

# Early detection and reintegration

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Joint responsibility for healthy employees and companies



With kind support from Helsana

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# Content

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Helsana preface	7
Swiss Employers Association preface	9
Early detection in the context of the labour market	13
“Tree project for employers”	17

## **Case studies**

MindStep	22
Aviga	32
City of Berne	40
Scout24 Switzerland	48
Stämpfli Group	56
Holzbau Schweiz	64
SBB	72
Netcetera	80
McOptik	88
Spitex Zürich Limmat	96
Föllmi	104
Helsana Group	112

Helsana corporate business	120
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PhD Michael Willer,  
Head of Benefits, Helsana

# Addressing major challenges together

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Complaints about rising health-care and incidental wage costs have been making the rounds of the media in perfect regularity. But now a cost level seems to have been reached that Switzerland is unable or unwilling to bear in the future, despite its huge economic muscle.

Measures are being called for – mostly from the other parties involved. But major challenges can be best addressed together. Helsana has therefore been involved for some time in industry projects, among others in the Early Identification and Reintegration (FER) project under the patronage of the Swiss Employers Association.

Groundbreaking employers show us in this booklet their experiences and successes in their HR operations: health-boosting measures, early identification and reintegration are equally highlighted as is the handling of changes. A unique look behind the scenes. All contributing companies deserve respect. In particular, however, they deserve gratitude for their commitment to the collaboration and for the openness with which they have made their experiences and findings accessible to a broad audience. Helsana supports the approach of a joint early identification in partnership and to reducing or avoiding incapacities for work.

To this end, we are taking an additional step and providing Swiss employers with aids for an easy but reliable early identification. The aim is to avoid incapacity for work from becoming chronic and to reduce disabilities. At the same time, we are also expanding the personal support measures for our customers in the event of an accident and, of course, also in prevention. This will allow you to rely even more strongly on our mission statement in the future.

I wish you an exciting read.

*PhD Michael Willer,  
Head of Benefits, Helsana*



Prof Roland A. Müller,  
Director of the Swiss  
Employers Association



## Raising all parties' awareness for early identification and (re)integration is required.

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Early recording and early intervention are preventive means of quickly recording persons with initial indications of a possible disability and enabling them to remain in employment and reintegrate quickly with the use of suitable intervention measures.

Any incapacity for work that lasts for longer than four weeks, regular or repeated absences of a couple of days or further abnormalities in absence management that cannot be explained may be an indication of an imminent disability. Employees and their level of awareness play a key role in early identification. The earlier the assessment of whether the indications detected are related to a disability-relevant problem, the greater the chances of a successful reintegration.

### **Integration before retirement**

For more companies to open up to the debate about "integration before retirement", it is important that better information is provided on the offerings of the IV (disability insurance) offices and on the benefits of integration. On the one hand, the individual remains embedded in a supporting social structure via his

work. On the other hand, a company gains an available worker. Furthermore, integration avoids costs that would otherwise need to be borne and financed over many years in the form of pensions. A targeted publication of the measures via associations, media or suitable information channels is key here.

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**A joint effort of employers, the IV offices and the people affected is required.**

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The entire debate about (re)integrating people with a performance impairment mostly revolves around the deficiencies and only rarely about what additional skills or what motivation these people have to offer. It will

only be possible to rethink this if the awareness of the persons affected and employers is raised accordingly.

The social commitment of the employers, the willingness to accept people with reduced performance capacity, is key here. Optimum staffing is given if the know-how remains in

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**The employer must not be considered in isolation during the whole discussion.**

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the business, absences are reduced and insurance premiums are saved within the framework of early identification. In addition to improving a company's image, within the framework of a (re)integration, the motivation and skills of such people can be used in a targeted manner and a labour shortage bridged. Furthermore, the costs in social insurances can be reduced, which is also in the interest of the employers, by co-financing a disability insurance for instance.

### **Professional early integration and (re)integration**

Under the patronage of the Swiss Employers Association, insurers, IV offices and employers established the FER specialist committee in 2007 and developed a new cooperation model.

The abbreviation FER stands for early health identification and reintegration. The model defines the processes and roles that support the early identification of cases with a need for coordination and a concerted medical stabilisation and reintegration. As an active founding member, Helsana was closely involved in designing the implementation of the 5th and 6th Disability Act (IVG) amendments as part of this expert committee. With the 5th IV amendment and IV amendment 6a, the framework conditions were optimised in such a way that no obstacles arise to a (re)integration.

The employer must not be considered in isolation during the whole discussion. Understanding among the employees in the workplace is required, as is outside the job in the social environment of the person affected. Willingness and understanding can only be achieved with a special effort by raising the awareness of all reference groups.

*Prof Roland A. Müller,  
Director of the Swiss Employers Association*

### **Swiss Employers Association**

**The Swiss Employers Association (SAV) is the voice of Swiss employers in business, politics and the public. It organises as the head business organisation 41 regional and 39 industry employer associations as well as some individual companies (members). The SAV unites all key industries. In total, the association represents more than 100,000 small, medium-sized and large companies with more than 1.5 million employees from all sectors.**

### **Roland A. Müller**

**Prof Roland A. Müller has been director of the Swiss Employers Association since 2013. He is also a lawyer and visiting professor for labour and social insurance law at the University of Zurich. He has 20 years of management experience in associations of the industrial and financial services sectors.**



From left: PhD Olaf Schäfer, Head of Benefits Management and the party ordering the “Tree project for employers”; Eliane Stricker, Head of Health Care Management Specialist Leadership; Denise Camenisch, Head of Care and Case Management Specialist Leadership



# Strengthening health and manpower

Helsana is committed to health promotion, case management and through to reintegration. Professional health management and an active commitment to early identification help employers to strengthen the performance of the workforce, increase employee satisfaction and reduce sickness costs.

For individual customers, Helsana has offered a broad range of health-promoting measures for some time: for instance, skin cancer prevention, diabetes prevention, nutrition tips or exercise programmes. Prevention is becoming increasingly important in the area of mental health, which Helsana supports with relaxation offers and specialist talks, among other things.

*For companies, Helsana provides tailor-made and sector-specific offers:*

## **Business Health**

The additional Helsana Business Health service helps active companies in promoting the physical and mental health of its employees, increasing employee satisfaction and reducing absences. Personal health managers analyse the internal needs, develop tailor-made concepts and accompany implementation in the company. In particular in the work environ-

ment, handling mental strains is becoming increasingly important. Helsana therefore raises the awareness of managers in special training sessions. Another component of Helsana Business Health is generations management. Helsana supports companies in tapping their potential in good time, so that they remain attractive to young employees and simultaneously maintain the performance and motivation of older employees.

## **Absence management**

Consistent absence management in partnership is the basis for every successful corporate health management. Its aim is to reduce absence caused by sickness and to prevent repeat absences inasmuch possible. Employers can often also prevent long-term absences occurring in the first place by intervening early. Individual and well-prepared reintegration meetings are a key factor for success to

reduce absences and the associated costs in the long term. Together with the employee, stressful situations are identified, possible solution strategies developed and clear implementation agreements concluded. Motivation and work quality can thereby be equally increased and the result is also often a positive effect on the working atmosphere overall.

### Early recording & professional reintegration

Companies see a direct financial benefit from a successful early identification and optimal support: a single day of absence at employee level costs a company CHF 300 to 800 (direct

costs). The costs of any absence of managers including the necessary replacement measures quickly rise to several times that figure. From a commercial perspective, the potential savings are correspondingly large if the sickness rate alone can be reduced by 10 to 20 per cent using suitable health promotion measures. Only a significant and long-term reduction in incapacity for work also results in a long-term reduction of premiums and relieves occupational prevention. Studies show that the chance of reintegration being successful stands at more than 80 per cent after one to three months of absence and falls to below 50 per cent already for absences of six months or more. Early

identification is therefore a central component to preventing chronic incapacity for work. A specialist committee of insurers, IV offices and employers under the patronage of the Swiss Employers Association was therefore established in 2007. Helsana has been hugely involved as a founding member from the very start. Early recording & professional reintegration (FER) were both established by this committee as a process as well as a coordination task between the players. In accordance with transparently agreed procedures between the employer, insurances and the IV office in charge, sick employees are given quick and jointly coordinated support. Helsana has also developed a complete support offer within the framework of the FER cooperation model which ensures the targeted and effective use of resources. In this model, employers benefit from faster and better support and advice as well as lower costs for continued salary payments and stable premiums. Helsana has also developed a software system with innovative employers and key scientists that supports this early identification and coordination process in a simple and effective way. The software system (Tree), which is currently being tested by employers, is embedded in the FER process as a triage method. Cases of chronic and disability risks can be identified, and the need for coordination is displayed transparently. Employees are provided with the correct company, medical or mental support where

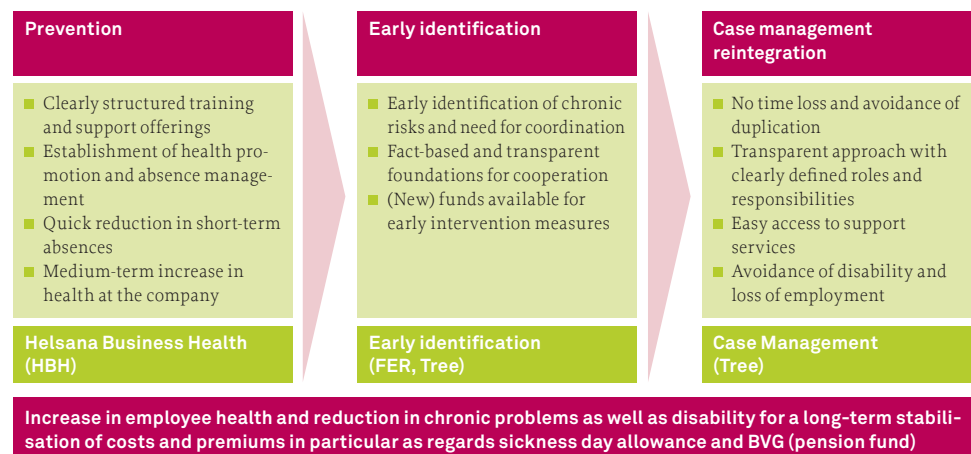
required and are called upon to actively work towards their recovery and return to the workplace.

### Case management

If long-term absences nevertheless occur despite prevention and early identification, the focus of case management is on a quick stabilisation and reintegration. The additional Helsana Case Management cover offers active case accompaniment to support employees individually who are sick or have had an accident. The case manager coordinates all measures with the employee and the employer, doctors and insurances, incl. IV and BVG. This approach often makes a crucial contribution to a quick and solid reintegration. As a sickness daily allowance, accident and health care insurer, Helsana offers a comprehensive concept that is coordinated across all sectors. This accelerates and facilitates the coordination between the parties involved in the social insurance system. Companies, above all, benefit from these synergies.

You can find additional information at [www.helsana.ch](http://www.helsana.ch)

### Comprehensive support for employers and employees from Helsana Health Care and Case Management





## Doing the “right” thing as early as possible

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Employees and companies benefit from a successful early identification, both in terms of health and financially. A day of absence costs CHF 300 to 800. The absence costs for managers quickly increase to several times that figure. Only the sustainable reduction of incapacities for work also results in relief for occupational pensions and stable premiums.

The use of standardised roles, processes and tools helps to identify courses of sickness early and consistently. They provide people who have become sick or had an accident with a more objective chance of quick and appropriate support. The Tree for Employers industry project implements for the first time such an evidence-based, system-supported triage for early health identification. This opens up new opportunities for employers to reduce absence periods and to keep ancillary labour costs down. The main beneficiary of optimised support is the employee.

The earlier health problems are identified, the more likely any worsening of the health situation or problems becoming chronic can be prevented. This increases the chance of a better quality of life for the persons affected and for maintaining their capacity for work. Absences or disabilities can often be shortened or avoided.

