

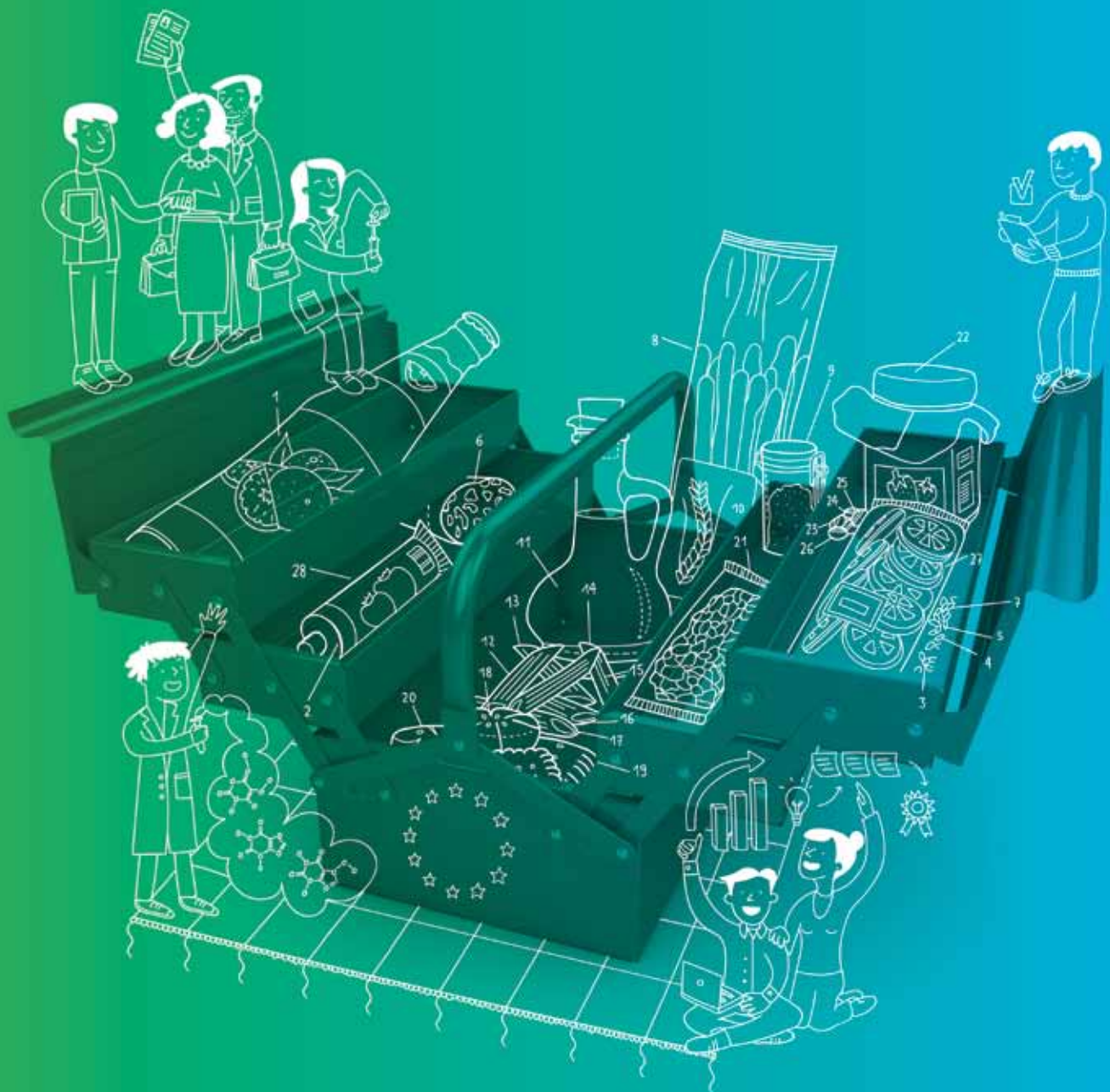


## CASE STUDY REPORT:

# TIL- TRANSFER OF INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR A FUTURE-ORIENTED HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY IN THE FOOD AND DRINK INDUSTRY IN GERMANY: HEALTH PROMOTION AND PREVENTION MEASURES

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## KEY FACTS

### Starting situation:

- Important influence of demographic challenges and physical and mental stress
- Need for a future-oriented human resources policy enabling employees to work until retirement age and to attract young professionals

### Activities and measures:

Support of 14 companies in taking stock of the current situation and reaching a diagnosis, implementation of measures, evaluation of the project results

