

## B4 Experience Cultural factors in occupational safety and health

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### Abstract

Addressing cultural diversity in the workplace can greatly impact on occupational safety and health, finds a recent report from the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA).

The report, 'Diverse cultures at work: ensuring safety and health through leadership and participation', reveals that there can be serious consequences resulting from a lack of awareness of cultural difference, but that it is possible for organisations to be more inclusive and use diversity to positive effects, as a resource for learning, change and renewal.

A precondition for business success is healthy and motivated employees, especially in times of growing pressure on market competition. Workers with a migration background have to face specific language and cultural challenges, which is also mirrored in higher accident and sick leave rates than national workers.

As the proportion of the labour force that is composed of migrant workers within the EU continues to grow, many EU workplaces are becoming increasingly culturally diverse. Poor communication and misunderstanding may arise as a result of cultural differences and can result in tension and stress, reduced job satisfaction and higher staff turnover. An increased occupational safety and health risk may be present, in part, because, in a multicultural work team, individual perceptions of what is safe may vary. Research has also shown that miscommunication owing to cultural differences has played a role in 70–80 % of all maritime accidents.

One case study highlighted is that of the car manufacturer BMW in Munich that has applied a new initiative to integrate workers from different countries of origin. The initiative trained management on how to better deal with cultural diversity and introduced 'health ambassadors'; workers, many of whom were migrants themselves, who were trained in health promotion and held an important mediating role among their colleagues. This helped to overcome typical language and social barriers for migrant workers, who often do not take advantage of company health promotion offers.

The report recommends that a constructive safety climate, which is shared by all those in a diverse workforce, needs to be established. The report applies cross-cultural theories to the workplace and demonstrates how leadership and worker participation are key to improving safety and health in culturally diverse workplaces. It recommends that managers adapt their leadership style, address

language barriers, effectively train workers to overcome intercultural issues and nurture an inclusive working environment.

The report was an essential tool for improving safety and health outcomes in culturally diverse organisations, adding to EU-OSHA's Healthy Workplaces Campaign on 'Working together for risk prevention'. In line with the campaign's spirit of working together, it is emphasised that the management of occupational safety and health in culturally diverse working environments demands an approach that includes multiple voices.



## Cultural factors in occupational safety and health

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Project Manager



Safety and health at work is everyone's concern. It's good for you. It's good for business.

### European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA)



- A body of the EU
- Established in 1996 in Bilbao, Spain
- EU-OSHA is committed to making Europe a safer, healthier and more productive place to work, by promoting a culture of risk prevention to improve working conditions in Europe.
- Tripartite Board bringing together:
  - governments, employers' and workers' organisations
  - the European Commission

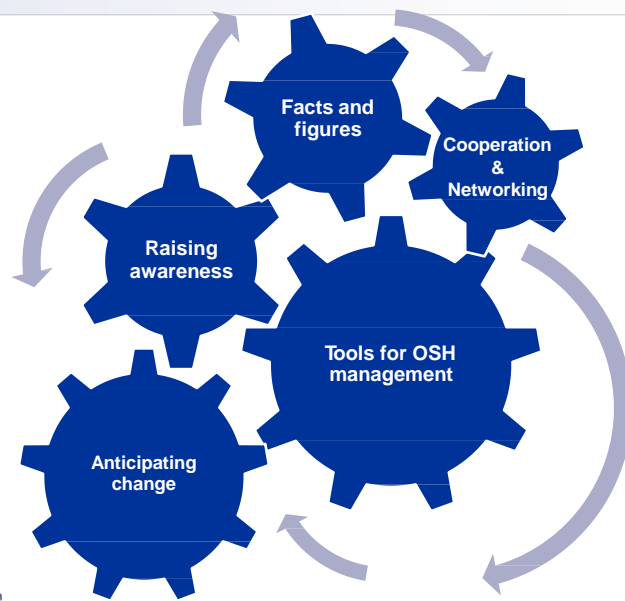


[www.healthy-workplaces.eu](http://www.healthy-workplaces.eu)

Healthy Workplaces

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## EU-OSHA key activity areas



## Facts and figures

### Why is safety and health important?

- Good for business, workers and for society as a whole
- Most occupational accidents and illnesses are preventable
- Significant improvements across the EU in recent decades, but ...
- Every year more than **5,500 people lose their lives** due to workplace accidents
- Every year, **6.9 million accidents** at work
- **159,000 die** as a result of work-related illnesses (ILO estimates)
- **€ 490 billion** cost to the EU economy (4% of GDP)

# EU-OSHA: Campaigning over 10 years

	2010-2011: Safe Maintenance campaigns
	2008-2009: Risk Assessment campaigns
	2007: Lighten the Load, Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) campaigns
	2006: Young people campaigns
	2005: Stop that noise campaigns
	2004: Building in safety campaigns
	2003: Dangerous substances, handle with care campaigns
	2002: Working on stress campaigns
	2001: Success is no accident campaigns
	2000: Turn your back on musculoskeletal disorders

# 2012/13 Healthy Workplaces Campaign

Healthy Workplaces. Good for you. Good for business.

