



COMMUNICATION RESEARCH – INHOUSE

ENERGY STATION INEOS IN KÖLN

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Companies are putting increased value on offering health programmes to enhance physical activity, which provides numerous health benefits, yet little information is gathered how such an offering should be designed to secure or increase employees' acceptance.

At INEOS in Cologne, Germany, staff always comes first. Therefore, before installing a fitness centre, a study was conducted to assess if there was a desire for it and how it should look like. The question "Which factors influence usage of a work-site health programme and how can usage be increased?" was raised to identify reasons and benefits of implementing a work-site health programme.

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HEALTH IS PARAMOUNT

INEOS is one of the world's largest chemical companies. Founded in 1998, the company employs 20,000 people and has a turnover of around 60 billion US Dollars. The Cologne site is the city's biggest chemical company and the third largest industrial employer with 2,211 employees and 150 apprentices. SHE (safety, health and environment) is the company's highest priority. Consequently, employees' health is of major importance.

INEOS is constantly investing and growing worldwide. During 2017 and 2018, a new office was built in Cologne where health was to play a major role. Should a fitness centre, that didn't exist before, just be installed, or wasn't it wiser to ask the people about their overall expectation – including their wishes? It was decided to conduct a communications research study.

The purpose of the study was to identify reasons and benefits of implementing a work-site health programme. It allowed us to test which factors, such as normative and empirical expectations, incentive schemes, and enjoyment of sport surrounded by colleagues etc., played a role in the usage of a work-site health promotion programme. Goals: 20 per cent take part in the questionnaire; 10 per cent of staff subscribe to the work-site health programme.

A VALUE TO STRENGTHEN ATTITUDES

The workplace is one of the most important settings affecting the physical, mental, economic and social wellbeing of people, and subsequently the health of their families, communities and society. It offers an ideal setting and structure to support the promotion of wellbeing to a substantial audience (Chu, 2000). The most common reason with 88 per cent for implementing work health programmes is the “responsibility toward the staff” (Bechmann/Jäckle/Herdegen, 2015). 42 per cent of companies stated that high absenteeism rate is the reason for implementing a work health programmes (Bechmann/Jäckle/Herdegen, 2015).

In a study by Shepard the anticipated benefits of a work health programme are the recruitment of premium employees with favourable attitudes toward fitness and health, a low rate of employee turnover, a small reduction in absenteeism, an enhanced productivity as well as a trend toward control of healthcare costs. In addition, results indicate an improvement in employees’ sense of wellbeing, a perception of own higher productivity and a decreased likelihood of future health problems. Supporting factors for enhancing sport at work are the already established channels of communication for example through a company newsletter or website, the ease of recruiting volunteer exercise leader through HR and the strong peer support among employees (Shepard, 1999). Limited research assesses how employees respond to work health programmes (Royer/Stein/Sydnor, 2011).

The trust in the employer is a prerequisite to implement a work health programme. Employees need to be confident that their employer treats their health data with reasonable care. They need to accept that the employer carries responsibility for their health. It is necessary that employees feel sought after and do not perceive the health management as an interference with their private life. Employees’ identification with the company plays a vital role for the success of work health programmes. This is why we decided to involve staff in the process of building a work health programme from the start.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES, ONE GOAL

To design an effective health promotion programme for the new office building, it was necessary to give employees the possibility to share their opinion and express their wishes. The study consists of qualitative and quantitative research. The combination of both supports a deeper understanding of the status quo at INEOS in Cologne. Holding a semi-structured in-depth interview offers control but also leaves room for a flexible schedule to discuss further topics that arise by interviewees' urgency.

Seven expert interviews were held with managers from different departments at INEOS in Cologne. The managers were chosen due to their department size. The interviews lasted for about an hour. The goal of the interview was to gain insights into the attitude towards a work health programme at the company. The manager's perception of employees' fitness level, their attitude towards sports, possible methods of incentives as well as trust in INEOS concerning the safety of health data were of concern in the study. Furthermore, the interview functioned to gain insights on the absenteeism rate of each department. In addition, managers could mention ideas and wishes for the new fitness centre.

The interviews served as the basis to design the questionnaire, to be sent out to all 400 employees of the commercial departments on-line through an in-house survey tool called lime survey. The communications department was involved from the very beginning. It helped creating the survey, formulating and adapting the questions and accompanied the study with regular communication updates and newsletters such as in weekly telegrams and stories in the site's magazine for employees, retired employees, neighbours and contractors.

STUDYING OPINIONS

A cross-sectional survey was carried out to discover the health and wellbeing needs of the employees of the Cologne based site of INEOS. Sampling was not necessary as all employees from the organisations' commercial and service departments were invited to participate in the survey. The survey was within the scope of good clinical practice, and, therefore, ethical approval was not compulsory. The survey was sent to 400 employees and conducted between May and July 2017, with 265 people participating (= 66.25 per cent).

To ensure content validity, members of the management were consulted, and any changes made to the questionnaire were discussed and evaluated with members of the works committee to ensure its accuracy. The questionnaire included both open and closed questions to gather information in several areas. Information was obtained such as the overall fitness level, the attitude towards sports, methods of incentives and trust in the employer. The results were described and investigated in a multivariate regression analysis.

THE ENERGY STATION

During construction of the fitness centre, the declared objective was to achieve a standard of highest quality relating to safety, health and environment that was internationally the best. Overall, the requirement that employees have a positive attitude towards their employer and the new programme was given, therefore designing and executing a work health programme at INEOS in Cologne proved to be more than welcome. The financial methods of incentives such as money and gifts were not welcomed and, therefore, abandoned. The fitness centre is now furnished with state-of-the art strength and conditioning equipment as well as an area for doing exercises, next to changing rooms and showers plus a room for courses such as Yoga and Pilates.

Employees welcome the fitness centre as it was built according to their wishes and designed according to their proposals and ideas. A personal trainer was hired for all staff, which was one of the most desired topics by the employees. The personal trainer works full-time and supports each employee individually. The health promotion programme also includes offers such as physiotherapy, osteopathy, outdoor functional training, nutritionists and a canteen with healthy food. Furthermore, courses such as Yoga, Pilates, Strength and Conditioning, TRX and many more were implemented with several personal coaches and the courses are fully booked.

The times of the courses were adapted to the shifts and office hours according the study's outcome. The fitness centre is well used. This proves the success of the communication strategy by taking people on board from the very beginning.

The objectives were absolutely exceeded:

- / 66.25 per cent took part in the survey and filled-out the questionnaire (265 of 400); the goal was 20 per cent
- / More than a third of staff (808 people or 34.22 per cent of 2,211 staff plus 150 apprentices) subscribed to the work health programme; the goal was 10 per cent
- / The average number of people using the fitness centre per week is between 250 and 300 (around 12.71 per cent)

Health and fitness is now systematically integrated in the daily activities of staff and living healthy is an integral part of our employees' work life. The communication research was adamant to achieve these results.



THANK YOU!

© Dr Anne-Gret Iturriaga Abarzua, Head of Communications at INEOS in Cologne

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