

GE MONEY BANK 'HEALTH AHEAD' PROGRAMME (‘GE PRO ZDRAVÍ’) — CZECH REPUBLIC

1. Organisations involved

- GE Capital, United States — ‘HealthAhead’ programme;
- GE Money Bank a.s., Czech Republic — ‘GE Pro zdraví’ programme.

2. Description of the case

2.1. Introduction

GE Capital is the financial services branch of the American corporation General Electric (GE). It is one of the largest business and consumer financing companies in the world, employing 19,000 people in Europe. GE Money Bank a.s., in the Czech Republic, is part of this global company and has 230 branch offices. Of its 3,214 employees, approximately 350 are older workers who have already reached pension age (62 for men and 60 for women) but who continue to work for the company.

‘HealthAhead’ is a GE-wide holistic programme focused on improving the working conditions of all workers and fostering a health culture at GE. The global programme seeks to take proactive steps to improve the health of GE employees by engaging them in preventive healthcare activities, physical activity, healthy nutrition and wellness programmes. Educational programmes focusing on healthy lifestyles are provided and interventions to improve working conditions are regularly conducted. HealthAhead also includes a ‘healthy workplaces’ certification programme that rewards excellence in workplace health promotion by evaluating the national and local GE offices.

HealthAhead certification programme

The purpose of the certification programme is to evaluate workplaces on specific metrics and recognise changes that create a healthier place to work. Sites benchmark and track their progress in the following categories:

- leadership;
- prevention and screening;
- healthy nutrition;
- physical activity;
- tobacco cessation;
- stress and non-physical health;
- health-related absence;
- medical and safety.

Examples of concrete measures to meet the certification requirements include:

- offering free fruit with the purchase of a healthy meal;
- helping employees reduce stress through ‘laughter therapy’;
- providing subsidised fitness centre memberships;
- organising ‘Spring Fling’ family events to promote a healthy low-stress lifestyle;
- implementing vending machine makeovers to improve nutrition on campus;
- enacting a healthy meeting policy for catered meetings and customer visits;
- scheduling regular wellness walks for employees;
- displaying calorie charts and nutritional information in cafeterias.

GE Money Bank a.s. joined the global HealthAhead programme in March 2010 through its 'GE Pro zdraví' ('GE for Health') programme. The GE Pro zdraví programme follows the global GE guidelines and is ongoing.

2.2. Aims

GE Pro zdraví in the Czech Republic aims to create a culture of health promotion for employees and their families by improving employees' knowledge of healthy lifestyles and by promoting healthier working conditions (e.g. by financing healthy food in workplaces and providing sport and wellness activities as part of employee benefits).

2.3. What was done and how?

This project formed part of GE's global HealthAhead programme. Initiated by top management, it was designed and implemented by a specific working group (a Wellness Committee), which includes representatives of management, human resources and workers.

The activities described here are carried out in addition to regular health and safety activities, such as risk assessment and prevention measures.

Implementing activities

Specific activities to promote healthy lifestyles and prevent work-related health issues take place throughout the year during working time. A company newsletter provides information about upcoming talks and educational programmes and also provides information on specific health risks and related preventive programmes (e.g. screening programmes for cardiovascular disease or cancer, strategies to prevent some major diseases). Employees can then choose to register for a particular activity (e.g. lecture, training programme, medical screening).

The following types of activities are implemented as part of the GE Pro zdraví project:

- *Talks on healthy lifestyle:* Healthy dietary regimes, techniques of stress management and strategies to overcome tobacco addictions are some examples of the talks provided.
- *Workshops:* Employees have the opportunity to participate in intensive workshops focused on giving up smoking. Other workshops specifically focus on stress management, using techniques such as assertive behaviour training, work-life balance management, and management and prevention of psychosocial strains in the work environment.
- *Health screenings:* Employees are offered free health screenings on site. Measurements of blood pressure, body mass index and cholesterol, as well as cardiovascular and physiotherapeutic examinations, aim to identify health risks. During a highly successful eye screening programme, 100 employees were diagnosed with eye problems and were provided with information relating to their treatment.
- *Consultations with external advisors:* Nutrition specialists, psychologists, medical authorities and tobacco-dependence centres are provided for employees, where necessary.
- *Healthy nutrition:* Healthy food is clearly marked and provided in the shop/canteen. Employees are also informed about the calorie and fat content of the main meal.
- *Return to work:* A set of measures to facilitate the return to work of workers after a long period of illness also forms part of the programme. Employees who are ill for more than six weeks can apply for temporary changes to their working conditions (e.g. changes in working hours and/or job description) to facilitate their return.
- *Financial support:* Financial support (e.g. subsidies) is provided for employees to strengthen their engagement in physical activities and other activities supporting healthy lifestyles (such as the purchase of healthy food).

