



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



PROJECT:

PRO-MOTION. Sensitive career management

Call: EACEA/34/2019: Social inclusion and common values: the contribution in the field of education and training, project number: 621491-EPP-1-2020-1-PL-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN

TITLE OF DOCUMENT:

POLICY RECCOMENDATIONS

ENGLISH VERSION

ALL PARTNERS

December 2023



Introduction

The project "PRO-MOTION: Sensitive Career Management" aims to promote inclusive education and common values by implementing innovative methods and practices to support highly sensitive learners and workers.

A key innovation of the project is the embedding of well-being and flourishing in careers guidance through research, methodological analysis, reviews and the development of models and tools. This includes pilot training for teachers, coaches, counsellors, mental health professionals, students and employees, focusing on environmental sensitivity and its integration into workplace design and career management.

The up-scaling strategy included mainstreaming and wider implementation of good practice to deepen impact and influence policy reform. This was facilitated by the applicability of the project products and the collaboration with a diverse consortium and stakeholders from the beginning of the project, ensuring the scalability of the project outcomes at local, regional, national and EU levels.

The project approach includes a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods, focusing on sensory processing sensitivity and its impact on career development. Innovative tools and materials developed include diagnostic tools, educational resources for career guidance and human resource departments, comprehensive guides for HR, career counsellors and coaches on sensitive career management and workplace design, three booklets on sensory processing sensitivity in career guidance and the workplace, a model of sensitive career management skills, training for trainers on embedding well-being in career management, and materials for effective career management in sensitive organisations.

The partnership involved a diverse consortium of academic institutions, NGOs and public organisations across Europe, ensuring broad stakeholder involvement and contribution to EU policy. The activities are in line with the New Skills Agenda, supporting the development of guidance policies and services responsive to the contemporary challenges of the workforce, including technological advancements, the need for lifelong learning, and the desire for meaningful work that contributes to personal and societal well-being.

The main aim of the project is to provide new answers as well as solutions in terms of professional career management for young graduates, long term unemployed and also professionals at risk of burnout, depression, working under stress and others risk factors at the workplace (e.g. drugs addition, somatic illnesses). Taking into account the specific situation of high sensitive people, which according to the research are 20% of the society.



The main result of the project was to develop innovative methods of career management (vocational advisory) to challenge the problem of skills mismatches at labour market, risks of exclusion at work, or even school environment by delivering tools, methods as well as supporting materials which can be widely used from vocational schools to professional HR agencies/departments.

The start of the project was based on limited number of resources on

high sensitivity – the temperamental trait has impact on the professional development and work satisfaction

High sensitivity refers to an increased or deeper central nervous system sensitivity to physical, emotional, or social stimuli¹. Highly sensitive people (HSPs) pick up more detail than others do, which can be both a good thing and a bad thing². HSPs are thought to have sensory processing sensitivity (SPS)¹.

Additionally taking into account newest researches (Judith Homberg, 2017 The Europe Research Area Network on Illicit Drugs (ERANID) – high sensitivity and drug use, or E.Aron articles: “Sensitive person in the work place”, or High Sensory-Processing Sensitivity at Work – research by A.Evers, J.Rasche, M.Schabracq – University of Amsterdam)

The role and importance of the early identification of high sensitivity and the support inclusion for such people are included in the works of e.g.: Early environment, emotions, responses to stress, and health (Taylor, Lerner, Sage, Lehman&Seeman,2004). It gives also new perspective on vocational counselling, where vocational skills related to the specific professions are not the only one pillar of the successful career development and work satisfaction. Research also shows that in addition, depending on how emotional sensitivity is valued in a given culture (supported/ridiculed), it will translate into self-esteem of sensitive people, their belief in their own abilities, future design etc.

During the 3 years of the project implementation partners identified number of the mechanisms and initiatives, which were presented during the online workshops ACTION Online Policy Event on 13th of December 2023:

Policy Recommendations from University of Alicante – Spain:

The ideas/proposals for policy makers that we were discussing yesterday based on PROMOTION project outputs:

- Creating a Highly Sensitivity Pan European Framework that could be useful for different contexts, specialties, areas of knowledge, professions and so on towards ensuring



integration of HS people, being inclusive in terms of cultural diversity, gender perspective, age-orientation and so on.