### Results:

Company-level solutions (among others) focused on health promotion and prevention measures: development of an exposure log for staff planning, a concept for “healthy leadership”, shift models reducing stress, mind-set changes and greater awareness of demographic aspects

### Success factors:

- Participation creates acceptance: involvement of employees in all project phases
- New input through the involvement of external experts
- Platform for sharing experience, allowing results to be transferred to other companies and the public at large
- Open communication and information, transparency

## BACKGROUND

The project “TiL- Transfer of innovative solutions for a future-oriented human resources policy in the food and drink industry“ started in February 2013. Funded by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS), it is part of the New Quality of Work Initiative<sup>1</sup> aimed at improving the quality of work in ways benefitting both companies and employees and promoting knowledge transfer and experience exchange. Founded in 2002 by the BMAS and leading social partners, the Initiative is a nonpartisan alliance of Federal and State-level governments, business associations, trade unions, the Federal Employment Agency, companies, social insurance providers and foundations.

The focus of the TiL project is on maintaining and promoting the employment and employability of workers as a crucial prerequisite to overcoming demographic challenges and ensuring company innovation and competitiveness. In fourteen pilot companies, management and works council representatives together with employees developed and tested innovative solutions for age-related work planning.

The pilot companies recognized the need to deal with demographic challenges. One important area of activity (alongside organising working time and managing demographic change and transitions to retirement) is the promotion of health and prevention measures. Occupational health management is of major importance in promoting and maintaining the physical and mental health of employees to retirement and beyond. Four pilot companies set themselves the task of finding ways to improve the working envi-

ronment and work organization as well as to promote healthy behaviour among employees and to develop optimization solutions.

Two TiL companies, **Oleon<sup>2</sup>**, a producer of oleochemicals, and **Hochwald<sup>3</sup>**, a milk processing company, focused on mental stress by surveying employees to assess their personal working situation, revealing a number of similarities between the companies. Firstly, employees wanted more feedback from their supervisors on their work. In addition, they wanted to be better informed about what is going on in the company. In their opinion, training and career opportunities needed to be improved. In particular, production staff often had little leeway in planning and performing their work and were exposed to such harmful work environment factors as heat, cold, vibration, noise, etc.

Two other TiL companies, **Ferrero<sup>4</sup>**, a confectionary manufacturer, and **Emsland- Stärke<sup>5</sup>**, a potato starch producer, focused on ergonomic workplace design. Using a workplace analysis, burdens on employees’ musculoskeletal system were assessed. In doing so, the *Berufsgenossenschaft Nahrungsmittel und Gastgewerbe (BGN)*, the German Workplace Accident Insurance Association for the Food and Catering Industry, or the competent health insurance company were consulted. Employees in the participating companies were filmed or photographed while performing their work. The motion sequences were then analyzed with respect to physical stress and strain. To raise employee awareness, the results were presented and possible solutions discussed.

<sup>1</sup> New Quality of Work Initiative (INQA - Initiative Neue Qualität der Arbeit). In: <http://www.inqa.de>.

<sup>2</sup> Oleon has been a leading producer of oleochemicals since 1950s. The production site in Emmerich, Germany, with about 100 employees is a TiL project partner.

<sup>3</sup> Hochwald Foods GmbH with 1,500 employees processes raw milk into dairy products. Its subsidiary in Thalfang, Germany, participated in TiL as a pilot company.

<sup>4</sup> Ferrero Germany, a manufacturer of confectionery, was founded in 1956 and employs about 3,600 workers. The company’s head office is located in Frankfurt am Main. The production plant in Stadtallendorf, Germany, participated in the TiL project.

<sup>5</sup> Emsland-Stärke GmbH is a company belonging to the Emsland Group and produces potato starch in Emlichheim – the plant participating in the TiL project - and at three other production sites. The group has 900 employees and is Germany’s largest producer of potato starch.

<sup>8</sup> innowise is a private research and consulting company based in Duisburg supporting change

In addition to the individual pilot projects, the project partners regularly organize transfer workshops to promote exchanges among project companies, other projects belonging

to the New Quality of Work Initiative and the interested public. Good practice examples are presented and published on the web page [www.til-projekt.de](http://www.til-projekt.de).

