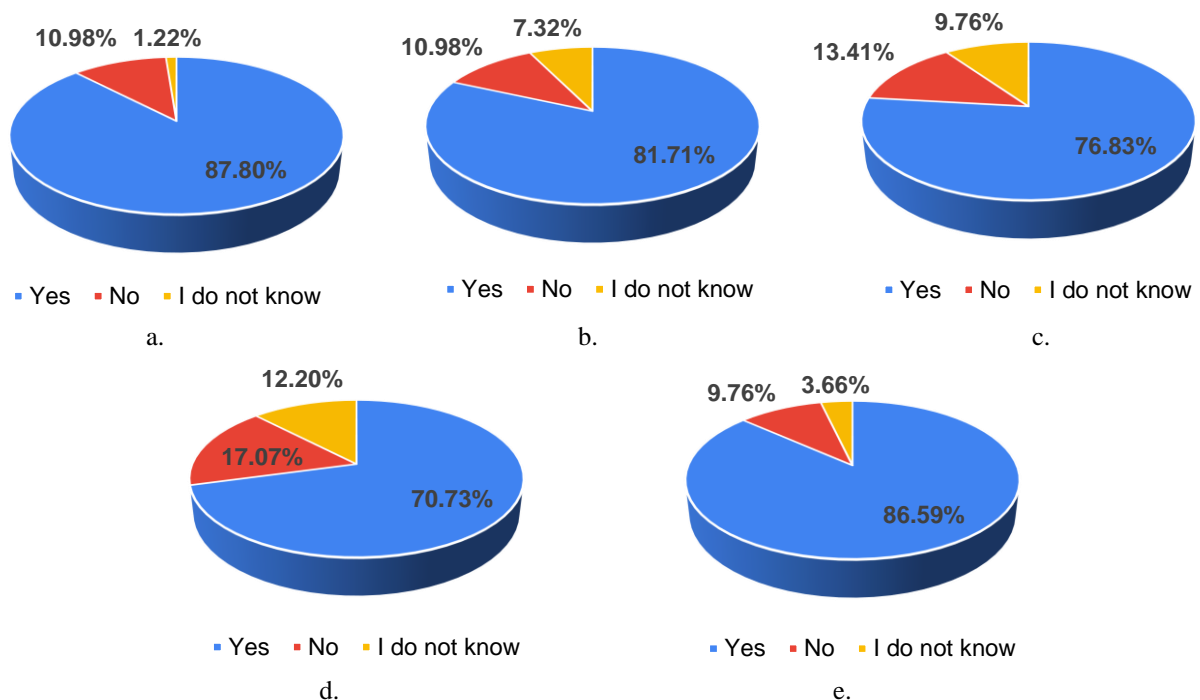


Fig. 1. The workers' answers to the item 1 interpretations.

The answers to this question prove that most of the workers consider they are sufficiently informed concerning the occupational health and safety issues and they are aware of their role and position in the management system. However, a smaller percentage was obtained for the aspect related to the rights of pregnant women and people with disabilities. One explanation could be that there are no people with disabilities among the university workers.

Even so, the training process must be improved in this area, considering that part of the workers are teachers and they may need to work with students with disabilities. On the other hand, more than 50% of the university workers are women and it is important to know their rights.

Item no. 2 (Figure 2)

Compared to the current situation, do you consider that the university, through responsible persons, should pay more attention to the following aspects?

- a. *direct consultation of workers;*
- b. *training in more attractive forms;*
- c. *technical level of training;*
- d. *periodic inspection programs for the protection of devices/equipment;*
- e. *new risks due to changes;*
- f. *pregnant women and people with disabilities;*
- g. *periodic medical examination;*
- h. *nervous overload.*