- *Other health-related initiatives:* The GE Pro zdraví programme also includes other on-site activities and initiatives promoting a healthy working culture. For instance, all of the smoking zones in the company were closed as part of the stop-smoking initiative.

HealthAhead certification

Part of the global HealthAhead programme is a site-certification programme that requires GE offices with over 100 employees to meet more than 30 detailed requirements ⁽¹⁾. Requirements such as employee access to on-site screening, stress management awareness training, free tobacco cessation programmes, etc., were implemented as part of the GE Pro zdraví project. The Prague and Ostrava branches of GE Money Bank a.s. were both awarded the certificate. Although the certification requirements are predetermined, the programme leaves additional scope for locally developed initiatives, making the exchange of best practice between countries where GE operates an important outcome of HealthAhead.

Evaluation

The programme evaluation is ongoing, with employees encouraged to complete online surveys. Evaluation of the activities is also a permanent item on the agenda of regular meetings.

2.4. What was achieved?

During the first two years of the project, 48 activities took place. The number of times employees participated in the activities over the two years was counted at more than 5,800. Evaluation has shown the following outcomes have been achieved:

- *Increased health awareness:* A significant number of employees were provided with information concerning their health condition (e.g. 100 employees were diagnosed with eye problems).
- *Increased awareness about healthy lifestyle:* Of 213 respondents, 78 % agreed that the activities of the company support healthy lifestyle for employees.
- *Success of stress management activities:* Of 206 respondents, 73 % could mention at least one activity organised by GE Pro zdraví that helped them to manage or prevent stress.
- *Increased motivation for physical activity:* Of 213 respondents, 88 % were aware of at least one form of financial support that the company provided for physical activity.

2.5. Success factors

The following factors contributed to the success of the initiative:

- *Inclusion in a broader strategy:* Clear guidelines and requirements from the global HealthAhead programme were essential for the implementation and sustainability of the project.
- *Exchange of experience:* GE Pro zdraví benefited from the opportunity to follow the good practice of other participating branches of GE.
- *Involvement of senior management:* The implementation of the programme was significantly facilitated by the active involvement of senior management. Additional motivation for senior management was provided by the certification system.
- *Use of external support:* The use of external advisors (e.g. collaboration with nutrition specialists, medical authorities and tobacco-dependence centres) ensured a high level of expertise and experience in the activities carried out.

⁽¹⁾ More detailed information concerning the certification process and site-certification requirements can be found online: <http://www.ge-healthahead.com/ge-sites-worldwide-moving-toward-healthahead-site-certification> (accessed 24.9.2014).

- *Holistic approach:* The incorporation of return-to-work measures in the programme ensured that workers' health was also taken into consideration following illness or injury.
- *Financial support:* The provision of financial supports to employees, in the form of free healthy food, physical activity subsidies, etc., increased their motivation to participate.
- *Communication and distribution of information:* Good dissemination of the information (especially via the newsletter) raised employees' awareness and motivated them to participate in the activities.
- *Evaluation:* Regular evaluation ensured that activities could be adjusted and improved to maximise the likelihood of continued employee motivation to participate.
- *Longevity:* The certification process ensures the longevity of the programme, with local branches required to maintain the evaluated criteria to keep their certification.

2.6. Transferability

The activities in this programme are transferable to other enterprises. While smaller companies could adopt it on a smaller scale, larger companies with a branch-type structure could take a similar approach, with central guidelines and certification and the sharing of good practice.

2.7. Further information

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3. References and resources

- Interview with Dana Jurickova, HR Manager, January 2014.
- GE Money Bank a.s. web page on the GE Pro zdraví programme: <https://www.gemoney.cz/kariera/proc-pracovat-pro-ge-money/kultura-spolecnosti> (in Czech).
- Web page on the GE Pro zdraví programme on the website of Business for Society: <http://www.byznysprospolecnost.cz/csr-reseni-detail/16/ge-pro-zdravi.html> (in Czech).
- GE's global HealthAhead web pages: <http://www.ge-healthahead.com/> and <http://www.ge-healthahead.com/ge-sites-worldwide-moving-toward-healthahead-site-certification> (in English).