

206-008

DGUV Information 206-008

Your
tool for risk
assessment of
psychological
stress



Healthy and fit in a small company

How brainstorming meetings can help

Tips for industry, administration and
service providers

Imprint

Published by:
Deutsche Gesetzliche
Unfallversicherung e.V. (DGUV)

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Layout & design:

Deutsche Gesetzliche Unfallversicherung e.V. (DGUV), media production

Cover: © VRD/Fotolia

Edition May 2014

DGUV Information 206-008 can be obtained
from your competent accident insurance
institution or at www.dguv.de/publikationen

Healthy and fit in a small company

How brainstorming meetings can help

Tips for industry, administration and service providers

Self-assessment – Where do you stand?

Please tick as appropriate!

1. We can plan and organize work independently.

2. When solving problems, the persons concerned are always integrated.

3. Conflicts are solved in a fair and open manner.

4. I take care that nobody is being embarrassed, unjustifiedly criticized or excluded.

5. At our company, there is no double work.

6. We regularly discuss how to make work more effective and less stressful.

7. We use improvement suggestions to better and faster organize work.

8. All employees receive the same appreciation irrespective of their position.

9. We hold regular meetings.

10. Employees are informed about new developments and changes on time.

11. It is important to me that my employees receive a regular feedback concerning their work.

12. Good work is appreciated.



9-12

Super! Benefit from brainstorming meetings to enhance your strengths. You will also benefit from your employees' ideas.



4-8

You are on the right track. Brainstorming meetings will support you in the future.



0-3

Benefit from the opportunity to gradually reduce your weaknesses and enhance your strengths with brainstorming meetings.

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1 What is it all about?

Being better today than yesterday and being better tomorrow than today!

The method described in the following will help you enhance the strengths of your company or your team and reduce weaknesses. Issues such as work flows, product quality, stress, occupational safety and health – there are many aspects for a gradual optimization within a continuous improvement process (KVP). The core strategy is based on holding regular talks with employees following a set model, referred to as “brainstorming meetings“ – it’s easy!

As an executive, do you wish to improve the operational situation? Are you interested in implementing a continuous improvement process? Do you endeavour to recognize or reduce psychological stress in your company? Are you willing to actively integrate everyone? Do you place confidence in your employees to solve problems independently? Are your employees willing to become actively involved in improvements?

If so, you should keep in mind the following points:

- At the start of the process, you as an executive must clearly point out to your employees:
 - why the brainstorming meetings are essential for the company or the department.
 - what the targets of the brainstorming meetings are.
 - how brainstorming meetings should be conducted.
- The aim of the brainstorming meetings is to find solutions. Reasons or guilt are insignificant. All solutions that support your employees or yourself are essential – irrespective of who suggested them or the reasons for suggestion.
- At the beginning, the emphasis will be on organizational problems. However, with increasing experience and confidence in the brainstorming meetings, general obstacles can be discussed and dealt with.

To obtain general information on work-related psychological stress and strain, we recommend the brochure „Arbeiten: Entspannt – gemeinsam – besser.“ (“Working: relaxed, together, better” (DGUV Information 206-006).

2 What should you keep in mind?

Essential issues for brainstorming meetings:

- The company management or an executive can attend brainstorming meetings in general. However, brainstorming meetings do usually not require attendance of a superior, resulting in a substantial relief on your side.
- Make sure that a room for undisturbed meetings is provided.
- Discuss the procedure of the brainstorming meeting with the attendees:
 1. One employee should be appointed to moderate the first meeting beforehand.
 2. The schedule (cf. page 10) should be adhered to – routine is helpful!
 3. Results are documented in writing in the task sheet (cf. page 26).
- Provide all employees with the task sheet. Openness builds trust!

Your tasks for decision-making!