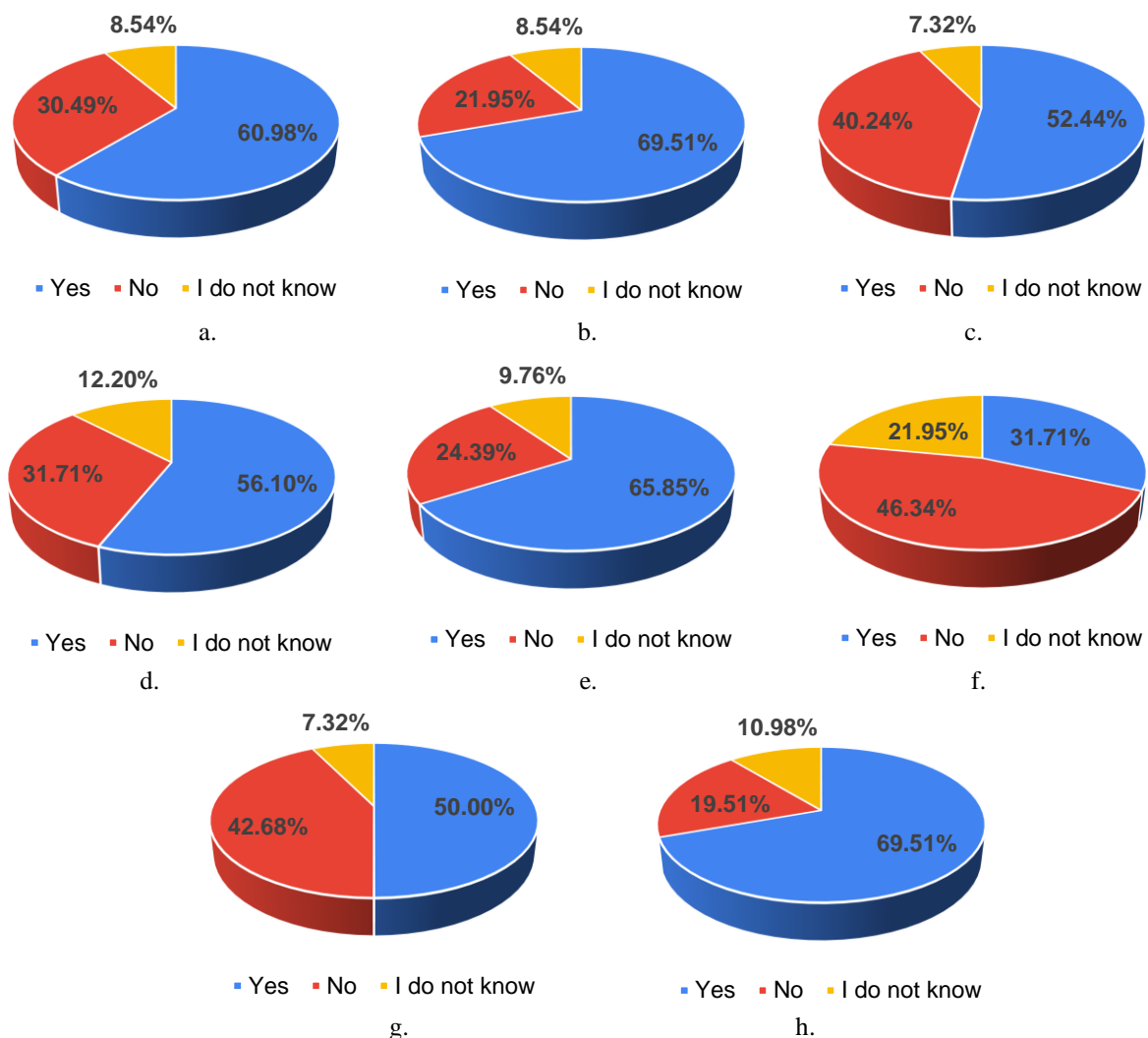


Fig. 2. The workers' answers to the item 2 interpretations.

The answers to this question highlight that workers may feel some work-related stress as part of them deemed necessary that the institution should pay more attention to the nervous overload and the way the training process is provided. Secondly, the workers preoccupation for changes is emphasized, in direct relation with their desire to be more involved in the decision-making process. Another reported aspect is related to the proactive

maintenance of equipment. So, all these aspects show, on the one hand, that the university workers are aware and preoccupied about the internal and external context of the institution and how it affects their life and, on the other hand, the improvement of some processes may have benefic effects on the health and well-being of workers.

Item no. 3 (Figure 3)

What is your opinion concerning the working environment?

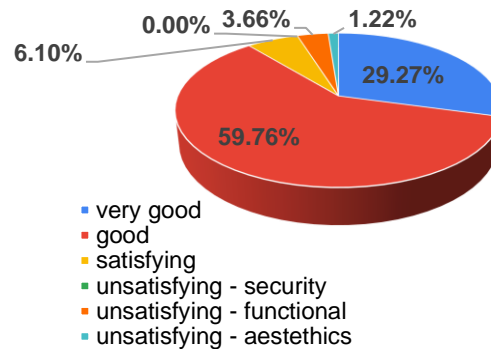


Fig. 3. The workers' answers to the item 3 interpretation.

