

Company Sport in Germany and its Importance for the Health Promotion of Employees

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Abstract

Due to the increasing technological development of modern industrial countries the necessity for muscular work or physical activity is decreasing more and more. The increasing sedentary activity in both private and professional life has led to alarming health problems in recent years. As a result of a passive lifestyle, people are increasingly displaying typical symptoms such as obesity, high blood pressure, metabolic disorders, as well as postural deformities and damage to the musculoskeletal system. The aim of this study is to identify health burdens at the workplace and to initiate measures through company sport to reduce health risks and to strengthen health-promoting resources. The method used in this study was a review of the relevant literature. By analysing various research results we discovered that a targeted movement-oriented intervention can serve to strengthen the cardio-vascular system and prevent musculoskeletal disorders. For health promotion and prevention, the relevance of sports activity or resumption of sports activities becomes evident. The wishes and ideas of employers and employees should be taken into account when putting together the measures in order to provide an incentive towards a long-term health-promoting programme. Overall, physical activity is becoming increasingly important in the field of primary and secondary prevention. Measures for individual counselling and support must be taken in order to counteract the diseases of civilisation in the future and thus also the costs for the companies and the health system. A holistic approach to company sport for health promotion deals with the psychosocial dimension of health in addition to somatic-physiological aspects. The prerequisite for a successful intervention is the establishment of suitable effective programmes and their long-term implementation and acceptance at all levels of the company.

Key words: workplace, health promotion, company sport, employee health promotion.

INTRODUCTION

In the literature, company sport is largely assigned to leisure and popular sports as well as alternative and health sports. Company sport is oriented towards the needs of the participating employees. Other studies, however, additionally emphasize the economic interests in goal orientation, such as the increase in the work productivity of employees or the compensatory effect of company sport (Schmid et al., 2013). For the people of the modern industrial and affluent society, the increasing mechanization and automation of the last decades have led to significant changes in the habits and conditions of work and everyday life. In the course of industrialisation, people have been literally brought up to physical inactivity. Thus, the car replaces the footpath to work and instead of

climbing stairs, the elevator or escalator is used. Many people no longer meet the minimum requirement for physical activity. The trend towards passivity and predominantly sedentary work during working hours is leading to an increase in health problems in the chronic- degenerative field, which is significantly manifested by the increased incidence of spinal diseases and cardiovascular complaints (Zinner et al., 2014). This is not least reflected in the enormous costs for the health care system. The positive, preventive effect of physical activity on health has already been investigated for several years and the results are clear. "No Sports", as practiced by the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill throughout his life, is no longer acceptable today. In recent years, back pain and spinal disorders have become the most expensive

and widespread disease in western industrialized nations. In addition to biological risk characteristics, work-related risk factors, weakened trunk muscles, social risk characteristics and also psychosocial risk factors play a decisive role in the development of back pain (Naegele, 2016). One of the main reasons for this is lack of exercise, because our everyday working life is characterised by One-sidedness. Sitting or standing for too long overloads the musculoskeletal system and can cause or aggravate back pain.

From the individual point of view of those affected, this means a changed need for treatment or a general loss of quality of life as well as negative effects on personal performance. From an economic point of view, this does not remain without consequences. A high level of sick leave or permanent incapacity to work is not only an enormous cost factor at the company level, but can also be held responsible for the desolate financial situation of the health care system (Lambert et al., 2010). Despite this negative development, however, the insight and willingness of employers and employees to handle health resources carefully and develop appropriate measures has fallen short of what is necessary.

Since an adult spends most of his or her life at work, the postulate of health promotion in companies can and must play an important role. Although the increasing number of workplace health promotion programmes suggests that the relevant authorities are paying more attention, there are still various deficits with regard to the quality and sustainability of implementation. Since sport is inevitably associated with exercise and enjoys a generally positive status in society, company sport, which has been institutionally anchored for more than a century, especially in larger companies, appears to be an adequate means of achieving this. For this reason, sports and exercise promotion programmes have been integrated into companies in recent years. These are carried out directly at the workplace with active breaks, at the in-house level with back training during working hours and outside the company in company sports groups with sports-related leisure activities (Fuchs, 2003). This workplace health promotion, if implemented appropriately, is a worthwhile investment for companies. Sickness-related absence results in high costs for the companies and the health system. The prerequisite for a successful intervention is the establishment of suitable effective programmes and their long-term implementation and acceptance at all levels of the company.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is a bibliographical survey study that presents the critical points of existing knowledge about a theoretical approach to the topic of “company sport as an actor in the health promotion of employees”.

