



PROJECT ADDHEALTH

1. Organisations involved

AddIT

2. Description of the case

2.1. Introduction

The employees of addIT suffered from severe stress caused by work to tight deadlines, high customer expectations and intense competition in the ICT sector. In a first step the stressors were identified. Secondly an OSH management system was designed which fitted exactly the needs of the company, including ongoing workstation evaluation, health circles, and individual workplace health promotion.

AddIT is an IT company with about 80 employees that provides IT business solutions and services for the industrial, public and health care sector. The employees of the IT company suffered from severe stress and overload. The fact that three companies merged in 2000 to form AddIT made the situation for the employees worse, because it brought changes to well established teams and resulted in the creation of new teams, and led to staff taking over new areas of responsibilities, serving new and major clients. The period immediately after the merger was characterised by heavy stress, considerable employee turnover and an increase in psychological problems such as burnout syndrome.

To help retain the loyalty of employees, to reduce/remove psychological barriers and to promote good relations between employees the management decided to implement addHEALTH, a company cultural project with the focus on health.

The project was supported by the Fund for a Healthy Austria (Fonds Gesundes Österreich) and developed with help from the ARC Seibersdorf Research. ARC Seibersdorf Research created the S3 – workplace health circle (schlank, schnell, salutogen = slim, fast, salutogenic⁴¹): a concept which is based on a salutogenic equilibrium model.

2.2. Aims

The main aim of the project was:

- To implement an OSH management system that is integrated into the corporate culture in an active and sustainable way to ensure healthy and content employees as well as smooth-running work processes.
- To develop a team spirit within the company to improve performance and profitability.

2.3. What was done, and how?

A special approach was developed according to the principle of 'expeditions management'. It is called this because the project was seen as an 'expedition' that could not be planned or predicted and was expected to give rise to unexpected events. For this reason expeditions management is based on very good teamwork, flexibility, creativity and the willingness to act unconventionally. The expedition (project) started with an initial survey (Ersterhebung) to help determine which actions should be taken as a first step. Then a second 'mini' survey was held to assess the actions and to decide on further actions. This process was carried out repeatedly, a procedure known as 'survey/action swing' (Erhebungs/Masnahmen Schaukel).

Initial phase

At the beginning of the project a 'project management board' was created. It consists of members of the company management and executive staff. The task of this board was to implement project steps, monitor the milestones and budget and assess the quality of the project.

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The following goals were set to be achieved within three months:

- fixing the priority value of health in relation to the business strategy
- surveying data to prepare a health and cultural profile of the company
- hiring and training of promoters
- developing a concept for evaluation
- implementing a structure for organising and communicating addHEALTH.

Promoters were chosen from all organisation units to ensure that the health circles would have a wide effect within the company, and they were trained in special workshops. The management board and the promoters met to agree on the goals and benefits of the project.

Circle phase

In this phase the circle of promoters analysed which factors were affecting the mental health of the workers and how they could be eliminated.

Specially trained employees carried out a survey to detect and analyse stress factors such as emotional distress. Actions to improve the health of the employees and to reduce mental barriers were developed and a salutogenic company process management was implemented.

To reach this goal the following questions were highlighted:

- What factors affect the mental health of the employees?
- What cultural factors are present?
- What measures can help to eliminate these factors?
- How can the elimination/reduction of these factors be assessed?
- How can the quality of the process be assessed?
- Relevant questions from the fields of health, 'soft skills', soft facts', corporate culture and company process management.

Methods of collecting data

Two main methods were used:

- Interviews with employees. The circle promoters developed a guideline for the interviews, to guarantee an uniform approach. Each interviewer interviewed a number of employees, but never employees from their own bureau (unit). The interviews were treated anonymously. They were recorded, transcribed and then analysed. About 49 interviews were carried out. The task of the promoters was to pinpoint typical company processes as well as barriers to innovation. 82 different cases were detected.
- Data collection in a newly developed so-called 'mishapes, missteps and misfortune database' (Pleiten-Pannen-Pech Datenbank). Employees and members of management entered the following information in the database:
 - Basic description of the problem (case): What happened, why and in what situation?
 - Is it typical for the company?
 - Examples?
 - Description of the situation.
 - Which type of barrier exists (property, process or culture barrier)?
 - Indicator to measure the changes?

About 112 cases were collected

Two different methods were used to analyse the information gathered:

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- Self-management model: this is a goal-oriented model to solve problems according to the principle 'Help for Self-Help'. Self-management skills include, among others, self-monitoring, self-control and self-motivation (Wikipedia, 2007).
- Pattern analysis to detect similarities between the different cases (problems) and interviews.

