

Employment transfer and health promotion

The Restructuring of the „Schalker Verein“ in Gelsenkirchen, Germany

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Executive summary

The focus of this case study „Employment transfer and health promotion – The restructuring of the *Schalker Verein in Gelsenkirchen, Germany*“ is the health promotion initiative which represented one part of the measures applied following the restructuring, that is the closure of the last remaining production lines of the Steel works, in 2004. The health promotion measures are new to Germany and contain significant potential to improve the situation of the employees and thus to complement traditionally used employment transfer measures.

This case studies also investigates the transfer measures employed at the site according to the § 216 b SGB III due to the conceptual connection between these measures and the health promotion in question. In addition, the role of the internal organisational placement office will be investigated in terms of transfer measures as such offices are not traditional means used in association with general employment transfer during enterprise restructuring.

A central finding of this study focuses on the combination of traditional labour market measures such as employment transfer in conjunction with the activities of the internal placement office. This cooperation of two institutions led to the successful placement of many employees into new companies. Regrettably, no such cooperation took place in term of the health promotion initiative: The transfer agency and the provider of the health promotion initiative did not work together although the mutual exchange of different measures and approaches would have offered an important opportunity for conceptual development of the measures inherent in health promotion as well as employment transfers.

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Foto: dimago/Kampert

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1 Abstract¹

The focus of this case study „Employment transfer and health promotion – The restructuring of the *Schalcker Verein* in Gelsenkirchen, Germany“ is the health promotion initiative which represented one part of the measures applied following the restructuring, that is the closure of the last remaining production lines of the Steel works, in 2004. The health promotion measures are new to Germany and contain significant potential to improve the situation of the employees and thus to complement traditionally used employment transfer measures.

This case studies also investigates the transfer measures employed at the site according to the § 216 b SGB III due to the conceptual connection between these measures and the health promotion in question. In addition, the role of the internal organisational placement office will be investigated in terms of transfer measures as such offices are not traditional means used in association with general employment transfer during enterprise restructuring.

A central finding of this study focuses on the combination of traditional labour market measures such as employment transfer in conjunction with the activities of the internal placement office. This cooperation of two institutions led to the successful placement of many employees into new companies. Regrettably, no such cooperation took place in term of the health promotion initiative: The transfer agency and the provider of the health promotion initiative did not work together although the mutual exchange of different measures and approaches would have offered an important opportunity for conceptual development of the measures inherent in health promotion as well as employment transfers.

The present study was compiled as part of the project „Monitoring Innovative Restructuring in Europe – MIRE“. This project is coordinated in Germany in cooperation between the IPG (Institute for Psychology of Work, Unemployment and Health at the University Bremen) and the IAT (Institut Arbeit und Technik, Gelsenkirchen). It is the aim of the MIRE Project to identify innovative examples of restructuring in Europe and further to organise an international exchange and knowledge transfer. The project is funded by the European Social Fund. It commenced in January 2005 and comes to an end in November 2006.

To achieve the above mentioned goals,

- each of the participating countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Sweden, United Kingdom) have set up national expert networks which will meet and connect more closely during the lifespan of the project, and
- each country will conduct several studies which will document present national „good practice“ examples of innovative restructuring.

¹ We would hereby like to thank the Agency Dimago - Lutz Kampert Fotografie as well as Daniel Hinze from the Initiative Dubtown Industriekultur for giving us permission to use their photographs. We also gratefully acknowledge the support of the Works Council of Saint Gobain Gelsenkirchen, who allowed us to use several pictures and illustrations from their archive for presentations and this case description.

2 Short portrait of the restructuring

When the spun iron pipe and foundry facilities of the Saint-Gobain steel works in Gelsenkirchen were finally closed in 2004, it means the end of a very traditional and extraordinary steel mill in Ruhr area of Germany. During the 20s in the last century, the steel works employed more than 6,000 workers. Only 37 employees remained in 2005 following the restructuring of the location, now working for the new logistic and confection centre. It is their job to process cast steel products being now produced abroad, to prepare them for storage and shipping them to the North German market.

The current restructuring case involved the dismissal and relocation of 200 workplaces. In addition to the relatively high compensation paid to the dismissed, the restructuring case involved



The Schalker Verein a few years after company formation

three central measures to improve the employees' situation regarding the threatening unemployment. The first measure included the organisation of a placement office as part of an internal cooperation between the Works Council and Human Resources so as to use company contacts to other companies so as to place their employees into new jobs. A second measure included a transfer company according to § 216b SGB

III, which was carried out by a local service provider. The third measure was „health promotion consultation for employees in insecure employment“, a pilot project which the Federal Association of Company Health Insurance was in charge of.

3 The Schalker Verein

The Schalker Verein could look back at a tradition of 130 years as an steel work. In 1999, the location became part of the French Saint-Gobain group. Friedrich Grillo founded the location in 1872 under the name of „Schalker Gruben- und Hüttenverein“ as a furnace works. The pipe production started in 1926 with the introduction of a centrifugal casting process, at that time revolutionary production methods for pipes, which were developed at and characterized this location. The production of ductile pipes in the 1950s made the Schalker Verein to the worldwide leader for drinking water supplies and sewage drains². In addition to producing steel pipes, until the 1980s the Steel Work also included typical facilities for processing by-products of the crude steel production, e.g. a cement factory and facilities for mineral wool.

² Prior to the introduction of ductile iron (in Germany 1956) cast iron in the form of grey iron was classified as a brittle and little impact resistant material. By using as specific kind of graphite – the nodular graphite – in the melting bath, ductile cast iron gets particular qualities, especially a high degree of tensile strength linked with high plasticity (=ductility). Furthermore, ductile cast iron can be welded in contrast to grey iron. The main application area is water supply and wastewater disposal, whereas buried pipes must get a protection against corrosion.

3.1 *The Long-term personnel trend and its background*

The personnel number continued to decrease since the 1960s. Whereas the Schalker Verein still employed 4,200 employees in 1962, this number decreased to 3,300 in 1966 following several restructuring waves. Following the merger of the works with Thyssen in 1974, all furnace capacities were step-by-step centralised in Duisburg. The capacity of the Gelsenkirchen furnace was reduced continuously with accompanying staff cuts.

