

ALERT BEHIND THE WHEEL

1. Case metadata

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▪ **Abstract**

Issue

Every day, over 100,000 professional drivers transport people or goods along the Finnish roads. Research shows that an alarming number of these drivers are overweight and thus at risk of developing illnesses such as diabetes or sleep apnoea, which reduce alertness and may lead to work disability.

Action

The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health currently carries out the 'Alert behind the Wheel' project (2008 - 2011) that aims at improving the eating habits of drivers during working hours, as a device for promoting professional drivers' work energy, alertness and work ability. The 'Alert behind the Wheel' project developed an operational model in collaboration with a Finnish transport company (Oulun Autokuljetus Oy - Trucking Ltd., Oulu).

Models for eating arrangements during working time have been developed with a view to change the eating habits of professional drivers; involving the drivers, their interest groups, the employing organisations, occupational health services and the providers of food services in the service station sector.

The goal is to increase knowledge and awareness regarding healthy food selections and motivate professional drivers to make lifestyle changes as well as healthier food choices and develop new eating habits.

Results

Private Finnish entrepreneurs and at least some of the drivers are now more aware of the connections between dietary habits and road safety issues. Some of the drivers who participated in the programme have lost more than 20 kg weight during the process.

The project revealed that the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) as a contact person within the company is a crucial factor for success. Also the central logistic unit is of major importance because it provides the necessary support and framework to develop the project activities.

2. Organisations involved

Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH) – (Työterveyslaitos)

Trucking Ltd., Oulu – (Oulun Autokuljetus Oy)

3. Description of the case

3.1. Introduction

The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH) is carrying out the 'Alert behind the Wheel' project, which is a three-year project, which commenced in 2008 with the aim of improving the eating habits of drivers during working hours. Every day, over 100,000 professional drivers transport people or goods along the Finnish roads. Statistics [1] show that an alarming number of these drivers are overweight. Common causes of being overweight include sedentary occupation, long working hours and non-standard working hours such as night and shift work as well as familial factors (these may be partly genetic but more often reflect common dietary habits), overeating, high-fat and high-carbohydrate diets and lack of physical exercise. More and more medical evidence proves that overweight persons are more likely to develop health problems such as coronary heart disease and stroke, high blood pressure, abnormal blood fats, metabolic syndrome, sleep apnoea, respiratory problems etc. These health problems affect general health and alertness and may lead to lower work ability and even disability. The project brought together various organisations active in health promotion or road safety in order to exchange working methods and share good practices on awareness-raising about good dietary habits; it has managed to build a large co-operating network. The 'Alert behind the Wheel' project has developed and shared strategies and methods to have an effect on the individual, environment and society.

The project is carried out in cooperation with professional drivers, their interest groups, employers' organisations, occupational health services and the producers of food services in the service station sector. This partnership could help in the development and implementation of WHP programmes by sharing available information or pooling resources, by raising awareness and by encouraging the main actors (employers and employees) to get involved.

One of the 'Alert behind the Wheel' project goals was to motivate employers to encourage and help professional drivers to adopt healthy dietary habits and to make positive, healthy lifestyle changes. It was achieved through providing information and raising awareness on health promoting process benefits for the organisation such as: reduced absenteeism, improved performance, enhanced employee motivation, easier recruitment, reduced turnover, and projecting the image as a positive and caring employer.

Another project goal aims at increasing the professional drivers' skills and motivation to advance their work ability by adhering to a healthy diet. The drivers were informed and involved in various stages and activities of the project so they became aware of the importance of the programme in order to increase their own skills and performance and maintain or improve their health (Figure 1).