Twelve types of barriers were detected and analysed as case studies. The analysis of the barriers incorporated analyses of the employees such as typical situation, reactions and consequences; the cultural background from the employee's point of view; and finally proposed measures to break down barriers (problems). At the end of this phase addIT started to create a salutogenic company process management.

Implementation phase

In the implementation phase 'Health Teams' carried out small projects aimed at providing continuous improvement in employee welfare and staff communications. A top priority of the projects was the development of 'soft' strategies such as communication strategies in dealing with criticism or delegating tasks. This phase included work on improving interpersonal relationships, strategies for dealing with criticism and successfully delegating work, and an assessment of the atmosphere at the workplace.

'Realtime strategic change conferences' (RTSC) were also organised. In these conferences, participants interact with the management team or the group that has presented a proposal for the future, together with outside experts and anyone else who will be affected by the strategic change. This ensures an effective, goal-oriented exchange of opinions. The proposals and points raised are analysed and any new strategies are revised and formulated. RTSC is a method for larger groups of participants (Grosgruppenmethode) that is especially effective in handling new ideas or strategic changes.

The project was developed in close cooperation with the ARC Seibersdorf Research GmbH which specialises in process-oriented OSH management and has developed innovative tools and methods to improve the health of employees in the field of New Economy.

The project was supported financially by the 'Fund for a Healthy Austria'.

2.4. What was achieved?

The project has been evaluated right from the start and documented half-yearly. Internal communication and teamwork in particular improved greatly and the training in 'soft skills/facts' was effective.

Some 90% of the company's employees were actively involved in the project, which ran from 2004 to 2006. The company is divided in different units, each of which was evaluated separately. This is why the results are given in a range rather than a single figure. The main achievements are:

- 14-28% reduction in stress factors
- 10-24% improvement in team spirit
- 8-27% health improvement.

The project received the seal of quality awarded by the Fund for a Healthy Austria in 2006.

Problems faced

At the beginning of the project there was some opposition and it required considerable effort to persuade the employees of its benefits.

At the beginning of the training phase the promoters experienced difficulties in learning and using the methods and tools of health promotion, and transferring their knowledge to the other employees.

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The training was held outside the company. This guaranteed that the promoters could concentrate on the special training without being distracted by day-to-day business (e.g. phone-calls, emails, meetings).

There was a risk that parts of the target group would be missed, because they felt excluded and not embedded in the project. To ensure that all employees felt involved, they were informed and integrated right from the beginning of the project. Meetings/forums for employees still take place regularly to guarantee the flow of information, and communication also takes place via intranet and special marketing activities. The Kaizen training and the sustainable continuous improvement process (NKVP) actively involved the employees.

Initially the employees were very suspicious about the interviews and surveys, so agreement was made to anonymise the data. To provide transparency the data were published in the database for 'misshape-missteps-misfortune'.

2.5. Success factors

The following factors made this project successful:

- Introducing the database for 'misshape-missteps-misfortune'. This transparency showed that all concerns and wishes of the employees were taken seriously.
- The project was supported by the management during the entire running period.
- External support by the ARC Seibersdorf. Health and safety projects can only be successful with competent expert advice.
- Measurable improvements during the project gave a boost to the project.
- Training such as Kaizen, the RTSC conferences and the sustainable continuous improvement processes.
- Publication of the results in the company.
- Reports to the Fund for a Healthy Austria: all reports (3 progress reports, 1 final report) were regarded as excellent.
- Very positive evaluation from the FB+ E (research, consulting and evaluation) Institute in Berlin (<http://www.fb-e.de/>)
- The award of the seal of quality ('Betriebliche Gesundheitsforderung') from the Fund for a Healthy Austria in 2006.

2.6. Further information

Contact information:

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2.7. Transferability

The addHealth project itself is not easily transferable to other companies, because it is an individual programme set up especially for addIT. During the entire running period the special requirements of the company and the employees were taken into consideration and a very specific project area was created.

However, the idea and the approach of the project are transferable to other enterprises, as well as the tools and methods developed. For example, the sustainable continuous improvement process (NKVP) is transferable to other companies with appropriately trained moderators. This method is now even used by addIT to identify problems and barriers between the company and clients at an early stage.

3. References, resources:

Sources and further information

AddIT, *Verantwortung zeigen 2007 – good practice*, addIT Dienstleistungen GmbH Co KG, 2007 http://www.verantwortung-zeigen.at/fileadmin/templates/vz/download/ubgp/addit_addhealth.pdf

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