

## Workplace wellness and specialists' attitude to work safety

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**Abstract:** We can speak about formal attitude to occupational health and safety and civil protection in Latvian society. On the one hand, employers and employees know occupational health and safety and civil protection provisions, on the other hand, they do not comply with these provisions on a daily basis. The aim of the research is to assess wellness, workplace wellness and attitude concepts, their connection, as well as people's desire to acquire and apply their knowledge on occupational health and safety and civil protection and their attitude to them. Methodology of the research – get acquainted with publications related to the study topic, unstructured observations, semi-structured interviews. It has been ascertained that attitude to occupational health and safety significantly affects safe and healthy behaviour in workplace. Sustainable education program may affect successful workplace wellness solutions.

**Keywords:** attitude, work safety, specialist, students, wellness.

### Introduction

Sustainable community development is related to the formation and development of new attitude to workplace wellness in educational process. People are exposed to a wide range of adverse environmental factors, physical and mental strain. Human health is affected by a set of interacting factors - natural and anthropogenic environment - air, water and food quality, social and working conditions, weather conditions and home environment. Anthropocentric ecological consciousness has to be changed by ecocentric ecological consciousness where life and health are basic values ousting such values as power, money and information (Briede, Peks, 2011). Occupational health and safety and civil protection include people's attitude to themselves, it is both employer and employee's responsibility to ensure wellness of a person lifelong.

Wellness is the optimal state of health of individuals and groups. There are two focal concerns: the realization of the fullest potential of an individual physically, psychologically, socially, spiritually and economically, and the fulfilment of one's role expectations in the family, community, place of worship, workplace and other settings (Smith, 2006). Workplace wellness is any workplace health promotion activity or organizational policy designed to support healthy behaviour in the workplace and to improve health outcomes (Pinder, Gibert, 2011).

A definition of the term focussed on active health promotion through lifestyle change emerged in the 1950s and spawned the wellness movement in the 1970s. The term then took on additional meanings as it began to be used as a marketing tool, and as it has since become linked with certain esoteric ideas.

The model of the six dimension of wellness was developed by Bill Hettler and includes the following dimensions: social, occupational, spiritual, physical, intellectual and emotional. Occupational include the following precept - it is better to choose a career which is consistent with our personal values interests and beliefs than to select one that is unrewarding to us (Miller, 2005).

R.Garleja (2003) characterizes a person's job satisfaction as satisfaction with job content, work environment and place. For an employee to be satisfied with the work he/she performs it essential to have positive attitude, interest, motivation, and ensure that his/her social and personal expectations are met.

A positive attitude includes the motivation and confidence to pursue and succeed at learning throughout one's life. A problem-solving attitude supports both the learning process itself and an individual's ability to handle obstacles and change. The desire to apply prior learning and life experiences and the curiosity to look for opportunities to learn and apply learning in a variety of life contexts are essential elements of a positive attitude (European Communities, 2007, 8).

When analysing researchers' observations (Eglīte, 2008), it has been found that a healthy way of life, following a rational daily schedule, healthy diet, and giving up bad habits increase life expectancy for 7-10 years. Analysis of scientists' ideas in literature, psychology and pedagogy, as well as in occupational health and safety and civil protection, the explanation of the concept *attitude* has been studied.

An attitude is an expression of favour or disfavour toward a person, place, thing, or event (the attitude object). G.Allport (1935, 798) once described attitudes "...the most distinctive and indispensable concept in contemporary American social psychology.. (p. 798) "...attitudes are often as rigid as habits.. (p. 813) and "...often persist throughout life in the way in which they were fixed in childhood or in youth.. (p. 814)", "...a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon an individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related.. " (p. 810). Attitude can be formed from a person's past and present (Allport, 1935). Attitude is also measurable and changeable as well as influencing the person's emotion and behaviour.

According to theoreticians *attitude* is purely hypothetical construct, a theoretical model of response to a stimulus, an emotional assessment (Fishbein, Ajzen, 1975, 21).

D.Krech and R.Crutchfield (1948, 152) wrote, "An attitude can be defined as an enduring organization of motivational, emotional, perceptual, and cognitive processes with respect to some aspect of the individual's world" , "A belief is defined as an enduring organization of perceptions and cognitions about some aspect of the individual's world. It is the totality of the person's cognitions about an object" (p.173).

E.Chapman and S.O'Neil (1999) defined attitude as "...a mental set that causes a person to respond in a characteristic manner to a given stimulus" (Chapman, O'Neil, 1999, 19).