The time aspect in identifying health problems – for sickness and after an accident – is also key from the perspective of the national economy, because the costs increase strongly from the 30th day of incapacity for work. This affects, in particular, the health care costs and daily allowances and therefore the employee, employer and private as well as social insurers to an equal degree. At the same time, the chance of keeping one’s job falls with every day of delayed support.

### **Early health identification**

Early health care identification means identifying as early as possible abnormalities, strains, problematic conduct or developments with negative psychosocial impacts. Ideally, a dysfunction is identified before severe problems occur. A good early identification allows both taking the correct measures and keeping



Denise Camenisch,  
Head of Care and Case  
Management Specialist  
Leadership, Helsana

costs low in the long term. Affected persons can counteract a worsening of their ailment early already in the initial stage of their dysfunction.

The aim of early identification is for the persons affected to be given a fair and good chance of help and support. The support and measures must be adjusted to the individual resources and deficiencies and result in the person affected being able to master the crisis. Help and measures must be aligned to the existing skills in this process and should not be provided on a drip-feed basis. Furthermore, the personal system of values and the experiences of the assessing person must not be the focus in the early identification. In fact, early identification and the measures taken after early identification must be evidence based, i.e.

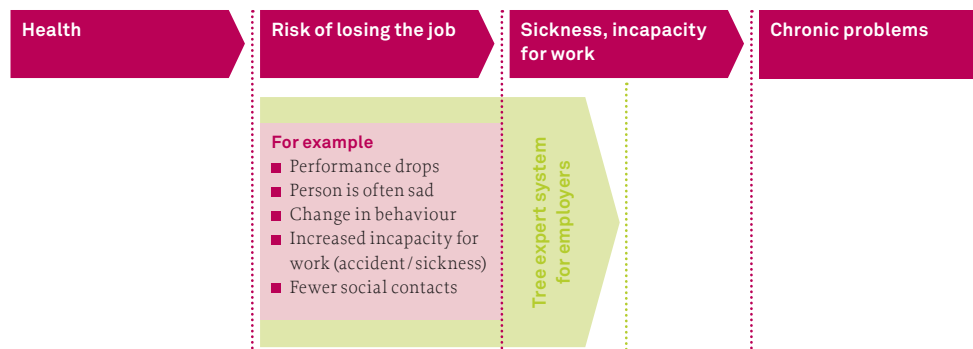
**Good early identification allows both taking the correct measures and keeping costs low in the long term.**

as scientifically sound as possible. The measures should also be continuously enhanced and the current developments in the medical and working areas taken into account.

**Optimum coordination**

The persons affected only receive optimal support if the coordination between all parties involved is conducted actively and in partnership along the entire treatment chain, including in the early identification phase: between the responsible employer, daily allowance insurer, health insurer and IV as well as, of course, involving the actual person affected.

**Tree for Employers early identification tool integrated in the absence management process or in a FER cooperation model.**



A key role here is played by case management (CM) as the central measure or as a link in the treatment chain. CM refers to the coordinated management of cases in the social, health care and insurance areas.

Precisely this interplay between all parties involved needs to be improved. Under the patronage of the Swiss Employers Association, a national specialist committee in the area of early health identification and professional reintegration (FER) was therefore established in 2007 (see page 8, preface Prof R. Müller). A cooperation model has been created for the optimised cooperation and reliable splitting of responsibilities among the partners involved.

The focus of the FER model developed jointly by employees and insurers is on early identification and on quick and coordinated support after an event of sickness or an accident.

The model breaks the support down into three phases: measures within the first 30 days, measures within the first 60 days and measures with an open outcome and undeterminable duration (case management). Pilots conducted by employers and social insurers using the FER cooperation model have shown that employers and employees benefit from the coordinated early identification and case management in several respects:

- Employers consistently record the absences of their employees and can identify health problems early.

- The FER model gives employers an ideal place to start aligning internal processes in a more employee-compliant way.
- Employers and (social) insurance partners cooperate more actively, faster and more closely.
- Case managers and reintegration advisors of IV strengthen the competence as regards early identification in HR departments with their know-how.
- Managers of FER companies have greater awareness of the subjects of early identification and reintegration and oversee in general the subject of health care management; job protection and know-how securing are more successful.
- Higher employee satisfaction, control of ancillary labour costs and protection of occupational pensions.

**Industry project for a system-supported early identification**

However, the members in the FER expert committee as well various doctors and labour market researchers ultimately came to the conclusion that the necessary tools for a good implementation of early identification are lacking. Helsana therefore implemented a computer-based triage software in 2012 on the basis of the findings and processes of the FER project. As a result, this Helsana solution, which was initially intended for internal use, was enhanced as an industry project for use by employers.

Early identification with the support of the Tree for Employers software-based solution is carried out regularly in the event of multiple absences or directly when identifying a considerable risk.

The Tree for Employers early identification tool is ideally integrated in the absence management process or in the FER cooperation model. In this way, HR and line managers are directly supported in the identification and verification of courses of sickness, while also taking into account the individual situation. The computer-based automation of the situation assessment largely neutralises personal preferences or value systems. This results in a neutral assessment on the basis of validated industry experience and therefore in optimised support.

### Simple entry

The Tree for Employers tool does not require any specialist knowledge, but can be easily operated via a clearly structured interface. Quality criteria are entered here in accordance with the ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health) global health classification defined by the WHO. In doing so, physical and mental symptoms as well as context factors (both relating to the environment and person) are queried in accordance with data protection. On the other hand, the parties entering data are queried by industry- and role-specific criteria, again in observance of data protection.

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### Tree for Employers automatically determines the need for coordination in compliance with data protection.

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Tree for Employers automatically determines in accordance with data protection the need for coordination and the reintegration potential and complexity of a case on the basis of these details. This allows taking measures tailored to the individual case. Furthermore, employers are provided with an overview of frequent sickness patterns and can therefore take corresponding prevention measures.

### Industry-specific know-how

The Tree expert system for early identification and triage was originally developed as an internal solution for faster and better support in the event of damage. However, already at an early stage Helsana took the decision to also make this solution for early recording, potential identification and triage support available at employers. That is why Tree has a module design and is developed as a standard solution as well as a solution with an enhanced support scope.

In a joint industry project with committed employees, the insurance solution was therefore enhanced and adjusted to the needs of employers. The early identification findings were developed together with the employers, implemented in the tool and continuously validated jointly. With the use of twelve

industry partners involved, it was thereby possible to develop a reliable and yet easy-to-use tool for evidence-based, system-supported early identification.

The joint approach also allowed integrating sector-specific know-how on sicknesses and accidents in a targeted manner. Different roles, levels of education or company sizes were also taken into account. As such, a good industry-related early health identification becomes possible. Furthermore, the reintegration potential can be shown in a transparent way. And, not least, this also allows a better assessment of the use of resources and necessary investments as well as the reintegration duration on a case-by-case basis.

reduces absences, secures important know-how and reduces ancillary wage costs. The insurer has lower damage costs, which is also reflected in premiums.

*Denise Camenisch,  
Head of Care and Case Management Specialist  
Leadership, Helsana*

[Link to the survey on page 122](#)

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### Tree for Employers does not require any specialist knowledge, but can be easily operated via a clearly structured interface.

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In the following case studies, twelve employers involved in the FER/Tree delivery explain their motivation and experiences in the area of early identification, HR work and reintegration services. Ultimately, all agree: doing the right thing early benefits everybody. The employee is stabilised more quickly, and his chances of retaining his job increase. The employer

# MindStep

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Case study 1





Opportunities and challenges of early identification and reintegration

## “The most important thing is to train managers for early identification”

After many years of being out of the workforce, the obstacle to returning the company is high for employees. This is where the FER cooperation model comes in. Ueli Streit, Managing Director of MindStep AG and initiator of the FER think tank, explains how employers can identify sick employees earlier and reintegrate them quickly.

### **Where is the biggest need for action on the part of employers when it comes to early health identification for employees?**

The activities of employers are often restricted to apple campaigns and fitness offers. There is a lack of prevention and raising awareness for the physical area when performance fluctuations and behavioural patterns become apparent. Mental dysfunctions make up about 60 per cent of absences today. In particular when it comes to mental diseases, employers therefore need to take an early look and preventive action. Most employers are, however, not trained for such discussions with their

employees. Difficulties arise, in particular, because private and financial matters often play a major role.

### **What is the employer's role in early identification?**

The employer has a very important task in the initial phase of early identification: because he is closest to the employee, he can identify grievances first. Supervisors need to be trained accordingly for this. In recent years, however, companies have outsourced the social insurance subject to brokers and thereby lost sight of the problem.

Ueli Streit,  
Managing Director of  
MindStep AG

### What is lacking most?

Managers do not have sufficient awareness of and training in health matters and early identification. These subjects are not discussed during management training courses. Another problem is the lack of exchange with doctors, for instance due to data protection. Most medical certificates are limited to the incapacity for work and not to the resources that the person

still possesses. This would show whether the employee could perform a different task, for instance, instead of not working at all. Furthermore, employees do not have sufficient knowledge of the benefits that social insurances can provide.

### Why is the reintegration of affected employees so difficult?

Employers and social insurance partners often react too late. If an employee stays at home for a longer period of time due to sickness without any contact with his employer, the obstacle to returning to work is a log higher after 30 to 60 days. The ideal case is when the employee remains in contact with the employer in the event of sickness and occasionally visits the company. This requires flexibility by all parties

involved and support from insurers. The healing process is positively influenced by this and the risk of losing one's job is reduced.

### Where is the cooperation of daily allowance insurance, IV and employers failing today?

The networking between the parties. Plus the time factor. In the event of an accident, Suva pays the daily allowance and pension benefit and the healing costs. The need for action is small there. In the event of sickness, however, the law specifies that daily allowance benefits must be paid for by the daily allowance insurers, pension benefits by the IV and pension fund, while healing costs must be covered by the health insurance. The measures of the insurers are often too late and a comprehensive view is rarely taken in the process. Hardly any employer knows that they can often request benefits more quickly if the daily allowance insurance or the IV office is approached proactively.

### In light of these problems, you established the FER think tank (early identification & reintegration) under the patronage of the Swiss Employers Association in 2008. What triggered the idea?

With the introduction of the 5th IV amendment in 2008, early identification became more important. The aim was to set up a committee that addresses the needs of employers and discusses them informally with all rele-





vant partners. The committee subsequently noted the importance of early identification by the employer and quick provision of funds as well as networking of the parties involved and developed a corresponding model.

**MindStep AG thereby conducted a two-year pilot with six employees and twelve insurers. What was the biggest success?**

By rolling out the FER model, awareness and transparency in early identification are increased. A survey has shown that more than 66 per cent of employees have noted a positive change since the model has been rolled out. All six companies involved have identified the benefit of the model and are continuing it.

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**If the employees remain in the work process and disability can be prevented, the entire social insurance system benefits.**

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**How many employees have been identified early or reintegrated?**

A total of 329 employees have been identified as at risk. During the first absence phase of a maximum of 30 days of absence, 70 per cent of all cases were completed.

In phase two, which permits 60 days, nearly 20 per cent of the people affected were reintegrated into the company. During the third phase, which relates to absences of more than 60 days, about another 10 per cent of persons were supported. They were reintegrated within a couple of months or placed in a different workplace. Adapted workplaces were created at some employers in order to facilitate the reintegration.

**Can you put a figure on the total costs companies have as a result of these cases not resulting in disability?**

The period of two years is too short to measure the effect on cost savings precisely. The number of days of absence was stabilised and occasionally reduced considerably. It must be taken into account that BVG and daily sickness allowance fall in the event of fewer absences. If the employees remain in the work process and disability can be prevented, the entire social insurance system benefits. If disability is prevented, all parties involved benefit.

