

Press Release - 20 March 2017

Health and safety at work, a performance lever for companies

This was the theme of the Eurogip¹ Discussions of 2 March 2017 in Paris. Several round table discussions² brought together speakers from different backgrounds. An overview of their discussions is presented below.

Although they are often perceived as such, are attitudes to performance and occupational risk prevention really antagonistic? The two concepts are in fact closely interlinked and "the challenge is to be able to reconcile them", according to the experts who introduce the Eurogip Discussions. To make occupational risk prevention more "sexy" for decision makers, it is necessary to adopt their language, to speak of performance, and to demonstrate to them that prevention generates "profits" for the enterprise, in terms of benefits that are quantifiable, direct and measurable, or more immaterial: well-being at work, brand image, productivity, quality, etc. This educational exercise is all the more necessary in that, in the eyes of decision makers, especially in SMEs, "occupational risk prevention often represents an immediate cost for results that are generally perceptible only later".

To convince company managers to go beyond the mere regulations and include risk prevention in their overall performance strategy, it seems advisable - or even necessary - to provide them with statistics. From this perspective, research performed at the international, European or French level is of great interest. The international study published by the ISSA in 2011, against a backdrop of economic crisis, showed that on average, on all the continents, 1 euro invested in occupational risk prevention would yield a return of €2.20 for the enterprise. This rather "magical" figure now serves as a reference for numerous prevention studies. The OPPBTP (an occupational risk prevention organization for the building and civil engineering industries) finds a rather similar ratio of 2.3 for construction firms. "A company that is virtuous in the area of occupational risk prevention is generally healthier in terms of productivity and working conditions". The idea is not to tell companies "do risk prevention to make money" but to convince them that it is an "extra factor of operational excellence".

The firms represented then illustrate this return on investment in the field. Some have adopted measures to prevent chemical risks, supported by figures, like the Lithuanian

¹ Eurogip, founded in 1991 by the French occupational risk insurance organization, is an observatory and a resource centre on occupational risk insurance and prevention practices at the European level (www.eurogip.fr). In this framework, each year it organizes a conference, the Eurogip Discussions.

² Programme and speakers' profiles at http://www.eurogip.fr/images/Debats/Program_EN_DebatsEurogip2017-A5.pdf

SME Statga, or to bring down the number of occupational injuries among baggage handlers for Brussels Charleroi Airport. Others aim at the performance or well-being of their employees. The Pringy plant of the Allergan pharmaceuticals group deployed a lean management system based on three key points: make well-being at work the focus of the strategy; define a base of common values and practices; and introduce “ergo coaches”, employees trained in ergonomics and capable of helping their colleagues on this subject. It experimented in its own way with a new approach to awareness raising regarding occupational risk prevention, conceived and implemented by the CARSAT³ Rhône-Alpes insurance fund, reconciling health and overall performance. Lastly, the rather nonconformist manager of Syd Conseil, an IT service provider in Nantes (France), explains how the well-being of his employees is the focus of his corporate strategy, “to progress toward overall performance”.

What is the viewpoint of the European social partners on the question? On the trade union side, the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) representative considers that “it is always difficult to put a figure on prevention policies because of the hidden costs. What is the cost of a life destroyed by MSDs at the age of 30?” These limits are recognized by the representative of the EFBWW (European Federation of Building and Woodworkers), although this cost study is, according to him, the “right path to take”. On the employers' side, the chairman of the FIEC recognizes the usefulness of having indicators on risk prevention, the need “of an incentivizing environment which encourages good practices”. He also stresses the importance of “keeping things simple”. According to the representative of BusinesEurope, “businesses are aware of the usefulness of investing in OSH, apart from the regulations which remain the fundamental base and which should not be made too burdensome, or should even be simplified”. She thinks that it would be good to work together on joint solutions, even though it is not easy.

To conclude, the representatives of the national risk insurance and prevention organizations in France (CNAMTS-DRP) and Germany (DGUV) agreed to view simplicity as evidence of efficiency. The DGUV can be expected to use its slogan “*Keep It Short and Simple*” in its communication campaign on risk prevention, endowed with a budget of €7-10 million over ten years. In France, the DRP has launched a programme of evaluation of occupational risk prevention measures which will facilitate the development of good awareness raising tools for companies which have not yet understood that prevention can be profitable. “We shall endeavour to propose to company managers decision aid tools which will provide them with relevant information to take the right decisions on an informed basis”.

³ CARSAT: Caisse d'assurance retraite et de la santé au travail / Retirement and Occupational Health Insurance Fund