Attitude can be defined as a relatively stable, positive or negative evaluative reaction, which is directed to concrete people, objects or ideas motivating behaviour connected with them (Olson, Zanna, 1993).

According to V. Myasishchev personality attitude is a system that characterizes a person as a personality in concrete action/behavior, based on social experience ties with different reality parties. It describes a person as a whole and not a separate field of activity of a human psyche (Мясищев, 1960).

A. Leontyev on the basis of V. Myasishchev studies indicate that the characterization of psychological development of a personality is in conjunction with real attitude of a personality and its content in relation to the world. Attitude characterizes a person and manifests both in individual acts and behaviour in general. The researcher points out that there is a correlation between a person's actions / behaviour and his attitude (Леонтьев, 1983).

The structure of attitude is characterized by ABC model of attitudes (McLeod, 2009), which comprises three components: **a**ffective, **b**ehavioural (or conative) and **c**ognitive. In our research behavioural component is significant: the way the attitude we have influences how we act or behave. As particularly essential we can emphasize the idea that cognitive and affective components of behaviour do not always match with behaviour (LaPiere, 1934).

Attitude object is one of four cognitive levels: physical object, category, intent, schematic. Researchers A.R. Pratkanis, A.G. Greenwald (1989) developed a sociocognitive model of attitude. Attitudes frequently serve three functions: heuristic—that is, attitudes provide a simple strategy for appraising an object; schematic—that is, attitudes organize and guide complex behaviour towards an object and memory for events; and self-related—that is, attitudes are used to define and maintain self-worth. These functions are used to construct a sociocognitive model of attitude. The cause for concern about the attitude concept is not warranted. Attitudes are successful predictors of a wide range of cognitive processes; they influence processing of episodic information in a predictable fashion; and they are related to important social behaviours under specifiable conditions. (Pratkanis, Greenwald, 1989).

In the context of occupational health and safety and civil protection working environment and place and attitude to it play an important role, but a specialist needs to obtain knowledge, skills and acquire competence on how to build the environment and maintain it in accordance with workplace wellness provisions. A specialist obtains knowledge and skills in formal and non-formal education as well as informal learning. The use of the knowledge in practice forms self-experience "...the obtained and evaluated knowledge, skills and attitudes in life activities that have turned into personally significant values" (Špona, 2001, 124). Self-experience can be considered as the basis of human competence. Specialists in various fields build up their competence in occupational health and safety and civil protection throughout their life, due to changes in information technology, social and economic activities it is necessary to diversify skills, methods, techniques, and to change attitudes. Several authors have studied the attitude to a healthy lifestyle and physical activities, eating habits and their effects on health. In his study W.DuMonthier (DuMonthier, Haneline, 2009) found that those students who have problems with having a healthy lifestyle (smoking, physical inactivity, obesity, excessive alcohol consumption), in practice do not indicate their patients the need for a healthy lifestyle and its impact on sustainable change. The question arises how an occupational health and safety specialist, who does not follow healthy lifestyle principles, affect people's attitude when teaching healthy lifestyle.

Dr Arien van der Merwe's (Workplace wellness...) in his research has discovered that workplace wellness can change employees' attitude. Attitudes and behaviour will not change, by overloading employees with information on illnesses and health. Sustainable peer education program will maintain lasting behaviour and successful workplace wellness solutions (Workplace Wellness..., 2013; Workplace wellness..., S.a.).

### **Methodology**

In order to assess possibilities to change people's attitudes towards occupational health and safety and civil protection, by understanding the processes that take place in psychological level of the endosystem and comprehensive functional level, it is necessary to determine the reasons causing non-compliance with occupational health and safety and civil protection requirements.

The task of the research was to determine: 1) whether people have a desire to obtain knowledge in occupational health and safety and civil protection; 2) if the obtained knowledge is applied in real life i.e. at work, social life; 3) if there is failure to apply the knowledge, what are the reasons; 4) what affects the respondent's thinking, attitude; 5) whether person's attitude is influenced if a specialist teaching correct way of life, does not follow it him/herself; 6) which of the professions is affected more? Data obtained from: 1) non unstructured observations, which the authors of the article have carried out for more than a decade; 2) semi-structured interviews, which were conducted through face to face interviews at respondents' homes or workplaces. In the selection of respondents people represented seven different professions- a sociologist, a lawyer, an accountant, a food technologist, an educator, an occupational health and safety specialist, a psychologist. Respondents' age: four people were in the age group 31-40, two were 51-60 years old; one person was 89 years old. Two respondents were men. Five of the respondents had a master's degree in the chosen profession. The interviews took place between 01.07.2013 - 15.08.2013.

