



AUSTRIAN COOPERATION ON WORKPLACE HEALTH PROMOTION

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▪ *Abstract*

Issue

In 1998, the Health Care Promotion Law was issued in Austria. The law was established to promote the health and wellbeing within the Austrian public, across all possible stages of life. Education and information about ill-health prevention and health promotion are its manifested targets. Every year a certain amount of tax income (7.25€ million) is invested for achieving the targets highlighted in the law.

The Fonds Gesundes Österreich (FGÖ, Fund for a healthy Austria) has been assigned, among others, to conduct and fund the projects and initiatives aimed to promote health according to the law.

Action

Many different approaches have been taken within the FGÖ to assure that health promotion becomes a prominent topic within Austrian enterprises. Among these projects, there is the cooperation with the Austrian Network on Workplace Health Promotion (ÖNBGF). The ÖNBGF has developed a quality assurance programme (funded by FGÖ) aimed to encourage companies to receive information about workplace health promotion (WHP), to conduct WHP measures according to the quality criteria as outlined by the European Network for WHP (ENWHP), and to assure sustainability of the measures started. The programme involves, among other aspects: a WHP quality label, bonuses for successful implementation, and a periodic award every three years.

Further projects carried out by the FGÖ include:

- the funding of WHP projects within Austrian companies of all sizes;

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- a further education programme targeting different key positions within companies and their possible contribution to a successful health promotion programme; and
- the possibility of funding institutes and organisations (such as, trade unions and the chamber of commerce) for supporting WHP activities.

Results

Many different projects have been supported by the FGÖ in the last years. The cooperation with the ÖNBGF and the common quality assurance programme has led to 537 companies signing the WHP charter and 187 companies receiving the WHP quality label for conducting a high quality WHP programme. In 2011, the 5th set of awards on WHP was assigned and presented.

In addition to this, seminars that are offered within the education programme are frequently asked for and are regularly fully booked. Other projects conducted with different stakeholders resulted in a high level of participation of companies from sectors that are normally difficult to reach.

2. Organisations involved

Fonds Gesundes Österreich (FGÖ - Fund for a healthy Austria), a division of Gesundheit Österreich GmbH

Gesundheit Österreich
GmbH



Austrian Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ÖNBGF)



3. Description of the case

3.1. Introduction

In 1998, the Health Care Promotion Law was issued in Austria. The initiative for setting up this law came from several persons being politically active in the field of ill-health prevention and health promotion, and believing in the value of a concerted approach to such measures.

The law is established to assure the promotion of health in different areas. Education and information about ill-health prevention and health promotion are the main targets highlighted in the law. Every year a certain amount of tax income (7.25€ million) is invested for achieving these targets.

The Fonds Gesundes Österreich (FGÖ, Fund for a Healthy Austria) was set up, among others, to conduct and fund the projects and initiatives aimed to promote health according to the law. Since 2006, the FGÖ is a division of the Gesundheit Österreich GmbH. However, there have not been any significant changes in regard to its mission and funding.



The Austrian Network on Workplace Health Promotion (ÖNBGF) is financed by public Austrian and EU funds mainly. The aim of the network is to provide support and consultation for companies regarding the implementation of WHP by different means: such as, the analysis of sick leave data, employee attitude surveys, and specific problems focusing on different topics. This is done predominantly through nine regional offices and service centres, which are in direct contact with the companies interested in WHP. A second pillar of its dissemination strategy is the distribution of information regarding good quality practices of WHP.

The ÖNBGF, as well as the FGÖ, both fully commit to the definition of good WHP, as laid down in the Luxembourg Declaration¹. Accordingly, all their projects and programmes put special attention to the holistic idea of WHP. Underpinning the concept of a holistic approach to WHP, is that WHP is more than just encouraging the individual to live healthy. A successful WHP programme always includes the whole organisation. In addition, a proper WHP programme is also requesting changes on organisational and environmental basis within a company.

3.2. Aims

The aim of this case study is to present the unique approach Austria has found by issuing the Health Care Promotion Law, and establishing numerous activities financed by the funds originating from that law. A special focus is therefore placed on the cooperation between the FGÖ and the ÖNBGF. The cooperation originated from a model project that was conducted by the ÖNBGF and financed by the FGÖ. The aim of the project was the development of an implementation programme for WHP in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). When the model was finalised, the question arose on how companies could best be motivated to use the implementation programme. In order to address this concern, the Fund for a Healthy Austria and the Austrian Network on Workplace Health Promotion developed the idea of the quality assurance assistance programme. This programme was made to encourage Austrian companies to implement health promotion programmes based on the ideas as outlined in the Luxembourg Declaration.

