

HHO: WPI for the Sake of Assisting Handicapped People

What does this case study demonstrate?

The company is a good example of combining “market” demands with a high employee needs orientation, improving organisation continuously together with the employees and their representatives. WPI is seen as a part of an overarching measure keeping the employees fit for their hard and ambitious work to support handicapped people day by day. WPI measures are showing that the management takes care of the employees and both sides will do the best to combine a healthy and good job with a highly qualitative assistance of the handicapped people.

Workplace innovation elements: work organisation practice (flexible working), learning and reflection partnership (continuous improvement), and structure and system improvement, workplace partnership (involvement in change).

Context

The non-profit company is religious dominated (based on a foundation of the German Protestant Christian Church) accompanying handicapped people on their way to an almost autonomous and self-reliant life. Within the institution the handicapped people live and work, getting support to manage their handicaps. With more than 60 facilities (mainly sited at the headquarters) and about 1.400 employees (about half of them with part-time work) the company supports about 3,000 children, young people and adults – residential, ambulant and partly residential (day time stay in an institution). The work within the organisation and the whole sector is characterised by high demands on the employees, often leading to stress and burn-out symptoms. The cooperation and participation philosophy is reflected also in the management structure (employees’ representatives are members of the board). The company is divided into five autonomous sites having a specific focus, but overarching and cross-cutting activities like works councils, personnel development are organised together.

Overwork Announcement

A formal procedure where employees can announce substantial problems that hinder them to do a good job was set-up. A template filled out by employees, individual or as a group, is the start of a company internal procedure. Responsible persons are fixed: first the line manager, if there is no solution the next step is an involvement of the works council, at the end a company internal arbitration is made. The process flow is obvious for every employee, feedback and solution oriented discussions are guaranteed. It is a kind of early warning system, to prevent mistakes or problems negatively influencing the assistance of the clients. It helps to sensitise the employer for workplace related problems and force him to find a company solution. Employees are not left alone with their problems or becoming sick of the situation (result: a very low absenteeism rate).

Internal Re-entry Management

After being sick for more than 42 days the employer organises a dialogue with the employee about the main reasons of the sickness and company related factors that could help to avoid the repeating of absenteeism. This meeting of the line manager with the former sick employee is done in order to integrate him or her in the day-to-day work and to avoid a new sickness or to find a new job in the company that will overcome existing constraints or “handicaps” of the employee.

Social Counselling Service

A counselling service done by a company external contact partner is offered to the employees and also the clients, including all life and work areas, social, private or work related problems (outstanding debts, critical life events, family problems, mobbing, etc.). Calling an emergency number within 48 hours a conflict dialogue is organised anonymously. Costs are taken over by the company. Having also internal contact persons, the external help is much more appreciated.

Employee and Customer Participation Measures

Employee participation and satisfaction is a main concern of the company, because the employees are the link to the clients, the handicapped people, and therefore the success of the company. A formal company's mission statement explains this linkage between employees and clients and their participation. The most relevant measures are continuous employee surveys, direct availability of the senior executives or managers, yearly employee-line manager conversations (appraisal interview), "employees days" for information and discussions of new developments, and a company related bottom-up innovation and improvement system. Every employee could propose improvements within a formal procedure (filling in a form, being proofed by the management, the best proposals are taken up and are rewarded). All these measures are implemented to ensure that the employees' voice is heard, to improve the organisation and to avoid major problems at the workplace. Also the perspective of the clients is integrated by regular customer surveys and participation possibilities within the innovation and improvement system of the company (e.g. a group of clients fills out a simple questionnaire or an improvement form assisted by the staff).

Know-how Transfer between Employees

A company related vocational training agreement for all the sites was made. If the training is relevant for a large number of employees, some employees take part in external training sessions and then train the other employees in in-house seminars or courses. A second way of know-how transfer is the transfer of knowledge of long-term employed staff to new staff members, from elder to younger people. This transfer is mainly about internal practice know-how and intended to overcome demographic change within the company staff. A third measure in this context is the health training on functional kinetics, which was initiated by the employees and their representatives. Also supervision is offered in specific cases and for relevant positions.

Yearly Working Time Account

The yearly working time account allows employees to collect overtime working hours on a yearly basis and to take an extra time for vacation (in accordance with the company needs). Only the employee has access to this account. The agreement helps to overcome work peaks and to regenerate in normal working phases. The duty rosters are made with participation of the employees, flexible time is given where possible, shift work is necessary in some areas.

So who benefits?

The company is living its Christian roots, helping handicapped people and supporting the employees as much as possible to do a good job. WPI has direct influence on the employees' professionalism and the performance of the assisting support for the customers. This leads to a typical win-win-win situation: for the company reputation, the employees working situation (as much as it could be influenced) and the quality of support for the customers.

Prognosis

This company needs to focus on the employee participation to a large extent. Absenteeism and stress at the workplace has a direct impact on the quantity and quality of the assistance for the clients (handicapped people). Therefore on the basis of a co-management and cooperation with all three actors (management, employees' representatives and the employees themselves) the company will continue to fulfil its public mandate for the assistance and inclusion of handicapped people in everyday life. Adoption and implementation is done mainly in co-operation between management and employees' representatives and most of the processes are institutionalised by company agreements and a process flow with a listing of relevant steps and responsibilities.