- Developing a Best Practice Statement on this topic that could be part of the previously mentioned Framework.
- Designing HS indicators for enterprises, companies, organizations, communities to assure the quality of the implementation of this topic and to monitor how this topic is applied and treated in different contexts.
- The previous point connects with the idea of developing an auditing process and protocol for HS friendly contexts.
- Apart from the Training developed until now in our projects we would like to increase awareness by creating one training for the general population. See the example of “Dementia Champions” in Scotland where they train the general population to support, aid, help the dementia people in daily life.

Policy Recommendations the Metropolitan City of Rome - Italy

The following recommendations are based on these findings from the literature review, desk research, focus groups with employers, HR professionals, managers and employees carried out in

the framework of the Erasmus project Promotion Sensitive Career Management Skills.

The policy recommendations focus on career management and the development of career management skills at individual (employee, manager, HR) and organisational levels:

Individual level:

- Employees should be aware of their own environmental sensitivity and seek out work environments that meet their needs.
- Employees should be encouraged to develop their mindful organising skills, which can help them cope better with unexpected events and improve their overall performance.
- Managers and HR professionals should consider individual differences in environmental sensitivity when designing career development plans and providing support.
- Managers and HR professionals should adopt a leadership style that emphasises the importance of leaders being present, aware and focused, enabling them to lead with clarity, empathy and effectiveness. It involves the cultivation of key qualities such as focus, clarity,



creativity and compassion in the service of others.

Organisational level:

- Organisations should assess their current organisational culture and identify areas where it can be improved to better support mindful organising and effective crisis management.
- Workspaces should be designed with the understanding that architectural experiences can influence social interactions and communication among employees.
- Organisations should invest in training and development programmes that promote mindful organising, risk management and crisis management skills.
- HR policies should be designed to accommodate individual differences in environmental sensitivity and ensure that employees have the necessary support and resources to thrive in their work environment.
- At the organisational level, companies can support the development of mindful leadership by providing training and development programmes, creating a supportive work environment, and promoting a culture of mindfulness and continuous learning. For example, companies can offer mindfulness training to both their senior and middle managers, provide resources and support for emotional intelligence and resilience development, and promote a culture of compassion and continuous learning.

By implementing these recommendations, organisations can create a more supportive and effective work environment that fosters career growth and development for all employees.

Policy Recommendations Experts Psy –Romania

The main aim of the project was to provide specific solutions and support for Highly Sensitive Persons (HSPs) in relationship with their work. As the project is very close to the deadline, and the activities according to the planning are mostly completed, we are now focusing on the dissemination part and final reports.

Focus groups and interviews we conducted in our country proved to be extremely prolific in terms of gathering information that is useful for HSPs. A detailed summary of this work can be



found in the study published by Veleanovici, A., Baryla-Matejczuck M., Oncioiu, A. E. (2023). The influence of work environment on hypersensitive employees. Materials of the International Scientific Conference. Science and Education: New Approaches and Perspectives. Chisinau, 2023. 10.46727/c.v1.24-25-03-2023.p201-208. The purpose of this study is both to characterize and gain insight about the highly sensitive people (HSP) in the workplace, with the main goal of a better integration of them into the labor market and enhancement of their professional wellbeing.

The specific general recommendations that came out from our research are listed as follows:

- knowing the characteristics and the specificities in functioning of these employees both by themselves and by peers and employers, together with the popularization of this knowledge with the purpose to rise awareness about it and made this typology more recognizable, understandable and accepted
- development of some specific instruments and guides which will allow both employers and employees to find specific ideas and possible solutions to particular situations when confronted with the hypersensitivity at the workplace
- assuring the access of the employee to career counseling, psychotherapy, training and resources to learn how to manage reactions and emotions (e.g. stress management, emotional intelligence, communication skills etc.)
- promoting an organizational culture based on empathy and care for the people, that reflects a true desire among the members for the performance and wellbeing of the other
- shaping attitudes and values such as a supportiveness, a true desire to have patience, to know and to understand the other and his strengths as a prerequisite for a very good working relationship
- assuring assertive communication based on active and emphatic listening; assuring constructive and customized feedback, avoiding criticism, aggressiveness or attacking the person
- promoting a democratic, participative and inclusive leadership with increased attention to the individual needs of each team member; frequent one on one discussions; use of the power of example through an appropriate and inspiring role model
- creating a work environment characterized by justice, trust, support, respect, positivity, which promotes safety and can function as a buffer for stress and negative affects of the employees
- minimization or elimination of the triggering factors for exaggerated reactions of the HS employees when appropriate and possible
- flexibility regarding work programme and ways of accomplishing tasks or goals, thus assuring comfort and respect for employee needs



- providing sufficient and accurate information for the employees, thus assuring a sense of safety and a basis for accomplishing tasks and for decision making.

Also, our quantitative study showed that high levels of SPS (sensory processing sensitivity) positively correlates with high levels of burnout and negatively correlates with job satisfaction, with approximately 25% of the amount of shared variance for both constructs.

The above mentioned results indicated that further support for this persons is needed, so we developed a second study analyzing if a specific Job Crafting protocol (developed by Positive Psychology ©) is suitable for HSPs and to what degree. The study was presented at the final Conference in Rome and is currently under review at Franco Angeli Publication in Italy. Its main outcome informed us that this protocol helps HSPs improve decreasing the level of internal conflicts in relation with work, as well as in increasing the level of performance and wellbeing at work. Further details can be found in Veleanovici, A., Oncioiu, A. E. (2023). Job crafting as effective career coaching or counselling tool for HSP. Franco Angeli Publication. Italy, Rome, 2023. (under review)

The research conducted by Antonia & Armand Veleanovici on how to foster an inclusive work environment where HSP can thrive showed that workplace well-being is highly connected with subjective well-being and the equilibrium between Job Demands and Resources. Subjective well-being is a must-have for a high-performing organization – it is directly associated with a company's financial performance, productivity and quality of output (Bryson et al., 2017). The perceived level of wellbeing at work is affected by both external, environmental factors as well as individual personality traits. The Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R) states that Job Demands – aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and Job Resources are aspects of the job that (a) help achieving work goals; (b) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (c) stimulate personal growth and development;

As organizational and individual level interventions it can be taken into account:

Management Training: Provide training for supervisors and managers on how to recognize and support HSPs effectively.

Accessibility: The ease with which company's facilities, products, services, functions or people are available to as many employees as possible. Sustainable environment for HSPs.

Employee Assistance Programs: Provide access to EAPs that offer counseling or stress management services. HSPs can benefit from these resources when dealing with workplace stress.

Psychologically Safe Climate (PSC): Working in a PSC has been proved to reduce work demands, prevent work-related stress and increase workers' engagement and performance.



Education: Offer training or workshops to help everyone understand the traits and challenges associated with HSPs.

Employee Resource Groups: ERGs have been found to reduce turnover, increase the perceived social support and organizational citizenship behaviors.

Flexibility: Flexible working time, remote work, fair distribution of responsibility and proper planning of days off are a direct predictor of well-being.

Reasonable Adjustments: Changes an employer makes to remove or reduce a disadvantage related to someone's disability.

In conclusion:

- HSP are an asset to any employer – as long as they properly managed & included
- Well-being is not only a moral/legal imperative, but a strategic advantage
- Most strategies to increase well-being for HSPs are easy to implement & have low costs
- One size doesn't fit all

Policy Recommendations WSEI University – Poland

The following recommendations are based on these findings from the literature review, desk research, focus groups with employers, HR professionals, managers and employees carried out in the framework of the Erasmus project Promotion Sensitive Career Management Skills.

The policy recommendations focus on career management and the development of career management skills at individual (employee, manager, HR) and organisational levels.

By implementing these recommendations, organisations can create a more supportive and effective work environment that fosters career growth and development for all employees.