In March 1982 an explosion of furnace IV, the last active furnace, led to the closure of the production of crude steel. All connected production areas such as the slag cement factory were also closed. The employee numbers were radically reduced from 2.200 to 1.200 employees, the biggest



The Schalker Verein in the 1920s

shutdown during the history of the steel works. Following this, all steel required for the pipe foundry was carried by rail from the steel works in Duisburg.

The steel works was relocated within the Thyssen group in 1984 to the Thyssen Guss AG with the headquarter in Mülheim/Ruhr. The Schalker Verein focused at this point primarily on the production of pipes with a diameter of 100 to 1,400 mm. This made the location less competitive within the

parent company, in which pipe production was not of primary strategic importance. Investment decreased and further research and development ceased in this area.

As a final step, the steel works was offered for sale in 1997. The takeover by Saint Gobain followed two years later. Saint Gobain is a French industrial group with its headquarters in Paris. Prior to the takeover, Saint Gobain already had a pipe production facility in the Saarland city of Brebach, in which the „Halberger Werk“ has been pouring steel since 1756. The Schalker Verein thus became a branch of the “Halberger Werk” in Brebach in 1999 and has since then been part of the Saint Gobain Gussrohr GmbH & Co. KG.

Prior to the sale of the Schalker Vereins, 160 employees had already been dismissed which meant that in April 1999, at the time of the takeover, the steel works still employed 890 people. Several more staff cuts followed in subsequent years. By the spring of 2004, just before the closure of the foundry facility, 235 employees remained. 200 of these were still being employed in the pipe and mould casting, the final 35 employees were responsible for sales of poured steels and spun iron pipes to the North and West of Germany.

3.2 *The characteristics of the workforce in relation to the restructuring*

The workforce was differently affected by the closure. Group (1) represented those who worked directly in the pipe and mould casting, who were those who were immediately affected. One exception was Group (2), those who were close to retirement. These people would be able to leave the organisation using the instrument of *Altersteilzeit* (gradual retirement). Group (3) included all those employees responsible for the sales and marketing of products. This group was not in danger of losing their jobs due to later plans to expand the sales department as a confection and

sales department. A final Group (4) included all trainees whose continued traineeship needed to be arranged.

Group (1): Half of the workforce responsible for the pipe and foundry production consisted of employees with technical qualifications, many of whom had also been initially trained at the Schalker Verein. Most of the skilled labourers were electricians and fitters, however, most had been working for many years in other professional areas, not making it possible for them to return to their origin areas. The other half of the workforce represented those without any formal qualifications with limited skills, who were responsible for the simple tasks of production.

Due to repeated social selection being employed in previous restructuring incidences, the age



The factory premises at the end of the 1990s

average of the 2004 workforce was unusually high. That meant that more than 70% of all affected workers were more than 40 years old. Another 10% were aged between 40 and 50 years. A final 30% were more than 50 years old.

Another particular characteristic of the workforce also relates to prior restructuring. The restructuring meant that only the „very best“, that is the „most competent and motivated“ employees remained at the end according to the Chairman of the Works Council. This would translate into

an advantage for the internal placement office during the 2004 and 2005 restructuring and helped to counteract placement problems based on age and the lack of qualification.

Group (2): At the time of the restructuring, a total of 33 employees above the age of 55 were employed using „Altersteilzeit“ (gradual retirement). In this case, the so-called block model was chosen. Employees worked full-time but were able – while still keeping their entitled shares – to discontinue working earlier than is usually the case. The „Altersteilzeit“ at Saint-Gobain aimed at allowing older people to retire at age 60. The subsequent 18% reduction of pension payments was compensated for by reallocating half of the amount due to specific steel work pensions arrangements.

The last contracts relating to gradual retirement will expire in June 2007. All employees were thus combined in the unit which would be responsible for the dismantling of the closed production facilities where the knowledge of these older and experienced workers was particularly useful. In some cases, these employees also assisted in the construction and reemployment of the same facilities at their new locations in the Czech Republic.

Group (3): The original concept of the management was to keep only those employees responsible for the sales at the location of the Schalker Verein. Thanks to the initiative of the works council, this concept was reviewed and adjusted so instead of a remaining sales department a new „Konfektionierungszentrum“ was established in Gelsenkirchen. Its task was to also review all incoming new products and prepare them for storage. This meant that 37 jobs eventually remained, 17 of which were industrial plus another 20 former employees of the Schalker Verein.

Group (4): All training finished on July 1st, 2005. At that point only five people were still completing their training. Prior to the end of 2004, the steel works cooperated with other enterprises

in organising traineeship places in Gelsenkirchen as part of an association which also included the factory of Vaillant, a renowned producer of warm water and heating equipment. But the restructuring of the Vaillant and steel works led to the suspension of the association. In this case it was possible for all trainees to continue their education at another institution, the Schweißtechnische Versuchsanstalt (institution for the development of welding techniques) in Gelsenkirchen.

3.3 Representation at the location

During the restructuring, the works council represented the workforce with nine members; the chairman was released from normal duties to dedicate himself solely to represent the workforce. Following the retirement of the chairman in 2006, 5 works council representatives will represent the remaining workforce of 37 people, but the future chairperson will no longer be exempt from normal work duties. All representatives are member of the IG Metall, the steel workers' union to which the connection is traditionally very close.

4 The closure of the steel production facilities in Gelsenkirchen

Due to the deteriorating profitability of the cast iron pipe business, the Saint Gobain group developed a new strategy following 2000 that entailed the relocation of production within the company to emerging nations. Present capacities were to be moved to locations in China, Czech Republic and Brazil. The management also decided to close the steel works in Gelsenkirchen, by now just a small subsidiary of Saint Gobain Guss in Brebach. All facilities were to be dismantled and moved to the new locations abroad.

The management announced the closure of the plant in a press release on March 4th, 2004. The works council in Gelsenkirchen was told on the same day in meeting of the economic advisory board. The original concept aimed at the keeping the regionally active sales department. The pipe production was shut down the following day. The rest of the foundry production came to a stop once the last products had been produced in July 2004.