- Specify a time frame:

The time frame may vary according to the workload and should be oriented towards the demand and conditions of the working area concerned (depending on workload, for instance 90 minutes per month or one hour per week).
- Specify a time frame for brainstorming meetings in advance:

i.e. for six months. Extensions are possible, but should always be decided upon anew. This ensures that the project character is maintained.
- Financial budget of 100 €/month, for example. The budget can also be accumulated over a longer period.
- Discuss the implementation of ideas.
- Important: Appreciate improvement suggestions and implement as many ideas as possible in the daily routine. This motivates and attracts imitators!

Regarding attendees of the brainstorming meeting:

- Participation in brainstorming meetings is voluntary.
- Brainstorming meetings are held during working hours.
- Limit the size of the group to four to seven employees. This enhances efficiency and reduces costs!
- If the employees show great interest, two variants are possible:
 1. The staff selects four to seven colleagues.
 2. Participants are selected on a rotational basis every six months or as necessary.

3 How are the meetings structured?

Step: What works – what doesn't?

1

Every participant answers the following questions:

- What worked out well in the past?
- What could be improved?

(approx. 15 min) 

Step: Finding main topic

2

One topic should be selected from the proposed improvements.
The selection can be decided by vote.
Central question:

- Which topic is the most essential and should be discussed first?

(approx. 5 min) 

Step: Finding solutions

3

Every participant answers the following questions:

- What will be achieved/different, once we have reached our goal?
e.g. "tools are always at the designated place" (express it positively!).
- What can each employee contribute today or tomorrow to reach the goal?
e.g. „I immediately return tools no longer needed" (proactiveness).
- What can we do to maintain this situation?
e.g. „We check and optimize the existing organizational system. We procure new mountings and cabinets." (short and medium term planning)
- What are the positive and negative impacts of reaching the goals?
e.g. positive: „It is quicker“, negative: „Everybody must be disciplined.“

(approx. 30 min) 

Step: **Creating task sheets**

4

Results are specified in writing: Who does what by when?



(approx. 5 min)

Follow-up meeting (from second meeting onwards)

Step: **What has changed since the last brainstorming meeting?**

0

The persons responsible provide information on changes.



(approx. 5 min)

Central questions:

- What has changed or what have I achieved?
- What worked out well?
- Which obstacles occurred?
- Which steps should be taken?

The measures to be taken are documented in the tasks sheet.

Proposed solutions which could not be implemented should be discussed again (step 3).

How are the meetings structured?

0 from second meeting onwards

What has changed?

- What has changed?
- What worked out well?
- Were there any obstacles?
- Which steps should be taken?

5 min. 

1 What works – what doesn't?

- What worked out well?
- What could be improved?

15 min. 

2 Finding main topic

- Which topic should be dealt with?

5 min. 

3 Finding solutions

- What will be different, once the goal is reached?
- What can each employee contribute?
- What can we do to maintain this situation?
- What are the positive and negative impacts?

30 min. 

4 Creating task sheet

- Who does what by when?

5 min. 

4 Which rules must be complied with?

Getting started!

- Punctual start of the brainstorming meeting and end at the agreed time.
- Assign one person at the start of each meeting to watch the clock. Extensive speakers should be asked to keep it short.

General rules

- Only one speaker at a time!
- Use the time at the brainstorming meeting to find solutions and target descriptions!
- Speak about yourself and your motivations! (do not talk about "everyone else" or "the others")
- Every statement has to be taken seriously!
- None of the topics discussed at the brainstorming meetings will be disclosed!
- Let others finish speaking!
- If someone annoys you at the brainstorming meeting – ask them to explain their statement! Just anticipate that you misunderstood them when feeling annoyed.
- Treat others sympathetically and with respect!
- Do not appraise nor judge others!
- If you have to speak about absentees, stay objective!

At the end of the meeting

- Specify at the end of each meeting, if necessary, who will head the next meeting!
- Decide together what will be disclosed!

5 Tips for moderating the brainstorming meetings

Reason

Agreement on changes – The reason for moderating is to analyse the actual situation and agree on changes.