Working together for risk prevention through Leadership and Worker participation

English  
 Español  
 Eesti  
 Suomi  
 Français  
 Magyar  
 Íslenska  
 Italiano  
 Lietuviškai  
 Latvian  
 Malti  
 Nederlands  
 Norsk  
 Polski  
 Português  
 Română  
 Slovenčina  
 Slovenščina  
 Svenska

Leadership	Worker participation	Media Centre	Resources	About
Benefits	Benefits	Press	Case studies	About the campaign
Enterprise Survey	Enterprise survey	Photo Gallery	Publications	Campaign partners
Leadership Guide	Worker participation guide	Napo film	Preventive solutions	Focal Points
Self-assessment tool	Checklists		Practical tools	Enterprise Europe Network
Legislation			Online interactive Risk	

**Get involved**  
 How to get involved  
 Good Practice Award  
 Become an EU partner

## 2014/15 Healthy Workplaces Manage Stress

- Improve understanding of work-related stress and psychosocial risks
- Promote management of these risks
- Prevent significant negative effects
- Provide support and guidance for workers and employers
- Encourage the use of practical, user-friendly tools



## Scale of the problem

### EU-OSHA opinion poll (2013)

- Over half of European workers report that stress is common in their workplace.
- Main reasons: job reorganisation or job insecurity, excessive workload, harassment, lack of support.
- Around 4 in 10 workers think that stress is not handled well in their workplace.

### ESENER survey (2009)

- Around 80% of European managers concerned about stress at work
- Only about 30% of organisations in Europe have procedures in place for dealing with psychosocial risks.
- Dealing with those risks is often considered as more difficult compared to 'traditional' OSH risks.

## Cross-cultural differences between Eastern and Western Europe

*“The footprint of history which appears to leave the sharpest imprint at present is not the legacy of the Roman Empire, but of the Soviet Union.”*

*Smith (1997)*

## GLOBE-Study

- GLOBE = “Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness Research Programme” (House et al. 2002)
- Participation of 18.000 managers from 61 countries
- Collaboration between 150 scientists
- “Germanic Cluster”: Austria, Netherlands, Switzerland, Eastern and Western Germany
- “East-European Cluster”: Albania, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Poland, Russia and Slovenia
- Similar clusters can be found when comparing working conditions

## Dimensions of the GLOBE-Study

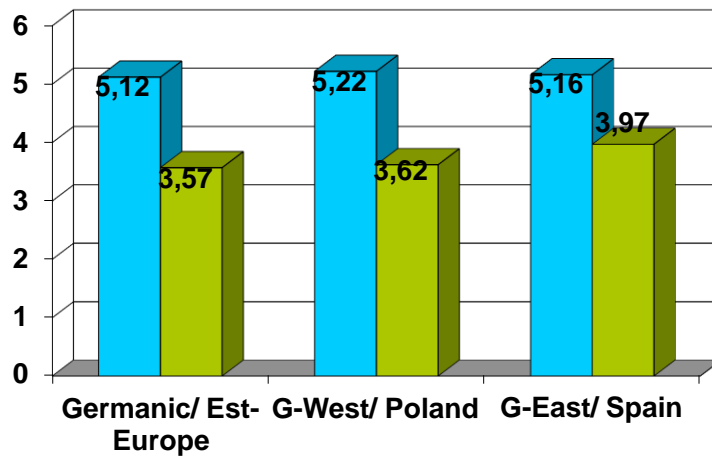
Cultural Dimension	Germanic Cluster	East-European Cluster	Germany (West)	Germany (East)	Poland
Uncertainty Avoidance	5,12	3,57	5,22 A	5,16 A	3,62 C
Future Orientation	4,40	3,37	4,27 B	3,95 B	3,11 C
Power Distance	4,95	5,25	5,25 B	5,54 A	5,10 B
Institutional Collectivism	4,03	4,08	3,79 C	3,56 C	4,53 B
Humane Orientation	3,55	3,84	3,18 D	3,40 D	3,61 D
Performance Orientation	4,41	3,71	4,25 B	4,09 B	3,89 B
In-Group Collectivism	4,21	5,53	4,02 C	4,52 B	5,52 A
Gender Egalitarianism	3,14	3,84	3,10 B	3,06 B	4,02 A
Assertiveness	4,55	3,51	4,55 A	4,73 A	4,06 B
Leadership style					
Charismatic/ value based	5,93	5,73	5,87	5,84	5,67
Team-oriented	5,62	5,50	5,51	5,49	5,98
Participative	5,85	5,09	5,70	5,88	5,04
Humane Orientation	4,71	4,75	4,60	4,44	4,56
Autonomous	4,16	4,18	4,35	4,30	4,34
Self-protective	3,03	3,67	3,32	2,96	3,52