**What are the main findings you gained in relation to early identification?**

Absence prevention results in no absences at all in an ideal world. An early identification and reaction to performance and behavioural changes can prevent absences. Crucial is to train the supervisors in this respect.



### **What is particularly effective in terms of early identification?**

First, the management must fully support this model. Second, a budget must be made available for early identification, because this gives the subject a greater weighting internally. And, finally, a company must know what needs to be done in which of the three early identification phases.

### **How can the cooperation between employer, daily sickness allowance and IV be improved in the reintegration of employees?**

With a joint cooperation agreement, with which employers and insurance partners commit to operating in accordance with this model.

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**Without discipline, systematic early identification is quickly forgotten in the day-to-day hustle and bustle.**

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### **What turned out to be the biggest problem for employees in the course of the project?**

Without discipline, systematic early identification is quickly forgotten in the day-to-day hustle and bustle. The solution is, on the one hand, to consider talks as a priority and to conduct

them as such. On the other hand, supervisors must be obligated who fail to comply with this.

### **The systematic process may overburden SMEs with less professional HR structures in particular. How do you see this and how does the think tank support employers here?**

The services of a larger HR unit could be assumed by the relevant employers or industry association and offered to SMEs. The evaluation revealed that a point of contact is required that is independent from the insurance.

### **The cooperation model is based on transparency. But transparency also means a risk for data protection. After all, data on sickness and impairment need to be sent out to many different parties. Where do you see the biggest difficulties for employers here? And solutions?**

This is a delicate matter and a major challenge. To carry out situation assessments for sick employees, we have created a declaration of consent that has been widely accepted. In the event of absences that last longer and involve various partners, a comprehensive power of attorney granted by the employee is required. Within the framework of the project, we have created a standard power of attorney declaration. It regulates clearly who may obtain which information. The document does not, for instance, grant the employer insight into the diagnosis of the employee, but simply pro-

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**The benefits paid by insurance partners often reach companies too late. This amount ensures employers' ability to act.**

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vides information on the existing resources and capacity for work.

### **A support fund was provided for the project. How often was the money used and what for?**

The support fund has less of a financial than of a psychological effect for the employer. It provides certainty that help can be called upon quickly if required. Of the six companies, five used partial amounts. One company used their entire amount. The money was used, in particular, for measures in the first 30 days, e.g. for training, health care meetings with specialists, situation assessments or workplace adjustments.

### **Why are additional funds at all required for early identification? One would imagine that the existing safety net of daily sickness allowance and IV should be sufficient...**

The benefits paid by insurance partners often reach companies too late. This amount, which is made available quickly, ensures employers' ability to act in the crucial early phase of a sickness.

### **So what are the objectives and measures for the employers and social insurances that should come out of this pilot?**

It is important that raising awareness for early health identification and reintegration is promoted on the part of employers. The [www.compasso.ch](http://www.compasso.ch) employer platform makes an important contribution here. The use of practical tools for the early identification of mental risks should be promoted further.



# Aviga

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Case study 2



The case managers of Aviga accompany patients with complex issues

## “Back to work after a breakdown”

Mental impairments require special expertise. Aviga often takes the lead here. The Helsana and Swiss Life subsidiary also stabilises and reintegrates with its case management clients in the labour market who are considered to be hopeless cases.

Felix Kunz (name changed) had for some time working ever longer on fewer and fewer tasks. At one stage, the electronic engineer stopped to take breaks in an attempt to cope with the rising mountain of uncompleted work. And this increasingly gave him sleepless nights. He had already consulted his doctor, because it was becoming too much for him. But the medication he was given did not really help. And now this: his employer gave him an ultimatum. “Felix,” his boss said, “you simply need to perform better, otherwise we will have to let you go.” Felix Kunz went back to his doctor in shock. His doctor put him on 100 per cent sick leave.

### **People suffering from mental health issues react differently**

Many dossiers that end up on the desks of Maja Bracher’s employees at some stage – at best a

couple of weeks later, in the worst case only after several months – start like this or similar. The managing director of Aviga reports of a good 420 sick people per year. The case management provider specialises in so-called mentally and medically highly complex cases; in people whose soul rises up against the world of work at some stage or in such people whose physical pain is not taken seriously by doctors, insurers and employers and who subsequently also suffer a mental breakdown: whiplash victims, chronic pain patients. The former make up 60 to 70 per cent of Aviga cases. And the figure will likely rise. Because patients with pain that cannot be objectified are no longer paid a disability pension, which does not mean that they are able to work. “It is often overlooked that even a small trauma can cause major damage mentally,” observes the Aviga head. This makes it all the

Maja Bracher,  
Managing Director of Aviga

more important to provide the persons affected with professional help at an early stage so they can remain in the work process. Aviga is needed here because special know-how is mostly required in order to resolve the allegedly deadlocked situation. “People suffering from mental health issues often react differently than “normal” people would expect due to their sickness. Without special training, it is difficult to support them correctly,” explains Maja Bracher. She is referring to the fact that, although many employers are understanding and obliging already long before the actual crisis, the clients with their “storm

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**This makes it all the more important to provide the persons affected with professional help at an early stage so they remain in the work process.**

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Because Felix Kunz’ condition had now deteriorated so badly that a three-month stay in a clinic was being discussed. Once the health insurance’s doctor of trust also supported this, the daily sickness allowance insurer initiated the case management.

Things moved quickly then: the daily sickness allowance insurer contacted Aviga. And a case manager visited the slowly recovering patient

in the clinic. Four to twelve weeks, then outpatient treatment was set to follow. But it was anybody’s guess what would happen with his job. The case manager should ensure a happy ending here. Felix Kunz granted Aviga a power of attorney to this end. The clarification machinery then started rolling.

#### **Gentle reintegration**

The case manager contacted the employer and social insurances as well as Felix Kunz’ doctors. The plan was low-level work at a maximum of 50 per cent, but not in the old workplace. Thanks to Aviga, Felix Kunz will now be

able to regain self-confidence in an IV-protected business for three months after leaving the clinic.

“If things run that smoothly, we will be happy. Problematic is the fact that many doctors do not immediately fill in the IV questionnaire on the health condition and thereby waste valuable time for the reintegration,” says Maja Bracher. In the first 60 days after the start of the sickness, the chance of a professional reintegration is big, it then drops rapidly. Because clients increasingly lose the structure in their day and lethargy and depression take over. But Felix Kunz is lucky. While working in the

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**Clients with their “storm in the head” get aggressive or retrench as a result of being out of their depth.**

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in their heads” do not realise this and instead become aggressive or retrench due to being out of their depth.

In the case of Felix Kunz it took a long time until Aviga was involved. Only after two months – when he already felt shut in at home – his doctor noticed that he was out of his depth with Kunz’ case. He referred his patient to a psychiatrist. This made the daily sickness allowance insurer sit up and take notice.







IV workshop, the case manager trains his boss at his old employer. “It’s very important in such a situation to make clear to employers that the employee was unable to function normally at the end due to his sickness,” explains Bracher. Her case manager show employers on the basis of what indications they can identify emerging problems early, for instance being unkempt, joylessness, avoiding breaks, skipping work steps, and how they should react. The employers are not left to their own devices during the reintegration. This was also true for Felix Kunz’ case.

After a three-month training period, he is set to return to his old employer and gradually increase his working hours. A job coach from the IV will support him, who will, in turn, be supported by the case manager of Aviga. Rejoining the old employer does not always

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**Sometimes the aim is not professional reintegration, but the simple medical stabilisation with 100 per cent disability.**

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make sense. If the relationship is broken for instance: because either the employer or the supervisor has a “difficult” character or if not both parties are really interested in the reintegration. After all, these are often long-standing courses of sickness, where the employer does not know whether he can really trust the capacity or whether a reintegration in the old job really makes sense from a health perspective. It is also the task of the case managers to identify this.

### “Don’t force things”

“There’s no good forcing something. We prefer to ensure that the working relationship is ended on good terms in such a case,” says Bracher. This starts with a meeting involving the employer, employee and case manager and ends either with a dismissal by the employer or a termination by the employer depending on the benefit. The IV or RAV is then involved to facilitate the job hunt by providing application support and a coach. “The old employer also often helps, even with own offers,” says Bracher. And sometimes the aim is not professional reintegration, but the simple medical stabilisation with 100 per cent disability, i.e. the breaking of an endless downward spiral of sickness, isolation, worsening, loss of social status, neglect and giving up.

### Aviga AG

**Aviga is a subsidiary of the two insurers Helsana and SwissLife. The case management provider based in Zurich employs 16 experts and focuses on mental and medical high-cost cases. As a neutral outsourcer, Aviga can continue, contrary to a daily sickness allowance insurance, continue to manage cases beyond a termination. Clients were accompanied for periods of between 6 and 24 months.**

### Case management

**Case management refers to the central, coordinated, interdisciplinary and comprehensive support of a case of sickness that is either characterised by high costs or requires a special quality of treatment. The focus is on the effective cooperation between private and social insurers, medical staff, employers and patients.**





# City of Berne

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Case study 3

Standardised absence and early identification system for the City Administration of Berne

## “It’s not only about absences, but also about the early identification of changes”

The City of Berne already rolled out a systematic absence management in Present in 2007. In Presente plus, the efforts directed towards early health identification are now being strengthened significantly and the tried-and-tested process enhanced from this year, explains Jonathan Gimmel, Head of the Early Identification and Prevention project at the Coordination and Resources Division of the City of Berne.

### **Why have you enhanced Presente?**

On the one hand, surveys show that 30 days until the first triage is too long to identify a possible chronic disease early. On the other hand, the PRD (Coordination and Resources Division of the City of Berne) wanted to reduce the long-term absences that can be influenced. Furthermore, the PRD was one of the six pilot organisations in the FER project – early health identification and professional reintegration –

under the patronage of the Swiss Association of Employees and the FSIO (Federal Social Insurance Office) between 2011 and 2013. The experiences made with Presente and FER have now been integrated in Presente plus, the over-all city process.

### **What is the strategy of Present plus?**

It has three pillars. First, the systematic and continuous accompaniment and support of

Jonathan Gimmel,  
Deputy Head of Central  
Services of the Coordination  
and Resources Division of  
the City of Berne





employees who are sick or have had an accident by the supervisors for their qualified reintegration. Second, the implementation of a comprehensive process of early identification and reintegration in the event of unexplained situations or unforeseeable long-term absences with the involvement of all parties affected. And, third, a contribution to the strengthening of the health-promoting framework conditions in the workplace.

**What values and success factors regarding the corporate culture have you defined here?**

The system is based on the principle of being voluntary. Transparent information of employees is important to this end. What's more, they should be aware of their own responsibility and act accordingly. This requires loyalty, commitment, bonding quality and trust in the supervisors. A strong corporate culture is important. For that reason, we at the PRD inform openly on the Intranet about our tools and news and conduct regular satisfaction surveys. Furthermore, we organised an ergonomics campaign and lunch events on various health-related subjects for all employees in 2012. Occupational health and safety, health protection and fire protection are also the subject of ongoing measures.

**Let's talk about the buzzword of employability – how do you ensure this for your staff?**

Target-driven management, ongoing updated job descriptions with a congruent design of tasks, competencies, responsibility and HR assessments / target agreements carried out annually on a systematic basis with personal development targets lay a solid foundation in order to be fit on the job and in the market. On the basis of the city's competence model, the City of Berne offers a comprehensive internal training programme centrally. This ranges

from competence in methods through to entrepreneurial actions. In addition to attractive internal offers, requirement-based external education and further training is also supported. What's more, the City of Berne is acclaimed for its vocational training, enables targeted internal career paths and creates career prospects even for older employees.

