

Mental Health Surveillance Tools for Sea Workers

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ABSTRACT: This article presents the results of the works of the PROMETHEAS project, which focuses on the mental health of sea workers. This project is carried out at the Maritime University of Szczecin and brings together a consortium of various maritime institutions from Slovenia, Greece, Spain, Finland and Great Britain. PROMETHEAS aims to provide tools for assessing the mental health of sea workers that can be used by professionals and stakeholders alike. The most important ones will include an application for mobile systems (Android, iOS) and an online and offline e-learning course.

1 INTRODUCTION

Seafarers' work in vessels at sea is one of the hardest, most demanding and under any difficult conditions profession. Seafarers often work for very long hours, far from their relatives, isolated in a multicultural, highly hierarchised micro-society. Studies also have shown that bullying is an often phenomenon on ships. This situation often generates mental health problems [6], which put at risks lives, the vessel, passengers, cargo, the environment from pollution and local coastal economies.

The description above was a main reason to start the Erasmus+ project called PROMETHEAS (PROmoting MEnTal HEAlth at Sea). The consortium consists of 6 partners from 5 countries. The leader is the Maritime University of Szczecin, Poland. The other partners are:

- IDEC SA (Greece)
- Chios Marine Club (Greece)
- Spinaker d.o.o. (Slovenia)
- Technical University of Catalunya (Spain)
- Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (Finland)

- Centre for Factories of the Future Limited (United Kingdom)

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Figure 1. Erasmus+ logo

The central aim of this project is to develop a training course and learning resources for seafarers and maritime workers concerning the preservation and improvement of their mental health. It is focused on the various issues that derive from mental health problems and tries to provide learners with necessary information and consultation on how to deal with these problems.

Main target groups of PROMETHEAS project are captains of merchant navy, seafarers and cadets, whilst additional beneficiaries are the trainers on mental health and bullying, VET centres and consultants of the sector as well as nautical academies, universities and shipping companies.

PROMETHEAS will produce three core intellectual outputs (the products):

- Repository of resources on mental health for maritime staff
- E-learning course for captains and seafarers
- Digital app for self-evaluation (Android)

The listed project results will be available for free to all interested parties for a period of at least five years from the project end date. This is in line with the principles of the Erasmus + program. The work so far has shown that the project has strengths in the form of:

- raises issues relevant to the industry
- The consortium was flexible about the COVID-19 pandemic

So far, after the evaluation of the first interim report, no weaknesses of the project have been found.



Figure 2. PROMETHEAS project logo

2 WORKPLACE BULLYING

2.1 What is workplace bullying?

Workplace bullying is abusive behaviour that takes the form of verbal abuse, threats, humiliation or intimidation, or in the form of interference in the work that prevents the harassed from completing their work. Similar to the schoolyard, workplace bullying often begins when one person begins to annoy another and encourages others to join. The workplace harasser can be a manager, a co-worker, a salesperson or even a customer or friend.

2.2 Legal aspects and protection

Unfortunately, in many countries there are no legal regulations that would deal with the problem of mobbing and bullying. Mutual relations between people, however, sometimes cross certain boundaries, and in many cases it is noticed. It is worth observing that even if there is no law on this issue, it does not mean that the victim is always vulnerable.

Workplace harassment is illegal when it violates federal laws or laws that prohibit discrimination and violence in the workplace. These laws protect employees from harassment based on religious, racial, or sexual characteristics, such as colour, national origin, religion, sex, age, or disability.

If someone is harassing the other in the workplace and the reason for the harassment is a characteristic protected by law [8], this could be classified as unlawful workplace harassment.

2.3 Bullying example

Take for example the company ABC where the manager is named Juan. Juan, is Maria's manager and teases and teases her constantly, calling her "incompetent", "stupid" and "lazy". If these comments are based on Carla's gender, the harassment could be illegal. That is, if Juan constantly says things like: "I know that women are not that smart, but you really are the champion." In most countries, this intimidation could be illegal harassment, as it is discrimination based on Maria's sex. Or if Juan, even if he doesn't specifically say the word "woman" in his comments, but he harasses all the women, but none of the men. Similarly, it could be considered illegal harassment, based on sex discrimination.