The official timetable, set out according to the labour legislation, differed significant from the actual processes. The conciliation of interest was scheduled to take place until June 30th, 2004. The substantial reduction of the form production would take place until September 30th at which point the facilities would be shut down completely until October 31st. The dismantling and relocation of facilities was to be completed by the end of 2004.

Due to the restructuring involving the complete closure of all facilities, the social selection did not play a role as the entire workforce would be dismissed. This also meant that there was no assessment of employee's circumstances and qualifications. The risk of subsequent dismissal suits was thus limited. The courts rejected three suits. Therefore, only one plaintiff was successful.

It was not possible to reemploy the workforce using group-internal vacancies, although the conditions of group internal relocations are stipulated in the Social Plan. The location in Gelsenkirchen was too small to offer vacancies to the victims of the restructuring, and the headquarter in Brebach was a significant distance away, so that personnel transfer within the Saint Gobain group was not a practical option available.



Ductile cast iron products of the Schalker Verein

4.1 *Consultations between the Works Council and the management*

The decision to close the foundry facilities had not been anticipated by the works council and came as a surprise to the employees' representatives as well as the local management. The chairman of the works council discontinued the finance committee meeting and arranged for an immediate meeting of the workforce in Gelsenkirchen so as to inform them about the plans. Following this, all available members of the works council and union workplace representatives meet to deliberate on their options.

The Chairman pursued two strategic goals at this time: On the one hand, he wanted to save the production lines and avert the closure. On the other hand, he wanted to work out alternative concepts by delaying the Social Plan consultations to gain extra time.

The Works Council attempted to win potential buyers for the Gelsenkirchen branch so as to ensure that the foundry production would continue. Amongst others, talks took place between the works council and the company DIHAG, Essen. With substantial help from the steel workers' union IG Metall, the works council also managed to work out a concept for worker initiative. This concept was completed by the end of March. It proposed that employees invested their compensation payments into the foundry plant so as to take over control of the company themselves and finance the continuing production. This concept was, however, reviewed quite sceptically by the workforce as it included the risk of losing their compensation payments in case of the business failed.

In order to analyse the realistic changes of developed alternative concepts, the works council hired the consultancy firm Ernst & Young to produce an expert report on the long-term profitability and continuation prospects of the Schalker Verein. Although the report attested good results to part of the foundries, the production of spun iron pipes was considered as having only reduced chances of being profitable in case of a continuation.

All activities to rescue the production by the works council were, however, in vain given the management's actual strategy for the location, facilities and equipment. A substantial part of the production lines were subsequently dismantled and put into operation at a different location. The basis for a continuation was thus removed.

The second strategy to delay the consultation about the reconciliation of interest so as to work out other concepts proved more successful, particularly since the management intended to finish the restructuring process as quickly as possible. The consultations began in a hotel in the north of the Ruhr Area at the end of May. Three months after the closure had first been announced, the final social plan and the reconciliation of interest were signed by both parties on June 15th.

The original plan of the Works Council to ensure the continuation of production or at least a part of it failed. However, the Chairman had managed to succeed in securing some concessions by using the time pressure of the employer to his advantage.

- The equation, which was used to calculate compensation payments, was relatively favourable compared to previous social plans. A further success of the works council included the provision within the social plan for all remaining employees in the confection centre. These workers are thus eligible to receive the same amount of compensation in case of future restructuring.
- The strategic initiative of the works council led to the sales department being upgraded qualitatively to become a confection and logistic centre responsible for the future processing and storage of foundry products for the North-German market.

It is difficult to give the exact number of employees initially projected to be working in the sales compared to the confection centre due to conflicting documentation. The regional section of the steel workers' union IG Metall suggested that the concept may have saved 10 to 20 jobs, whereas the press report from Saint Gobain stated that only three to four additional employees would be working in the new centre.

4.2 The role of the unions during the restructuring ...

The connection between the Works Council of the Schalker Vereins and the Steel Workers' Union IG Metall was traditionally very close. It is thus not surprising to hear that the IG Metall in Gelsenkirchen was involved in the restructuring right from the start and continued to play a central and important role for the Works Council during the strategic conceptualisation as well as the operative consultations.

- The union secretary's knowledge and his intensive work were implemental in the working out of a strategy in less than 14 days to organise a worker initiative. He also supported the works council by encouraging the engagement of Ernst & Young to prepare the expert report.
- The union secretary was present at all consultations concerning the reconciliation of interest and the social plan. The works council was thus able to refer to his experience as a union secretary as well as his legal expertise.

4.3 ...and the region: The initiative of the „Gelsenkirchen-Konferenz“

The Gelsenkirchen IG Metall was also one of the initiating parties of the regional initiative called „Gelsenkirchen Konferenz“. This initiative aimed to find solutions and political concepts for the many regional cases of restructuring which were occurring around the same time

4.3.1 *Past history of the region around Gelsenkirchen*

During the golden age of the steel and coal industry, Gelsenkirchen bore the title of the „City with the 1.000 fires“ with furnaces, steel works, coking plants, and coalmines – a model example of the German „Wirtschaftswunder“ (economic miracle). The high degree of industrialisation at that time would later prove to be a bad starting point for initiating sectoral and structural change during the increasing development of the tertiary sector. The gradual decline of the industrial core areas was not compensated for, the service sector being developed very slowly in Gelsenkirchen. At present, Gelsenkirchen has one of the worst labour markets in the West of Germany. The unemployment rate in June 2005 was 26.2%³, which is one of the highest rates in Germany.

The restructuring of Saint Gobain reveals that this specific, consequential structural change is still continuing in Gelsenkirchen. This case of restructuring was just one of several painful downsizing experiences. Just a few months before the management of Saint Gobain announced its plans for closure, the Remscheid headquarter of the Vaillant Hepsworth Group announced the closure of its Gelsenkirchen branch in November 2003, which affected 240 jobs. Shortly afterwards in January 2004, the automobile supplier TRW Fahrwerkssysteme met a similar fate, in that part of its production lines employing 440 jobs were to be relocated to Eastern Europe. Restructuring also threatened Pilkington Automotive also in January 2004 (endangering 80 jobs), as well as REXAM, a tin producer, in March 2004 (60 jobs).