Aim

Joint solution – The aim of moderating is to find a joint solution that everyone involved can agree on. This creates the willingness for implementation.

Components

Openness – Approach the task of moderation with an open attitude. Should you have a preferred solution for solving the problem, abstain from this during moderating or transfer the moderation to a colleague.

Appreciation – Appreciate the opportunity to find a joint solution as well as the attendees who take the time and contribute their perspective.

Deceleration & listening – Many problems arise from not listening correctly and thinking that we can anticipate what others want to say. Listen actively. Summarise statements of attendees and ask whether you have understood correctly. “Slow down if you are in a hurry” is a helpful rule.

Neutrality in the sense of “**multi-partiality**” – Take sides for each issue, see the good side of the proposal and the contribution to discussion and specify it.

Expertise – Attendees are experts with respect to problems and solutions. Solutions will be jointly developed. Your task as moderator is to pose the right (open) questions to enable participants to find the solution path.

Questions – Pose open questions. Discuss the problem with the participant, but do not linger on the issue for too long. Use open questions to help the attendees to find solutions for improvement. **Please keep in mind: The solution can be independent of the problem.**

In your questions, do not concentrate on the whys and wherefores! Why? Because you put the attendees in a defensive stance. Instead, ask “how” something is working.

Speaking time – Everybody should be listened to and get a chance to speak. As a moderator, you may summarise long contributions and shorten them, if agreed. Ask whether you have reproduced the essentials.

Objections – All objections must be taken seriously. Acknowledge every objection. Ask the other participants for the reasons for objection and then for an alternative how to discuss this issue.

Documentation – Document the solution path (on a flip chart or wall drawing) so that it is visible for everybody.

Consent – Before concluding with a solution, ask all persons involved whether they have further ideas or objections. And if so, listen to them.

Potential pitfalls

- ! You have a solution in mind and look for fellow campaigners.
- ✓ In this case assign another person with the moderation and take part in the discussion yourself. If you are unable to assign another person with the moderation, present your solution and motifs in a transparent way – and give others the chance to discuss this issue openly.
- ! The emphasis is on evaluation and judgment, not on observing.
- ✓ **Evaluation** is viewed as judging. Persons who are evaluated negatively usually keep quiet. This is dangerous as they are not involved in finding a solution.

- ! If it does not work out initially and you are unsatisfied:
- ✓ **Practice** makes perfect. It is vital to keep trying and to make own experiences. You may also make the attendees aware of their own responsibilities. Inform them on what is important to you and ask them whether someone is willing to support you in terms of feedback or co-moderation. Accept support!

Slow down if you are in a **hurry!**

(by Till Eulenspiegel)

The **solution** can be
independent of the **problem.**

6 Risk assessment of work-related psychological stress

with the help of brainstorming meetings

Reason

Stress results from workloads, organization, working environment and equipment as well as social relations in the workplace. The risk assessment should also identify such psychological stress factors.

Aim

This concerns the working conditions – what needs to be improved and which individual steps should be taken? The aim of the risk assessment of psychological stress is not to evaluate persons or simply offer seminars for stress management, but rather to promote humane working conditions as specified in the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Necessary measures then refer to company operations such as working conditions, organization or leadership.

Components of the meeting

Brainstorm meetings are an “orientational” method – i.e. they provide an overview of the stress situation of a unit or of the whole company. Frequently asked questions in practice: “How can we recognize that all essential aspects of psychological stress have been taken into account in the brainstorm meeting?” Just to be safe, it is advisable to refer to the guideline “Advice and supervision of psychological stress in the workplace” of the Joint German Occupational Safety and Health Strategy (GDA) for orientation (cf. page 19).

What is your approach in practice?

You can use the checklist for brainstorming meetings as follows:

1. Start with “free” brainstorm meetings. The topics to be discussed come from the group. In one or several follow-up meetings, the implementation of results should be discussed.
2. Once the brainstorming meetings have been introduced, compare the results with the checklist on page 19 and define the previous emphasis (= preparing the next meeting). This enables you to recognize which characteristics have already been or still need to be

taken into account (work content/workload/organization, social relations, working environment and new methods of work).