## Uncertainty avoidance:

The extent to which a society, organisation or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events.



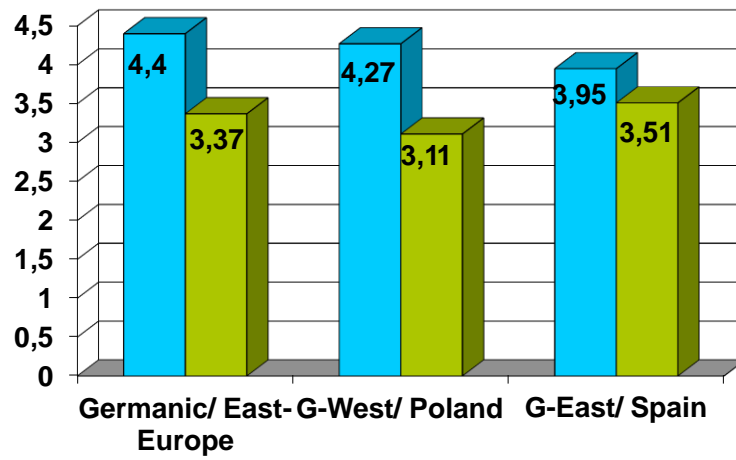
## Uncertainty avoidance



## Future orientation:

The extent to which individuals engage in future-oriented behaviours such as delaying gratification, planning and investing in the future.

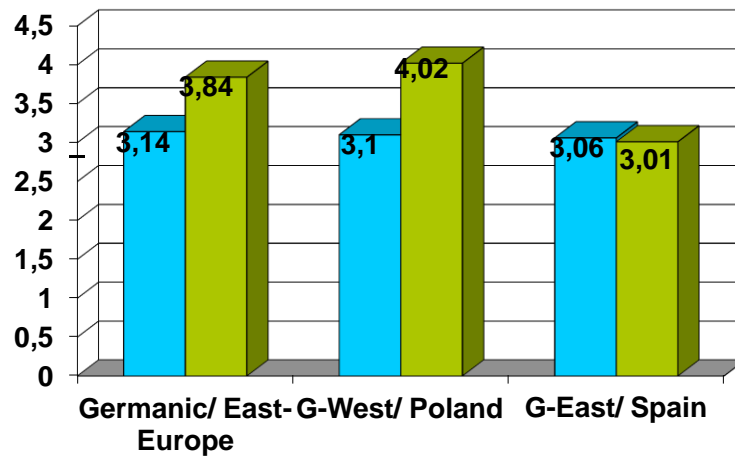
## Future orientation



## Gender egalitarianism:

The degree to which a collective minimises gender inequality.

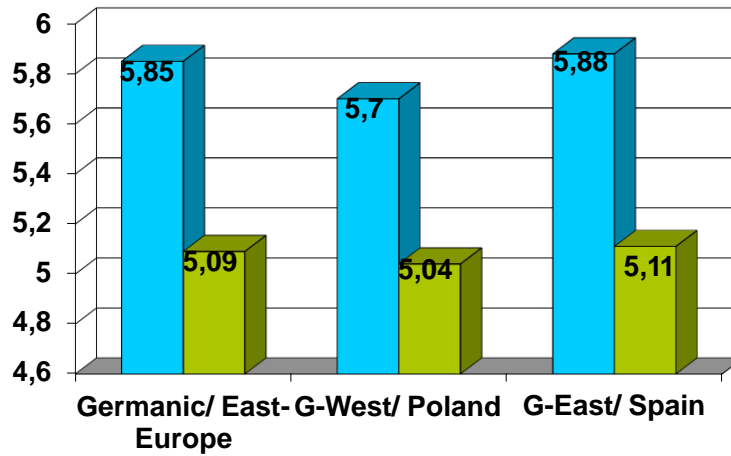
## Gender egalitarianism



## Participation

As leadership dimension, participation indicates the degree how far the manager includes other workers in the finding and execution of decisions.