Figure 1: **'Star'**, the nice, fatty cartoon character that is used in the promotional material of the 'Alert behind the Wheel' campaign (source FIOH, [2])



Within the 'Alert behind the Wheel' project FIOH has collaborated among others, with Oulun Autokuljetus Oy, to reach these goals. Oulun Autokuljetus Oy is specialised in transport, ground-construction, and water engineering (Figure 2) and is a joint-stock company¹ where the shareholders are private entrepreneurs. The truckers are thus private entrepreneurs. Oulun Autokuljetus Oy's terminal in Oulu, Northern Finland, is the logistic centre of its operations. There is a constant inflow of small and large consignments at the terminal. Sorting and packing are done during night time, and customers' orders are delivered to them during day time. Scheduled deliveries cover the whole of Northern Finland. In freight traffic Oulun Autokuljetus Oy is specialised in temperature-controlled transportation. This type of transportation equipment guarantees maintaining the quality of the delivered products throughout their product life cycle. The company also rents out warehouse space of its terminal to customers. The company also offers ground construction services, provides customers with ground and rock material and demountable platform and crane services.

Figure 2: Pressure tank trucks in Oulun Autokuljetus Oy



The company has competent staff whose skills are continuously improved by training; the staffs are encouraged to participate in environment and work quality improvement. Operating principles are checked and revised regularly and any changes are communicated to the interest groups of company drivers.

¹ a business which is owned by the group of people who have shares in the company (according to Cambridge Dictionary)

3.2. Aims

The 'Alert behind the Wheel' project developed an operational model in collaboration with Oulun Autokuljetus Oy. This model helps to approach, reach and collaborate with a logistic centre in a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME). The models for eating arrangements during working time have been developed with a view to change the eating habits of professional drivers involving the drivers, their interest groups, the employing organisations, occupational health services and the providers of food services in the service station sector.

Some of the challenges to be overcome:

- occupational health services of different companies differ as for material and human resources, contents and professional competencies;
- due to their small size, these companies have few support measures from their work community;
- transporting goods is a very lonely job and even spending TYKY² days was difficult to be settled, since the transport schedules and timetables are so challenging.

The 'Alert behind the Wheel' project aims at improving the eating habits of drivers during working hours (Figure 3). The project goals are the following:

- to promote healthy dietary habits during working hours as a device for promoting professional drivers work energy, alertness and work ability;
- to make professional drivers aware of their skills and motivation in maintaining and enhancing their own work ability by adhering to a healthy diet;
- to motivate employers to encourage and help professional drivers to adopt healthy dietary habits;
- to assist occupational health care in promoting healthy dietary habits among professional drivers;
- to encourage food-service providers to support the approach by offering fresh and healthy meals and snacks.

Figure 3: Drivers in rest break (source FIOH, [2])



The overall goal of the project is to increase knowledge and awareness regarding healthy food selections and to motivate professional drivers to make lifestyle changes, make healthier food choices and develop new and healthier eating habits.

The professional drivers' work community is supported in its efforts to promote health by providing information, ideas and methods for health promotion. Moderate consumption of alcohol, healthy eating habits, performing exercise and enough sleep are examples of the ways in which drivers can look after their health and well-being.

3.3. What was done, and how?

The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH) is a recognised research institute and a specialised organisation that has been promoting occupational safety and health as well as well-being

² TYKY is an abbreviation of Finnish words meaning maintenance of the working ability and equates to the term Workplace Health Promotion, which is used in several European countries. The difference between the two terms is that Workplace Health Promotion includes also a broader and more holistic idea of health promotion.

at work for over 60 years. FIOH supported Oulun Autokuljetus Oy during the entire project process [3].

For a start, a 'Driver's Health Day' was organised including active, empirical learning and guidance aiming at promoting healthy dietary habits and increasing the amount of physical exercise.

With the help of a qualified nutritionist they (FIOH and Oulun Autokuljetus Oy representatives, staff of health care services):

- Disseminated information on how to compile a lunch pack according to the food plate model, and/or make good night time meal packs (Figure 4);
- Supplied a bulletin about the basic principles of a healthy night time diet;
- Helped the drivers to evaluate their own situation and think about their individual lifestyle; the changes needed, goals and plans;
- Made visible the connections between dietary habits and road safety and;
- Measured the drivers' blood pressure and carried out body composition analyses (e.g. body mass index).