### **Results and discussion**

Answering the question - whether people have a desire to obtain knowledge in occupational health and safety and civil protection issues- the respondents answered that majority of people do not have it, "...humans are lazy by nature, rely on risk – thinking that nothing bad will happen to them, that is why they consider knowledge in this area as insignificant. Only when facing a real problem situation, such as deterioration of health, injuries, accidents, make people be more aware of their actions and lack of knowledge, or their inability to use them in a real life situation."

The interviewees try to use the obtained knowledge in real life - at work, in everyday life: for example, when working with electrical appliances, be able to act properly and prevent fire in case it is necessary. They usually follow the principle - "God helps those who help themselves". If the work is

strained and intensive (e.g. work at a computer), people forget about ergonomic recommendations. A typical example is an accountants' job, since there are direct duties and in addition there is a need to prepare reports or provide additional information. This gives a psychological stress as the work has to be done precisely and in due time, but this cannot always be done within working hours, as a result people do not take breaks as often as they have to. Occupational health and safety specialist said that, "...business leaders often have other priorities than those of setting up ergonomically correct workplaces for their employees". Respondents' personal experience affects their attitude towards occupational health and safety and civil protection regulations, they start contemplating - why I acted like that, and the information available in relevant literature (as web-based information is not always reliable).

The interviewed specialists believe that: "If a person really wants, he can affect his life, regardless of circumstances". An accountant shared her experience: "...due to busy schedule, I started having health problems. In order to get better, I began doing regular physical exercises. I have to admit that this in turn reduced the time I spent with my family. I could spend more time with my family only on Saturdays and Sundays. As I want to be with my family I began thinking that something in my life has to be changed, and started to look for a new job. But I have not managed to find anything so far ". The study showed that all the interviewed professionals agree - even though a human as a reasonable being is able to judge, he cannot often cope with his weaknesses considering his whims to be more important, his attitude is affected notwithstanding the fact that a specialist teaching a correct way of life does not follow it himself. Although it affects all professions equally, police officers (drink and drive, do not observe traffic rules, are often fined), also doctors significantly affect people's attitudes. Occupational health and safety specialist's formal attitude to occupational health and safety affects those employees with whom the above mentioned specialist works together, but the rest of society cannot assess his/her behaviour. Attitudes are expressed in human values. During the study the respondents arranged five values in order of importance (1 – the most important, 5 – less important). It should be noted that five of the respondents consider health as a key value in their lives. An accountant and a psychologist (age group 31 - 40) consider family as the most important value in their lives (Table 1). A sociologist mentions work as the second most important value because loss of a job cause problems to enter labour market due to employers' disproportionately high requirements, they mainly want to recruit young professionals with experience. Most of the respondents underestimated education as a value because age is the most important factor in a labour market.

Table 1

### The most important values of human life

The results of the interview

Respondents	Values				
	Success at work (career)	Family	Education	Health	Work
Sociologist	5	3	4	1	2
Lawyer	5	4	2	1	3
Accountant	2	1	3	4	5
Food technologist	5	2	3	1	4
Educator	5	2	3	1	4
Occupational health and safety specialist	4	2	5	1	3
Psychologist	4	1	5	2	3

Respondents had different points of view when answering the question whether it is possible to change people's attitudes.

An opinion expressed by a sociologist (aged 51-60): "System of penalties is very highly developed in our country, but it does not work. We have to change the advertising system, paying more attention to promoting healthy lifestyle, pointing out the importance of preserving health throughout our lives. More emphasis should be placed on healthy things. To make healthy things more attractive and enjoyable, especially for children so that they start to turn to healthy lifestyle already from childhood. Family traditions, advertisements affect their attitude.

A lawyer (aged 31-40) thinks that "Only person`s own bitter experience can change attitude." While working as a judge, she has gained conviction that family with its positive example can inculcate honesty and positive attitude towards life values in their children. It has to be admitted that society also forms human attitude. For example, I tell my five-year old son when and how to cross a street at the traffic lights. Then an elderly woman goes past us and crosses the street at the red light. Of course, the child asks why the others can go across the street, but he cannot? At work I have to meet with people denying their traffic infringement until a video recording is displayed, so this is people`s attitude. While the attitude from most of society does not change, the problem will exist.