**How does Presente plus work?**

We distinguish three process phases that are standard across the city: reporting, accompanying and returning phase. For the process step, information material, checklists and lean forms were created, which ensure the key dialogue between all parties involved. The key tool of the absence management is the time management system. The employees record their presence and absence in addition to the work performed. The directorate HR services

conduct a weekly absence monitoring on a random basis. In doing so, they distinguish between explainable, normal brief absences and unexplainable, abnormal absences. They discuss the latter with their superiors. They hold health-relevant meetings with the relevant employees and initiate any further steps. The systematic monitoring enables them to react far sooner and to conduct an initial triage already on the sixth day of absence as a rule. If someone is incapacitated for work, however, he does not need to submit a medical certificate until after five days.

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**If someone is incapacitated for work, he does not need to submit a medical certificate until after five days.**

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#### **What happens after the initial triage?**

If no measures are necessary, the case is closed. If someone needs further support, the internal reintegration plan developed under the leadership of the directorate HR services is applied: immediate measures are taken, which include the verification of the personal professional situation, ergonomics and occupational health aspects, for instance. Or directorate HR services and the supervisor decide – of course always with the involvement of the employee – to have

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**A novelty is the additional focus on the avoidance of long-term absences that can be avoided with the rollout of corresponding tools.**

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the situation assessed externally. The second triage then follows, usually after 30 days, which include three options: no measures are necessary and the case is closed. a joint reintegration plan is defined within the framework of the assessment of the situation. As the third option, an external case management follows. The aim of all of this is to ensure the reintegration in the job.

#### **How does Presente plus differ from Presente?**

The superiors assume a key role as previously: they support employees who have become sick or had an accident from the outset and are in permanent contact with them. The novelty is the additional focus on preventing long-term absences that can be influenced by rolling out corresponding tools for absence monitoring, assessing the situation and case management. Furthermore, the employees are even more strongly the focus and not only have more responsibility of their own, but also a comprehensive say. If, for instance, the decision is taken to assess the situation, the report and reintegration plan first go to the affected person: he can correct it. The directorate HR services receive a cleaned-up version, which they

then discuss with the supervisor. What's more, classic absence systems are based on a monthly statement. An initial triage is mostly only carried out after about 45 days, which is far too late for the purposes of an early intervention. And Present plus us not only about absences, but also about the early identification of changes as regards performance and conduct, which means that employees can be supported as soon as possible.

#### **Presente plus is still young and needs to establish itself. But what is your initial stock-take?**

We don't have specific figures yet, as the processes will only start to have an effect this year. But on the basis of our experiences at the PRD, I can say that standardised processes for resource strengthening can also greatly reduce long-term absences that can be influenced in an organisation subject to public law, which means that it is must fulfil special requirements regarding data protection and official secrecy. Between 2011 and 2013, we did not see any long-term absences that can be influenced such as burnout or other mental sicknesses over 180 days at the PRD. I also see a gain in culture: we speak far more frankly about circumstances in our lives, the relationship between employer and employee is changing. The bond has become stronger. This ultimately improves our attractiveness as an employer.

#### **Jonathan Gimmel**

**Jonathan Gimmel is Deputy Head of the Central Services (HR and Finance Service) of the Coordination and Resources Division (PRD) of the City of Berne.**

#### **City of Berne**

**The city administration of Berne consists of five directorates and various staff sections. The Berne City Administration has a total of 3,800 employees. The Coordination and Resources Division employs 200 people. The HR management is organised in a dual structure at a central HR office and five directorate HR services.**





# Scout24

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Case study 4

Trust as the basis of the corporate culture

## “There is no top and bottom in our organisation”

Roland Nydegger, COO of Scout24 Switzerland Ltd in Flamatt (FR), reports how trust as the basis of the corporate culture promotes employees' health and how the Ringier subsidiary managed to reduce sick days by 20 per cent thanks to implementing a systematic occupational health management system.

“We are all on a first-name basis here. There is no lived top and bottom. That's more than just a buzzword at Ringier Digital Flamatt. Because all our approx. 300 employees are equally needed; the CEO as much as the cleaners. Only jointly, everyone in their position, can we achieve our goals. This is part of our culture of trust, and it has a long tradition.

The foundation for this was already laid when the company was established in 1995. As the then publishing world mistrusted the internet and was accordingly unwilling to invest in digital business models, the then 31-year-old Daniel Grossen, the founder of the company, wanted to turn his highly innovative, cross-media idea into a success with the help of people of his trust. This enabled him to raise the CHF 20,000 seed capital as an investment

in kind on the form of three cars from his colleagues already from the outset. The thereby documented trust of his personal environment in the future entrepreneur and in his vision was simultaneously the most promising and most cost-effective feasibility study.

In 2006 we institutionalised this culture of trust. Because at this moment it became clear that our founder aimed to sell our group of companies in the medium term and would exit his operating responsibility. We therefore developed a corporate mission, derived management principles from it and have since verified their implementation every year in employee appraisals. This has resulted in a cycle of vision and mission, management principles, HR strategy, personnel recruitment and development, health management, feed-

Roland Nydegger, COO  
Scout24 Switzerland Ltd



back and surveys as well as improvement and further development.

### **HR as the keeper of the culture of trust**

Our culture of trust is based on the mutually conditional three pillars of trust, freedom and responsibility. In a strong relationship of trust, corporate freedom can be largely delegated. This requires, on the one hand, the unconditional assumption of the responsibility

associated, which in turn promotes the creation of trust and therefore the development of employees (trust strengthens self-confidence). Every decision taken by the management impacts on these dimensions. This means that human resources management is more at our company than a mere administration unit; it is more of a keeper of the culture of trust. The associated activities/tasks in the areas of personnel recruitment, personnel

development and health management can be calculated in a proven manner. What does that mean in day-to-day operations? We want to empower our employees for joint success and therefore conduct intensive personnel development. It starts with a focus on the relevant strengths. In an annually held employee appraisal, the employees discuss with their superiors their strengths in the areas of specialist, individual, social, method

and, where applicable, management competence. The regular exchange of own and third-party impressions also makes a strong contribution to the creation of trust. The measures subsequently agreed to strengthen the personal core competencies aim to develop the employee in a resource-driven manner. Another objective is to focus on the core competencies in an overall context. The work must make sense and may not be considered




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The work must make sense and may not be considered in isolation. We endeavour to let our employees become part of our vision.

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in isolation. This means that we consistently endeavour to integrate our employees as part of our vision, whose visualisation is also ensured via annual mottos. In addition to this employee appraisal, the so-called LOBE process is also a key part in the development process. The wage appraisal (LOBE – Lohnbeurteilung in German) reflects our understanding of management. We manage by objectives. The strategic corporate objectives are broken down to operating objectives at the start of the financial year together with the relevant employee in a level-compli-



ant manner. At the end of the year, the target achievement degree determines the payment of the variable wage element and also influences the further wage development. This system makes the above dependency on top and bottom tangible.

### Quick route to early identification

But we wanted to go beyond that. With the new construction of our office building, we were also able to devote more attention to physical health prevention. For instance, the new office landscape in a Minergie standard building offers exceedingly pleasant climate conditions. A gourmet kitchen with two experienced chefs and a specialised diet chef prepare various delicious menus every day. In doing so, a health-oriented diet is given the highest priority. Fresh, regional produce are the main component of a balanced menu composition. Some 80 per cent of the predominantly young employees present use the offer. The associated cross-company/ cross-team encounters and discussions, above all also of a business nature, more than justify the investment and cost contributions. A coffee lounge, gym, relaxation room and table football corner top off the premises available. In addition, the employee campaigns liven up the sporting events. For instance, enthusiasts regularly team up in running and cycling groups, for weekly unhockey tournaments, Circlefit and many other fitness events, free fruit/tea and Granderwasser top off the range.

The area of physical health prevention, on the other hand, is more difficult to approach for us as an employer. To what extent the employer's duty of care, in addition to the above personnel development measures, also requires, indeed permits intervening in the personal sphere of employees requires a subtle approach to the

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**A coffee lounge, gym, relaxation room and table football corner top off the premises available. There are also running and cycling groups.**

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subject. For that reason, we rolled out a systematically operated health management within the framework of the FER project (early health recording & occupational reintegration) already two years ago. The concept convinces by its pragmatic, SME-compliant approach. The basis is the prevention area, which matches our philosophy of the employee assuming responsibility. A filter is placed over this. It consists of a supplemental absence management system, which displays more than three short- or long-term absences of more than five working days to the relevant manager as well as human resources management. In standardised meetings, possible causes are discussed and support offered,

where required. It can be drawn from a pool of case managers who are provided by the statutory sickness insurers. Regular roundtables with representatives of the insurers as well as, where applicable, attending doctors contribute to the professionalism of the approach. The whole thing is supported by a so-called financing pool that is feed equally by insurers and the employer and is financed by the expenditure for preventive measures and case management. The system already had an impact during the pilot project phase in 2011/2012. The absence rate was gradually reduced. Today, the sickness rate is at about one per cent (20 per cent below the rate of 2011), which has had a strong impact on premiums. This development has also resulted in considerable repayments from the profit participation. All in all, we are speaking here of annual, direct six-digit finan-

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**The absence rate has been reduced. The sickness rate is today at about one per cent, which has a strong impact on premiums.**

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cial discount. Not included in this calculation are the indirect benefits of several hundred thousand francs thanks to production downtimes avoided.”

### Scout24 Switzerland Ltd

**Scout24 Switzerland Ltd is a subsidiary of Ringier Digital Ltd. Ringier Digital unites under one roof the most significant digital competencies and is a business area of Ringier Ltd.**



# Stämpfli Group

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Case study 5

A comprehensive view of employees as an opportunity for all

## “The company is not only interested in money, that’s why I like to work here”

Stämpfli, the publishing company, advocates a job to be living environment and not only a workplace. Low staff turnover and satisfied employees in the business prove that this philosophy works. And this in a time when everybody is complaining about the unhealthy amalgamation of working hours and spare time. Peter Stämpfli, Board of Directors Delegate of the Stämpfli Group, explains what this success model is based on.

**Stämpfli Ltd is today managed in its sixth generation as a family-led business. Certain values will be deeply embedded in the culture. What are they?**

Individual responsibility, respect, openness and transparency – that’s what our company lives with customers and employees. Applied to day-to-day operations, this means seeing eye to eye, regardless of the hierarchy.

**Have the values changed over the company’s history of nearly 200 years, or are they fixed?**

We don’t know what our predecessors thought about the individual values. But we believe that they also lived our credo of “a workplace is a living environment” in their way. This motto is very important to us, because we consider people to be an integrated being. Employees take private matters, ideas, dreams for the future and much more to work. They way they feel at home is also how they feel at work and vice versa. The power of this interaction was already identified by our great-grandparents and we take it very seriously.

Peter Stämpfli,  
Board of Directors Delegate  
Stämpfli Group



**Today, you have operations in Berne, Zurich and Warsaw. Do you apply your central values in all operations? Or do you also allow the individual sites to develop their own cultures?**

We expect the above values from all regardless of the site. Otherwise, there is great leeway. The response to this is entirely positive in Warsaw as in Berne or Zurich.

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**If you want to achieve long-term targets with your employees, you need a common basis; this is the foundation for the consensus on the values.**

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**Stämpfli Ltd has also turned values into a product in the form of a value card set, which can be used for job interviews, employee appraisals, alone or for team development. How did this idea come about?**

We originally wanted to create something as a basis for our management training that picks up on the corporate values and promotes the exchange of ideas in their respect. We implemented this wish with the game of cards. On the basis of a certain interpretation order or an exchange of cards, all players have the same opportunities of holding a discussion or debat-

ing how the corresponding values are meant to be understood. The game of cards is beneficial both in private and business matters and can even be used on the go.

**How do you use the value cards today in your own company?**

We use them in job interviews to get to know the applicants better. In management training sessions and for team building, the cards help to identify certain values as a common denominator.

**What objective is to be thereby achieved?**

On the one hand, the cards should result in the users questioning themselves and their own work. On the other hand, they should promote communication at the relationship level. If you want to achieve long-term targets with your employees, you need a common basis; this is the foundation for the consensus on the key values.

