

VIVA AT PRO MENTE – HEALTH MANAGEMENT

1. Organisations involved

pro mente Oberösterreich

2. Description of the case

2.1. Introduction

Pro mente Oberösterreich is an Austrian social service provider employing 1,400 persons. It takes care of more than 26,000 mentally handicapped and impaired persons with more than 150 institutions all over Upper Austria. Pro mente Oberösterreich supports this target group in observing their human rights, in improving and ensuring their care, in providing them with information and accompanying them with regard to medical, psychological, social, and economic aspects.

The results of an employee attitude survey carried out in 2000 indicated that the employees at pro mente Oberösterreich were exposed to high pressure due to time and cost restrictions. They also suffered from high overwork including excessive quantitative demands, but at the same time they felt qualitatively underchallenged. In addition, a high amount of employees sometimes felt exhausted. Due to these alarming results the mental health promotion project “VIVA” was launched, involving all pro mente institutions in Upper Austria. As a consequence, an employee health survey was carried out at pro mente Oberösterreich in 2001. Thereby, questionnaires were distributed to all employees. The results of this employee health survey clearly revealed the need for action and the need to take measures to improve the employees’ health. In addition, the management of pro mente Oberösterreich was aware of the fact that employees caring for the health and well-being of mentally handicapped and impaired persons need resources with regard to their own health.

The salutogenesis (by Aaron Antonovsky) can be regarded as the theoretical background of the mental health promotion project “VIVA”. The idea behind the concept of salutogenesis is not to ask what factors cause illness but to put emphasis on aspects that support and maintain health. In consequence the project does not only aim at revealing problematic aspects and stressors, but also aims at making aware available resources and potential support factors. Thus, ways of how to decrease stressors as well as how to increase resources were focused.

2.2. Aims

The employees should be made aware of and sensitised to aspects related to their health. Thereby, the project was based on the idea that mental health promotion can not be regarded as a singular action or short-term activity, but as a long-lasting process. Besides identifying problematic aspects and stressors, the management also made employees aware of available resources and potential support. Thus, “VIVA” aimed at making aware of factors affecting the employees’ health in a positive and negative way: E.g. the employees were asked in health circles to list possible solutions in order to decrease their stressors and to increase their resources. In order to improve the employees’ health, the mental health promotion project “VIVA” followed a holistic approach, involving measures concerning the structure of work as well as the personal health behaviour of employees.

2.3. What was done, and how?

The health insurance company, Oberösterreichische Gebietskrankenkasse (OÖGKK), was contacted by pro mente Oberösterreich. The health insurance company, which had initiated other mental health promotion projects in profit organisations before, provided an expert who participated in the steering committee. However it was the first time that the OÖGKK carried out a mental health promotion

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project within a non-profit organisation. They provided relevant statistics (number of days on which the employees were not able to work and the diagnoses related to these inabilities to work). They also took actively part in carrying out and analysing the employee health survey and in preparing the health report on the results of the survey. The project management was allocated to the educational institute of pro mente Oberösterreich which is also engaged in organisational and human resource development.

The mental health promotion project “VIVA” can be divided in nine project phases, which will be described in detail in the following:

1. Preparatory meeting

First a preparatory meeting was summoned. In addition to the Oberösterreichische Gebietskrankenkasse (OÖGKK) the management of pro mente Oberösterreich attended this meeting. During the meeting the primarily rough concept of mental health promotion of the VIVA project was presented, discussed, shaped and modified.

2. Launching of the steering committee

The steering committee was entrusted by the management and the managing board with carrying out the health management project. The members of the steering committee were chosen by the management of pro mente Oberösterreich. The participants of the steering committee consisted of the manager of pro mente Oberösterreich, the project leader of the mental health promotion project “VIVA”, and other members of the educational institute, the workers’ council, the manager of the department related to job training, an employee of housing and care for mentally handicapped and impaired persons, and the company physician of pro mente Oberösterreich as well as an external counsellor and counsellors of the Oberösterreichische Gebietskrankenkasse (OÖGKK). Nowadays, the representative of the human resources development department is responsible for the complete health management programme.

3. Data collection

In order to assess the actual health condition of the pro mente employees, available data from earlier employee attitude surveys were consulted and an employee health survey was carried out with the help of the job analysis questionnaire “Salutogenetische Subjektive Arbeitsanalyse” (SALSA). The SALSA questionnaire consists of five parts and in particular focuses on the resources which are available for employees. A response rate of 65.4% was reached in the employee health survey.

4. Health report

On the basis of the information achieved by the employee health survey a health report was written. The employees were provided with this consolidated report and the results were presented at the staff meeting taking place once a year.