3. Characteristics not yet worked on will be gradually dealt with in the brainstorm meetings.

Potential pitfalls

- ! Moderator has insufficient moderating expertise.
✓ Solution: Moderator training.
- ! The group focuses on the impact of stress (e.g. stagnant conflicts or existing diseases).
✓ Solution: Preventive approach with checklist.
- ! The group focuses on person-related aspects.
✓ Solution: Orientation towards the characteristics included in the checklist (cf. page 19).
- ! Contents or terms of the checklist are partly difficult to understand.
✓ Solution: Provide information about possible psychological stress in the workplace in advance.¹

Brainstorming meetings in combination with the checklist are a suitable method for **defining** work-related psychological stress.

Use **brainstorming meetings** as your **“vehicle”** and the checklist as your **“navigation system”**.

¹ In this case, we recommend the guideline of the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health „Psychische Belastung und Beanspruchung im Berufsleben: Erkennen und Gestalten“, www.baua.de

Checklist for brainstorming meetings (according to the Joint German Occupational Safety and Health Strategy Guideline)

Characteristics	Crucial facets/need for improvement
1. Work content/workload	
1.1 Completeness of the task	<p>The tasks comprises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • merely preparatory or • merely performing • or merely controlling actions
1.2 Scope of action	<p>The employees have no influence on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work content • workload • working methods/procedures • sequence of tasks
1.3 Variability (diversity)	<p>Monotonous tasks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • few, similar objects of work and equipment • frequent repetition of similar actions at short intervals
1.4 Information/information offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • too comprehensive (sensory overload) • insufficient (no new information over a longer period) • inadequate presentation • incomplete (important information is missing)
1.5 Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unclear competences and responsibilities
1.6 Qualification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tasks do not correspond to the qualification of employees (overload/underload) • insufficient instructions /training on the job
1.7 Emotional exposure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • due to highly emotional incidents (e.g. dealing with severe diseases, accidents, death) • due to constantly responding to needs of others (e.g. customers, patients, students) • due to permanently showing expected feelings irrespective of own sentiments • threat of violence by others (e.g. customer, patients)
2. Organization of work	
2.1 Working hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • changing or long working hours • unfavourable shift work, frequent night work • extensive overtime • insufficient regimes of rest • work on call

Risk assessment of work-related psychological stress

Characteristics	Crucial facets/need for improvement
2.2 Work flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time pressure/high work intensity • frequent disturbances/interruptions • high level of cycle-based work
2.3 Communication/ cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • isolated single workplace • no or little support from superiors or colleagues • no clearly defined areas of responsibility
3. Social relations	
3.1 Colleagues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of social contacts too low/too high • frequent disputes and conflicts • type of conflicts: social pressure situations • lack of social support
3.2 Superiors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unqualified executives • lack of feedback, lack of appreciation of services rendered • lack of leadership, lack of support when necessary
4. Working environment	
4.1 Physical and chemical factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • noise • lightning • hazardous substances
4.2 Physical factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor ergonomic design • heavy physical work
4.3 Design of workplace and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unfavourable working areas, lack of space • poor design of signs and information
4.4 Work equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of or unsuitable tools and/or equipment • unfavourable operation or set-up of machines • inadequate software design
5. New ways of work	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spatial mobility • atypical working conditions, discontinuous job histories • flexibility in terms of time, no clear distinction between working life balance

7 Structured approach in the Health and Safety Committee (ASA)

with the help of the ASA checks and brainstorming meetings

Reason

In companies with over 20 employees, the Health and Safety Committee (ASA) meets at least once every three months. At this meeting, the employer, the specialist employee for occupational health and safety, the company physician, the safety officer, the works council and other specialists discuss occupational safety and health topics. The better the outcome of the solution-oriented exchange between the parties, the faster essential occupational safety and health targets can be achieved.