**The printing sector is under pressure Stämpfli was also forced to introduce reduced hours temporarily in 2009. How can one credibly represent these values in such moments without them becoming an empty shell?**

2009 was a difficult time. In particular in such moments, it's important to stand by one's values and be authentic. That's why we created transparency from the very start and involved



the employees in the events early. That earned us a lot of understanding.

**“A workplace is a living environment” is a key part of your philosophy. You and your brother Rudolf Stämpfli are advocating this in a time when everybody is complaining that the borders of working hours and free time are being blurred by the increasing digitalisation. Is that not very unpopular?**

With our motto, we also mean that work – be it at home or at the company – requires a large chunk of our life time. That’s why we take the integral view of the person and the matter very seriously. Anyone who fails to understand that work is a key element of life will also fail to understand how important the delimitation between work and free time is.

**Printing shops don’t exactly offer the most health-promoting working conditions. Shift work, stress and contact with hazardous chemicals are a matter of day-to-day operations. What do you do to prevent health problems?**

The industry has improved hugely in these matters, it’s no longer hazardous to health. To create good conditions for our employees, we have a health group that asks questions and seeks solutions. We try to act as preventively as possible and when someone shows signs of changing or fatigue, we point this out to one

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Anyone who fails to understand that work is a key element of life will also fail to understand that taking a break is also important.

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another, for instance. As regards shift work, we give employees a say and apply a rotation mode. Anyone working overtime, should be able to compensate as soon as possible.

**What measures do you take for early identification?**

The managers have the task of monitoring their employees. One example: if an employee is coughing for more than a week, or has not been himself for some time, the superior approaches the employee and contacts HR if necessary. Together they then look for a solution so that the employee can recover. Where necessary, external experts are also involved. We also inform the team of the employee not being able to work, which then absorbs the shortage. This system has always served us well.

**Within the framework of the FER health promotion project, you rolled out “gentle jobs” for employees who have become sick or had an accident. What have your experiences been here?**

In two cases we were able to reintegrate the employees in the work process. One employee rather quickly increased her 50 per cent working week to 100 per cent again. Even while working

full time, she accompanied by our coach for a certain period of time. Today, she is again fully integrated in the work process like every other employee. Such examples are very pleasant. Unfortunately, however, we have also had an employee whom we were no longer able to help.

**How many employees with weaker performances do you employ?**

People with reduced output work for us. In terms of their performance, it would make sense to fire them. But for two per cent of the entire workforce, such cases must have a place with purely for social reasons, so that such people remain integrated and have prospects in life.

**And what are the additional costs incurred by them for you?**

I’ve never done a calculation. I would say it’s about one per cent of turnover. That’s a significant amount considering our narrow margins.

**What’s the benefit of this approach?**

As a business, we consider ourselves obligated to give something back to society in as much possible. We also note that key persons observe how we handle weaker members of staff. Our support is commented on positively: “The company is not only interested in money, that’s why I like to work here.” That cannot be expressed in figures in the balance sheet, but in the functioning system of our business this is one of many key pillars.

## Stämpfli Group

The Stämpfli Group is one of the biggest Swiss companies in the graphic arts industry. It has five subsidiaries and employs a total of some 360 people in Berne, Zurich, Ettlingen-Karlsruhe and Warsaw. The company is managed in its sixth generation by the brothers Peter Stämpfli and Rudolf Stämpfli, the former President of the Swiss Employers Association.



# Holzbau Schweiz

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Case study 6



New directions for the Swiss wood construction industry in social sustainability

## Health prevention also for small businesses

With a comprehensive sector solution in health and accident prevention as well as new career offers, the Swiss Wood Construction Industry is addressing the staff turnover in the best age to other sectors.

The dynamic growth of major emerging markets and high consumption of resources of industrialised nations are resulting in resources becoming scarce around the globe. In parallel, environmental problems are becoming more severe, in particular due to climate change and its consequences. Some 49 per cent of fossil energy consumption and more than 40 per cent of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in Switzerland are generated in the housing sector annually. For that reason, it is both an obligation and opportunity for the wood construction industry to contribute to the implementation of the Swiss climate and energy policy and thus to increasing climate and energy efficiency in Swiss construction. The sustainability term originates from the Swiss forestry legislation. For that reason, the wood construction industry has traditionally and consistently been committed to sustainable and CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral construction in the development of its construction systems.

These developments pay off. Building with wood is fashionable, not only when it comes to single-family homes, but also for multiple-storey blocks of flats. The strongly increasing market volume of wood construction can, however, not be processed solely by increasing productivity. That is why the number of employees in the wood construction industry has increased by about 5,000 FTEs over the past ten years.

### **Worrying turnover**

Jobs in the wood construction industry are attractive. The job of carpenter is today one of ten most popular jobs amongst young men and the number of apprentices has remained stable despite falling numbers of people leaving school. When considering the age structure of the entire wood construction industry, however, it is conspicuous that that proportion of young men is dominant. Specifically, some 38 per cent of employees are aged between 20 and 29.

Hans Rupli,  
Central President of Holzbau Schweiz

The proportion drops in the age group between 30 and 39: the figure is only 20 per cent here. Because carpenters are also popular workers in other industries. “Not least because they are down to earth and like to work,” says Hans Rupli, Central President of Holzbau Schweiz. The early turnover of nearly half of all young employees with up-to-date training, the necessary professional experience and a high level

of physical performance to other jobs are worrying and unacceptable for the wood construction industry. Many employees from the wood construction industry are recruited by the police, building supplier sector and planning offices, for instance. Holzbau Schweiz has therefore made it its target to keep the employees in the industry with a differentiated package of measures. A satisfaction survey amongst

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**The Swiss Wood Construction Association is investing with Suva in a wood construction sector solution to further increase safety.**

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employees is regularly carried out together with the social partners on the basis of the wood construction collective labour agreement. At the same time, the formalisation degree of

occupational organisation is surveyed amongst employers. To learn about the reasons for the high turnover rate, the employees were confronted with specific questions in the latest survey. The following reasons can be derived: the most frequent reason is the risk of accidents. According to Suva statistics, the risks of accidents in the industry have fallen strongly in recent years, but there is still need for action. The second reason was the increasing workload, followed by the wish to alternate jobs. At the same time, the industry is required to develop and offer new career paths for older employees.

**Investment in new sector solution**

Many industrial sectors are complaining about an increasing lack of specialists, because they are unable to recruit apprentices for their jobs, meaning that their workforce is ageing. The starting situation in the wood construction industry differs fundamentally from these sectors. If employers manage to retain young employees in the industry more strongly and to thereby reduce the staff turnover, the lack of specialists will be reduced considerably and possibly even eliminated in the medium to long term.

That is why Holzbau Schweiz is investing with Suva in a new wood construction sector solution to further increase safety. This offer is popular amongst employees, which is resulting in an increasing commitment to occupational health and safety. A pilot project carried out







The wood construction industry is now showing how small companies can be integrated in a larger framework with a specific sector solution.

jointly with Helsana showed that there is additional need for action in the area of occupational health management. In 2013 intensive negotiations were therefore held with Helsana. From 2014, Holzbau Schweiz will offer the member companies a new industry solution in occupational health management. It consists

of a sickness daily allowance insurance for wood construction companies, a care agreement for employees and a comprehensive range of services in the area of occupational health prevention and case management.

#### **“Holzbau Vital” [Vital Wood Construction]**

Major companies, such as SBB, can develop and implement such framework conditions independently and on a business-specific basis. The wood construction industry is now showing how small business can be integrated in a larger framework with a specific industry solution, meaning that occupational health prevention can be practiced. Under the term of

“Holzbau Vital” [Vital Wood Construction] the sector solutions of Suva/EKAS and Helsana will be merged in 2014. This will create a new generation of industry solutions that include both occupational accident prevention and occupational health management. The operating implementation will take place as part of a social partnership body. It includes a “Holzbau Vital” agency with one full-time employee, an education fund for co-financing education activities of employees and a social partnership body (Syna, Unia, Swiss Construction Workers, Swiss Commercial Training and Holzbau Schweiz).

Rupli is convinced that “Holzbau Vital” can make a key contribution to the social sustainability in the wood construction industry, thereby also reducing the lack of specialists. “The ‘Holzbau Vital’ project is an important requirement for business to better tap their market opportunities and meet the expectations of investors and principals both in terms of quantity and quality,” believes the Central President of Holzbau Schweiz.

#### **Holzbau Schweiz**

Holzbau Schweiz, the Swiss Wood Construction Association industry body sees itself as a service centre and centre of excellence and is active in the entire wood construction sector. Its main task consists of teaching and anchoring up-to-date knowledge in an implementation-driven manner and connecting member companies in a user-driven way. It unites 1,222 member companies with aggregated wages of CHF 549 million.

#### **Hans Rupli**

Hans Rupli has been Central President of Holzbau Schweiz for 14 years and sat on the association’s board for 22 years. The 55-year-old carpenter by trade studied architecture after his first education at Burgdorf College and worked at ETH Lausanne in wood construction. He subsequently managed the wood construction company for 16 years, which he took over from his parents. Due to his activities in Holzbau Schweiz, he handed over the management of the business, ultimately sold it and established a new consultancy, which is dedicated to strategy and organisational development.





# SBB

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Case study 7

Comprehensive health strategy going in four directions

## “Identifying performance limitations early”

SBB has had a health strategy since 2010. This allows the federal railways to identify possible cases of sickness earlier, react accordingly and ultimately cut costs.

SBB is the biggest transport company in Switzerland and a popular employer. In recent years, it has created additional jobs and recruited more employees, both younger and older people. Because SBB has no age limit. Furthermore, the demographic development not only plays an important role for the national economy, but also for companies. SBB is strongly affected by this. “In the age group above 50, the workforce increased considerably between 2008 and 2012,” says Urban Studer, Head of Operational Management in Occupational Health Management.

This is a typical feature of a company with a low staff turnover. The latter is based, amongst other things, on the fact that SBB offers many rail-specific professions. They include train drivers, conductors, shunting employees, rail traffic managers, track workers, craftsmen as well as technical staff in maintaining the rolling stock. The demographics has a strong influence on sickness and absences. As a rule, the employees of SBB are healthy: “Of the good 29,000 employees some 96 per cent have only

a few days of absences accumulated over the year,” says Studer. “Amongst these 96 per cent, the absence rate changes between 18 and 55 years of age only very marginally as they get older, and only increases slightly from the age of 55, by 65 less than 50 per cent. The general statement of ‘old means difficult’ is therefore not tenable,” he explains.

### **A few cases cause high costs**

Of the four per cent of employees with long-term absences, typically more than three months due to sickness or accident, one per cent is made up by the 18- to 45-year-olds. Their absences amount to nine per cent of all absence days per year. The remaining three per cent of long-term absences are made up by the 45- to 65-year-olds. Their absences amount to 35 per cent of all absence days per year. “From the age of 45, the risk of a severe long-term sickness is therefore considerably higher. This considerable impact of age is, however, not a typical SBB, but a Swiss phenomenon,” says Studer and adds: “Against this background, the

Urban Studer, Head of Operational Management in Occupational Health Management SBB



following question is a major challenge for companies and health care: how can those few persons be identified early and without discrimination – for instance from the age of 45 – and supported appropriately who have a high risk of suffering from long-term sickness?” In terms of numbers, persons with long-term absences are a minority, but: “The four per cent generate half of all sickness- and accident-related costs. This is a huge cost driver,” explains Studer. To counteract this and to promote the health of employees in general, SBB has developed its health strategy.