3.3. What was done, and how?

The work done by the FGÖ, originating from the Health Care Promotion Law is divided into three parts. The first part describes the general approach of project funding that is taken within FGÖ. Projects can be divided into two categories: stakeholder projects and company projects. The second part of the description focuses on training programmes offered by the FGÖ, and the third part focuses on a special initiative set up by the ÖNBGF with funding from the FGÖ.

¹ http://www.enwhp.org/fileadmin/downloads/free/Luxembourg_Declaration_June2005_final.pdf

3.3.1. Project Funding at FGÖ

Company project funding

One of the main aims of FGÖ is encouraging companies to become active in the field of WHP, and to do so in a structured way. This includes implementing WHP programmes that fulfil the general criteria of good quality in WHP² as outlined in the Luxembourg declaration of WHP.

According to the law, the FGÖ has some general rules to comply with when funding WHP projects in companies. The Fund for a Healthy Austria only reimburses companies for implementation costs that result from consultancy and structural changes, as well as capacity building (Fig. 1). Courses and other costs that result from the implemented measures within these programmes (e.g., information sessions on healthy eating, structural building changes for setting up resting areas, costs for trainers conducting smoking cessation courses, etc.) are not paid by the FGÖ.

Depending on the size of a company, a certain percentage of the implementation costs can be submitted for refunding. SMEs currently get reimbursed up to 100% of the implementation costs. For bigger companies (more than 1000 employees), the maximum reimbursement is up to 50% of the costs paid for implementing the WHP programme.

Figure 1: Factsheet summarising the criteria for project funding



² <http://www.enwhp.org/good-whp-practice/methods-tools-mogp/quality-criteria.html>



Stakeholder project funding

In addition to funding projects directly conducted within the companies, FGÖ also cooperates with different stakeholder organisations. Institutes can propose projects to FGÖ and apply for funding. Especially when it comes to target groups that are difficult to reach, such an approach allows more options to reach the companies and to actually get something changed. The following are three examples of stakeholder projects supported by the FGÖ:

- **WHP in Upper Austria**

The Upper Austrian Health Insurance submitted a project to the FGÖ with the aim to spread WHP in upper Austria in small and medium-sized companies. The project involves 80 SMEs that are conducting workplace health promotion measures. The regional office of the health insurance is taking over the formalities for supervising correct funding procedures. By cooperating with the Upper Austrian Health Insurance, the FGÖ is able to reach far more companies than it could by taking care of all the cases themselves.

- **Austrian Federal Economic Chamber: The Pro Fitness Programme**

The Austrian Federal Economic Chamber set up an Internet database for providing companies with information on where to find competent advisors and consultancies with regard to WHP. For being included in the database, providers have to prove that their concepts and practices are in line with the Luxemburg Declaration on Workplace Health Promotion. By setting up this database, the Chamber wants to enhance quality of WHP in companies and to encourage providers to offer high quality measures.

- **Subsidies for the innovation and technology transfer Salzburg GmbH (the establishment belongs to the Federal State of Salzburg)**

The cooperation with Salzburg is based on the share of reimbursement of WHP measures between the FGÖ and the Federal State of Salzburg. While the FGÖ according to its rules only provides subsidies for implementation processes, Salzburg then gives financial support to the companies for the intervention costs. The regional office of the Health Insurance Fund Salzburg is further providing advice to the companies.

3.3.2. Training programmes offered by the FGÖ

Part of the FGÖ's agenda is a special training programme for actors involved in WHP within the company. In the beginning, all courses on workplace health promotion were offered free of charge to the companies; however, FGÖ then faced problems with short-term cancellations or with people subscribing and not showing up. Due to this, courses are now offered for a very low rate (100€ for each participant/day). This measure solved the cancellation problems; and FGÖ now generally conducts courses that are not only being fully booked, but also are being fully attended by all persons that subscribed.

The FGÖ started this programme with offering courses on how to moderate health circles within companies. Aims of these courses are, among others,

- to learn the basics and tools of WHP;
- to try out visualisation, presentation and question techniques for moderating health circles;
- to develop concrete processes for health circles.