## INITIATION AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Companies in the German food and drink industry are confronted with demographic challenges. While numbers of young job applicants are decreasing, the average age of sector employees has risen significantly. A substantial proportion of older employees will not be able to work until regular retirement age as they are subject to major physical and psychological stress and strain. Production staff are often exposed to humidity, heat, cold and noise as well as dust (e.g. in starch production). Process streamlining has led to increased performance requirements and larger ranges of tasks for employees. Shift work and flexible work organization are very common in the industry. Due to additional seasonal burdens and an associated increase in shift times – in some cases up to seven days a week – sick leave rates are relatively high.

Cardiovascular and knee problems are among the most common physical impairments affecting employees.

The number of employees unable to perform their original tasks for health reasons is increasing. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly difficult to create sufficient adapted workplaces. As regards mental stress, a systematic approach to assessing psycho-social stress with a view to implementing appropriate countermeasures for preserving employability was not commonplace in the industry.

Based on these challenges the aim of the Til project was to develop and test innovative solutions with pilot companies with a view to transferring them to the entire sector as well as other industries. Therefore, the top criterion used by the German food trade union (Gewerkschaft Nahrung-Genuss-Gaststätten - NGG<sup>6</sup>) when addressing potential pilot companies was the use of new operational approaches relevant to other companies in the food and beverage industry and with the potential to provide input for addressing operational challenges.

## FOCUS AND TARGET GROUP, INITIATOR AND PLAYERS INVOLVED

The trade union NGG initiated the Til Project in cooperation with companies from the food and drink industry. Two consulting companies wmp consult<sup>7</sup> and innowise research & consulting<sup>8</sup> carried out the consulting within the pilot companies. wmp consult was also in charge of overall project coordination and – together with NGG – of organizing transfers. The individual company projects all kicked off with a workshop aimed at defining project objectives. Works council members,

plant managers, HR managers, executive personnel and selected employees were involved and also participated in the steering group established at the beginning of the company projects.

The project was carried out in close cooperation with the Berufsgenossenschaft Nahrungsmittel und Gastgewerbe (BGN), the German Workplace Accident Insurance Association for the Food and Catering Industry<sup>9</sup>, and statutory health insurance companies.

## PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED, LESSONS LEARNED AND SUCCESS FACTORS

A participatory approach was chosen for all company projects, as solutions are only meaningful when all stakeholders support them. As a result, works council members and management were part of the steering group. Generally speaking, project success is dependent on involving employees at every project stage. In the pilot companies this initially took place in the form of a comprehensive and systematic survey of certain features of employees' work situations. To ensure the open and unreserved participation of employees in the surveys, maximum transparency is important. To achieve this, the project group comprehensively informed staff as soon as possible in order to counteract any employee fears and to avoid rumours possibly endangering the project. As the loudest voices do not necessarily reflect the opinion of majority, one additional benefit of the surveys is the possibility to

capture all relevant opinions among employees. In the case of **Oleon**, an exceptionally high rate of completed questionnaires was achieved because the HR manager personally presented the questionnaires to employees, requesting them to participate in the survey and giving them the opportunity to ask questions directly.

Employees concerned also have to be involved in the development of measures. At **Emsland-Stärke** the steering group held employee workshops to gain a clear idea of department-specific negative health factors. Project experience shows that employees are experts with regard to their work and working conditions and know better than anyone else how operations have to be designed in order to achieve the desired effect. With regard to reducing any physical strain caused by production equipment, emplo-

<sup>6</sup> NGG is one of eight unions in the German Trade Union Federation (DGB) and the oldest trade union in Germany. NGG has about 206,000 members (as of 2014) and represents the interests of workers in industries such as hotels and catering and the baking, beverage, confectionery, tobacco, sugar and meat industries.

<sup>7</sup> wmp consult is a research and consulting company based in Hamburg and specialized in all aspects of job security, co-determination and employee participation.

<sup>8</sup> innowise is a private research and consulting company based in Duisburg supporting change management in companies and their supply chains. <sup>9</sup> BGN is the statutory accident insurance association for approximately 3.4 million insured in over 400,000 companies in the food and beverage industry, the hotel and catering industry, the bakery and confectionery industries, the meat industry, the tobacco industry as well as fairground and circuses.

yees using or maintaining it are the ones best able to provide important hints even in the planning stage. In practice it proved positive to hold brainstorming workshops with these 'company experts' to identify problems and possible solutions. Cornelia Rieke of wmp consult, consultant in the TiL project, emphasised that *"even the simple implementation of employee workshops can be an asset. People appreciate it very much to be asked for their opinions."* But it is also crucial for feedback on results and information on further steps to be provided in a timely manner. Survey results should always be taken seriously, even if they have not come up with the expected results.

