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## Developing and testing an internal audit tool of the psychosocial work environment in the oil and gas industry

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### ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to present and discuss a pilot study for conducting internal psychosocial risk auditing in the oil and gas industry, focusing on offshore units. Psychosocial risk auditing is a proactive method for monitoring the status of psychosocial factors influencing the risk of stress and ill-health in the oil and gas industry. It is a systematic and independent assessment of the status of psychosocial factors and barriers, it reveals non-compliance with requirements and best practice within different relevant levels of the organization, and is suitable as a basis for the development of risk reduction measures. The method comprises performance standards that are linked to the company's internal organizational requirements related to the psychosocial work environment. A range of different methods and data are used to assess and grade compliance with these standards. The aim of the auditing is to provide transfer of experience between units and the development of best practice while supporting organizational learning in offshore (and onshore) environments.

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### 1. Introduction

Health and safety in the workplace is a clear objective of both European Framework Directives and national legislation in Europe. In order to improve health and safety in the workplace, governments and organizations have since the 1990s increasingly developed and applied Occupational Health and Safety Management (OHSM) systems (Hasle and Zwetsloot, 2011). Even though these management systems address both health and safety in the workplace, it is still argued by several researchers that they focus mostly on safety rather than on workers' health (Hasle and Zwetsloot, 2011). However, in recent years OHSM systems have been increasingly developed toward a more comprehensive approach where all OHS risks are addressed equally. This shift

has also been demonstrated in EU and national regulations, international frameworks and best practice principles and standards on health and safety (WHO, 2010; HSE, 2007; Leka et al., 2011). For many companies today, in line with good practice, having an OHSM system in place is a requirement in the same manner as the ISO 9000 series for quality management standards (EU-OSHA, 2002, 2010; Hasle and Zwetsloot, 2011; Zwetsloot, 1994).

An important part of the OHSM system is auditing and as such several organizations and industries across the globe have adopted audits in their internal monitoring systems in order to assess their compliance with OHSM regulations and standards (Hasle and Zwetsloot, 2011). Audit is the process of systematic examination of a quality system carried out by an internal or external auditor or an audit team. Audits are performed to verify conformance to standards through review of objective evidence (Allegrini et al., 2006; Hass et al., 2006; Sobel, 2011). To benefit the organization, auditing should not only report non-conformance and corrective actions but also highlight areas of good practice and provide evidence of conformance. In this way, other departments may share information and amend their working practices as a result, also enhancing continual improvement (Pain, 2010). Two types of auditing are often described in standards such as ISO 9000: auditing by an external certification body (external audits) and auditing by internal staff trained in this process (internal audits) (Reding

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et al., 2007). According to the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA), it is considered more appropriate for internal auditors to audit outside their usual management line so as to bring a degree of independence to their judgments (Reding et al., 2007).

Auditing is commonly used in order to ensure that an organization's health and safety management system is being effectively implemented in order to prevent accidents and ill health occurring in the workplace (Evans and Parker, 2008). Evans and Parker (2008) describe auditing as one of the most powerful safety monitoring techniques and an effective way to avoid complacency and highlight slowly deteriorating conditions. This is true especially when the auditing focuses not just on compliance with requirements but also on effectiveness of work processes. However, researchers have also argued that audits do not necessarily cover contemporary complex work environment issues, such as psychosocial hazards (Hohnen and Hasle, 2011). This has led to a growing awareness that standards, tools and methods need to be further developed to include these issues and integrate them into business practices (Hasle and Zwetsloot, 2011; Hohnen and Hasle, 2011; Leka et al., 2011).

### 1.1. Good practice in managing the psychosocial work environment

Reports and scientific literature show that psychosocial risks are a growing challenge related to occupational safety and health (Leka and Jain, 2010; EU-OSHA, 2007; EU-OSHA, 2012). Work-related stress has been reported to be the second most prevalent work-related health problem affecting 22% of workers in the European Union (EU) (EU-OSHA, 2009). Furthermore, work-related stress is believed to be a major cost to companies and countries in a wider sense, as it affects productivity, notably through absenteeism and presenteeism.