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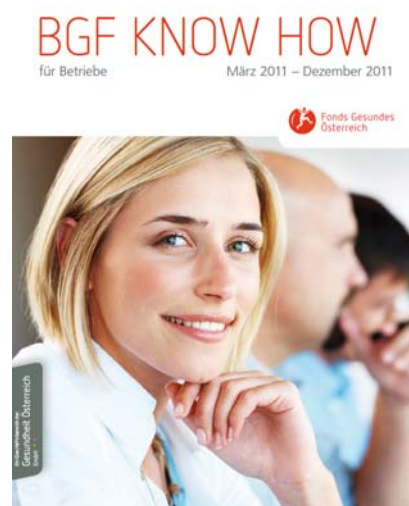
Feedback from the participants was very positive, and the general content of the seminars was found to meet their needs. However, participants reported that they encountered problems in implementing the aspects learned within the seminar in their company. This often happened because the WHP project leader/responsible within the company and the person moderating the circle had different perspectives on the WHP approach. FGÖ assumed that these differences resulted from different understandings on WHP; and, thus, they decided that there was a need to spread more widely the idea of what a holistic approach to WHP entailed (including organisational changes as well as individual approaches).

As such, FGÖ developed a second series of seminars for WHP project leaders. The seminar is not meant for experts or people wanting to set up a consultancy in relation to these aspects. The content of the seminar has a concentrated focus on laymen being responsible within a company for setting up a WHP programme. Again, the feedback from this group of trained persons resulted in the idea of extended training needs. Consequently, a further training programme on WHP was set up for managers (Fig. 2).

Further awareness on this topic also resulted from a project in a supermarket chain that aimed to implement WHP involving all employees. It was thought that training would be beneficial for several employees, and health circles should have been conducted. Regional managers as well as branch managers were informed about the measures. For some reason, communication in this supermarket chain did not work well and finally many heads of department did not allow their employees to take part in the programme. The initiative failed due to bad communication, and due to the heads of department not being informed and not seeing the need for such activities.

With the aim to change this approach, FGÖ set up the third set of seminars for managers. The seminar consists of two parts. One part focuses on how managers can provide employees with healthy working conditions, and how to best assist employees in maintaining and promoting their own health as best as possible. The second part of the programme focuses on the managers themselves and on their own working situation and behaviour. This is necessary because manager should serve as a role model for their employees.

Figure 2: Further training programme for WHP available at:
http://fgoe.org/fortbildung/BGF_Programm_2011.pdf



3.3.3. Quality assurance programme conducted by the ÖNBGF

Since the establishment of the FGÖ, a productive cooperation exists between the FGÖ and the ÖNBGF. Between 2003 and 2005, the ÖNBGF developed a model for the implementation of WHP in SMEs. The project for developing the model was financed by the FGÖ. This model was then tested within 12 companies. Among other findings, the results showed that companies tend to implement mainly measures that are primarily easy to conduct, and that companies sometimes are less attentive when it comes to quality aspects with regard to the implementation of WHP measures. Consequently, less attention is paid to those aspects that require more effort. In addition, the quality of WHP programmes was observed to decrease in small degrees the longer the implementation period had passed.

As a consequence the FGÖ and the ÖNBGF started thinking about how quality and sustainability can be best assured during the implementation phase, as well as in the long run. They developed the quality assurance programme. The programme is based on a stepwise approach. The first step is meant to inform companies on good quality criteria of WHP measures: for example, including information on holistic approaches and worker involvement. Companies get a free consultation at the regional health insurance office, and sign a WHP charter for having participated in the information session and having the intention to implement WHP according to the quality criteria. Based on this information companies can then set up their own WHP programme. Once they have implemented the WHP programme, they can apply for the WHP quality label. The health insurance office oversees the checking of the quality of the project. If the regional health insurance office approves the quality, the advisory board takes the final decision. The advisory board consists of different representatives, among them a member from the FGÖ, a representative from Germany and from Switzerland. In case the project meets the Luxembourg standards on good quality of WHP², the company gets the quality label, which is valid for three years.

At the end of the three-year period, companies can apply again for the quality label. The idea behind this approach is to assure sustainability within the WHP projects. In case a company gets the quality label a second time, the label goes along with a reward of 2500-7500€ (depending on the size of the company). From 2012 onwards this system might be reorganised, but the new rules have not been decided to date. The money that companies receive is meant for being invested in further WHP measures. One company (RHI AG) used this money for producing a trailer on the role of safety and health during the apprenticeship at RHI AG.

