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*COLLABORATING FOR SUCCESS***

Title of Paper

IMPLEMENTING DISABILITY MANAGEMENT IN COMPANIES

Presenter

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Descriptive Abstract

Implementing Disability Management in companies is a complex process. Findings of a pioneering study on eight companies in Switzerland show crucial factors for its success.

Topic Track

**Innovative Programs in Workplace Health & Safety: An Employer
Perspective**

Extended Abstract

Disability management, the use of which has become increasingly widespread in Switzerland over recent years, is a new type of workplace strategy. One of its key objectives is to enable employees who have suffered an illness or injury to return to work, to take up a different post with their previous employer or to find a new job elsewhere. Social security providers can greatly assist employers with the administration of their disability management programmes. In a pioneering study information are gathered from companies about the introduction and administration of their in-house disability management programmes, and find out how they rated their success. A total of eight companies from different sectors and of varying sizes were surveyed. This involved qualitative interviews with all the key participants in the disability management process: human resources and management staff, disability management staff and the workers who were in receipt of these services. All respondents

were also asked about the importance of social security providers and family doctors in the process. A standardised written questionnaire was used to gather information on every company employee involved in disability management in the workplace and how they rated this service.

Based on the research findings it can be stated that Disability management in the workplace implies systematic action on the part of employers. The aim of disability management programmes is to assist and support employees with an illness or injury and should be part and parcel of a company's overall strategy and organisation, i.e. should not be deployed merely on a case-by-case basis. Disability management can also be seen as the professionalisation of workplace assistance for employees who have been ill or suffered an injury. Companies implement early identification and prevention measures as part of their own in-house disability management programme. Companies which have introduced their own in-house disability management programme have seen a substantial reduction in health-related costs as well as significant improvements to their corporate culture. This encouraging development is also reflected in how recipients have rated disability management measures. Far from seeing disability management as a means of control - a criticism often levelled at this strategy - the employees we surveyed considered it a sign of their employer's appreciation of their work and of their willingness to help.

The study shows that Disability Management in companies is a complex process which is highly demanding for all participants involved but maybe most for the employer. Therefore, the main focus of the presentation is to show how the implementation process in the different companies researched did develop. Some crucial findings of the study with relevance to the implementation process are:

- Firms explained their adoption of disability management programmes with a range of motives, some financial and others based on broader elements of corporate culture. They reported that *they had largely reached the targets* they had set themselves at the start of the process, such as fewer employee absences and the successful return of ill or injured employees to the workplace.
- A number of factors influenced the decision of companies to adopt disability management programmes: *financial and corporate culture reasons, as well as external incentives*. The surveyed companies stated that they wanted not only to increase efficiency but also to identify problems and come up with effective solutions. With one exception, the companies in our survey also cited corporate culture as a major impetus behind their introduction of in-house disability management programmes. Several companies also cited external motives.
- The incorporation of disability management programmes into the existing organisational structure of the company varies across the surveyed firms. The present study found three approaches: *incorporation in existing employee counselling services, creation of a separate subdivision of the HR department (most common), or incorporation as an integral part of the HR department*. In some cases, the in-house disability management programme was run in addition to an independent employee counselling service. Where companies chose to make these services an HR matter, the disability management programme shared the same organisational structures as HR. However, the study found that this did not have a negative effect on the administration of in-house disability management programmes.

On the basis of these research findings crucial factors for a successful implementation of Disability Management in companies will be identified and discussed.