There is no specialized and comprehensive research in this area. This study attempts to fill this gap and may be a useful aid for those who will make similar efforts in the future. The main objective of the bibliographical review is to integrate the study into the “body” of the subject in question. The review of the current study refers to clearly formulated questions and uses systematic and explicit criteria for the critical analysis of a published paper by summarizing, sorting, grouping and comparing.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REVIEW STUDY

Development of Workplace Health Promotion

The World Health Organization (WHO) described the concept of workplace health promotion in the Ottawa Charter of 1997 as follows: Changing living, working and leisure conditions have a decisive influence on health. The way a society organises work, working conditions and leisure should be a source of health, not illness. Health promotion creates safe, stimulating, satisfying and pleasant working and living conditions (WHO, 1997). Greater attention is being paid to workplace health promotion. The company is a place where, on the one hand, the health of the employees is used for production. The diverse work-related stresses and strains endanger health and can contribute to the civilisation diseases of our time that have been described above. On the other hand, work for people has a meaningful function beyond the generation of income. It can convey a sense of achievement, contribute to self-esteem and create social contacts. In principle, therefore, work also has a health-promoting character. A company health promotion strategy will therefore attempt to reduce work-related health risks and strengthen the health-promoting potential of work.

Essential for health promotion is the preventive orientation, the focus on health instead of illness. Health promotion aims to influence the conditions and causes of health, rather than just reducing the risk factors for certain diseases. The concept of health promotion complements the hitherto

predominant concept of disease prevention with the aim of increased prevention and active mobilisation of all health-supporting factors. It therefore shows a more far-reaching and active approach to health promotion. The importance of health promotion in the sense of moving away from a perspective of health education and prevention that is oriented solely towards pathogenesis and risks and risk factors is emphasized (Zinner et al., 2014). Thus, a change of direction towards the search for factors that promote health is not only initiated, but is a firm principle of health promotion. Health promotion encompasses all strategies and measures that have a positive influence on health and, therefore, this means also prevention at all its stages as well as treatment (Groeben & Ullmer, 2004; Wedekind, 2020).

Workplace health promotion pursues various objectives. On the one hand, it is intended to reduce stress, while at the same time strengthening and promoting the positive demands on people for their health is also an aim (potentials and resources contained in work). To this end, behaviour-oriented and relation-oriented offers are combined (Huber et al. 2011; Missalek et al. 2014).

Behaviour-oriented measures deal with the human being and concern the behaviour of the individual, in the following areas:

1. use of drugs
2. education and information actions
3. heart and circulation actions
4. continuing education with health promotion content
5. social competence
6. dealing with stress
7. physical activity programmes
8. leisure activities (Huber et al. 2011).

Relation-oriented offers deal with the circumstances in which workers move around in the sectors:

1. organisational design
2. nutritional offers
3. work ergonomics
4. organisation of working time
5. career guidance

6. wage setting
7. forms of cooperation
8. work design (Huber et al. 2011).

One measure alone is not effective, but a combination of behavioural and relational measures will bring success. However, in practice it often looks different. According to overview studies, there is an imbalance, i.e. more behaviour-related measures are implemented in contrast to relational measures (Huber et al. 2011).

Benefits of Workplace Health Promotion

The economic benefits of workplace health promotion are shown, and other positive effects are also produced, which show how important the use of workplace health promotion can be for both the employer and the employee.

Employers can benefit from

1. ... a decrease in sickness absence,
2. ... a decrease in staff turnover,
3. ... an increase in productivity,
4. ... an improvement of product or service quality,
5. ... an improvement in internal company cooperation,
6. ... an improvement of the corporate identity (working atmosphere),
7. ... an improvement in the corporate image;

Employees can benefit from

1. ... a reduction in workloads,
2. ... a reduction in health complaints,
3. ... an increase in well-being, more joy at work,
4. ... an improvement in the relationship with colleagues and superiors,
5. ... an improvement of knowledge and practical skills for healthy living

benefit behaviour in business and leisure (Groeben & Ullmer, 2004).