The closure of the last production lines of the Schalker Verein was thus part of the larger wave of restructuring occurrences. Regional initiatives started to form in 2004 to voice their protest beyond the gates of the individual companies, the motto of these initiatives was „Gelsenkirchen – City of the Fired 1.000“ (Stadt der 1.000 Gefeuerten“). Therefore, both the press and the public discussed the restructuring case at Saint Gobain intensively. Next to the topicality of restructuring due to these events, other factors also contributed to the heated debate:

- Both the works council as well as the IG Metall worked closely together with the press during the entire duration of the restructuring at Saint Gobain.
- The restructuring at Saint Gobain coincided with the start of the election campaign for the local election scheduled for September 2004.
- The closure of the foundry plant at Saint Gobain also had a strong emotional component: The plant was a symbol of the city’s industrial tradition. The closure of the last production lines was thus considered the final decline of this tradition.
- The public debate also gained a further emotional edge since a French and thus foreign concern had closed the location relatively soon after acquiring it in 1999.

4.3.2 *From the Gelsenkirchen-Konferenz to the regional Emscher-Lippe Alliance*

The IG Metall in association with the works council of the Vaillant works in Gelsenkirchen also attempted to win over the city council for a „Gelsenkirchen-Konferenz“ given the economic developments in the region. They took up the motto of the „Fired 1,000“ („1 000 Gefeuerten“) and linked this to the central aim of the Konferenz: The federal, state and regional government

³ Percent of the unemployed of all dependent civil employees (liable to pay social benefit and those in limited employment). Source: City Council Gelsenkirchen.

should cooperate with the regional economy to create 1,000 new jobs so as to compensate for the losses due to restructuring – at least at the regional level. The initiators also kept in mind the neighbouring city of Dortmund. A so-called „Dortmund Project“ had similar goals and had become nationally known.

The initiative „Gelsenkirchen-Konferenz“ was received very well by the political actors. Unfortunately, many political parties in Gelsenkirchen used this initiative primarily during their election campaign and so as to increase their community profile. Initially conceived of as a program for economical and targeted sector development, the initiative soon suffered setbacks due to criticism about its very localised focus (thus excluding other regions) and the support of the state and federal government. Particularly the dispute between the SPD government at the state and federal government level with the CDU-led City Council in Gelsenkirchen hurt the initiative as well as the ongoing dispute between the SPD and CDU candidates during the election campaign for the mayor's office.

The state government soon signalled that it would not get involved in Gelsenkirchen unless the concept was widened to include the region. The initiative lost further ground when the Minister for Work in North-Rhine Westphalia and the state minister president both cancelled their participation at a local conference. The local social democratic party demanded that the concept had to be extended and redefined as „Emscher-Lippe-Konferenz“, whereas the CDU wanted to retain the old concept of a „Gelsenkirchen-Konferenz“.

Despite of this political dissent, a compromise was agreed upon in form of a council decision for a conference to take place in June 2004 with the title „Gelsenkirchen-Konferenz“. This event was intended to serve as a preparation to a larger „Emscher-Lippe-Konferenz“ which would include the surrounding cities and communities. This last conference took place in September 2004 and resulted in the foundation of the Emscher-Lippe Allianz. The participating actors – amongst them the city of Gelsenkirchen, the district of Recklinghausen, the city of Bottrop, representatives of the state government, the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit), the unions as well as the industrial associations eventually agreed on a paper and aims for the region („Together for the Region – Agreement on Objectives“).

5 Supporting labour market politics during dismissals

Due to many prior restructuring experiences (including lay offs), the works council and personnel department had gained a lot of experience that it could use in this round of restructuring. Documents and similar scenarios were thus available to them during the reconciliation of interest and the negotiation of the social plan. However, a few points were amended and differed this time around.

The most important instruments in this case were part of the reconciliation of interest and the social plan and included the severance pay, the implementation of a transfer company, and the organisation of an internal placement office. An additional, fourth instrument was introduced here for the first time and did not play a role in the reconciliation and social plan negotiation – the health promotion initiative („Gesundheitsorientierte Beratung“) was part of a separate cooperation between the Federal Association of Company Health Insurance Funds, the local management and the works council (see Chapter 5).

The above instruments had also been used and tested in previous cases of mass dismissals, which meant that parties more readily agreed to these instruments. In 1999, before the merger with St. Gobain, the restructuring and the social plan included the implementation of a transfer company, which hypothetically offered qualifications and placement measures. In fact this former employment company aimed on older employees who were close to retirement. The objective of the transfer company in 1999 was to organize the transition from employment to retirement and to avoid unemployment. Gradual retirement, however, did not play a role in the new 2004 social plan as the new instruments aimed at the integration of employees into the labour market. To achieve this, the social plan specified that a transfer agency and an internal placement office should be established.

5.1 The Saint Gobain placement office

The idea to organize an internal placement office for a limited period of time had already been applied successfully in 1999 when Saint Gobain acquired the foundry plant in Gelsenkirchen. Due to the successful operation during the various dismissals taking place in the following years, the placement office became a fixed institution used in case of mass dismissals. The main concept behind it is the use of existing, informal contacts to other companies so as to place employees into new positions outside the concern. These network contacts were based on the work and experience of both the works council as well as the personnel department in Gelsenkirchen. The previous association to the Thyssen group proved to be particularly useful and many employees could be placed in Thyssen companies after the Gelsenkirchen location was taken over by Saint Gobain.