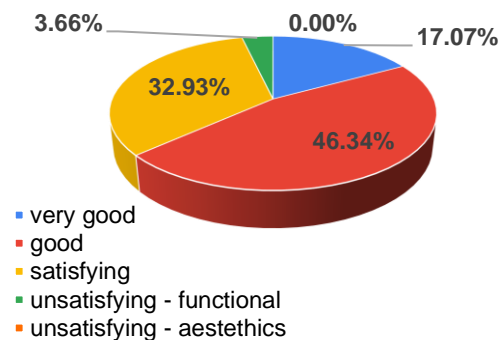


Fig. 4. The workers' answers to the item 4 interpretation.

The answers to this question show that more than 89% of workers are content and very content with their working environment. This is a strength point for the institution since the workspace design can affect mood, performance, and well-being of workers; a healthy workplace environment helps maintaining a positive atmosphere and overpass easier the tasks of each workday.

Item no. 4 (Figure 4)

What is your opinion concerning the non-working places (locker rooms, toilets etc.)?

Most of the workers are content with the non-working places. However, the percentage is lower than the previous item, so that some improvements must be done to increase the workers' satisfaction.

Item no. 5 (Figure 5)

How do you consider the endowment with personal protective equipment?

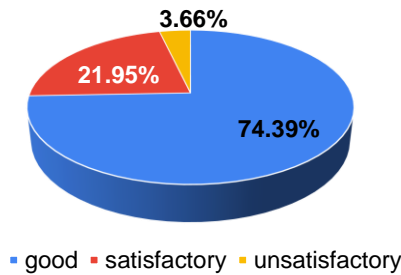


Fig. 5. The workers' answers to the item 5 interpretation.

Providing personal protective equipment for workers is a legal requirement. Therefore, it is not the case that the university do not comply with the legal requirements to protect workers from risks that could endanger their safety and health at work, but the workers' answer to this questions reflect their opinion concerning, probably, some quality aspects of such equipment.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The questionnaire addressed to the „Vasile Alecsandri” University workers' probe their perception regarding the occupational health and safety issues. The answers to the questionnaire's items highlight that workers are thoroughly involved into their activities, which sometimes become overworked, and that they are very sensitive to the changes of the institutional context, since it could affect both, their health (physical and especially mental, due to the nature of performed activities) as well as their possibility to achieve the intended results. Moreover, they suggested an improvement of the consultation process so that to be more engaged into the decision-making process. Finding more effective, efficient, and captivating training methods is another expectation of workers; providing information in the minimum possible time and in an attractive manner must be perceived as an investment in performance and not as a source of stress.

The results of this study were brought to the attention of the management team, so that it can implement direct measures to increase the workers' satisfaction and the overall system performance.

Acknowledgments

Author wishes to acknowledge the support of the management team of “Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacau as well as the support of workers who responded to the questionnaire.

REFERENCES

- [1] <http://antrenoriat.upm.ro/antrenoriat-transilvan/resursele-umane-elemente-strategice-ale-organizatiilor~22.html> (29.05.2020).
- [2] Jilcha, K., Kitaw, D., Industrial occupational safety and health innovation for sustainable development, Engineering Science and Technology, an International Journal, vol. 20, 2017, p. 372–380.
- [3] Garetti, M., Taisch, M., Sustainable manufacturing: trends and research challenges, Production Planning and Control. The Management of Operations, vol. 23, no. 2-3, 2012, p. 83–104.
- [4] <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/protecting-workers'-health> (30.05.2020).
- [5] Jeehee, M., Yangwoo, K., Sujin, L., Tae-Won, J., Inah, K., Jaechul, S., The fourth industrial revolution and its impact on occupational health and safety, worker's compensation and labor conditions, Safety and Health at Work, vol. 10, 2019, p. 400-408.
- [6] <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/value-occupational-safety-and-health-and-societal-costs-work-related-injuries-and/view> (30.05.2020).
- [7] <https://visualisation.osha.europa.eu/osh-costs#!eu-analysis-illness> (30.05.2020).
- [8] Ramos, D., Afonso, P., Rodrigues, M.A., Integrated management systems as a key facilitator of occupational health and safety risk management: A case study in a medium sized waste management firm, Journal of Cleaner Production, vol. 262, 2020, p. 121346.
- [9] Panainte- Lehadus, M., Nedeff, V., Mosnegutu, E., Temea, A., Tomozei, C., Irimia, O., Study regarding occupational health and safety management at the „Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacău, EE&AE'2015 – VI-

th International Scientific Conference, Energy Efficiency and Agricultural Engineering, „Angel Kanchev” University of Ruse, 2015.

[10] The standard ISO 18001:2008 - Occupational health and safety management systems. Requirements with guidance for use.

[11] Roncea, C., Provocările migrării de la OHSAS 18001 la ISO 45001, CCF 2018, Sinaia, Romania, 26-28 September 2018, p. 140-148.