

Hewlett-Packard Cuts Ergonomics Risks

Employees who use computers for significant amounts of time are being asked to engage in a seven-step process.

By Brett Weiss, MPT *Sep 01, 2003*

IN the middle of 2001, Hewlett-Packard made a decision to change the way it addressed ergonomics in its office environments. HP had two goals: decrease the rate of repetitive strain injuries (RSIs) corporate-wide and create significant administrative efficiencies. HP's proactive implementation of its new program to almost 2,000 employees has significantly decreased the likelihood of RSIs for those who have participated in the program.

A critical element of HP's strategy has been the leveraging of technology. HP identified a Web-based tool that assesses, trains, and follows up automatically with employees. It then rolled out this tool to a portion of its employee base. HP is now beginning to see significant and positive results--more than 78 percent of the individuals who have participated in the new process have measurably reduced their risk of injury.

HP planned to roll out this program in more than 50 countries and nine languages beginning in the second quarter of this year.

HP's Corporate Process

In designing the new program, Hewlett-Packard needed to find solutions that could accommodate its internally accepted processes. HP chose to use a Web-based Ergonomics Program Management Platform--the Ergonomics PMP--that was able to do just that.

The model embraced by HP is based on PDCA (*Plan, Do, Check, Act*). PDCA serves as the foundation for quality and environmental management systems such as ISO 9000 and ISO 14001. This model outlines the components that are necessary for efficiently addressing ergonomics, or any other environmental, health, and safety issue, at HP.

Flexible Technology

Because of its flexibility, the Ergonomics PMP enables HP to adhere to its PDCA model. For example, using the Web-based tool, HP is able to do the following with all of its employees more efficiently than in the past:

- Identify, assess and prioritize ergonomic risks (Plan).
- Train and educate (Do).
- Verify risk reduction by reassessing high- and moderate-risk individuals after they have had a chance to change their set-up or behavior (Check).
- Re-address risks not initially reduced via the prior steps (Act).
- The following implementation steps used by HP clarify how the company will be turning its Ergonomic Process Model into practice using technology. All employees who use computers for significant amounts of time will be asked to engage in this process:

Step 1: Complete the Web-based assessment and training.

Step 2: Receive e-mail feedback offering advice on mitigating existing issues.

Step 3: Thirty days after completing the assessment and training, high- and moderate-risk employees receive an e-mail with advice on how to mitigate those risks. They also receive a personalized reassessment.

Step 4: If risk is reduced to low via the reassessment, the employee is removed from the process, but if the employee remains moderate or high risk . . .

Step 5: . . . Sixty days after completing the assessment and training, employees receive another set of personalized recommendations as well as a personalized e-mail reassessment. The employee's manager receives a copy of this e-mail. EHS is also notified (or conducts a system search) for outstanding high-risk cases, and contact is made with the employee. One-on-one evaluations of the workspace may be utilized at this time, if deemed necessary. Information gained from a one-on-one evaluation is added to the system by the evaluator. If risk is reduced to low, the employee is removed from the process, but if risk remains high . . .

Step 6: . . . Ninety days after completing the assessment and training, employees receive another set of personalized recommendations as well as a personalized e-mail reassessment. The employee's manager receives a copy of this e-mail. EHS will again make contact with the employee after being notified by the system or conducting a system search. Then, the same follow-up process used at the 60-day point is followed.

Step 7: One hundred and 20 days after completing the assessment, the remaining high-risk employees receive a more detailed evaluation and/or other assistance from an outside resource.

Repeated, Easy Follow-up

The above process describes repeated e-mail communication and reassessments as a way to create and record changes that reduce risk. Use of the Ergonomics PMP allows rapid "cycling back" to update employees' risk profiles and other records as conditions change. The Web-based application's provider calls the process *iteration*. Iteration means "repetition; the process of repeating a set of steps until a specific result is achieved."

Use of a Web-based ergonomic application facilitates easy and effective iteration of assessment, analysis, and action. Using iteration, HP continually gathers data through assessments and reassessments; the company analyzes the data and draws conclusions; and it can take specific action (locally and/or globally)--all of this, literally at the push of a button.

HP has found that iteration works. Eighty-nine percent of the people who have participated in the e-mail reassessment process have reduced their risk to low.

Results

The Ergonomics PMP provides reports that allow HP to look at the ergonomic risk profile of the whole company and to use that information to identify common issues and needs.

John Gargiulo, Global Ergonomics Program Manager at HP, is pleased with the program. "People around the world at HP who manage ergonomics programs in their regions can now focus their efforts on the people that need it most," he said. An equally useful benefit of the tool is its ability to provide reports on the results of corporate efforts.

With 89 percent of the people engaged in the feedback loop described above having reduced their risk of injury to low, HP's focus will continue to be on the high- and moderate-risk people. Some people have not yet participated in the feedback loop, but 78 percent of the entire user population have reduced their risk of injury. More than 40 percent of the issues that are likely to increase risk

of injury have been resolved.

Using an anonymous survey of users, HP has been able to verify employee acceptance of the Web-based tool:

- 98 percent would recommend the Ergonomics PMP to a colleague.
- 91 percent rated user-friendliness 3 or better on a scale of 1-5.
- 98 percent of users rated the overall experience 3 or better.

With extended global rollout of this new program within the next 12 months, HP hopes to learn more about how best to leverage technology to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its ergonomics program.

About the Author

Brett Weiss, MPT, is the founder of Remedy Interactive, a Sausalito, Calif. company that developed and provided the Ergonomics Program Management Platform used by Hewlett-Packard. For information, visit www.remedysinteractive.com.

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