General findings:

- High sensitive employees are an asset to any employer – as long as they properly managed & included
- Well-being is not only a moral/legal imperative, but a strategic advantage
- Most strategies to increase well-being for HSPs are easy to implement & have low costs

Individual level:

- Employees should be aware of their own environmental sensitivity and seek out work



environments that meet their needs.

- Employees should be encouraged to develop their mindful organising skills, which can help them cope better with unexpected events and improve their overall performance.
- Managers and HR professionals should consider individual differences in environmental sensitivity when designing career development plans and providing support.
- Managers and HR professionals should adopt a leadership style that emphasises the importance of leaders being present, aware and focused, enabling them to lead with clarity, empathy and effectiveness. It involves the cultivation of key qualities such as focus, clarity, creativity and compassion in the service of others.

Organisational level:

- Organisations should assess their current organisational culture and identify areas where it can be improved to better support mindful organising and effective crisis management.
- Workspaces should be designed with the understanding that architectural experiences can influence social interactions and communication among employees.
- Organisations should invest in training and development programmes that promote mindful organising, risk management and crisis management skills.
- HR policies should be designed to accommodate individual differences in environmental sensitivity and ensure that employees have the necessary support and resources to thrive in their work environment.
- At the organisational level, companies can support the development of mindful leadership by providing training and development programmes, creating a supportive work environment, and promoting a culture of mindfulness and continuous learning. For example, companies can offer mindfulness training to both their senior and middle managers, provide resources and support for emotional intelligence and resilience development, and promote a culture of compassion and continuous learning.

1. **Introducing standards in workplaces** that are particularly important for highly sensitive people, but also useful for everyone, to improve their mental condition and social and professional well-being:



- Participatory style - introducing elements in places that build belonging and the importance of the work performed, regardless of the position
- Flexibility – not only in the sense of choosing what I want, but in the sense of adapting to needs and possibilities
- Mutual exchange - cooperation that builds community
- **Designing HS indicators for enterprises, companies, organizations, communities** to assure the quality of the implementation of this topic and to monitor how this topic is applied and treated in different contexts.
- Developing of auditing process/protocol for high sensitive friendly work environment
- Shifting the focus from the assessment of the individual (I fit in - I don't fit in here) to the institution - to what extent its climate is favorable for development
- assuring the access of the employee to career counseling, psychotherapy, training and resources to learn how to manage reactions and emotions (e.g. stress management, emotional intelligence, communication skills etc.)
- promoting an organizational culture based on empathy and care for the people, that reflects a true desire among the members for the performance and wellbeing of the other
- shaping attitudes and values such as a supportiveness, a true desire to have patience, to know and to understand the other and his strenghts as a prerequisite for a very good working relationship
- assuring assertive comunication based on active and emphatic listening; assuring constructive and customized feedback, avoiding criticism, aggressiveness or attacking the person

Research, education, European context:

2. **Creating a Highly Sensitivity Pan European Framework** that could be useful for different contexts, specialties, areas of knowledge, professions and so on towards ensuring integration of HS people, being inclusive in terms of cultural diversity, gender perspective, age-orientation and so on.

- Developing a Best Practice Statements on this topic that could be part of the previously mentioned Framework.
- Developing the training for the general population to increase awareness on this topic

➔ knowing the characteristics and the specificities in functioning of high sensitive employees both by themselves and by peers and employers, together with the popularization of this knowledge will make this personality trait more recogizable, understandable and accepted

3. **Further research** on the risk of burnout, exclusion, and discrimination of highly sensitive people due to, among others, on susceptibility to stress.

Defining protective factors showing the potential of highly sensitive people on the labor market -> to avoid stigmatizing highly sensitive people as having psychological problems only as a potential within the meaning of the inclusive approach.

- Using methods that already exist in sources and practices - it is recommended not only to prepare new ones but also to make good use of existing methods and techniques - many of the solutions existing on the professional market are particularly useful and have proven effectiveness
- The system is not only human but also universal solutions that improve the quality of life for everyone - using research results that the quality of the environment affects the quality of relationships undertaken and maintained