However, if Juan's comments have no link to the person's gender, that is, if he harassed all of his employees, regardless of his sexual gender, his actions are probably not illegal.

2.4 Definition

While there is no universally accepted formal definition of workplace bullying, and some researchers even question whether a uniform definition is possible due to its complex and multifaceted forms, several researchers have struggled to define it:

According to Olweus's [5] widely used definition, "Workplace bullying is a situation in which one or more people systematically and over a long period of time find themselves on the receiving end of negative treatment by one or more people, in a situation in which people exposed to treatment have difficulties to defend themselves against this treatment."

According to Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf and Cooper [2], "Workplace harassment means to harass, offend, socially exclude, or negatively affect someone's work tasks. For the bullying (or harassment) label to apply to a particular activity, interaction or process has to occur repeatedly and regularly (for example, weekly) and over a certain period of time. Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts."

2.5 Characteristics

Because it can occur in a variety of contexts and forms, it is also helpful to define workplace bullying by the key characteristics these behaviours possess. Work bullying is characterized by:

- Repetition (occurs regularly)
- Duration (is durable)
- Scalable (increasing aggression)
- Power disparity (the target lacks the power to defend itself successfully)
- Attributed intent

Thus, the above factors that characterize workplace bullying seem obvious. On this basis, it can be concluded that this undesirable phenomenon is similar to what occurs in schools, academies, etc.

2.6 *What to do?*

Dealing with workplace bullying should be one of the tasks of Human Resource Management. Even if the law is not violated, maintaining a good atmosphere is in the interest of the employer and employees. Mobbing, bullying, etc. also lead to lower work efficiency, which in turn can affect even the entire organization. Each case should be recorded and appropriate measures must be taken to eliminate these undesirable phenomena in the future.

3 PROJECT ACTIVITIES

3.1 *Partner meetings*

Partnership meetings are aimed at controlling project management. There will be one meeting per country. The first took place in November 2019 in Greece at the beginning of the project. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the meeting in the United Kingdom was held online (June 2020). The remaining meetings are planned in a traditional way, but in the current epidemic situation it is difficult to predict whether they will be held remotely.

3.2 *Short-time training*

This event was supposed to take place in April 2020 in Pori (Finland) but due to the COVID-19 epidemic it was conducted online in December of the same year. Project participants took part in training in the field of mental health problems.

During the training, various situations and scenarios related to mental health problems were discussed. In connection with the subject of the project, special attention was paid to the phenomenon of bullying and mobbing in the environment of sea workers. Materials, conclusions and comments will be used to build an e-learning course and a mobile application (intellectual outputs).

3.3 *Multiplier events*

These events will take place in mid-2022 and will aim to disseminate the results of the PROMETHEAS project. So at this moment there is nothing to add. Multiplier events are typical for the Erasmus+ projects.

3.4 *Repository of resources on mental health for marine staff*

This is the first intellectual output of the project which will be called O1. According to findings of research conducted in many places of the globe by universities

as well as by renowned organizations demonstrate that:

- Mental health of seafarers bears a high pressure which is hazardous for their health, their life, their colleagues lives, passengers' lives in the case of passenger ships, ships they work in, ship cargo, the environment, coastal economies. Reasons producing stress on seafarers' mental health may be organizational, personal and/or due to other colleagues.
- There is extensive bullying taking place in ships. Victims of bullying are often "green feet" cadets, women who may reject their career in ships for this reason or crew members from developing countries lacking in many cases even the simplest tools of communication, a common language. Victims of bullying do not know how to react and very seldom refer to the captain or the company the tortures they suffer.

