

Ways to improve working time conditions in IT-service companies

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Objective

Employees, especially in the IT-sectors, are increasingly facing more complex work loads combined with excessive demands and time pressure at work. Every second IT employee complains about work interruptions and time pressure leading to loss of control, fatigue and occupational stress (Gerlmaier/Latniak 2011, p.71f). This abstract outlines a practical preventive working time concept in a middle-sized IT company in Germany, which was developed through the project “DIWA-IT” (demographic change and prevention in the IT economy), financed by the Ministry of Education & Research, Germany, and co-financed by the EU. The working time concept, including issues of stress and health management, was developed in participative workshops with the employees. The check-up analysis provided important information and was conducive to creating innovative working time concepts.

Method

The participating company is an IT service/consultant company mainly for the energy sector with 80 employees and three agencies in Germany. DIWA-IT workshops were administered to 19 employees from one agency who volunteered during regular working hours. In the first workshops they received basic information about working time, occupational stress and health management and the importance of these key factors in connection with effective resource management. Then they completed the questionnaire for the check-up analysis. All participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential. The sample comprised 15 men and 4 women; all are employed full-time.

Results

The check-up analysis revealed that although the participants have a great deal of latitude, they also feel a great deal of time pressure. Very often the employees leave work late ($r = 0.47$; $p = 0.04$). Employees who find inflexible working time unpleasant prefer trust-based working time ($r = 0.7$; $p = 0.0009$).

In addition, there is a clear connection between satisfaction at work and strains on family and social relationships. Satisfaction decreases when the work-life balance is seen as bad ($r = -0.82$, $p < 0.0001$) and when working conditions for elderly employees are perceived as negative ($r = -.60$, $p = 0.0095$).

Conclusion

In organizational psychology, scope of action at work is desired (Ulich 2005), but in this case it didn't prevent participants from working overtime and suffering from time pressure. Effective and sustainable concepts should focus on customized mechanisms and participative designs with goal-oriented agreements.