Regarding work load and work characteristics the employees of pro mente Oberösterreich suffered from high work demands above average. These high work demands were also displayed in the data associated with stress and time pressure. Accordingly, the employees mostly suffered from stressors such as time pressure and the lack of possibilities to retreat (e.g. no breaks during consulting). Furthermore noise and narrow rooms were two frequently mentioned stressors.

Qualitatively, the employees of pro mente Oberösterreich regarded themselves as only slightly underchallenged. This suggests that they experienced their work as rather challenging and demanding. Regarding organisational work characteristics, the employees of pro mente Oberösterreich enjoyed autonomous work as well as a high freedom of action and job control regarding their work. Thus, the employees appreciated high individual responsibilities within their work. A high amount of employees perceived the working atmosphere as very good or good. A below average percentage of employees regarded the working climate as negative at pro mente Oberösterreich. However, there was evidence that the social support of the supervisors was regarded as rather low, whereas the social support of the colleagues was assessed as very good.

5. Health circles

All in all, seven health circles – one circle for every homogeneous department (including e.g. departments of administration, counselling, housing, addiction, etc.) and one for the supervisors of

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these departments – were established. The health circles were led by moderators and their participants suggested measures which were based on the employee health survey results for improving the employees' health. Every health circle consisted of five to seven members of a specific department. They participated in meetings for three to four times and discussed the health situation with regard to their working environment, working conditions and other problems within their specific department. In addition to the discussion about the actual situation, they defined the aims, suggested solutions and decided on a responsible person caring for a specific problem. In June 2002, the measures were presented to the steering committee, the management, the managing board, the responsible person for the district and the coordinators of the departments in a meeting. The measures included e.g. improved IT equipment, more possibilities for recreation, buffer times, the possibility of having a warm lunch, more possibilities to exercise as well as the reduction of time pressure. All in all, the members of the health circles collected more than 1,000 measures. This led to difficulties in the work of the steering committee, as it had to condense the number of measures. Therefore, it would have been better, if the health circles would have been asked to transmit the ten most important measures instead of naming as many measures as the members of the health circles could think of.

6. Discussion about measures

Due to the high number of suggestions as well due to the aim of integrating the measures in existing structures of pro mente Oberösterreich, work was distributed among the various scientific committees at pro mente Oberösterreich. A person in charge of the steering committee and a responsible person of an already existing scientific committee at pro mente Oberösterreich discussed how urgent, realizable and feasible the measures to be implemented were. When e.g. facing a problem related to the information culture, the department of communication and marketing was informed about the suggested measures. The department was also asked to improve the intranet as well as to install a working group for further proceedings. The problem regarding the time pressure was handled by the educational department by organizing time management courses and other management trainings as well as by discussing alternative working time models. However, suggestions which could not be realized also appeared (e.g. personal parking place in front of the office or distribution of information in a digital and a paper version).

7. Decision making regarding the measures

At the end of 2002, the management and the managing board decided upon the measures to be implemented. Furthermore, it had to be decided in which departments the measures were to be implemented as well as which kind of cooperation could be regarded as necessary. Their decision was based on the results of the discussion provided by the steering committee. Thereby, “urgency” and “realisability” were the most important factors for decision making. However, interestingly, a lot of measures that were suggested by the health circles had already been available or were about to be implemented. Thus, besides implementing new measures, it was regarded as important to make employees aware of these measures as well as of those measures already available. The employees should be informed about existing resources and feel responsible to make use of them. Thus, in order to implement the measures in the daily work, it was important to make use of resources already available as well as to assign the measures to the particular scientific committees.

8. Efficient implementation of measures

After the management and the managing board decided about the measures to be taken, another steering group meeting was called. It aimed at implementing the decisions taken in the structure of pro mente Oberösterreich as efficiently as possible. Additionally, the steering group meeting was to enable a successful coordination of the diverse measures to be taken. Finally, the group succeeded in developing a list of duties and responsibilities including short-, medium- and long-term goals and steps to be taken.

9. Informative meeting

Finally in 2002, the measures which were decided to be conducted and the ways of how to implement them were presented to the management of pro mente Oberösterreich, the managing board of pro mente Oberösterreich, the steering committee of the mental health promotion project “VIVA”, delegates of the health circles as well as to responsible persons of the departments (e.g. the

The logo features a blue rectangular background. On the left side, there is a white stylized graphic of a ribbon or a path that curves upwards and to the right. To the right of this graphic, the words "CASE STUDIES" are written in a large, white, sans-serif font. The letters are slightly shadowed, giving them a three-dimensional appearance as if they are floating above or attached to the blue background.

administrative department related to communication and marketing, the department related to occupational medicine...) in an informative meeting. In addition, the results were presented to all employees at the employees' meeting in 2003.