The psychosocial work environment relates to the organization, design and management of work and its social and organizational context that have the potential to cause psychological and physical harm and affect organizational performance (Leka and Jain, 2010; Bergh et al., 2014). In the WHO report "Health Impact of Psychosocial Hazards at Work: An Overview" (2010) psychosocial hazards have been categorized in ten broad categories, including work demands, job control, role in the organization and interpersonal relationships.

In recent years there have been a number of initiatives and guidance that focus on the management of the psychosocial work environment. These guidelines and best practice frameworks are based on the principles outlined in international guidelines on OSHM systems. One example is the European Excellence Framework for Psychosocial Risk Management (PRIMA-EF), a collaborative project funded by the European Commission's 6th Framework Programme for Research which developed a framework for psychosocial risk management in the workplace. The framework places particular focus on work-related stress and workplace harassment and it includes a number of practical tools such as factsheets, guidelines and inventories of best practice in psychosocial risk management (Leka and Cox, 2008).

The deliverables from the European Excellence Framework for Psychosocial Risk Management work have further been disseminated into the World Health Organization's (WHO, 2010) Global Framework for Healthy Workplaces. This framework combines evidence-based approaches and principles of health protection and health promotion and is meant to be used by companies, countries and international stakeholders.

Another example is the BSI standard for psychosocial risk management (PAS1010) that was published in 2011 (BSI, 2011). The standard provides support to companies in this area of workplace health by setting a standard and benchmark for good practice related to psychosocial risk management, including assessment,

follow-up and evaluation. By making guidance and best practice principles available, PAS1010 enables organizations to develop and implement strategies and to identify objectives that also take into account legal requirements.

Finally, Canada has also established a Canadian National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (2013). This standard, which is the first auditable standard in this area, aims at helping small, medium and large size businesses, across all sectors, to promote good mental health and prevent psychological harm of employees. It is achieved by providing guidelines and tools in order to promote a healthy workplace.

Over the last 10 years, a major Norwegian oil and gas company has put effort into adapting and implementing international frameworks and standards for psychosocial risk management. The company uses the Psychosocial Risk Management Approach (PRIMA) (Cox et al., 2000b; Leka and Cox, 2008; Bergh et al., 2014) and adheres to good practice according to PAS1010 (BSI, 2011; Leka et al., 2011). The company's psychosocial risk management framework is based on the principle of prevention in line with the control cycle, and aims at risk reduction. It is a systematic process by which hazards are identified, risks analyzed and managed, and workers protected.

The company has a comprehensive toolbox aiding the business in controlling psychosocial risk, addressing interventions at primary, secondary and tertiary level. In 2011, the company initiated a pilot project with the goal of developing an internal auditing method that can measure the status of psychosocial barriers of considerable importance to the risk of stress and ill-health offshore and onshore.

The purpose of incorporating the psychosocial work environment into the monitoring system was to assure compliance with the management system and to provide a basis for improvement. As such, it was decided to use tools and methods that are applicable and can be considered as good audit practice. It is important to note that this company already had an extensive audit practice incorporated into the management system. One category within auditing practice is called verification tools. A verification tool in this company is described as the confirmation, through the provision of objective evidence, that the requirements for a specific intended use or application have been fulfilled. Examples of verification activities are: verification to ensure compliance with governing documentation; and verification of products and processes to ensure compliance with relevant standards and specifications. It was decided that the internal auditing tool for the psychosocial work environment would be a verification tool.

The result of this project is an internal auditing tool for the psychosocial work environment. The objective of this paper is to present and discuss the auditing tool for psychosocial work environment by presenting its pilot in an offshore installation. It also aims to describe how it is suitable for monitoring the status of psychosocial barriers aimed to reduce the risk of the development of stress and ill-health in offshore and onshore environments.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Sample

The pilot group used in this study worked at an oil and gas installation on the Norwegian Continental Shelf. When drilling and well work are under way on the field, about 240 workers are at the installation on rotation 3 × 2 weeks. The scope of the audit covered 446 employees, personnel that are on a permanent shift rotation. Personnel on temporary shift were excluded.

The employees working on installations are transported to and from their workplace with a helicopter. The activities on a platform are continuous 24/7, night and day. Employees spend 2 weeks on

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