Effectiveness of Workplace Health Promotion Through Sport and Exercise

In the German-speaking countries, there are few results on the specific effectiveness of workplace sport

and exercise promotion. In most cases, the effects of complex workplace health promotion programmes are reported without it being clear what proportion of the results the sport and exercise component has. Workplace health promotion is therefore not only beneficial for the employees but also for the company (Badura & Hehlmann, 2003; Elbe & Wein, 2014). Sport and exercise are ideal starting points for health prevention programmes. Most people will associate sport with positive experiences and the orthopaedic effect of sport (strengthening of the muscular, ligament and skeletal system) is of great value for health at work. As a rule, multiple biological mechanisms, induced by physical activity, have a positive health effect. In this context, this refers to morphological, muscular, motor, cardiorespiratory, metabolic and immunological components, the promotion of which can have a biologically traceable beneficial influence on the health status of various organ systems (Sockoll et al., 2008; Wedekind, 2020). Lagerstroem & Froboese (1995) have published a study in which movement-related measures were tested for their “medical effectiveness”. They showed that exercise breaks at the workplace contribute to a certain extent to reducing spinal strain and that cardiovascular training (in company sports groups) can contribute to a positive influence on fat metabolism. Other studies in turn observe the behavioural effects of certain interventions. The well-being of the employees, which is considered a prerequisite for their performance and motivation, is of increased importance in economically difficult times, when the adaptability and productivity of companies is increasingly in demand.

Nevertheless, the most recent evaluations in the operational field usually examine the effects of sport- and movement-related interventions on the number of employees on sick leave and can show positive results in terms of cost reduction. However, since health is an extremely complex construct that depends on many different and individual factors, sport cannot per se be attested to produce health. In order to approach a holistic view, the health value of sport must be examined in the light of a wide range of value-related factors in order to select adequate and realistic measures for workplace health promotion (Sockoll et al., 2008; Huber, 2010). Sport offers excellent conditions for a holistic approach and implementation of innovative health promotion. Company sport increases the *joie de vivre*, performance and well-being of a broad

target group. A holistic approach to “company sport for health promotion” deals not only with somatic physiological aspects but also with the psychosocial dimension of health. The overriding goal is to increase the health-related well-being, satisfaction, motivation and performance of employees (Bechmann et al., 2010). Only when health is recognised as the fuel for economic success and its preservation and promotion has become a natural part of corporate culture, will it be possible to develop a concept for health promotion across the company. Particularly with regard to middle adulthood, targeted preventive measures can be assigned special significance. In this phase of life, the increasing loss of physical fitness begins due to the more passive movement behaviour, with negative effects on the health constitution (Graf, 2011). Because of the declining performance and the resistance of this age group, there is a risk of increased susceptibility to diseases, which can be prevented or reduced from the outset by preventive interventions. Since the average age in companies tends to be the middle and advanced adult age, preventive exercise programmes starting with the career entry offer a worthwhile, protective measure and should therefore be an elementary component of company sport.

Dosed exercise not only helps to reduce weight and thus lowers blood pressure, but it can also reduce stress and thus ensure psychological well-being. Sport and exercise act like a drug that simultaneously increases the oxygen demand and oxygen supply, it increases the volume of the mitochondria and the capillarisation. Furthermore, sport improves the flow properties of the blood and thus has an antithrombotic effect, it has highly significant effects on the lipid and carbohydrate metabolism, e.g. lowers the insulin level, and also contributes to psychological well-being. If there were a drug with these effects, it would be the drug of the century (Hollmann, 1994). The aim of sports activities is primarily, in the sense of disease prevention, to maintain and promote health and also to alleviate already manifest complaints or to prevent a further deterioration of the physical condition.

Due to the high costs of illness caused by the widespread back problems, it is easy to understand that sport and exercise have moved into the circle of interest from both a socio-political and a business perspective. However, health strategies can only be successful if they are accepted and implemented by the relevant target group (Goehner et al., 2007; Stoffel

et al., 2011). From this perspective, the significance of sport as a special form of our culture of physical activity is of great importance. Not only its enormous expansion and popularity as an important individual and social part of our lives, but above all, the recognition of sport as an accepted means of health promotion and assignment of a general health value is of great benefit in this context (Titze et al., 2010). Positive influences on the mental well-being could be observed with regard to the reduction of stress, psychosomatic illnesses, reduction of anxiety, depression as well as an increased self-esteem, identity, body perception and the general mental balance. Social health is supported by integration, cooperation and positive communicative aspects. From a health-related perspective, sport combines social, psychological and physical components (Voelcker-Rehage, 2012).