The health promotion project officially ended in 2003. However, a permanent mental health promotion process followed up on the project completion at pro mente Oberösterreich. This does not consist of all specific project phases, but still makes use of employee attitude surveys being regularly carried out as well as of a special committee under direction of the health and safety manager which was set up. It consists of the manager, the personnel management, specialists for prevention, the work council, as well as health and safety managers of pro mente Oberösterreich. Meetings of this committee take place four times a year.

In the educational institute of pro mente Oberösterreich it is made use of human resources and organisational development, in order to improve the working environment. The first results of the mental health promotion project "VIVA" were made use of and special products for health management were developed:

- Nowadays, an increasing number of health topics can be found in the education programme of the educational institute of pro mente Oberösterreich. In the winter term 2002/03 courses such as e.g. "My health – Experiencing body and exercise as resources", "Starting to eat in a healthy way – with the help of a fully-fledged, diversified and balanced nutrition" were offered. In the summer term of 2003, a module for the diploma of social psychiatric work on which can be build up was developed in the educational institute. This "Training for psycho-social health in companies" should enable disseminators at work to identify their own and others' symptoms including stress, burnout, addiction etc. and to adequately intervene against them.
- A programme for managers was developed. It consists of inaugural days for supervisors where the structure and the departments of pro mente Oberösterreich are presented to the supervisors.
- With regard to human resources development, the programme for advanced training was enlarged by topics such as mental hygiene, team spirit, leadership and management skills, time and stress management, burnout, etc.

In 2004/2005, the health promotion committee dealt with the following aspects:

- With enacting stricter laws on smoking in Austria, pro mente Oberösterreich dealt with aspects concerning the prohibition of smoking in waiting rooms and stairways. This prohibition especially affected the clients of pro mente Oberösterreich.
- A workshop was set up, in order to develop a subsidiary for evaluating and identifying stressors and resources, duties and responsibilities of supervisors as well as supportive measures and instruments regarding psychosocial health.
- In the project called "Ready4job" the health promotion committee was also engaged with early warning with regard to the hazard of addiction. It aimed at preventing hazards of addiction and wanted to make aware of how to deal with problems and conflicts going along with psychoactive substance/alcohol abuse and dependency at work. The employer/work council agreement provided consistent guidelines on how to deal with employees addicted to any substance, a plan by stages for the present case, outreaches for employees at risk and addicted employees as well as precise instructions for supervisors of how to handle such situations. Thereby, internal and external experts provide support and a place to go for concerned employees. The project's steering committee consisted of the personnel management, specialists for prevention, experts concerning addiction including health professionals as well as psychologists, the head of housing and care for mentally handicapped and impaired persons, the work council, as well as health and safety managers of pro mente Oberösterreich. In singular cases, the management of pro mente Oberösterreich was also part of the steering committee for the project "Ready4job".
- Due to the topics' relevance, supervisors are obliged to take part in advanced trainings regarding psychosocial health and addiction at work since the end of 2005.

In 2006/2007, the health promotion committee dealt with the following aspects:

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- All measures developed before were further implemented.
- Additionally, the number of participants in and their satisfaction with the advanced trainings were evaluated at pro mente Oberösterreich.
- In case of undergoing a personal crises the concerned employees were asked to address the issue, so that pro mente Oberösterreich could provide assistance.
- An internal regional network was established, in order to enable pro mente Oberösterreich to offer trainings outside the bigger cities such as Linz. In October 2006, a first meeting took place in Wels, Austria. The health promotion project “VIVA” as well as its offers were presented to the representatives of all network regions. Thereby, the demands to be covered and the involvement of the regional institutions were discussed by the participants of the meeting.
- An employer/work council agreement was developed, in order to clarify how to deal with internal conflicts. The written agreement consists of a plan by stages for how to deal with such situations at work.
- From March until December 2006 a health campaign was mounted at pro mente Oberösterreich. It aimed at communicating the mental health promotion measures as well as at strengthening the health awareness regarding the following specific issues among the employees of pro mente Oberösterreich: (1) Indulgence/addiction, (2) stress, (3) ergonomics and back and (4) healthy immune system - focusing on nutrition and exercise. This was accomplished by distributing e-cards, posters, and professional articles regarding the health issues as well as competitions taking place and coming with attractive prizes.
- Last but not least, preventive and interventional procedures associated with burnout were developed by pro mente Oberösterreich.