An accountant (aged 31-40) considers that: human attitudes can always be adjusted by a series of positive examples and revision of knowledge. "People learn from positive examples in their families, from superior officials such as politicians, business leaders, teachers, doctors, etc. I also feel stressed at my work (it is intensive, and I want and it is necessity to manage all things on time, we need to master a new program, etc.). I started having health problems. In order to reduce such risks, I focused on healthy life style involving all my family in physical activities and, where possible, changed my eating habits. I hope that I will be able to change our family life and my example will serve as a driving force for the whole family to lead a healthier lifestyle.

A food technologist (aged 89), she worked as a senior research assistant and lecturer and gained experience when working with young people, she believes that the hallmark of the era is to do everything formally. It is typical to be married in a church, but how many of these couples attend church after the wedding. Family is a place where person`s attitude to the most important values of life have to be acquired. One of the features and values characterizing Latvian people was intelligence; it was brought in children in their families. During the Soviet occupation the intellectuals gradually disappeared. The rapid pace of living as well as changes in technology have changed values characteristic to the people of Latvian nation, such as - honesty, domesticity. Parents lack time for their children and they tend to compensate it with gifts. Educational establishments can teach The Golden Rule of ethics "Do to others as you would have them do to you!", but only family can teach the attitude to it and how to apply the rule in real life.

A teacher (aged 51-60) believes that a person`s attitude is influenced by one`s family and its positive example. As regards following occupational health and safety requirements, my workplace both at home and at work has not been set up according to ergonomic requirements. Can I serve as an example to my family and students on how to build a positive attitude? Of course not! It is hard to be a pedant, wanting to do everything on time and conscientiously, due to bureaucracy we start having stress, and face emotional burnout. As I want to do my duties on time, I spend a lot of time at a computer, which affects my health. Although there are just five years left to my retirement I start considering a job change (which of course is very difficult), or even stop working and focus on my private farmstead . In our country, a large number of people have higher education, which is a very positive tendency, but how many of them work in their profession. People of my age regardless their education and experience are rarely required in the labor market. Therefore, if you have a job, then regardless of the layout of the workplace and busy schedules, people choose to work, even though they think health is a core value.

Occupational health and safety specialist (aged 31-40) indicates if since childhood a child has been brought up to think and do everything with positive attitude to life values, and is used to assess priorities in his life, then these attitudes cannot be affected and changed by other people point of view. Occupational health and safety and civil protection issues have to be discussed already in the early childhood. Preparing children to school, we buy him a desk where he will do his homework, but do we

pay attention to whether it meets ergonomic requirements? The same applies to technological equipment - computers. At school our children sit at the desks which do not meet their height parameters. The same applies to setting up a workplace and provisions related to occupational health and safety and civil protection. If an employer has not received any information about the need to follow ergonomic rules why would he do differently in his company? He follows a principle - why to do if you may avoid doing that.

A psychologist (aged 31-40) thinks, that it is not possible to change attitude of all individuals, because there are also confirmed sceptics and conservatives. It is easier to convince people by giving real life examples not just speaking. Apart from educating and teaching in families, kindergartens, at schools and work we also have to follow different requirements in different places, and only then we can expect to have some changes in attitudes, but again not in all people. Few people learn from mistakes made by others. When having injuries or health problems, people start to think of changing something to avoid the repetition of the situation.

### Conclusions

Evaluating the findings in the identified sources, and the author's long-term unstructured observations it has been found that:

- wellness is affected by processes in social, occupational, spiritual, physical, intellectual and emotional dimensions;
- workplace wellness is any workplace health promotion activity or organizational policy designed to support healthy behaviour in the workplace and to improve health outcomes;
- a safe and healthy behaviour in the workplace significantly affects attitudes towards occupational health and safety, that have become personally important values, family and self-experience play an important role in their formation;
- cognitive and affective components of behaviour do not always match with behaviour;
- an essential element of a positive attitude is a desire to use the acquired experience and curiosity;
- sustainable education program that will maintain lasting behaviour and successful workplace wellness solutions.

By evaluating the results of the interviews, it was found that according to the respondents:

- health is regarded as one of the key values, but most people do not want to acquire and use knowledge in occupational health and safety and civil protection in their everyday life, to promote health maintenance, this becomes essential mainly in cases of health problems;
- company directors often have other priorities than setting up an ergonomically correct workplace;
- in strained and intensive work ergonomic recommendations are frequently ignored;
- attitude towards occupational health and safety is affected by self-experience, which originally forms in a family, positive and negative examples given by occupational health and safety specialists and medical professionals, traumas and health problems, and regular updating of the knowledge on occupational health and safety.

Further studies are essential to develop and approve a sustainable education program suitable for Latvia that will maintain lasting behaviour and successful workplace wellness solutions.

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