Although these conclusions of research are rather recent, there are already scarce pieces of resources, such as leaflets with information or even scientific papers on these issues, their causes and ways to mitigate results, which could be of help to persons facing analogous problems.

The aim of O1 is to search and find these resources, classify them in a rational and easy to find way as well as to develop simple infographics and two leaflets, one for mental health at sea and one with instructions how to behave to stop bullying.

At the time of publishing this article, O1 is complete, but new items can still be added to it.

3.5 *E-learning course for captains and seafarers*

This intellectual outputs is called O2 and refers to the e-learning content. This course is currently developed and consists of two units:

- Improving mental health
- Facing bullying

In each of these units there will be two distinctive parts, one for seafarers in general and an additional one for captains (containing both stress factors specific to their role and relief exercises, support notices for helping others having problems on-board). Captains will be entitled to have access to both parts. Separation will be effectuated during registration whereas captain will get rights of access also to their part.

From the content point of view e-learning course (mental health) will include:

- Factors putting pressure on mental health at sea
- Organizational factors and how to mitigate them
- Positive attitude and tips to think positively
- Physical exercise and its impact
- Reflection on the situation
- Distinction between facts and statements
- How to think constructively
- Human relations
- Group dynamics

The bullying unit content will include:

- Bullying and harassment, similarities and differences
- Specificities of bullying in vessels

- Types of bullying and their effects on victims
- Proper ways of dealing with bullying at the workplace
- Effective strategies for dealing with bullies

From the technical point of view, the training will be available on an open source platform Moodle (of course adaptation to other platforms is possible). It will contain assignments, quizzes, games, videos etc. It will ensure also the monitoring of the participant's progress in the whole course.

3.6 Digital App for self-evaluation

This is the third and last intellectual output of the project and is called O3. It will contain an assessment questionnaire, quizzes, exercises, advices and hints.

The assessment questionnaire will be useful for each individual to spot in privacy the areas that need special care or even treatment.

Quizzes will be useful for persons to realize in an entertaining way their situation of mental health. Exercises will provide marine staff ways of physical movement while on board. That can be either activating or relaxing. One group of exercises will focus on how to raise the energy levels of the marine staff, while the other on how to make them feel distressed and relaxed. Yoga, pilates or meditating exercises that do not require a large space will be preferred. Advice and hints will have to do with the habits of marine staff, for example how many hours do they sleep during a day or a week, if this is enough, what do they eat, if their diet includes fruit and vegetables and how do they spend their leisure time.

The digital app will be available also on mobile phones.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The Erasmus + program financed by the European Union funds serves various educational purposes, in principle at all levels of education. Its advantages include the international environment and mobility (unfortunately recently limited by the COVID-19 pandemic). The PROMETHEAS project is a project within the framework of strategic partnerships in the action "Vocational education and training - VET". It is devoted to a very important problem that remains unresolved, even though various institutions are trying to do so.

Mobbing and bullying are unfortunately typical phenomena in the modern economy. It is obvious that the fight against them is aimed at increasing the efficiency of work, and thus faster building of prosperity. When dealing with it on land, the problem can be solved, although it is not always easy to do. Yet even greater obstacles are encountered when working at sea [1, 3, 4, 7]. Human resources department, management staff of an organization, doctors, psychologists - they are usually many kilometres away from victims of bullying or mobbing.

This project aims to provide tools for victims to self-assess mental health and provide essential support. It should be remembered that working far from home is also associated with other difficulties such as loneliness, difficulty coping with stress, etc. A seafarer works on the ship 24 hours a day. Even if he has time to rest, he cannot go home, but goes to his cabin, which is usually a very small room. Such a spatially limited environment cannot positively influence mental health.

Unfortunately, no single effective tool has yet been developed to help people who face mental health problems at sea. And even if they do appear, they are not systematized and the person who suffers is not even able to find out where to seek help. The PROMETHEAS project is making this attempt, and its first results will appear at the turn of 2021 and 2022.

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