In 2008/2009, the health promotion committee dealt with the following aspects:

- Since 2008 a working group evaluates the opportunities and the risks of the demand rates indicating the money which is paid by the conveyor for a specific achievement and the equal opportunities law (“Chancengleichheitsgesetz”) stating that mentally ill have the same rights as physical ill persons. This working group consists of the management, the work council, the departments of documentation and research and of communication and marketing, the occupational health practitioner, health and safety managers, representatives of the clients, of the human resource management as well as of the educational institute.
- Advice and help is provided for the employees of pro mente Oberösterreich with regard to the following pillars since the end of 2008: Prevention and intervention with regard to substance dependency, burnout, crisis management and conflict settlement. In case of conflict and burnout – if desired – external experts give anonymously advice to the employees of pro mente Oberösterreich, totally free of charge.
- A first aid course lasting 16 hours is required for first-aiders every ten years. In addition, a short refresher course is required every five years. If required, pro mente Oberösterreich arranges these courses.
- At the moment, the work council, the human resource management and the health and safety managers work on a possibility to support the employees, returning to work after long-term illness.
- The project “Gingko” standing for “Generationen IN Guter KOoperation” (generations in good cooperation) aims at improving the cooperation between younger and older employees. Possibilities to support the older employees being employed for many years at pro mente Oberösterreich are further developed and implemented.
- Additional workshops and short courses can be booked by employees and can be found in the education programme of pro mente Oberösterreich. The programme includes e.g. courses associated with relaxed sights during computer work, archery as another form of mental hygiene, drumming, yoga, Qigong, pole walking, and conscious eating.

2.4. What was achieved?

The project was evaluated with the help of an employee attitude survey in 2005. Specific project measures such as seminars and workshops are continuously evaluated. Whereas the behaviour-oriented measures were popular and efficient, the measures aiming at changing the environment were less known among employees.

After the implementation of the measures, employees were asked about their health behaviour. 16% of the employees reported to pay more attention to their health. 75% of the employees reported to pay more attention to their nutrition, 72% of them to recreation and less stress as well as 50% of them to more exercise. Last but not least, the information management improved and there were less conflicts reported at pro mente Oberösterreich. Nevertheless, the percentage of employees knowing about and making use of the existing health measures still could have been higher. Whereas behavioural measures such as health courses were widely known, structural measures such as working groups were known by fewer employees. In order to make the employees aware of these structural measures, a health campaign was started in 2006. All in all, the survey indicated that the health situation of the employees of pro mente Oberösterreich had improved and the majority of them believed that pro mente Oberösterreich cares more about their health situation than other companies would do.

2.5. Success factors

The health circles were crucial for the whole process. Intervention proposal from employees revealed a lot of successful measures. The request of reducing the complexity and number of measures as well as prioritizing them enables the moderators to focus on specific measures in the health circles. Therewith, the complexity and number of suggested measures can be reduced and categories for prioritizing the measures such as urgency, feasibility, and potential integration of the structures and the responsibility exist.

The active participation of employees turned out to be the major success factor for the project. Generally, employees were able to actively participate by taking part in the employee health survey and by developing measures in health circles in the context of the mental health promotion project "VIVA". Thereby, they were regarded as experts of their labour situation.

The mental health promotion project "VIVA" is based on the idea that occupational health management can not be regarded as a singular or short-term action, but as a long-lasting process.

The assurance of transparency during all project steps on all hierarchical levels constituted a second important success factor of the project. This was done by letting the employees actively take part in the employee health survey and by developing measures in health circles. Therewith, they were regarded as experts of their labour situation. When dealing with the health topic, transparency has to be assured on all hierarchical levels: In order to continuously circulate the relevant information (such as results of employee health survey, of the steering committee meetings, and of the health circles) to all employees, it was crucial to make use of diverse measures by the internal public relations department: Employees were informed about the actual state of affairs by the internal journal ("pro mente intern"), by the intranet, by the website of pro mente Oberösterreich and by the educational institute as well as on the meeting of the managers and the one of the employees taking place once a year. This information policy was a main pillar of the prosperity and popularity of the project within pro mente.

When recruiting the participants for the health circle, it became clear that simple online promotion is not sufficient to promote mental health promotion at pro mente Oberösterreich. Instead employees had to be individually contacted and had to take the responsibility for their health.

Due to its success the mental health promotion project "VIVA" was priced with seals of quality by the network "Betriebliche Gesundheitsförderung" (BGF) in Austria in 2005-2007 and 2009-2011.

2.6. Further information

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2.7. Transferability

The health promotion project “VIVA” can be easily transferred to any other European social service provider.

3. References, resources:

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