Figure 4: How to compile a lunch pack according to the food plate model, and/or make good night time meal packs;



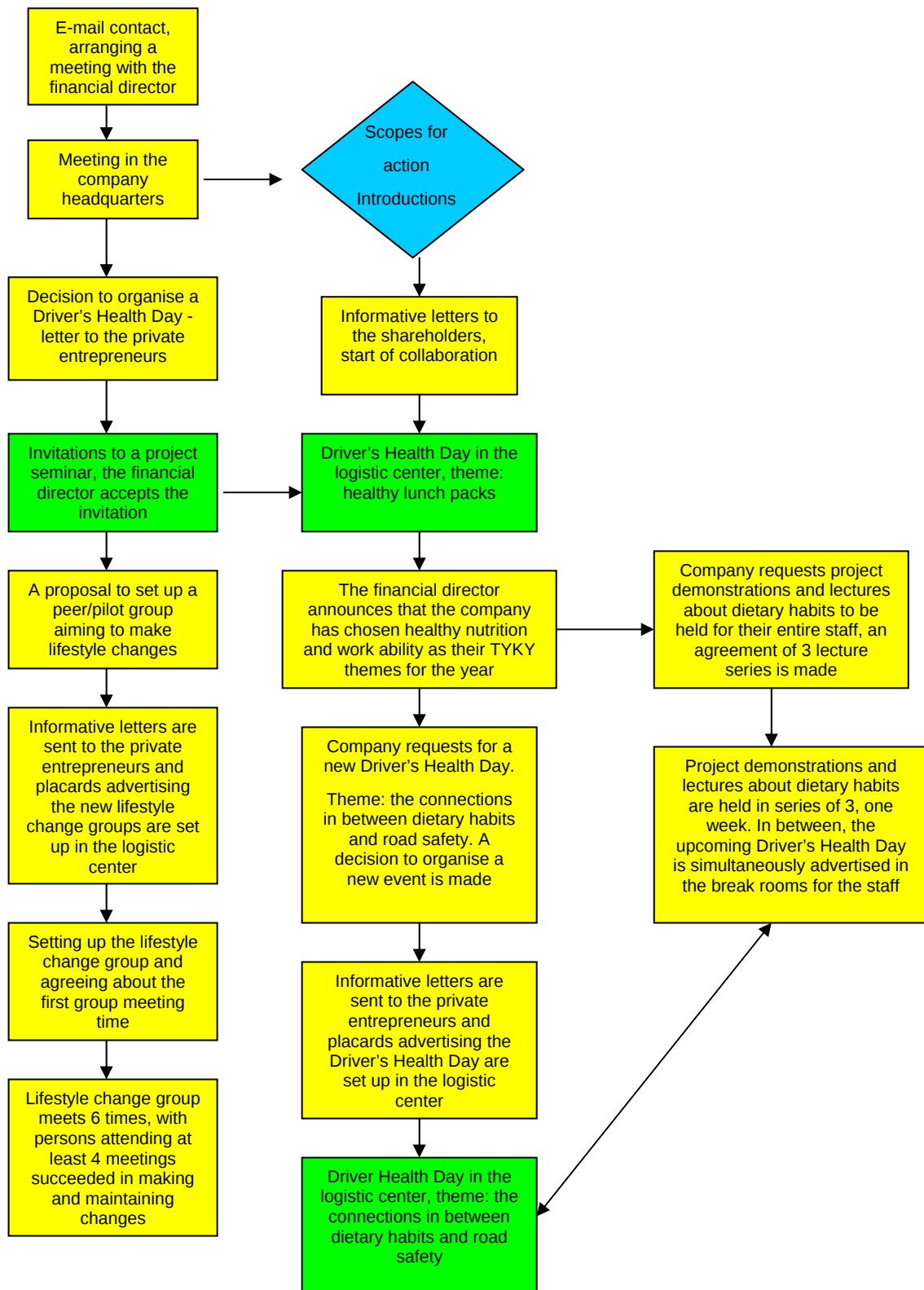
A pilot group of volunteering drivers was established with the aim of making lifestyle changes. All group members were closely supervised by a qualified nutritionist and had regular meetings in the logistic centre. One of the enterprising drivers even got a qualified nutritionist to travel with him several times while driving in the night shift from Oulu to Helsinki and back again.

