

# Corporate Culture Based on Partnership and Company Health Policy



**BERTELSMANN**  
media worldwide



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## Corporate Culture Based on Partnership and Company Health Policy

**What role do corporate cultures and company health policies play regarding a company's capacity for innovation and change in the era of the knowledge society? What are the distinguishing features of corporate cultures based on partnership and what creative leeway do they provide in a practical corporate context? What contribution does a company health policy make to the competitiveness of the enterprise and to sustainable social development? What are the values that will determine tomorrow's working world and how can companies respond to the challenges facing the relationship of work and health that are already emerging?**

These and similar questions were at the focus of a meeting of a group of European companies jointly initiated in Germany in early 2001 by the Bertelsmann Foundation and the Federal Association of Company Health Funds (BKK). Under the chairmanship of *EfH* President *Rita Süßmuth* the company representatives from the areas of personnel, social affairs and occupational safety and health came together in May 2001 to discuss the future perspectives of a corporate culture based on partnership and a dedicated company health policy.

### **Corporate culture: buzz word, myth or reality?**

The culture of a company is shaped by the written, but above all by the practically lived rules for cooperation within the company as well as for relations to the outside world like customers, suppliers or other companies. The differences between corporate cultures are sometimes reflected in the symbols used or in so-called artefacts like the dress code, the architecture or the language used.

*Eberhard Ulich* (the scientific head of EfH) outlines four areas of activity in which corporate culture finds expression and can be influenced: the values and basic convictions, the visions and role models, the forms of financial participation and income distribution, and the design and organisation of work.

*Jean-Francois Caillard* (scientific advisor to EfH) points to the ethical dimension of the discussion on corporate culture. This is characterized by two poles. At the one end of the spectrum there is the paradigm of the personal responsibility of every individual for his living conditions and thus also for his health. At the other end is the paradigm of solidarity emphasising the responsibility of the community.

### **Does corporate culture make you healthy?**

Already the very values and convictions of a company can promote health at the place of work if and when work is interpreted as a source of health. However, many companies have got into the habit of tending to associate work with disease and of concentrating almost exclusively on the prevention of accidents, occupational diseases and work-induced ailments.

Even income distribution indirectly influences health-related matters at the place of work and reflects the corporate culture. The smaller the differences in income distribution the greater will be the extent of the perceived feeling of belonging together in a company. In addition, studies from the USA have shown that the economically most successful companies of the past few decades as measured by the increase in shareholder value also turn out to be distinguished by relatively small differences in income distribution.

A corporate culture based on partnership can be particularly valuable in turning work into a source of health by way of the design and organisation of work. The traditional approach in occupational safety and health, on the other hand, is frequently still geared to reducing individual

health risks and hence targets the single employee but should, according to *Eberhard Ulich* and *Jean-Francois Caillard*, rather be complemented by measures that focus on the organisation of work. At the very centre of any such effort to design work processes that promote the health and personality of the individual must be the endeavour to create as holistic a task as possible to give the individual staff member or the work group a maximum of autonomy.

# Experience from corporate practice

Primarily at the initiative of the founder of the company, Reinhard Mohn, the **Bertelsmann media corporation** began to develop a corporate culture based on partnership as far back as in the 50th and 60th. It became part and parcel of the corporate constitution and – according to *Franz Netta* – forms the basis of the health policy activities of the company. The notion of partnership includes such crucial elements as mutual information of employees and an open exchange of opinions, the creation of a personal scope for development, the involvement of staff in corporate decision-making processes, the assurance of material justice and the socially responsible actions of the company. Special challenges emerge – reports *Franz Netta* – as a result of the decentralised structure of the group with some 300 independent profit centres and the necessary integration of different corporate cultures in the course of mergers and acquisitions.

The company supports the implementation of the corporate objectives in the area of in-company partnership by means of a number of instruments. These include individual talks with staff, quarterly talks at the place of work (where elected labour representatives can make suggestions concerning proposed investments and other changes), the January Talk where superiors face assessment by their staff, and an employee survey that is conducted worldwide. At the moment *Bertelsmann* is developing a procedure by which the degree of implementation of important dimensions of the corporate culture is integrated into the formal reporting system. In addition to important personnel and social policy data (like sickness rate, staff turnover and standard-of-living indicators) the “Cultural Report” is based on the degree of implementation of the instruments and the assessment by employees based on the data analysis of the results of the employee survey.

The Norwegian manufacturer of office furniture **HÅG** has gained some very positive experience with the development of a culture of trust based on shared values. The starting point was an economic crisis as well as the conviction that highly qualified staff could only be gained and retained by *HÅG* through a visible and living employee focus. Corporate culture – says *Kirsti Vandraas* – is not an academic subject but a matter of common sense and “good manners”. Their growing number of staff had been the reason for the company to give more formalised support to the development of values and their implementation into corporate practice. To this end the five *HÅG* values (security & care, initiative & commitment, customer focus, innovation, responsibility & loyalty) are translated step by step into concrete improvements in all parts of the company. The successful outcomes are then combined with the results of an employee survey (climate analysis) conducted annually. The results of the climate analysis form the basis for target agreements with the executive staff.