Sport offers excellent conditions for a holistic approach and implementation of innovative health promotion. Business enterprises can make a decisive contribution to mastering this requirement as a place of social gathering in everyday working life within the framework of their company sports facilities. Company sport increases the *joie de vivre*, performance and well-being of a broad group of addressees. Due to the salutogenic effect of certain physical activities, their positive recognition and the general popularity of sport, sport is becoming the main medium for company health promotion (Vetter & Redmann, 2005; Huber, 2010).

Work-life balance is also an important keyword in the context of company sports facilities. Companies feel more and more responsible for a good balance between the private and professional life of their employees. This includes flexible working time models and family services as well as sports activities. By improving the work-life balance and the well-being of the employees, their work motivation is also to be increased. In this way, a positive connection between profitability and humanity of economic activity can be achieved (Badura & Hehlmann, 2003; Elbe & Wein, 2014). Especially from the point of view of decision-makers in companies, there are not only positive arguments for the introduction of company sport measures. A widespread reason for companies to decide against company-organised sport is financial considerations. The company may also lack the human resources to organise company sports activities. Some company managements are also convinced that sport

is not a remedy or that it is difficult to monitor its effectiveness. There are very few reports about the positive effects of exercise, the effects on employees and the profitability of company sport. For this reason, many companies opt for other social benefits instead of offering company sports facilities and activities. Company sport can bring a wide range of benefits to employers and employees if used properly. There can be no patent remedy for all companies, but the range of sports and sports facilities on offer should always depend on the needs and wishes of the employees. If the motives of the employees are ascertained by the employer and are also sufficiently taken into account in the decision-making process, conflicts of interest and lack of demand can be avoided in advance (Bechmann et al., 2010; Kunert, 2014). In such a case, the manifold advantages and benefits of company sports activities can be fully appreciated by all the players involved. In a competitive economic system, companies will invest in health-promoting activities if the commitment to health promotion promises medium and long-term economic benefits in addition to the humanitarian aspects (Sockoll et al., 2008; Stoffel et al., 2011). The number of companies that have been engaged in systematic health promotion over several years is still too small to be able to make empirically valid statements about effectiveness and economic efficiency. It can already be seen that an awareness of this has already been created and more and more companies are deciding to introduce company sports activities as part of a holistic personnel development approach.

CONCLUSIONS

Health is at the top of the social value hierarchies in the western industrialised countries. It enables people to participate actively in social processes. This applies to the various areas of life, such as work and leisure, and applies to the entire life cycle. Changes in living and working conditions have led to an increase in chronic degenerative diseases. Curative medicine reaches its limits in these diseases. In order to achieve an improvement in the health situation, it is necessary to make personal lifestyles and working and environmental conditions more health-oriented (Rudow, 2014). The World Health Organization therefore demands that work and working conditions (and thus the companies) should also be a source of health and not a source of illness. From a health perspective, this demand is certainly justified. From

a business management point of view, however, the company is first and foremost a place where tangible goods and services are produced through a combination of production factors. The health of the employee is a prerequisite for participating in the company's performance - in return the employee receives income. Health has an economic dimension above all because the loss of health causes costs for a company. In addition to sickness-related costs, another aspect is becoming increasingly important for the future. Only one third of all employees reach retirement age while working. The main reasons for this are early invalidity due to reduced earning capacity caused by diseases of the circulatory system, the musculoskeletal system, mental illness and cancer (Grossmann & Scala, 2011; Kunert, 2014). However, due to demographic developments, fewer and fewer young people are available for the labour market. There is therefore much to suggest that, in addition to promoting qualifications, promoting health will become a business necessity in the medium and long term. Against the background of the constantly changing framework conditions and stresses in the world of work, workplace health promotion offers possible answers and solutions. This includes above all the active and positive approach to working for health. The aim of health promotion is to stabilise biological, emotional and social resistance and protective factors of the individual and to create living conditions that allow positive thinking, positive feelings and an optimum level of physical and psychological stress and relief. Especially societies whose disease panorama is determined by chronic suffering can benefit from this approach (Goldhuber & Ahrens, 2009; Helmenstein et al., 2020). The concept of health promotion focuses on strengthening healthy parts and resistance of the human being and strengthening personal and social protective factors. Health promotion is a cross-sectional task with which an attempt is made to improve the health situation of people, taking into account the conditions of an individualised, specialised, division of labour and largely physically one-sided or physically low-stress working and living environment (Badura & Hehlmann, 2003). It makes sense to carry out workplace health promotion for both health and economic reasons.

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