### Comprehensive health strategy

“Our health strategy aims to maintain and promote the health and performance of all our employees. We approach the subject holistically and have developed a concept with four strategic directions to this end,” says Studer. They include: first, an operational occupational health management, which includes occupational case management (BCM) and presence management; second, health-promoting working conditions; third, the promotion of healthy behaviour and, finally, the integration of the subject of health in the management. The predecessor of the holistic health strategy was the BCM, which was rolled out across the company on 1 January 2008. It takes care of “damage limitation” and aims to bring employees back to the work process as quickly as possible. This also includes retraining so that

sicknesses do not become chronic. “Per year, the BCM accompanies a good 1,300 employees. In about half of them we can complete the process; for three quarters of them, we find a new solution in the company,” says Studer. From 2006 to 2009, they were able to reduce absence days by 36 per cent as regards long-term absences. However, the BCM has a reactive effect. That is why SBB has developed a suitable presence management for its operations. This is a specific method of how superiors can assume their management responsibility in the event of absences. To support the superiors, SBB have developed their own IT tool on a SAP

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**“Our health strategy aims to maintain and promote the health and performance of all our employees.”**

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basis, which was implemented last autumn. If certain absence day patterns emerge in employees’ time entries, repeat short absences of longer absences, the superiors are given an overview of the absences, the so-called presence schedule, and must decide whether it is necessary to conduct a presence dialogue. The superiors establish in this meeting with the employees possible issues, suggest additional clarifications if necessary and derive further steps. The key element



is that the responsibility lies with the superiors. Where required, they are supported by HR. If it is to be assumed that someone is showing a limited performance over more than three months, the BCM takes over. “Employees with possible long-term absences are clearly referred to the BCM earlier today thanks to the presence management, we can respond sooner and find solutions more quickly,” says Studer. The employees are actively involved in the process of presence and occupational case management. This is set out in the collective labour agreement of SBB. Under the collective labour agreement, SBB may not dismiss employees suffering from sickness or the consequences of an accident for two years. This also has an impact on costs: the

expenditure in the event of sickness are borne by SBB over the two years. “In addition to the salary for the days of absence, capital payments for pensions and in the form of severance pay are incurred as direct costs. Overall, the direct costs amount to about four per cent of the gross aggregate wages per year.” The health management system allows SBB to avoid about one quarter of the costs. However, “although SBB was awarded the Friendly Work Space® label at the end of 2013 by Swiss Health Promotion and thereby achieved a value of excellence, we still have a long way to go before we have developed further effective measures and tools and an even better understanding of the interconnection between work and health.”



### Social challenge

One of the future challenges will be the rising costs in health care. They need to be stabilised, says Studer. To this end, the effects of the demographic impact need to be controlled. Furthermore, the ratio of resources for completing work and workload has also changed. Although an increasing number of technical tools are available, work is becoming increasingly denser (e.g. denser timetable, increase in shifts, high cadence in maintaining rolling stock and repairing the infrastructure). Similar tendencies also emerged in recreational activities; people want to be involved in everything and be able to do

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“In addition to pay for the days missed through sickness, capital payments for pensions and a form of termination pay are incurred as direct costs.”

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everything. “The interaction of these factors creates a major challenge. A certain amount of strain can be handled by anybody. Crucial is the question when this strain becomes too much,” he says. It is therefore both an obligation and major challenge for companies to develop solutions in order to identify early and correctly employees with a higher risk of long-term sickness and to support them accordingly.

### Creating health-boosting employment relationshipst

Key elements of this are an ergonomics programme and occupational group-specific work design. The work design is all about finding out where strains can be reduced or even prevented: Is it possible to change anything in terms of the times of shifts? What does a process optimisation involve? Are additional tools required? And How varied is the activity? Where can stereotypic work be avoided?

### Promoting healthy habits

A major concern here is raising awareness for the subject of work and health. This includes training sessions for the employees, in particular of the supervisors. Supervisors increasingly have administrative tasks. This means that the interaction between supervisor and employee may not be reduced, as it is key for the well-being and satisfaction of the employees. Equally important is to know possible dangers and risks for one's own health and to handle them accordingly.

### Integration of the health subject in management

This area includes, for instance, auditing and monitoring and reporting for the health events at the company. To this end, SBB has developed an effects model on the interrelation of work and health in collaboration with ETH Zurich. On this basis, regular steering group meetings at executive board level are held. The knowledge of the various health aspects also influences strategic procurement (e.g. rolling stock).

### SBB AG

1902 is considered to be the year that Schweizerische Bundesbahnen SBB was born. Today, the Federation owns SBB AG (the Federation holds 100 per cent of shares). The parent company SBB AG (group without subsidiaries) includes the four divisions of passenger traffic, goods traffic (SBB Cargo AG), infrastructure and real estate property. Added to this are the controlling and services roles, which include, amongst other things, HR and finance.w





# Netcetera

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Case study 8



The best IT employer in Switzerland

## “The employer must explain that he can secure jobs in the long term”

The IT services provider Netcetera is the best IT employer in Switzerland according to an employee survey of the Employer Award 2013. CFO Thomas Geier explains why this is the case and what his company does to ensure its employees are satisfied and healthy.

“The satisfaction of employees in technology companies is often based on other needs and demands than those of employees in other sectors. Amongst our 350 employees, the average age is between 30 and 35. Many are university or college graduates who want to draw on their full resources and achieve their potential. Our employees are looking for meaningfulness and joy at work in addition to income and job security. We try to live up to these expectations by placing great store on team spirit. This becomes manifest in cultural elements, such as seeing eye to eye and in an open, personal exchange of ideas across hierarchy levels, but also in a great degree of freedom in executing the work and in mutual trust. I believe that this coming together of

different cultural elements was also the key factor for the nomination in the Swiss Employer Award.

The question arises, of course, whether every company can be like us. I don't think so. A key requirement for such a culture is certainly the fact that a company is a stable employer with commercial success in the long term. The employer must be able to show that he can secure its employees' jobs for the long term. He does not do so by creating the illusion that everything will remain the way it is. In fact, he must show that he can handle change in a positive and constructive manner. This, in turn, requires lots of flexibility when it comes to working hours, mentality and organisation. Attractive employment terms such as com-

Thomas Geier,  
CFO Netcetera



pensation, fringe benefits, table football and much more are part of this. For instance, we have two first-class employee restaurants, employee events such as a day in the snow or a two-day company seminar for all, various career models and one of the most contemporary workplace infrastructures that can also be used for private matters. But such formalities don't help when the content of the work is not suitable. It goes without saying that bad infrastructure should not be an obstacle. Excessive strain coupled with unsatisfactory work content are extremely damaging. Work content and workload need to be in a healthy balance with the rest.

To ensure this balance and enhance the corporate culture, we rolled out a so-called Employment Design Team with seven representatives of the various areas, roles, countries and age groups nearly two years ago. We realised that not only one instance is responsible in certain stressful situations. If, for example, a project team is permanently under pressure, not only the project manager is responsible for the situation. Sales, the line managers or HR can also be considered to be responsible. However, in the past there was nobody who brought together all parties involved and coordinated the approach across areas.

The Employment Design Team meets once a month. Across various channels, ideas and proposals are thereby brought together that relate to the employment conditions in the



broadest sense. Starting from employee events to defining salaries through to complex team situations. The Employment Design Team members are given a good day per month to devote their time to such superordinate tasks without having to focus on their day-to-day work.

Another result of this team is the expansion of our career model. The possibility of a specialist career was additionally integrated in it. A very central element is currently also the design of the employment conditions for our site in Macedonia. Although we want a strong, cross-site corporate culture and attractive employment conditions, there are also cultural, historic and legal differences between Switzerland and our foreign sites. Furthermore, local customs should also be respected.

Of course, all these efforts do not help if the wrong people are employed. For us, the recruitment is therefore a crucial element in the chain. The biggest risk for a bad recruitment are different expectations, which are not identified in the recruitment process. We therefore attach great importance to a most realist external appearance of our company. This is reflected by our website and our job descriptions. If recruitment is successful, technical criteria make up only 25 per cent of the success. In addition, the chemistry is important, which can be explored in the job interview.

When someone is finally employed, our focus is, in addition to compensation, workload and

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Everything that serves employee satisfaction ultimately strengthens the psyche and reduces the risk of health impairments.

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work content, also on the prevention of health disorders. Everything that serves employee satisfaction ultimately strengthens the psyche and reduces the risk of health impairments. In this sense, we also try to let our employees work where they can best apply their knowledge and experiences and thereby also enjoy themselves.

For instance, we developed our staff deployment planning software ourselves. This allows assigning the employees in a detailed and flexible manner across 200 projects with a granularity of half a work day. With this support, the Project Controlling Committee oversees staff deployment planning once a week. Workload and work content are as equally taken into account in the process as are the interfaces with Sales, project managers, team leaders, etc. I am convinced that only people only find the best solution at Netcetera who are committed and want the best. In addition, the employees have insight into this tool and can voice their wishes.

But we're not satisfied there. The aim is to detect any problems early. Here, we have institutionalised three channels of attention: the project managers, the team leaders and the HR managers. During team leader training, there

is also a targeted focus on the early identification of problems at work. In addition, there are repeated refresher courses. Finally, the HR department assumes the senior supervision and exchange role. An absence management software also shows us possible problematic cases early.

If an employee nevertheless falls ill, it is our aim to reintegrate the person affected in the job as best possible, and we aim to do so in close collaboration with our social and insurance partners. We believe that it's important not to hush up a sickness. It can affect anyone despite all prevention."

### Netcetera AG

Netcetera AG is amongst the top software companies in Switzerland and supports the most varied customers in its core business with tailor-made solutions. Established in 1996, the holding whose head office is in Zurich employs some 350 people in Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Macedonia and the United Arab Emirates. Netcetera was honoured as the best IT employer in Switzerland in 2013 by the Swiss Employer Award.



# McOptik

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Case study 9



Increasing satisfaction with training session for optimal management

## “The working atmosphere has a crucial impact on health”

When employees are sick, a store may soon lack half its workforce. McOptik with its many small branches is well acquainted with this scenario. To bridge such shortages, the optician relies on so-called stand-by staff. A labour-intensive measure. With an improvement health management, the employees should now live more healthily and be absent from work less.

**Bettina Meuli, McOptik has more than 60 stores with only few employees in some cases. What do you do when half the workforce of a store is unable to work in the event of a flu epidemic for instance?**

In the event of flu epidemics, we rely on our employees' flexibility. Employees from other stores without cases of sickness help those stores where employees are forced to stay at home. We also worked with so-called stand-by staff, who are deployed to other stores when employees take leave or are sick. Depending on the situation, a solution involving the store manager and the team is aimed at.

**Longer-term sickness is worse than a flu epidemic. How do you manage these absences?**

In the event of longer absences of employees, we deploy a fixed-term stand-by employee to the sick person until the latter is healthy again. Alternatively, we also recruit replacement staff in individual cases, which can be used in a different role after the sick employee has returned.

**What do stand-by staff do when everybody is healthy?**

All stand-by staff have their standard work schedule, i.e. a normal deployment scheduled,

Bettina Meuli, Head of Human Resources McOptik




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We ensure that we hold systematic meetings with recovered employees returning to work, in particular in the event of short-term absences.

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which is limited to just a couple of stores. We consider the distances for the quantity of these additional stores where they are deployed. It makes no sense to deploy stand-by staff who normally work and live in Zurich to Basel, Berne or Lausanne.

#### **What are the requirements for stand-by staff?**

Stand-by staff need to be flexible. They also need to enjoy working at different stores. Because they need to get to know the various stores, their processes and customers. The technical requirements are the same for all employees. Because it depends on the personality whether someone is happy as a stand-by employee or not, we advertise such jobs with the stand-by role and discuss the requirements in the job interview.

#### **Are there alternatives to the stand-by staff?**

Another alternative at McOptik is that a store manager consciously amasses hours with the team and then reduces them again. There are also some other solutions that store managers implement as a matter of their individual responsibility, so that stand-by staff don't need to be deployed at all. We see a preventive

supplement to reduce absences in an improved health management.