Every three years, the FGÖ awards two of the companies that gained the WHP quality label (a small or medium-sized company as well as a large company) for having implemented an outstanding WHP programme. The process starts with the regional offices of the health insurances proposing companies. In a second step, a regional office from another region then assesses the programme. If both offices agree on proposing the company for taking part in the award, the next step is taken. The advisory board then finally goes through the different proposals from the regional offices and decides on the winners.

3.4. What was achieved?

- The company's project funding scheme has been in place since 1999. Funding rules and projects have been going through changes since this time, but in all approximately 300 WHP

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projects have been funded and living and working conditions of many employees have been improved. Employers' interest in the programme continues to grow.

- The stakeholder project funding is a successful tool to reach employers by the FGÖ directly. Funding of stakeholder projects allows the efficient management of approaches often targeting SMEs. By getting support from chambers and trade unions, the companies often do not have to go through the whole administrative application procedure. Projects are conducted more easily, and especially SMEs are easier to reach.
- Different trainings have been offered now for several years. The first training programme aimed to provide training on moderation for health circles, and was then amplified by trainings for persons being in charge for managing WHP programmes within a company and for managers. The high number of request on such training, even from persons searching for general training possibilities, proves the good quality of the trainings offered. Continuous evaluation of the training programmes further assures ongoing improvement.
- The quality assurance programme has been in place for five consecutive years. In 2011, funding conditions will be reviewed and might change afterwards. However until such time, 537 companies have signed the WHP charter; under which 187 companies achieved the quality label, out of which 66 achieved the label twice or more often and, in turn, received the financial funding for rewarding sustainability.
- In 2011, the 5th set of awards on WHP was implemented.

3.5. Success factors

The first issue to highlight when telling the success story of the Austrian approach to WHP is probably the political will and the power of endurance of certain politicians that made the Health Care Promotion Law come true. The law guarantees a yearly budget for funding health promotion projects in several areas among them workplace health promotion, and resulted, in turn, in the foundation of the FGÖ. The fact that the money is available yearly and that the FGÖ is in charge of distributing it in an efficient manner assures sustainability for the FGÖ projects, and allows for productive long-term cooperation with different partners like the ÖNBGF and stakeholder organisations.

The networking with these stakeholders follows one main goal: distributing WHP ideas and approaches all over Austria, and encouraging employers to get interested and to take action in these areas. Employers' interest is kept high, not only because of offering financial funding but also because of other incentives like publicity and low priced support as offered by trainings for WHP actors and managers.

3.6. Further information

Fonds Gesundes Österreich (FGÖ)

URL: <http://www.fgoe.org/>

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3.7. *Transferability*

The approach taken by Austria is a very efficient way of ensuring and supporting workplace health promotion. The idea to fund projects within companies, as well as funding stakeholder projects allows for different groups of actors to become active; and, in turn, assures that SMEs can get additional support by chambers and trade unions.

The cooperation established with the ÖNBGF and the regional health insurance offices further support the regional dissemination of the messages spread by the FGÖ. By offering free support and information sessions for companies, employers are encouraged to receive an additional benefit without paying for getting the advice. The second step is encouraging WHP projects, and the third step is encouraging sustainability by offering financial incentives perfectly complementing the regional approach.

The most difficult aspect when copying the Austrian approach is finding an appropriate funding for such a project. The Austrian approach is based on a law aimed at supporting health promotion, but other funding schemes are of course also possible. However, it might be helpful to have in mind that the Austrian law also originated from the enthusiasm and activity of certain politicians.

Divisions of the ENWHP exist across the entire EU, and also in some EFTA countries. The cooperation with the national ENWHP offices and other national and regional partners allows for access to support and to find a company targeted approach to different establishments.

4. References, resources:

- Homepage FGÖ: <http://www.goeg.at> & <http://www.fgoe.org/>
- A list of projects funded by the FGÖ can be found here: <http://www.fgoe.org/projektfoerderung/gefoerderte-projekte>
- A brochure presenting different projects in more detail can be found here: <http://www.fgoe.org/presse-publikationen/downloads/broschueren-folder/betriebliche-gesundheitsforderung-in-osterreich-beispiele-guter-praxis-2011/2011-06-09.9983610941>
- Homepage Austrian Network for Workplace Health Promotion: <http://www.netzwerk-bgf.at/>
- Austrian Health Care Promotion Law: http://www.jusline.at/Gesundheitsfoerderungsgesetz_%28GfG%29.html