Employees were released while working on probation for another employer in cooperation with the employment agency, but also in placements that were arranged by the internal placement office. This placement scheme was very successful. In those few cases, where no placement could be achieved it was often that the actual employees did not want to take up the offer after the internship. In many times they stated the unusual and – in their experience – worse and disorganised work conditions in small and medium sized foundries. One example included particular health and safety concerns that were significantly lower than the standard which Saint Gobain employees were used to.

| Table 1: Time frame of measures in the Schalker Verein | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|------|---|---|
| Year | 2004 | | | | | | | | | | | | 2005 | | |
| Month | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| <i>Time frame of consultations and negotiations</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Announcement of the closure | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Negotiation of health promotion initiative | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Reconciliation of interest, negotiation of social plan | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Time frame of measures</i> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Health promotion intervention | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Internal placement office at Saint Gobain | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Transfer company – first "beE" | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Second transfer company "betriebsorganisatorisch eigenständige Einheit" | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

The placement office was opened immediately following the reconciliation of interest and the signing of the social plan in June 2004 (and will continue until the end of 2005). The office is staffed with a personnel officer and a works council representative. One additional member of the works council was released from normal duties to focus solely on the placement of employees. This person was the main point of contact for all employees. The office was located in the main administration building at the location and was open to all employees – including those who were still working on the remaining production lines.

The Saint Gobain placement office managed to place about 40 employees immediately. This group represented those who were better-qualified proportion of the workforce. The majority were placed in companies belonging to the ThyssenKrupp Group. Business partners and suppliers of the „Schalker Verein“ also took on some of their employees.

Unfortunately, the placement office was not able to help all proportions of the workforce. Some employees were more difficult to place due to their lack of qualification, limited knowledge of German, health problems, and age. In addition to this, the few open vacancies available to those with limited or no qualifications paid a significantly lower wage compared to their rate at Saint Gobain.

The internal placement office also cooperated with the local employment agency in attempt to place all their employees into available vacancies outside their network of companies. This was occasionally successful, particularly because employees were released from work at Saint Gobain to attend test internships and work on probation at different locations and for different companies. This meant that the (new) employer did not have to pay for the Saint Gobain employee during his internship (generally up to 4 weeks) during which the employees still received their benefits from Saint Gobain.

Table 2: Results of placement activities

| | Absolute numbers | Relative no.s in relation to (b) | Relative no.s in relation to(c) |
|---|------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | I | II | III |
| (a) Employees before restructuring | 237 | | |
| Remaining workplaces in the confection centre | 37 | | |
| Number of jobs being lost on production lines | 200 | | |
| ...gradual retirement (Altersteilzeit) applies to | 33 | | |
| (b) Threatened by unemployment | 181 | 100.0% | |
| Immediate placement via internal placement office | 38 | 21.0% | |
| Immediate exits | 35 | 19.3% | |
| (c) Transfer to the transfer company | 108 | 59.7% | 100.0% |
| <i>Numbers of employees leaving transfer company (end of June 2005)</i> | | | |
| Placement into work via transfer company | 4 | 2.2% | 3.7% |
| Resignations/Employees handing in their notice to the transfer company | 18 | 9.9% | 16.7% |
| Pursuing other options (i.e. continuous professional development) | 3 | 1.7% | 2.8% |
| Remaining unemployment after transfer company | 32 | 17.7% | 29.6% |
| (d) Numbers left in transfer company by early July 2005 | 51 | 28.2% | 47.2% |

5.2 *The transfer company*

In addition the internal placement office, the instrument „Transferkurzarbeitergeld“ (§ 216b SGB III) has also been used in previous social plans at Saint Gobain. In the last restructuring prior to the closure in 2004, a local service provider was responsible for the organisation of the transfer company. Neither the personnel department nor the works council were satisfied with their services, hence the service provider engaged in 2004 was another company, called BAQ-Transfer- und Qualifizierungsgesellschaft mbH, Bochum. This company had already organised transfers for Saint Gobain at the Brebach works and thus had a good reputation in the personnel department in Brebach. It is owned by a lawyer for labour law in Bochum. He was well known for his work for unions and works councils, which meant that the BAQ was engaged quickly and without a lengthy process.

The employees were told about the installation of a transfer company at a meeting on June 16th, 2004 by the personnel department. The workforce was given ten days to consider the option of either signing a new contract (between themselves, Saint Gobain and the BAQ), which meant a new employment contract with the transfer company, or to receive their dismissal notice on June 26th. All but 11 employees decided to sign the transferral contract, meaning that 108 employees transferred to the new company (Table 2).

Employees would stay a minimum of three but no more than twelve months within the transfer company. Generally, their stay should be double the time of their dismissal notice period. About

60% of all transferred employees were eligible to stay in the transfer company for the maximum period of twelve months. A further 15% were eligible to remain for up to 6 months.

5.2.1 *The concept of the BAQ at Saint Gobain in Gelsenkirchen*

The labour market concept for the former Saint Gobain employees included four steps, which followed the initial profiling exercise according to § 216b (4) SGB III. One of the main tenets of the BAQ concept is to symbolically emphasize the departure of employees from their previous employer by conducting all tests and similar away from the old workplace.

- The transfer company conducts an initial consultation, where BAQ consultants talk to each employee about the results of the profiling exercise, their professional career ambitions and to plan necessary further measures and qualification. This consultation takes 30 to 60 minutes. It took two weeks until all consultations with the transferred former employees were completed.
- Following this, the employees had to attend orientation training that was conducted in groups and lasted for five days. The focus of this measure („Basisqualifikation“) was to train them extensively in managing the application process.
- The third step consisted of further qualification initiatives as part of the individually worked out career plan in step one. Continuous professional development service providers conducted these courses. They included welding courses, which were thought to be particularly promising for the job market.
- The fourth and final step focused on the placement of the employees. The BAQ tried to find vacancies and also coached the employees when they applied or had interviews. The employees also had the chance to request individual consultations if necessary.

Finding open vacancies proved to be difficult for the BAQ and was only successful within limits. This may have been due to the lack of a network and informal contacts which would have been instrumental in placing employees. In the end, the BAQ had to result to calling up companies in an attempt to find potential job openings for the employees. This took a lot of time and was successful only in a few occasions. This was also the reason why the BAQ cooperated so closely with the internal placement office at Saint Gobain, since their contacts in the steel industry raised the chances of placing employees. The result was a productive sharing of the workload in that the Saint Gobain office contributed to the placement by using its network of contacts, whereas the transfer company organised further qualification for the employees.

| Table 3: participants at the measures organized by the transfer company | <i>absolute</i> | <i>relative</i> |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| Participants in total | 108 | 100.0% |
| ... basic qualifications | 75 | 69.4% |
| ... technical qualifications | 33 | 30.6% |
| ... internships | 17 | 17.7% |

In addition to the further qualification of employees, internships played an important role in the cooperation between the BAQ and the internal placement office. Saint Gobain employees were able to attend internships while still at the “Schalker Verein”, but this service was available also

once they had changed to the BAQ transfer company. The internships functioned as a sort of probationary period and lasted two to four weeks. In total, 17 employees were placed via the transfer company into internships. All but one employee could thus be successfully placed with the new employer after the temporary internship had come to an end (Table 3).