#### **What does McOptik do to promote its employees' health?**

We ensure that systematic meetings are held with recovered employees who return to work, in particular in the event of short-term absences in order to establish the reasons for the absences. This allows taking corresponding measures. In particular, our employees sense, in addition to our appreciation in the form of a one-on-one meeting, that absences are not considered to be normal. As I already mentioned, McOptik will also launch various and continuously adjusting projects in the health prevention area.

#### **Employees are only obligated to report sicknesses if they are directly incapacitated for work. How do you handle this from a legal perspective?**

So far, this issue has fortunately not occurred. This would be examined and legally clarified on a case-by-case basis.

#### **How does McOptik respond specifically when employees have many short-term absences?**

The superiors address the matter with the persons affected. But sometimes an employee does not wish to confide in their supervisor. In such cases it's possible to contact HR. We have had good experiences with this offer: employees use it, as they can rely on their problems being addressed in all confidentiality.

#### **What role does the working atmosphere play for your employees' health?**

I believe that the working atmosphere and the atmosphere in the individual team play a major role. If the staff is happy at work, it will also be more willing to support the team despite minor ailments.

#### **How do you have a positive influence on the working atmosphere?**

As a rule, we lead by example, which is also what we expect from our employees. This results in a collaboration that is based on trust and where we see eye to eye. We consider this to be positive. We also offer the possibility of so-called sales training sessions that, contrary to our product training sessions, do not






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**We also raise the store management's awareness for hearing out friction from the meetings with employees.**

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include the technical aspects but also focus on personal development and management. This allows employees to continuously develop further and remain motivated, which has a direct impact on the atmosphere. We also focus on management development, of course. Training sessions are currently scheduled, such as how to voice criticism in meetings in a constructive way, how attendees part with mutually positive emotions and how collaboration is improved.

We also raise the store management's awareness for hearing out friction from the meetings with employees. For instance, listen closely when employees say they have too little time for themselves or to pursue sports. Because we need to support these employees with suitable measures. On some occasions this also means employees reducing their working hours. Store managers should seek personal meetings with the employee and use but not abuse the exchange of experiences.

**How do you promote the health awareness amongst employees?**

We will also address this with training sessions. However, only when we see with the new absence recording what the most frequent sicknesses and reasons for absence are. We also

wish to show to employees in these training sessions what effects it has on the performance and targets of the entire team if they are often sick for short terms.

**How do you identify long-term sicknesses or mental sicknesses early?**

Within the framework of the improved health management, we will also focus more strongly on this matter. Specifically, this means that superiors will be trained in early identification and provided with tools, such as checklists. The aim is for them to be able to better decide whether they should raise the symptoms with the employees or whether they forward their observations to HR in order to involve external support, if applicable.

**What is the expenditure of McOptik for health management and training?**

These efforts cost a great deal of money. As we are a rather small company, we can implement our plans step by step. This year, we will pay about five per cent of the wage bill for training sessions in the personality area and for health management. We are convinced that the expenditure pays off – both for employees and for the company.

**McOptik (Switzerland) Ltd**

**McOptik (Switzerland) Ltd, a Swiss family-led company, is the sole Swiss optician chain that operates in German-speaking Switzerland, the Romandie and Ticino with more than 60 sites and a total of more than 300 employees. To promote Switzerland as a place to do business, McOptik works exclusively with Swiss glass supplier Optiswiss. The company generates sales of CHF 56 million.**

**Bettina Meuli**

**Bettina Meuli, who holds a degree as an HR expert, has worked for McOptik for three years. Since summer 2013, the 30-year-old has headed up the company's Human Resources department. Previously, she worked for an event agency and in the subconstruction industry.**





# Spitex Zürich Limmat

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Case study 10

Being one

## A sense of community is the trump at Spitex Zürich Limmat

Spitex Zürich Limmat merged various sites at the end of 2009 and created a company with 850 predominantly mobile employees. Its biggest success to date is the expansion of its employee utilisation. This is not least possible thanks to healthy and conscientious employees.

A sense of community is extremely important in the home economics and care sector. The work of the various employees with a different background is hard. But ensuring people's well-being is key and paramount despite financial limits. "We attach great importance to our employees assuming a good kinaesthesia – the teaching of the sensation of movement – and regularly attending relevant courses. They learn there, for instance, how they can work without straining the back," explains Christina Brunnschweiler, CEO of Spitex Zürich Limmat. Kinaesthesia courses are a means of protection for the employees in their heavy work. But is that sufficient? "We know that a certain exchange is needed in care to regularly switch off. Because the work situations are often very

stressful," says Brunnschweiler. In difficult situations, the company therefore offers its workforce case meetings with internal and external experts, for instance for handling difficult patients with dementia. A debriefing after the work has been completed is very important in such cases. "We can involve several expert teams in difficult situations. Because we can see that many of our employees, who mostly work part-time, are single parents or care for their own parents, already live in such a stressful environment. We therefore also offer social care," she adds. This service is used by seven to eight per cent of the workforce annually. If superiors detect the need for support, they may occasionally also register the person affected directly. Courses on taking a break are also used.

Christina Brunnschweiler,  
CEO Spitex Zürich Limmat





It is evident that these measures work and help not only from the figures, but also from the energy reserves of the employees, says the head of Spitex Zürich Limmat.

#### **Consistent early identification**

Consistent presence management also prevents burnout. The superiors keep a support log, where every absence is entered. After every multiple-day absence, return meetings are held. If someone is absent for only one day, the person is at least asked whether he is better again. If the superior detects several absences, he or she asks to discuss the matter with the employee for clarification and support. HR management carries out an absence controlling annually. Presence management has turned out to be the most effective means as regards early identification. "After rolling out this system, absences clearly dropped," says Brunnschweiler. The Spitex organisation considers systematic customer feedback to be a further effective measure. Case management processes have an effect after only one month of absence and make a major contribution to reintegrating sick employees. The company has about ten reintegration cases per year. They are mostly people returning to work after back operations or mental sickness in rare cases. Brunnschweiler considers case management to be a key measure, but also as appreciation towards employees in that someone takes care of their case when things become difficult.



About three to five disability cases occur every year despite all efforts to prevent these. Mobility problems, such as discus hernias, after often the cause. However, Spitex allows most of these disability cases to retrain and continue in employment with reduced working hours within the framework of case management.

#### **Effect models and their Eureka! impacts**

The fact that Spitex Zürich Limmat is successful is not least down to the good utilisation. The management was able to expand this considerably thanks to measures. One of them is the management plan game. This measure created the foundation for growing together as a unit. It was developed for the management level and everyone involved in deployment

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**A pin board in the cafe, where everybody gets regular updates, is not very conducive.**

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planning and explains to all employees the importance of the company's health. "Our centrepiece," as CEO Brunnschweiler calls it, "it allows us to explain to all persons involved in the company what the company's success is based on or how every employee can have a

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**The fact that Spitex Zürich Limmat is successful is not least down to the good utilisation. The management was able to expand this considerably thanks to measures.**

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positive impact on the company's success." Spitex Zürich Limmat has developed an effect model that shows the success drivers, such as doctors, customers, hospitals and employees, and how the individual employee can influence these drivers during day-to-day work. The game helps to find the correct answers to the following questions: What are my levers to contribute to the company's success? On the basis of the plan game, Spitex Zürich Limmat was able to further expand its utilisation which is vital for the company. "The workshop in which we presented the game also strongly increased employee satisfaction. Our staff considers this to be an expression of how it is appreciated. This solidified our sense of community. It empowered employees and strengthened them in their self-confidence," says Brunnschweiler.

#### **Strong corporate culture**

Another factor driving success is the cross-company corporate culture. Every one of the ten Spitex centres today lives its own corporate culture. But since the merger, a cross-company Limmat culture has also been in place. The crucial achievement was to make it

tangible for the employees. Because most of them work at their customers on a mobile basis. A pin board in the cafe, where everybody gets regular updates, is not very conducive. What is more, a large proportion of the employees have an immigration background and the customers also come from the most different countries. This means that the environment which is meant to live a new culture is itself dominated by many cultures. "We therefore relied strongly on management and leading by example to anchor the corporate culture. The conduct desired by the staff needs to be lived by example by us as managers," says Brunnschweiler.

#### **Spitex Zürich Limmat AG**

**Spitex Zürich Limmat AG is the biggest of the three NP Spitex organisations in the city of Zurich. It was established in 2009 following the merger of four associations. In 2012 the core business was transferred to a joint-stock company owned by the association, which provides care to some 6,500 persons in the city of Zurich with its ten sites and 850 employees.**



# Föllmi

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Case study 11

Presence and proximity in the company

## “The group is only as healthy as the individual and vice versa”

The Föllmi AG building company has a very open communication culture and considers this to be the biggest success factor for its own sustainable health promotion.

For more than 75 years, Föllmi AG has contributed to the building up the region between Lake Zurich and Central Switzerland. In 2013 the company with 145 employees won the Artisana health promotion award under the patronage of the Swiss SME Foundation and the Swiss Trade and Crafts Association. That is hardly surprise: “We always wanted our employees to be in good health and for them to enjoy working for us. That’s why we enhanced our health management 18 months ago,” says Jürg Nussbaumer, Managing Director of Föllmi AG. Together with Helsana, the health management was then examined and an age structure analysis conducted. It showed that all age structures are evenly balanced at Föllmi. The company is also a popular employer according to the subsequent employee survey. But need for action became apparent in some areas: to further train the managers in their management competence and to ensure a standard-

ised approach in the company, Föllmi held three management workshops for meetings with employees returning to work after sickness. For this process, a process diagram and associated tools were developed together with Helsana which are now being applied in practice.

### **Creating good conditions**

The company also took measures as regards the hard day-to-day work on construction sites: “We made more machines and supporting equipment available. The industry also adjusted the weight of the materials. Manual or heavy lifting of loads is therefore a lot easier for our employees today,” said Nussbaumer. It is in the interest of the company to maintain its employees’ good health in order to avoid sickness or partial or full disability, adds Head of Communications Daniel Föllmi junior, the grandson of the company founder. “When

Daniel Föllmi,  
Head of Internal Services  
Föllmi AG



something is wrong with someone, this is reflected in their work. In our industry, a drop in performance is visible by the eye on the same day,” he adds. Their employees are healthy; not least thanks to the regular work outdoors and lots of exercise. The company does therefore not have any long-term absences. But additional factors are also responsible for this.

#### Good reasons for healthy employees

“In our business, we maintain a direct and open culture of communication. If someone doesn’t like something, it’s discussed directly, regardless of the person’s rank. That provides relief for the mind and mood,” explains Nussbaumer. The company aims to treat one another in a frank and caring manner and to also resolve private concerns. It is also important to offer employees interesting work. “Worries hold people back. Contrary to physical work, concerns are not so immediately visible. But dissatisfaction can spread within a company like a mushroom. That’s why our culture of frank communication is very precious to us,” he adds. Superiors and employees therefore discuss concerns and discomfort without any taboo in the company. The management then looks for solutions that should relieve the persons affected quickly. “Every employee is equally important, regardless of the hierarchy. This provides everyone with the possibility to address a colleague, the site manager or me directly at any time,” says Jürg Nussbaumer.

The doors are also open to all employees at the company’s head office. CEO Nussbaumer is often present and always willing to hold personal meetings. Anybody can come round to his office at any time, he says. “In today’s times, in particular, it happens that relationships fall apart, employees come round and tell me about their private situation. When things like this happen, I recommend employees to go home and to find some inner peace,” says Nussbaumer. If someone is not feeling well and does not open up to discussion of his own accord, the company tries to find a way to talk to the person via someone he relates to closely. Everyone has somebody like this in the company. And the CEO also regularly visits the building sites to actively get feedback from the employees. “Showing presence and proximity to employees is very important as the CEO,” is Nussbaumer’s conviction. This frank and desired communication has always been pursued by the company, even before the Helsana survey. “The group is only as healthy as the individual and vice versa,” says Föllmi too.