Aim

- Identification of deficiencies, detection of improvement potentials
- Specification of measures (enhancing strengths – reducing weaknesses)
- Check on effectiveness and „re-adjust“, if necessary

Components of the meeting

1. The meeting can be prepared using the ASA check¹ Choose a special subject for the ASA meeting using the ASA checks . To work on the special topic effectively, data must be determined in advance. For the preparatory tasks, please refer to the upper box of the ASA check. Specify who can determine this data (e.g. number of accidents, analysis results). This data should then be available in the ASA meeting.
2. Now, use the method of brainstorming meetings: As you have already chosen one subject to be discussed, you can directly start with step 3 „finding solutions“.
3. Specify a subject for the follow-up meeting: For this, you can deploy step 1 and 2 of the brainstorming meeting. Collecting information on the chosen subject can be carried out using the ASA check.

¹ For ASA checks and further information as well as support regarding brainstorming meetings, please visit www.dguv.de (Webcode: d125363)

Potential pitfalls

- ❗ If the employer participates in the ASA meeting themselves, a situation might arise due to the hierarchical gap which does not allow for open discussion on problem-solving.
- ✅ Proposed solutions:
 - The employer takes part but deliberately abstains from heading the meeting.
 - The employer does not take part in the ASA meeting but appoints an authorized representative.

- ❗ The ASA members are unable to find a solution for a specific problem because they lack necessary information and detailed knowledge.
- ✅ Proposed solutions:
 - The ASA members leave the conference room and continue the discussion at the problematic location, i.e. “on-site”, for instance in the workshop or warehouse.
 - The group of participants will be quickly expanded by employees who can contribute to solutions thanks to their practical expertise.

8 Dialogue-oriented instructions

with the help of brainstorming meetings

Reason

Instructions must be sufficient and appropriate and adapt to the risk development. The brainstorming meetings allow you to give employee-oriented instructions. This method includes risk perception of managers and employees alike. Handling of risk is clearly defined and coordinated with all employees.

As an employer, you can carry out the instructions personally. However, you can also assign an authorized manager or a specialist. It is important that the stipulated or recommended specialized information be well-known and integrated. Options for implementation can be discussed with the employees at the respective workplace in the instruction discussion.

Aim

- provide information on current risks
- find solutions for handling risks together with the employees
- specify a joint approach

Components of the meeting

1. Refer to and justify the subject

What have I seen? What have I experienced? Why is this subject important to me as employer?

The significance of the subject must be clearly defined. Therefore, current topics and/or unsafe or unclear situations should be used for instructions.

2. Describe risks from the perspective of the persons involved

What might happen when performing the task? Which risks or impacts are perceived by managers or employees?

3. Discuss specialized information

What must be complied with according to statutory stipulations? Which code of conduct is set forth in the company ruling? What is important from the professional perspective?

4. Compile measures and alternatives in behaviour What can we do?

Use the brainstorming meetings for finding a solution: As you have already chosen one subject to be discussed, you can directly start with step 3 “finding solutions”.

Compile measures demonstrated by “using skin protection”

- What will be achieved/ different once we have reached our goal?
e.g. “everybody uses skin protection cream several times a day” (express this positively!)
- What can each employee contribute today or tomorrow to achieve the goal?
e.g. “I will use skin protection cream each time after washing hands” (proactiveness)
- What can we do to maintain this situation?
e. g. “We check whether the used skin protection is suitable and kept in such a way that it is easily accessible for all employees”, “We remind each other to use skin protection” (short and medium-term planning)
- What are the positive and negative impacts of achieving the goals?
e.g. positive: “Everybody accepts skin protection as a vital measure of personal protection “, negative: “Everybody must be disciplined” or “some feel observed and controlled”.

5. Specification of measures and code of conduct

The defined measures will be adopted after consent of all persons involved. In the next meeting, the successes of implementation are outlined in brief (cf. step “0”).