5.2.2 Obstacles in the placement of Saint Gobain employees

According to the BAQ, the placement of the workforce was problematic due to their age (the majority were aged 40 plus years) and their lack of qualifications. Most had only limited technical expertise, and even most of the skilled workers could not be placed into their former jobs where specific technical qualifications were required. The regional labour market posed further problems as it offered no perspectives to unqualified labourers.

Recruiting practices in many metal and steel companies also complicated things further, as they tend to recruit new employees via temporary employment agencies. According to the BAQ, this counts for 90% of all recruitments. In effect, companies employ workers for a few weeks as temporary workers and only later sign them up on with a regular contract – or they reject the candidates if they were considered not suitable. Most employees in the transfer companies have difficulty in understanding this concept and are thus reluctant to work as temporary labourers.

5.2.3 Results

Given the close cooperation between the internal placement office and the transfer company, it is not really possible to evaluate each measure separately. Altogether, both instruments jointly managed to place 60 employees into new jobs from 167, with 32 employees now being unemployed. This is quite a positive achievement considering the characteristics of the workforce.

The variables leading to success and the reintegration into the job market were clearly the informal contacts and the network available to the internal placement office. The placement and further qualification courses organized by the transfer company was also important as these played a further decisive role in the placement (i.e. welding techniques training). The ability to attend internships in other companies also played an important role. Even if the internships had resulted in contracts for the interns, the employees would also have had the chance to return to the transfer company. Furthermore, employees were financially secured during the internship as the transfer company was still paying them. The internship opportunity was thus advantageous for the company who got an intern for free and the employees in so far as the internships led to several successful job placements.

5.3 The role of the labour administration

The Gelsenkirchen labour administration contributed to the financing of the transfer measures in two ways: At the one end, the labour administration approved that the transfer agency costs are financed according to § 216b SGB III. On the other end, it is possible for the service provider

organising the transfer agency to request additional funds from ESF funds available at local labour administrations for the costs of qualification measures⁴.

In the case of St. Gobain, the labour administration simply gave permission to fund the transfer measures according to the above. The administration did not get involved in the BAQ's selection of transfer concepts and measures. Even the opportunity to participate in meetings, which were regularly held between the BAQ and the works council, were not made use of by the labour administration. According to the BAQ, the cooperation with the labour administration was smooth, especially getting additional ESF funding for qualification measures within the transfer agency. Here the BAQ found that the labour administration handled this process well, being service oriented and surprisingly not bureaucratic.

6 The health promotion initiative

The „health-oriented consultation for unemployed and those in insecure employment“ constituted the third measures in addition to the two previously described instruments (internal placement office and transfer company). It provided a means to improve the life and work situation of those leaving the Schalker Verein.

The health promotion measure originated in a long-term cooperation between the Faculty for Organisational Psychology at the university of Dortmund and the Federal Association of the Company Health Insurance Funds (BV BKK) in Essen. The cooperation had centred on the topic of unemployment and health. In association with the Institute for Work Psychology and Work Medicine (Institut für Arbeitspsychologie und Arbeitsmedizin, IAPAM) in Herdecke, the collaborators developed a consulting concept specifically targeted at the unemployed and those in insecure employment.

The project is based on two assumptions:

- Unemployed and those threatened by unemployment experience significantly higher amount of uncertainty. This may lead to a change of behaviour in relation to physical activity and nutrition. Unhealthy behaviours are likely results in cases of higher uncertainty when the person is in or threatened by unemployment.
- A second argument in support of health promotion initiatives is the difference in actual labour market perspectives depending on the health status of the unemployed person. People who are ill are less likely to find employment on the labour market compared to those who have less health issues.

The assumptions led on to the formulation of two aims: firstly, to improve the access to and chances on the labour market for those who are unemployed. A second aim is to promote health amongst those in unemployment and to work with them to maintain a certain quality of life. These goals were anchored in the interests of the BV BKK for this target group, which were manifold:

- To save costs by avoiding the expenditure which were caused by dismissal-related health problems

⁴ In case such a request is granted, the organisation has to contribute 70% of the qualification costs. 30% of qualification costs will be funded out of the ESF budget available to the local labour administration.

- To positively influence the employment rates and risk structure of the remaining members in employment

The concept stemmed from several health projects aimed at different professional groups. The concept was developed at the Universität Dortmund, whereas the IAPAM organised these consultations in specific organizations. Later it was redesigned for a new target group (those in insecure employment) in cooperation with the BV BKK. The first implementation was 2003 at the Hoesch steel works in Dortmund (part of the ThyssenKrupp group). The project was also intended to be piloted at a restructuring company in Bremen, which did not happen due to internal resistance within the company. The Saint Gobain steel works was recruited using personal contacts. The practical implementation was again organized by the IAPAM, whereas the “Team Gesundheit – Gesellschaft für Gesundheitsmanagement mbH” in Essen (a subsidiary company of the BV BKK with a close association with the University Duisburg-Essen) oversaw the financing and project organization.

6.1.1 *The theoretical concept of health promotion for the unemployed*

The health promotion concept aimed at the following: „The seminars shall help participants to recognise strains, dangers and risk factors so as to manage, overcome and prevent these from becoming professional barriers, decreasing their health, productivity and life quality. Participants shall learn to cope with their present life situation, to mobilise their own resources, and to look for new perspectives, thus leading to a increased sense of confidence and control, which will help them to influence their own life situation“⁵.

The main assumption of this model is that strains/demands and resources need to be adequately and effectively balanced. Buffers support the model on both sides of a “seesaw” (the strains and resources) and help to maintain this balance.