## Participative leadership style



## Motivation for safety and health

	Eastern Europe	Germanic Europe
<b>Dominant organisational cultures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hierarchic-authoritarian</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hierarchic-benvolent</li> <li>• partizipative-advising</li> </ul>
<b>Typical characteristics of organisational cultures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strong hierarchy</li> <li>• Avoid mistakes at any cost</li> <li>• Authoritarian assertiveness of managers</li> <li>• Less responsibility for single worker</li> <li>• Tayloristic divison of work (pysical and mental work)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• flat hierarchy</li> <li>• see mistake as learning opportunity</li> <li>• collaborative leadership style</li> <li>• take advise from workers</li> <li>• seriously mutual trust</li> </ul>
<b>OSH management approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting clear objectives</li> <li>• extrinsic motivation</li> <li>• command / control</li> <li>• rewards / sanctions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participative setting of objectives</li> <li>• intrinsic motivation</li> <li>• Safety and health circles</li> <li>• Participative risk assessment</li> </ul>

## Case study at BMW: intercultural health management



- To promote the long-term health of all employees with an immigrant background, BMW started a pilot project for intercultural corporate health management in Munich.
- Voluntary "health ambassadors" are intercultural multipliers, motivators and reference contacts for health and related topics.
- In 2010, BMW won the "dfg award" for this project and in 2009 the Bavarian Prevention Award.



## Case study at BMW: intercultural health management



- Workers with migration background are more likely to face specific language and cultural challenges, which is also mirrored in higher accident and sick-leave rates compared to national workers.
- Therefore management was trained to deal better with cultural diversity and increase intercultural competencies.
- Further a system of "health ambassadors" was developed, specifically trained workers in health promotion, who take over an important mediating role in relation to their colleagues.
- The health ambassadors, many of them with migration background themselves, can help to overcome the typical language and socio-cultural barriers for migrant workers, who often do not take advantage from company health promotion offers.



## Case study at BMW: intercultural health management



The intercultural workplace health management focusses on two factors that are easy to influence by the enterprises:

- The leadership behaviour of direct superiors, especially towards workers with migration background
- The involvement of workers in workplace health management, amongst other things through the training of these health ambassadors.



## Case study at BMW: intercultural health management



The three pillars of the intercultural workplace health management can be adapted to the situation of each company in a flexible way.

- All responsible persons involved have to be sensitised for intercultural aspects. Specific problems of workers with diverse cultural backgrounds and the close relation between leadership and health have to be analysed.
- In a joint kick-off meeting of managers and workers, participating in the project are inter-linked to common network. Afterwards management is trained in culture sensitive leadership styles, selected workers are trained as health ambassadors.
- The proposals for further measures are fed back to a steering committee and integrated into the further planning, allocating clear responsibilities and deadlines.



## Tools of German Social Accident Insurance (DGUV)

- Tools for OSH professionals to help overcome cultural barriers
- Practical guides with country-specific facts and figures
  - orientation towards people and relationships; orientation towards hierarchy
  - indirect communication
  - time orientation
  - gender (roles of men and women)
  - personal space and non-verbal communication.
- Short cases and examples, explaining how the cultural preferences differ from the German ones
- Practical tips (dos and don'ts) are included.



## Example: practical guide Turkey

### Dos

- Personal relations are of highest importance
- Respect the different roles of women and man
- Refuse offered drinks and food 3 times, but then accept
- Respect the hierarchy and seniority principle
- Enough Business cards
- Small presents

### Dont's

- Don't talk only about business
- Never refuse offered drinks and food categorically
- Avoid long eye-contact and low body distance in the context women/man
- No time pressure!
- Always confirm appointments via phone
- Avoid direct criticism, leads to loss of face
- Avoid tabu-topics
- Don't blow your nose loudly

## Conclusions

- **Dispite of globalisation there are still great cultural differences between nations and enterprises**
- **Cross-cultural differences should be considered in recruitment and training procedures of enterprises**
- **Enterprises with a high share of migrant workers should consider their diverse cultural background**
- **Leadership styles should be adapted to differencnt cultures when setting up new branches abroad**

**Thank you!**



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