Potential pitfalls

- ❗ The specialized information becomes less important Experiences of the persons involved are not compared with the recommendations of the specialists.
- ✅ Proposed Solution: Through the use of recommended instructions tools essential specialized information can be discussed together from which rules of conduct can be derived from.

- ❗ Only organizational measures are discussed and specified. The conduct of individual employees is scarcely/not discussed.
- ✅ Proposed Solution: It is stipulated that in each instruction at least one rule of conduct must be defined. This motivates proactiveness. Furthermore, it should be clearly pointed out that safety and health of each employee can only be achieved through the active involvement of all.

Behaviour can only be changed
through **comprehension** and **respect**.

Employees do not do what they have
been **told**, but what they **think** is being
expected from them.

9 Task sheet – Example

Tasks	Activities	Person responsible	To be completed by	Completed?	Remarks
Check organizational system for tools and optimize	Carry out inventory	D. Müller	5 March 2014	yes	
	Determine demand	M. Maier	5 March 2014	yes	
	Obtain information on products (mountings and cabinets)	H. Schulze	12 March 2014	yes	
	Procurement and installation of products	L. Lehmann	26 March 2014	no	Delivery delayed by 2 weeks
	Conduct safety inspection	F. Schmitz	31 March 2014	no	

Task sheet

Tasks	Activities	Person responsible	To be completed by	Completed?	Remarks





Tasks	Activities	Person responsible	To be completed by	Completed?	Remarks

Task sheet

Tasks	Activities	Person responsible	To be completed by	Completed?	Remarks





Tasks	Activities	Person responsible	To be completed by	Completed?	Remarks

10 Documentation sheet for risk assessment

– Example

Area of operation: Subsidiary Cologne West
Date: 14/02/2014

Detected risk or burden	Measures	Implementation		Effectiveness review	
		responsible	until: Date	on	effective?
Information Sales staff is not always informed on time regarding new product offers.	In future, a brief written notice regarding the new product will be submitted to the sales subsidiaries at least 5 days prior to completion and delivery. Information will be highlighted in colour and marked with „NEW“ and the date of creation. The store manager will inform the employees verbally and the information will be attached to the notice board.	Ms. Müller	01/03/2014	15/06/2014	yes



Documentation sheet for risk assessment

Area of operations: Date:	Detected risk or burden	Measures	Implementation		Effectiveness review	
			responsible	until: Date	on	effective?



Area of operations:

Date:

Detected risk or burden	Measures	Implementation responsible	until: Date	Effectiveness review on	effective?



Documentation sheet for risk assessment

Area of operations: Date:	Detected risk or burden	Measures	Implementation		Effectiveness review	
			responsible	until: Date	on	effective?



Area of operations:

Date:

Detected risk or burden	Measures	Implementation responsible	until: Date	Effectiveness review on	effective?



Documentation sheet for risk assessment

Area of operations: Date:	Detected risk or burden	Measures	Implementation		Effectiveness review	
			responsible	until: Date	on	effective?



Area of operations:

Date:

Detected risk or burden	Measures	Implementation responsible	until: Date	Effectiveness review on effective?



Essential rules for brainstorming meetings

General rules:



- Only one speaker at a time!
- Use time to find solutions and define targets !
- Everybody says what they think – and not what others may think!
- Take every statement seriously!
- All subjects discussed will remain confidential!
- Let others finish speaking!
- Has someone annoyed you? – Ask for an explanation!
- Treat others sympathetically and with respect!
- Do not appraise or judge others!
- When speaking about absentees, stay objective!

Getting started:



- Start and finish brainstorming meetings punctually!
- Assign one person to monitor the time!
- Politely shorten long speeches (e.g. through interposed questions)!

At the end of the brainstorm meeting:



- Specify, who will head the next meeting, if necessary!
- Decide together what will be disclosed!



Notes



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Notes

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