In the change of generations and the economic environment, the culture of communication has even become more intensive, and the company has grown as a result. Transparency in operations, acceptance of criticism, reflection is lived by all parties involved. The company has an average staff turnover measured by the industry. But this is also ensured by further



factors: “A major driver is to enjoy one’s work,” says Föllmi. Anyone who wants good employees needs to contribute to this. The company attaches great importance to basic training. Many apprentices are given full-time jobs after they complete their training. The proportion of apprentices stands at slightly more than 10 per cent. Long-standing employees also participate actively in the training process. “We show our young colleagues that our business is open to all kinds of career aspirations. The fact that we have a healthy demand for apprentices probably also has to do with the intensive support we offer our apprentices. It’s above average for the industry,” says the CEO. At Föllmi, apprentices have a good training plan. They

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“A major driver is to enjoy one’s work. Anyone who wants good employees needs to contribute to this.”

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get to know the most varied professions at the company. The company also has one FTE, which is devoted solely to supporting apprentices. An external person also supports the apprentices during working hours in social matters and if they have learning disabilities, where required. “We don’t see our apprentices as a profit centre, but as our long-term future,”

explains Nussbaumer. Föllmi emphasises how important it is to show the young employees in what direction they can grow.

### Effect in figures

How healthy the employees of Föllmi really are becomes apparent from the lower Suva premiums and the efficiency on the building sites. The motivation to participate in the Tree project was for the company to have a say and to be in a driving seat. But not only that: “We also consider it to be an expression of our appreciation of our staff. To take a step ahead, the view across the industry is also important. Our sector is rather conservative. But we consider it to be a good approach that goes in the right direction. Tree makes interrelations clearer. What we assume from Tree is to more consciously address the subject of early identification, to ask more and to take more down in writing,” explains Föllmi. Every member of management also has an additional tool thanks to Tree in order to increase satisfaction amongst employees and to ensure that indications of weakness are identified more quickly. That’s particularly beneficial for young management employees. But neither Nussbaumer nor Föllmi can imagine aligning early identification entirely towards Tree. “A good mix of the previous management culture and the new absence reporting system is practical,” says Föllmi. In what form they will implement the findings is not yet clear.

### A new image for the industry

CEO Nussbaumer is still uneasy about the image that the construction industry has: “It needs to be improved,” he says, adding: “We are not at all backwards in terms of technology.” The industry’s reputation is indeed not good. Prejudice and misconceptions still dominate in society. For instance, Föllmi digs construction pits with navigation devices in its excavators, the work clothes no longer get dirty like they used to and noise emissions during road repairs are not nearly what they used to be. A lot has changed in the industry. While various languages are still spoken on many building sites, the company has implemented German as its working language. Anyone who cannot communicate in the company is sent to German courses at the company’s expense. “Information must flow in a company. That’s why we always support our employees with language problems. Everybody speaks and understands German at our company. But language problems are a frequent issue in the industry,” confirms Nussbaumer.

### Artisana

Artisana has awarded a company every year since 2005 that has shown outstanding and long-term achievement in occupational health promotion. Since the first award, Föllmi AG is the first building company to win this award.

### Föllmi AG

Föllmi AG has existed as a family-led company for more than 75 years. It employs 145 people, of which slightly more than 10 per cent are apprentices. With high quality requirements, the company has grown to its current size and become a top address for structural and civil engineering, conversions and refurbishments in the Lake Zurich and Central Switzerland regions.



# Helsana Group

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Case study 12



Supporting employees in further training and adjustment

## “It’s also the responsibility of employees to face new challenges”

Beat Hunziker, Head of HR at Helsana, explains in an interview how the health insurer helps employees to adjust to increasing demands and changed job descriptions and to remain healthy in the process.

### **How have the demands for administrators changed at health insurers?**

Let’s look at the example of administration in the benefits area: ten years ago, we processed all invoices manually. Some employees simply recorded invoice details or physically archived processed invoices. This did not require any specialist knowledge. Today, 95 per cent of invoices are digitalised, of which only about one third is manually checked and processed. With a total volume of 13.8 million invoices per year, this is a huge increase in automatic document checking and processing. This means that nearly all repetitive, simple work is no longer performed. The demands on employees have changed entirely and have increased hugely.

By discussing the changing demands instead of avoiding them and by accepting and living further training as a permanent task. We there invest a lot of money in further training. But there are always employees who cannot or are unwilling to make the change despite further training. We were able to offer these persons different jobs internally for some time. But with repetitive work no longer being required, this is becoming increasingly more difficult, for which reason we are also forced to let employees go. These are mostly people above the age of 50, for which we also have social responsibility which can be assumed by providing support.

### **How can long-serving staff be protected from becoming superfluous?**

**The “typical” old school administrators are therefore seeing something of structural unemployment?**

Beat Hunziker,  
Head of HR Helsana

We are living in a time where the life cycle of unchanging jobs has become extremely short. It's the joint responsibility of us as an employer and of employees to face these changing requirements. We do an awful lot to always be one step ahead of the coming developments and to keeping our employees fit. Of course, we cannot rationalise away the fact that there will always be employees who are not willing to change, despite further training offers, despite early information on the change to requirements and despite the transparency that the existing job will not continue in its current form. It's difficult and demanding to distinguish between those who want further training but are unable to given their intellectual skills and those who can take further training but are unwilling to do so. The responsibility for this kind of structural unemployment can therefore not be unilaterally placed at the end of the employer.

#### **How do you support the managers in charge in their leadership tasks?**

We set clear guidelines as to how employees must be made aware of changes requirements. Every person needs to be informed transparently; they must be given the opportunity to seek further training. And the requirements must be clear. We have two job profiles for each role in the company: on the one hand, the reference profile that describes the tasks, on the other hand, the requirements profile that

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Treatment by doctors rarely questioned. Today, customers contact us when they don't agree with it.

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describes the skills an employee needs for the tasks. Our job profiles are being consistently revised; not least also because they are used to define the salaries and act as the basis for the external benchmark. In addition, Helsana supports the managers with comprehensive development measures on the job, e.g. with tailor-made organisation development measures, individual coaching, etc.

#### **What options do employees have who no longer suit their job despite the best efforts?**

Let's come back to the example of administration in the benefits area: Helsana is increasingly calling customers again, we are approaching them more actively. This customer support offers employees with an opportunity who find working on the automatic system difficult. To inform our customers, in-depth specialist or system knowledge is often not required, but integrated knowledge about our range of services.

#### **How do you meet the increasing demand for service quality in this process?**

We have set ourselves targets that partly sound banal but are very important. For instance, we want to ensure that all calls are taken within a reasonable period of time. In doing so, we are



friendly, listen to our customers and take their concerns seriously. We solve the matters immediately and competently or offer to call back if the problems are more complex. We thereby create a commitment to and certainty for our customers.

#### **How is the employees' service quality promoted?**

We regularly conduct call coaching. The employees are also trained in the typology of human beings so that they note that not every customer can be treated in the same way. The

employees also learn to know their own typology and how to deal with the various typologies in their team. However, it is necessary not to stick customers in strict categories.

#### **How have demands for customers changed?**

Customers are today better informed, more price sensitive and more sceptical. Treatment provided by doctors was rarely questioned in the past. Today, our customers contact us if they disagree with medical services or the costs. In response to this, we have invested in services and have more employees with medi-

cal expertise. We did so in the case management area in particular. We approach customers more actively, make our services more transparent and clearer. We also work more closely with doctors and hospitals and can thereby make a major contribution to the early identification of sicknesses and reintegration.

**How do you identify whether the mental strain on your employees of not living up to the changed demands is becoming too big?**

A dropping performance and increasing absences are often an indication. We expect our managers to support their employees closely and to notice when someone is struggling. Our further training courses help to develop and apply these sensors. What's more, we also provide care management as support. The basis is, of course, our BGM (occupational health management). In this area we have been awarded with the Friendly Workspace label by Swiss Health Promotion.

**It's one thing to identify the mental strain. How do you act in order to help these employees?**

We have many different ways. If individual employees are affected, we aim to talk with the person and jointly define measures that help to reduce the mental strain. Sometimes it's sufficient to help to change something in the personal environment. For instance by providing support in pursuing a hobby that

gives them satisfaction and fulfilment. If the cause is primarily in the working environment, we help in work techniques and systematically examine the working conditions. Sometimes it's also necessary to end the situation so that employees don't becoming chronically sick.

**How can the ability to handle heavy workloads be assessed during a job application?**

We always examine various things in a job application. For instance, the candidates need to have specialist knowledge for administration in the benefits area. They need to be able to correspond and communicate. We also verify the customer orientation and want to know how the candidate seems himself as a person, what his so-called self-image is. On some occasions we let applicants join in the work process for half a day so they know what is in store for them. If we recruit carefully, we get a good mix of new, competent employees and long-standing employees who need to adjust to changed demands. The mix helps long-standing employees to enjoy the new demands.

**What are the requirements for the employees of tomorrow?**

Employees will need to be familiar with the world of social media. In addition, the individual support of customers will increase, and demands regarding specialist knowledge and customer orientation are also growing.

**Beat Hunziker: the developer**

Beat Hunziker is Head of Human Resources at the health insurer Helsana. The 52-year-old is responsible for the areas of training, compensation & benefits, HR consulting and marketing, care management, management development, organisational development, employee insurance and payroll/time management / HR services. Previously, he worked for 14 years as the head of a large operating area, coordinated the entire operating business in the benefits area and was the representative of the benefits group area. In 2008 Beat Hunziker completed his training as a graduate business economist at St Gallen's Management Institute and attended various further training courses in management, change and organisational subjects.

**Helsana Group**

The Helsana Group is present in basic, supplementary and accident insurance in all parts of the country as a health insurer. It owns Progrès, Sansan, Avanex and Maxi.ch. Furthermore, Helsana is a leading provider in daily sickness allowance and accident insurance for companies. Some 1.9 million people are insured by the Helsana Group, which generates CHF 5.7 billion in premium contributions with some 3,000 employees (as at 2013).

**Care and case management**

Care management focuses on the process of comprehensive care (health system), while case management focuses on the individual.



Martin Werthmüller, Head of Corporate Services; Marcus Steger, Head of Actuarial Practice Corporate Clients; Oliver Halter, Head of Corporate Sales

## New approaches to early identification, case management and prevention

Corporate business is a key pillar in Helsana's business activities. With the collective sickness daily allowance and accident insurances, employees are protected against the financial consequences in the event of sickness and accident and the risks of a company are reduced.

Sickness- and accident-related absences cause high costs. In addition to continued salary payments, companies are faced with indirect costs as a result of overtime to be worked, lower quality or loss of know-how.

As the leading health and accident insurer in Switzerland, Helsana is far more committed to the national economic responsibility than simply assuming insurance risks. We consider it to be our duty to make a contribution to keeping health care and continued salary payment costs as low as possible. With an integral solution, we focus on prevention and occupational health promotion from the very outset. Early identification of absences represents a further key component. However, if longer absences nevertheless occur, the focus must be placed on case management, while appropriate and expert steps must be taken towards a quick reintegration. The role of the employer

can still be expanded in this respect. However, it has become clear that maintaining the health of employees is not only in the social interest of the employer, but can also have significant cost effects. Furthermore, our experience has shown that a low absence rate correlates to a high level of employee satisfaction, which again results in market success.

To achieve this, we wish to take a fresh approach with you to prevention, early identification and case management. With the consistent interlinking of these three elements, the full potential can be tapped. Your employees and shareholders will thank you!

### Tree for Employers survey

[https://de.surveymonkey.com/s/industry\\_project](https://de.surveymonkey.com/s/industry_project)

### Specialist literature

Denise Camenisch (2014):  
Früherkennung – zwischen Wohlbefinden und Krankheit  
Stämpfli Publishers, Berne

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