Project experience showed that it can be difficult to maintain the motivation of all players involved over a longer period. As a result, projects that were too complex were broken down into several packages at **Emsland-Stärke**. The steering group defined milestones and clear responsibilities for each phase or work package. The achievement of a milestone should always be seen as a success and communicated to all stakeholders. In

this context the chairman of the Emsland-Stärke works council stated that *"in order to achieve improvements, the motivation of those responsible and of employees plays an important role. It is of particular importance, of course, that measures are implemented and that achievements are made visible."*

It turned out that continuity was a major success factor. Changes in responsibility within the HR department or in the composition of the steering group could cause a step backwards, delays or a change in priorities. A further decisive factor is the commitment of steering group members. As the parties at company level acted in concert and promoted the individual projects, the players in the TiL pilot companies were able to reach the shared goals.

Lessons learned were made available to other TiL companies in the context of bilateral exchanges encouraged by the TiL consulting team as well as during TiL transfer workshops. The trust-based relationship between all project partners promoted lively exchanges of experience.

## ASPECTS FOR TRANSFERABILITY TO OTHER REGIONS, SECTORS OR COMPANIES

The following steps were involved, supported by the external consultants during the individual company projects with a view to achieving sustainable results:

### 1. INITIALIZATION & ORIENTATION

- 1.1 Establish a Steering Committee and Project Management
- 1.2 Analyse the current situation: challenges of demographic change
- 1.3 Define objectives: What should be achieved in the project?

### 2. PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

- 2.1 Define measures
- 2.2 Assess and develop measures
- 2.3 Plan implementation steps (milestones / intermediate targets)
- 2.4 Develop a communication concept: Who has to be informed about the project and its progress and when?

### 3. IMPLEMENTATION & CONTROL

- 3.1 Implement measures according to plan
- 3.2 Check progress
- 3.3 Discuss difficulties and resistance
- 3.4 Develop solutions to any problems
- 3.5 Adapt measures / make course corrections

### 5. TRANSFER

- 5.1 Check transferability of the measures to other areas
- 5.2 Adjust measures to the conditions of the next area
- 5.3 Build an implementation plan taking into account the "lessons learned"
- 5.4 Implement it in other areas of the company

### 4. EVALUATION & IMPROVEMENT

- 4.1 Evaluate the results of the measures taken
- 4.2 Analyze causes of any disruptions
- 4.3 Reflect on cooperation between the various players
- 4.4 Make adjustments to and/or optimize measures
- 4.5 List "Lessons learned"

The joint and participatory approach together with the support provided by trade union and external experts led to meaningful and sustainable solutions. Cornelia Rieke, consultant in the TiL project, explained that *"this means that not only the works council and management cooperate in order to achieve results but also that employees are involved in developing solutions."*

The TiL projects at **Hochwald** and **Oleon** were characterized by a high degree of participation. Staff at the pilot plants were initially included in the employee survey to determine areas of action. As part of the survey, work aspects potentially leading to mental stress were questioned. The department- or site-specific survey results were then presented and discussed in workshops or meetings and suggestions for solutions collected.

**Hochwald** conducted workshops with four to eight representatives from each department, as well as a workshop with five representatives from middle management. Certain problems were discussed and resolved directly. The advantage of this bottom-up approach was that the decision-makers received information on concrete starting points for improvements as well as on staff

information needs. **Oleon** discussed the department-specific survey results in voluntary meetings. Employees were given the opportunity to describe the various forms of stress in their everyday work. In addition, the TiL consultants interviewed representatives from all departments on suggestions for solving problems. The results were presented and discussed in the steering group and priorities set. In some cases, concrete measures in the field of work organization and working environment were implemented immediately, while in others the need for wider-ranging action was identified.

The example of **Emsland-Stärke** showed that a participatory approach can positively influence leadership culture. As a result of the support from external consultants and the involvement of such external experts as the BGN, the perception of problems changed, opening the door for new solutions. The chairman of the Ferrero works council also highlighted the fact that *"the social partnership approach in the TiL project helps increase the acceptance and understanding of the different perspectives. The external consultants bring new perspectives into the company and ensure that various aspects are considered in problem solving."*

Employees in the pilot “bagging line” unit were involved in the process at an early stage. Staff workshops were used to identify problems. The employees concerned came up with first ideas for workplace improvements to reduce stress. The steering group then discussed the workshop results and evaluated the implementation status of ongoing activities. Further approaches for detecting and improving the situation on the bagging line were developed. For example, the participants developed a whole list of suggestions for reducing stress, ranging from measures to reduce dust through better filters and screens to ergonomic improvements: e.g. the installation of platforms allowing workers to work without straining their backs.

