

Case Study

INDUSTRY Diplomacy &
International Relations

LOCATION Vienna, Austria

SIZE 2,000

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

The organization orchestrates Austria's global diplomatic relations, requiring its employees to frequently transition between varied roles and locations worldwide. This not only entails professional adaptability but also significant personal adjustments, as employees and their families navigate new cultural landscapes, schools, and career challenges, adding complexity to their personal and professional lives.

CHALLENGE

Uncovering Deep-Rooted Workplace Stress Beyond Initial Employee Satisfaction Metrics.

SOLUTION

Comprehensive Well-being & Transition Support

Change Management: Restoring Employee Well-being

The Context

The organization, based in Vienna, stands at the forefront of Austria's diplomatic endeavours, shaping its foreign policy and fostering international relations. As the backbone of Austria's global diplomatic network, it operates embassies, consulates, and missions across the world. Employees of the organization are expected to be highly adaptable, often assuming varied roles both within Austria and in any of the numerous locations worldwide where the ministry has a presence.

This unique operational model means that every few years, employees are not only tasked with training for new roles but also face the challenge of relocating to entirely different geographical regions. Such relocations are not just a professional shift but a profound personal transition. Employees, along with their families, must leave behind familiar surroundings, friends, and extended families to immerse themselves in often vastly different cultural environments. For children of diplomats, this means adjusting to new schools, forming new friendships, and navigating the nuances of a different culture. Similarly, spouses of diplomats encounter their own set of challenges. While the diplomat is engaged in their official duties, spouses, many of whom have specialized professions like law or medicine, find it challenging to continue their careers, especially in countries where their qualifications may not be recognized or where work permits are hard to come by. This dynamic, while essential for the ministry's global operations, adds layers of complexity to the lives of its employees and their families.

The Challenges

The governmental organization faced challenges stemming from its operational model of frequent global relocations and role transitions for employees, leading to workplace stress and psychological strain.

The Approach

The public sector's initial endeavour to assess employee satisfaction soon unveiled a deeper, more intricate issue. The unique operational model of the public institution, which necessitated frequent relocations and role transitions, was found to be a significant source of stress for many employees. The preliminary satisfaction metrics hinted at a broader concern: Psychological strain in the workplace.

Recognizing the gravity of this revelation, this approach was pivoted:

- **Shift from Satisfaction Metrics to Holistic Mental Well-being Evaluation:** Instead of merely gauging satisfaction levels, the study expanded its assessment to encompass a comprehensive evaluation of mental well-being. This involved understanding the specific challenges faced by employees due to the ministry's operational model and the resultant psychological implications.

- **Addressing Underlying Causes of Workplace Stress:** Recognizing the inherent responsibility of leadership to establish trust and provide unwavering support, the ministry took proactive measures to delve into the root causes of the identified stress. Initiatives were launched to provide support for employees and their families during relocations, ensuring smoother transitions. Training programs were introduced to help employees adapt to new roles more effectively. Additionally, counselling services and workshops were made available to address the unique challenges faced by spouses and children of diplomats.
- By refocusing its approach, the organization aimed not just to identify the challenges faced by its workforce but to actively implement solutions, ensuring the well-being of its employees and, by extension, enhancing the overall effectiveness of its global operations.

The Outcome

The organization's revised approach yielded transformative results. By shifting from a narrow satisfaction assessment to a comprehensive evaluation of mental well-being, the state agency was able to pinpoint and address the unique stressors faced by its employees.

Enhanced Employee Well-being: With the introduction of targeted support systems and training programs, there was a marked improvement in the overall mental health of the employees. The ministry reported fewer instances of burnout, and employees expressed feeling more equipped to handle the challenges of frequent relocations and role transitions.

Improved Retention and Job Satisfaction: As the ministry actively addressed the root causes of workplace stress, there was a noticeable uptick in employee retention rates. The proactive measures not only reduced the psychological strain but also fostered a sense of belonging and appreciation among the staff.

Positive Feedback from Families: The support extended to the families of diplomats, particularly the counselling services and cultural adaptation workshops, received positive feedback. Spouses and children felt more prepared for the challenges of relocating to different cultural environments, leading to smoother transitions and reduced familial stress.

Strengthened Organizational Reputation: The organization's commitment to the well-being of its employees did not go unnoticed. It set a benchmark for other governmental departments, showcasing the importance of a holistic approach to employee well-being, especially in roles demanding frequent geographical and functional transitions.

Academic Supervision: The entire project was guided by an academic expert, ensuring that the methodologies employed were robust, evidence-based, and aligned with the latest research in organizational psychology and well-being.

The ministry's proactive and comprehensive approach not only addressed the immediate challenges but also laid the foundation for a more resilient, satisfied, and efficient workforce, ready to represent Austria's interests on the global stage with renewed vigour and dedication.