Examples of strains and demands are:

- Physical strains such as noise, temperature, pollution, materials (situational).
- Task-related demands (situational)
- Lack of regulation versus too much regulation on one’s position at work (organisational)
- Subjective demands such as perfectionism, ambition (personal)

Examples of resources:

- Abilities, skills, attitudes (personal)
 - Equipment, technical helps (situational)
 - Authorization, responsibility, organisational support (organisational)
- A demands buffer manages the balance between resources and demands. This demands buffer refers to freedom to manoeuvre in a situation, as well as situational and personal resources. As such personal stress resistance or resilience, situational support (which also in-

⁵ Bökenkamp, Kathrin (2004). Gesundheitsorientierte Beratung für Arbeitslose und instabil Beschäftigte“. Abschlussbericht zur Gesundheitsförderung St. Gobain, S. 25.

cludes financial buffers) as well as organisational characteristics (staff coverage at work) are examples of buffers that help a person to manage demands better.

In case of those who are unemployed, resources no longer meet their counterweight of demands and strains. In this case, resource buffers are required so as to reduce the effect. Usually, this resource buffer is heavily used by those who experience a lot of strain and demands, often resulting in the buffer becoming ineffective with excessive use. This situation is reversed for those who are unemployed. The question here is whether or not their resource buffers are effective in managing the lack of demands and strains. Important personal buffers include a healthy self-esteem, curiosity, and ability to redefine and review goals. Opportunities available to participate in sport activities, workshops, and thus to have a wide variety of tasks to achieve in various situations, in addition to social organisational to avoid isolation, subsequent deprivation and depression.

It is the aim of the health promotion consultation to „transform the devaluation associated with unemployment into a process of discovering added value, by either helping unemployed persons to get back into the labour market or by helping them to remain healthy and productive during their unemployment and to enjoy sufficient quality of a life despite of it“ (director, IAPAM, 2005).

6.1.2 *The practical implementation at Saint Gobain*

The concept was first introduced to the workforce a week after the closure had been officially announced in a company meeting. Both trainers heavily promoted the consultation concept using information stands, but they also approached individual employees and arranged for a phone-hotline for eventual queries to the proposed consultation. In the end, 80 employees attended the information events with 56 of these participating in the workshops (see Table 4).

The focus of the workshops was to impart concrete health knowledge to the participants that should increase their awareness of health issues and their motivation to increase health-promoting behaviour.

| Table 4: Participation at the health promotion events | absolute | relative |
|---|------------|---------------|
| Maximum participation possible | 200 | 100.0% |
| Participation at information events | 80 | 40.0% |
| ...participation rates group discussions and personal consultations | 56 | 28.0% |
| ...personal consultations | 16 | 8.0% |
| ...Nordic-Walking | 10 | 5.0% |
| <i>Dropping out because of work</i> | 11 | |
| <i>Others dropping out</i> | 5 | |

The participants were offered group consultations as well as personal consultations on health promotion subjects. These workshops and sessions took place between June to December in 2004 in the rooms of the administration building at the Saint Gobain location.

All participants were grouped into six groups of five to ten participants each. These groups met once a month for a five-hour session⁶. Before the group seminars

commenced, each participant was interviewed separately for an hour. This first interview introduced the measure again in more detail to each of the participants and served as a source of information about all the participants for the consultants. The talk was supplemented by an inter-

⁶ An exception was made for the August summer break.

view using a semi-standardized questionnaire. In addition to the group seminars and the compulsory first meeting, participants were also able to arrange personal consultations and coaching appointments if they so wished with one of the consultants. In total, 16 participants eventually used this offer.

All group seminars had a similar structure, starting off with a review of the last session and a discussion of the learnt aspects (which was checked with the help of a small questionnaire). An introduction to the new topics followed with an analysis of what are the ideal and the realistic scenarios for the employees. Employees also had to work out individual strategies on how to cope with various aspects. The seminars finished with a little card game that served as a check to reflect on what had been learned in this session.

Table 5: Themes of the seminars

| | |
|------------|--|
| Workshop 1 | Exercise, nutrition, alcohol, smoking, sleep |
| Workshop 2 | Included goal setting, planning, perception, expectations, motivation |
| Workshop 3 | Review and extension of issues mentioned in Workshop 2 |
| Workshop 4 | Feelings of anxiety, anger, boredom; communication, application procedure and interviews |
| Workshop 5 | Stress, relaxation, sustainability |

In addition to the seminars, participants also initiated a small Nordic walking group that met once a week outside the works gate to exercise in a nearby public park. This group constituted ten participants and continued to meet long after the health promotion initiative came to an end.

6.1.3 Effectiveness of measures

The workshops aimed at the improvement of participant health behaviour and the imparting of further health knowledge. Discussions and interviews with participants revealed that they made behaviour adjustments and learnt from these workshops. Although it is not possible to conduct a detailed evaluation for various reasons, the case study does show several indicators that confirm the successful nature of the measures in terms of their operative aims.

- Workshop 1 focused on the behaviour of participants in terms of exercise, nutrition, alcohol consumption, smoking and sleep patterns. As such, discussion included topics such as individual sport behaviours as well as dietary recommendations of the German Society for nutrition (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Ernährung). The discussion of these issues led to a changing health behaviour, one example of which was the popularity of the Nordic walking group. One participant stated that small changes were made in that people began to eat an apple daily or similar, which is something they had not done before.
- It was more difficult to assess the impact of the workshops 2 to 5. These measures aimed at providing participants with tools that enabled them to develop their own individual, long-term perspective as well as allowing them to assess and work towards their goals. The workshops also addressed the importance of self-motivation. However, it is not possible to evaluate the impact of these measures. Partial support can be found in the good cooperation of all participants, in that they solved tasks given to them between the workshops with their partners at home. Participants also reflected positively on the contents, context and connection between all workshops.

The positive atmosphere and the willingness of the employees to participate actively in workshops further support the above assessment. Questionnaires used during the initiative reveal a relatively high learning achievement of all participants. There are, however, critical points to be mentioned. As such, only 16 participants used the offer of individual interviews with the organisers of the health initiative. According to one of the trainers, certain group processes would have required a higher number of participants of ten plus people. However, group sizes declined over time that left only five to ten participants in each group (see section 6.1.2).