The **Ferrero** project group developed an exposure log in order to tailor jobs to employee needs and to maintain their skills. A company-wide employee survey pinpointed work organization aspects perceived as particularly burdensome. A check was made to determine which light-duty workplaces had to be created for whom. All jobs were surveyed with regard to their requirements, with results entered into the SAP system. Simultaneously it was determined whether and for what jobs employees were eligible or whether there were any restrictions. Job requirements and workers’ capabilities were then “matched” to find out who could be considered for which job.

After taking stock of ongoing measures to reduce pollution and promote health, a video analysis of jobs in a pilot department was

carried out in cooperation with the AOK<sup>10</sup>, with steering group members presenting the findings and recommendations to the workers. Together with an external service provider, relevant sports activities were then defined, successively offered to the staff concerned, and transferred to other business sectors in the course of the project.

In addition to ergonomic improvements, staff awareness to health considerations had to be raised in order for them to change their work routines to protect their health. A key factor here was the communication concept developed by **Emsland- Stärke** which led to increased transparency. The steering group installed a bulletin board for employees providing information on what was being worked on and what had already been achieved. This keeps employees permanently informed on how suggestions for improvement and measures promoting healthy behaviour are being dealt with, and explains why certain ideas have been discarded or other solutions found. Photos comparing before and after situations illustrate achievements. As a form of representing implementation progress, a traffic light system is used.

The regular exchanges of information organized by the project coordinators ensure the sharing of experience among participating companies. Networking and transfer events make project experience available to other companies and works councils. Good practice examples from other companies and sectors are used and adapted to find suitable solutions.

## CONCLUSION

Looking at the individual benefits for the TiL pilot companies, the players involved developed a new way of working together in the course of the project that will continue to exist even after the funded project ends. A permanent project structure provides the framework to cooperate beyond everyday business needs on issues that would otherwise fall by the wayside. Solutions found are beneficial to both employees and employers, as staff well-being is improved and employers gain a motivated and productive workforce.

**Ferrero** established a workforce planning scheme which was integrated into the SAP system. Focusing on work-related stress and strain on the basis of an exposure log, it automatically takes account of any personal health limitations, ensuring that employees are assigned appropriate tasks. This procedure is intended to prevent colleagues with limitations being stigmatized, as they would otherwise be “left out” when work is allocated. In addition, the project group developed and implemented various health promotion activities to complement the existing repertoire. The installation of “ergonomics experts” as drivers of a healthy working environment is planned. In addition, a communication concept has been developed to promote measures for improving workplace health and raising health awareness among employees.

**Emsland- Stärke** has managed to reduce dust emissions, improve the handling of bulk goods, and redesign silo discharge processes to improve safety. The project group designed and implemented measures to better manage recurring activities and the manual handling of loads. A “carrying and lifting” e-learning system regularly teaches back-friendly work techniques. Dust in the

bagging line has been significantly reduced. Silo discharge processes have been optimized. A significant improvement in working conditions has been achieved. The cleaning process has been optimized, thereby reducing musculoskeletal strain. This all helps make work a lot easier for employees. Project results and measures implemented are regularly communicated to the workforce. The newly introduced ‘SOS tour’ with facility staff members and the SOS team has improved communication among and with workers.

Employees at Hochwald and Oleon expressed their satisfaction with the employee survey that showed that their opinions were appreciated.

As regards more general project outcomes, solutions have been developed that are not only interesting for the other TiL participants and other companies in the industry, but can also provide input for the social partners in developing collective agreements. Moreover, the TiL project has helped the social partners to become more aware that demographic change has an impact on the future viability and competitiveness of companies and entire industries and that the need for action is increasing. Peter Dunkel, responsible for the TiL project at NGG, considers the project to be an important success for the social partners: *“The social partners see an increasing need to establish a framework for demographic solutions focused on promoting operational solutions through complementary regulations in collective agreements. The experience gained in the TiL pilot companies is an important catalyst for introducing age- and ageing-friendly forms of work organization and serves as input for collective agreements taking account of demographics and employee needs.”*

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<sup>10</sup> The AOK is a German statutory health insurance company: [www.aok.de](http://www.aok.de).



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