In the lifestyle change group drivers were motivated to start making important changes in their life. They were empowered to try and test lifestyle changes while getting support during this process from other group members and a professional advisor. Group meetings were always conducted in a casual atmosphere, focusing on productive conversations and helpful topics, no lectures were given and no powerpoint presentations were shown. Group participation was free of charge.

Further on, more meetings for the same and new groups and health days were first advertised to the private entrepreneurs and their staff and then conducted. The advertisement and the invitations were sent in the same envelope with the company payslip letters. The same means of communication was also used when sending material about healthy dietary habits to the shareholders. The development of the project as a flow chart is presented in Figure 5 and more results can be found on the website of the project [4, 5]. Together with occupational health services, FIOH is working to find more approaches for promoting the work ability of professional drivers through nutrition; therefore, the multi-skilled occupational health service team also include a qualified nutritionist. In this way, they try to improve the nutrition, work ability, alertness and work energy of professional drivers through several actions at the same time. The 'Alert behind the Wheel' checklist, developed for the occupational health care units, can function as a supporting tool in physical examinations. It can help in deciding whether a nutritionist should be consulted (For details, see Figure 5).

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Figure 5: Operational model as a flow chart (source FIOH [6])



3.4. What was achieved?

- Employers are now more aware of the connections between dietary habits and road safety issues and support drivers in their effort to make lifestyle changes, healthier food choices and develop new eating habits.
- Drivers are more aware of the link between lifestyle, eating habits, the state of their health and professional performance.
- Some of the drivers have lost more than 20 kg weight during the process. The medical evidence proves that for overweight people losing as little as 5 to 10 per cent of body weight may improve many of the problems linked to being overweight [7, 8]
- The Driver's Health Day aims at producing a checklist that the employers can use in developing their own operations and evaluations: What has already been done in the company? What still needs to be developed? What was especially popular in the Driver's Health Day?
- Some health promotion information was designed and displayed on FIOH website and the 'Alert behind the Wheel' project website; also, two brochures, seven posters and three postcards were designed [5].

3.2. Success factors

Several factors are key factors for programme success.

Employers have an important role in health promoting processes. Transport companies can encourage and enable healthy dietary habits as it brings benefits for the employer too. The financial director as a contact person in the company proves to be a crucial factor for success. With his continued assistance the logistic centre manages to encourage and enable healthy dietary habits; as a result the employees are more content and their well-being at work is in general enhanced.

Some of the Driver Health Days were developed together with the company's occupational health services.

Also, employees' involvement throughout the process has an important role in gaining 'buy-in' and the projects achievements.

The appropriate and professional information, as well as the comprehensive communication strategies to employees used in the operational model of the project, enabled drivers to be more aware of the link between lifestyle, eating habits, health state, professional performance and road safety.

Finally, the collaboration of all stakeholders (employers, professional drivers, their interest groups, employer organisations, occupational health services, and the producers of food services in the service station sector) contributed to the success of the work health promotion programme, by changing the lifestyle and eating habits of professional drivers.

3.3. Further information

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3.4. *Transferability*

The operational model developed in the project is a model on how to approach, reach and collaborate with a logistic centre in a SME in the transport sector, but it can be adapted for SMEs in different sectors of activity. The tested interventions (Driver's Health Day, lifestyle change groups, ways of advertisement and contact) are well suited for joint-stock companies with several shareholders and many operating SMEs.

Such good practices (in the transport sector, food-service and occupational health care) can be extended to a wider field of action. It would be useful if they were embedded into Finnish society.

'Alert behind the Wheel' was a campaign carried out across the whole of Finland. The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health co-ordinated the project, and together with the Finnish Heart Association, Condia PLC, food specialists in the service station business, and transport industry organisations promoted the health and good lifestyle habits of professional drivers. 'Alert behind the Wheel' implements the Government's Policy Programme for Health Promotion, therefore this type of collaborative approach could be used in other industries.

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