6.1.4 Conclusion

At present, certain trends can be discerned. Unemployment has a generally negative effect on health, particularly because the increased uncertainty affects the physical and mental constitution of the dismissed. The health promotion intervention in this present case study reflects the *Zeitgeist*. The concepts of considering „health a resource“, the importance of „corporate social responsibility“ and the renaming of personnel departments into „Human Resources“ emphasize the shift in the relationship between employer and employees.

All in all, the cooperation of these different actors (IAPAM, universities, company health insurance funds, and a company) in relation to this health promotion initiative is still rather unusual and innovative for Germany.

The successful cooperation between participants, the works council, and the health promotion consultants may lead to a new way of supporting those in insecure employment, which goes beyond the areas usually covered by the transfer companies. The trend towards a more flexible and disrupted professional life causes a lot of uncertainty for many German professionals, who view this trend with anxiety and frustration. Repeated restructuring with dismissals based on social selection criteria leads to the ageing of the workforces, which in turn decreasing the willingness of these employees to start afresh and work towards a new career.

The intervention is also unusual in that this was the second consultation of this kind in Germany, organized jointly by the Federal Association of Company Health Insurance Funds and the consultants from the IAPAM and the University Dortmund.

To implement such consultation scheme, it is necessary to get the financial support, the agreement on various sides (the management and the workforce concerned). Although the full potential of this innovation and its possible areas of application will only be known when several interventions of this kind have been conducted and evaluated, this consultation scheme presents a promising measure to accompany courses and support measures. It may prove to be useful for those target groups in insecure employment or those who are unemployed given the difficulties they face on the labour market (which include shorter work contracts, increased competition between applicants, the need for more self-efficacy and initiative to find work and locate new professional and career opportunities).

7 Results and evaluation of the restructuring

The interaction of three different measures to improve the situation of the concerned workforce was relatively complex. The key success factors and innovative elements do not only relate to

each measure, but they are also the product of the combination of the measures. Promising are the following aspects:

Sharing the workload between the internal placement office and the transfer company was essential in placing 38% of all concerned employees back into work. This figure is relatively high given that there were several employee characteristics that hindered this process as well as the very limited and competitive labour market opportunities in the region. The combination of informal contacts of the job placement office to other companies and the targeted qualification of employees via the transfer company created a real synergy, which resulted in new work opportunities for a number of employees. If the transfer company and the internal placement office had tried to achieve this separately, the rate of those who were successfully employed elsewhere would have been significantly lower-

7.1 Health promotion at a restructuring company – an innovation

A further innovation in the presented case study is the health promotion initiative. In the past, health and safety issues were closely related to safety at work. Following the continuous technical development and modernisation of work processes, the topic health and work was expanded and now increasingly recognises both physical as well as mental health demands at work. In addition, work is often associated with a person's standing in society. This in turn implies that unemployment has negative consequences for the individual's position in society and his or her sense of self-worth: For many, especially older workers, it is still a shock to learn that they are now unemployed. This shock often correlates with a heightened sense of personal and professional uncertainty and changed behaviour. At this point, there are hardly any systematic coping or health-promoting measures in place to help dismissed workers to manage their health and the situation better. This is why an intervention focusing on health promotion is particularly relevant in cases of restructuring, as it may function as a source of support for those going into unemployment or those in insecure employment. The health intervention aims at the assessment of the full person and is thus not limited to his or her role as an employee only. It focuses on the skills of the individual to manage new challenges, and possibly, to re-orientate themselves in terms of their professional and personal aims.

7.2 Useful addition to transfer practices

The health promotion initiative still had the character of a pilot project, this being only the second time it was implemented in an organisation. However, innovative elements are apparent by looking at the framework for the implementation and the main basic proposition of the measure:

- The health promotion aimed at increasing health management skills and competences, thus increasing employability of the workforce without fixating solely on job placements. This broader context avoided some of the problems (i.e. increasing frustration) sometimes found in long-term participants of transfer companies, particularly since transfer companies are primarily assessed according to their placement activities and successes. In addition, the health initiative dealt with some more difficult aspects that are sometimes not as openly addressed by transfer companies: the real possibility of unemployment. The focus on the person and his or her health management also promises to have positive long-term effects for the employees when they are trying to get back into work, by influencing their health behaviour positively and also increasing their subsequent employability.

- It is regrettable that there are no hard facts available in terms of the effects of the health initiative. This is due not just to data protection which did not allow for the comparison of participant versus non-participant in such areas such as integration into the labour market. The evaluation thus had to rely on one participant interview, which attested to the positive effects of the health behaviour for all participants. The Nordic walking group still met six months after the health initiative had come to an end implies that the measures had a certain positive long-lasting impact on the health of the participants.
- The involvement of the company health insurance funds is a further innovative aspect to be considered. A natural interest for all health insurance funds is the improvement of their risk strategy, avoiding a decrease of membership contributions, as well as establishing commitments with members. This case study may thus provide an incentive and starting point for the continued development of health promotion concepts and to implement such initiatives in other cases of restructuring.

The present practices of employment transfer and outplacement activities may be enhanced in their quality and acceptance if used in collaboration with other health related initiatives. A closer cooperation between transfer companies and health promotion initiatives would be desirable for future projects. These co-operations might focus on establishing longer-term relations between the various consultants and jointly agree on operative measures and time schedules.

It remains to be seen to what extent health promotion will be accepted more widely as an accompanying measure to be employed during restructuring in German organisations. Continued research on the topic of health, work and unemployment may provide further impulses for companies and insurance funds to take an interest. Management trends and concepts are also developing and have increasingly become more attentive to health promotion at work. Although the possible potential and maximum benefit of these sort of initiatives is not calculable at this point, it may be the role of the MIRE project to highlight the usefulness and potential benefits of this sort of a health promotion initiative accompanying restructuring on a wider German and international scale. This initiative may further the dialogue about how organisations can play an active role in supporting those who are being dismissed more effectively, accept their social responsibility and contribute to the development and support of the many individuals in society who face the challenges of unemployment and insecure employment.

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