The German **Rewe** company is a service provider with the emphasis in its business activities on trading and tourism and a European workforce of more than 240.000 employees. The palette of its companies ranges from numerous micro-enterprises all the way to some very large logistics centres. For more than a decade the company has been actively involved in in-company health promotion on the basis of regular corporate health audits. In a whole series of health circles numerous improvements in working conditions could be developed in cooperation with the employees. As a result of these activities – says *Dieter Steinborn* – accident figures could be halved in only a few years. Among the priorities of the company’s health and social policy are the optimisation of the value chain under economic, ecological and humane aspects, the improvement of security in the stores and the integration of ergonomic and health considerations in the investment decisions of the company. In the future – *Dieter Steinborn* points out – the role of the individual health measures and the personal responsibility taken by the employee will get more and more important. This will pose major challenges to *Rewe* in view of their large number of part-time employees.

**Zakład Energetyczny** is a utility company in Poland with headquarters in Toruń where the company employs some 1.400 staff. Until 1993 Zakład Energetyczny was part of the national power company and was then converted into a stock corporation. At the moment – explains *Wiesław Szurmiej* – the company is looking for investors. Occupational safety and health enjoys a high level of priority in the company well exceeding the national minimum standards, according to *Wiesław Szurmiej*. In comparison with companies in Western Europe the development of a corporate culture based on partnership is still very much in its infancy. A major incentive for a stronger culture of involvement and participation is provided by the background conditions demanded by the economy.

**Caixa Geral de Depósitos CGD** is the largest financial group in Portugal with 552 branches in Portugal and 400 branches abroad. It employs 9.552 staff members of which 42% are female. The best example of its partnership culture are the Social Services Department. It is an institution with its own legal statute, having administrative and financial autonomy. It is managed by representatives of the employees and has responsibility for assisting about 45.000 members (employees and families) during illness / general health assistance, sports, recreational / cultural activities. Its health policy currently concentrates on well being with a special focus on psycho-social pressure and physical working conditions. Analysing the causes of time absent of long-term ill employees has, so *Manuela Neto*, clearly indicated psycho-social factors of pressure for two thirds of the concerned employees. The Occupational Medicine Service reacted with measures in three priority areas: stress management, physical exercise, and helping people to give up smoking. In order to be able to evaluate the need and the pressures of the employees concerning psycho-social pressures, a company-wide staff survey was carried out.



# Future challenges to partnership and health in the working world.

**RuhrGas AG**, one of the leading natural gas trading companies in Europe, relies on an employee-centred corporate culture in view of the changing competitive situation in the national and European markets. This, according to the report by *Carl-Sylvius von Falkenhausen*, requires not so much a written outline of corporate values as the consistent implementation of a form of dealing with each other in day-to-day work firmly based on principles of partnership. Under the motto "Focus on People" the human resources management at RuhrGas AG has pooled a number of different measures designed to bring about a continuous and sustainable improvement of the corporate culture based on partnership. The project activities offered support the personal health of the employee and promote employee-oriented management and communications behaviour as well as profit sharing with the employees. The RuhrGas AG offers its employees numerous supportive measures to achieve a favourable work-life-balance. These measures include flexible working hours and provision of day-care and emergency services for children.

**GlaxoSmithKline GSK**, a world-wide operating pharmaceutical and healthcare company, employing over 100.000 people. In the UK alone, GSK has 23 sites. The Employee Health Management Department co-ordinates GSK's Occupational Health, Employee Health Support and Resilience work. The merger of *Glaxo Wellcome* and *Smith Kline Beecham* allowed a review of both legacy companies' approaches to health in the workplace and has afforded the opportunity for new and innovative work. *GlaxoSmithKline's* Mission is to improve the quality of human life by enabling people to do more, feel better and live longer. There is also an emphasis on working towards building a corporate culture which promotes personal and organisational resilience. Personal resilience is characterised by a positive, focused, flexible, organised and proactive attitude in the context of work life balance, physical health and mental well being. Organisational interventions, in areas such as work practices, management behaviour and work environment, reduce barriers and enable positive health outcomes and sustainable organisational effectiveness. GSK is placing considerable emphasis on the importance of a healthy work life balance. Effective use of population health measures to identify priorities and drive targeted interventions is a key to enhancing health and well being. As a means of identifying health needs, GSK uses a health risk appraisal tool that is offered to all GSK staff. With these aggregate

health profiles, targeted high-risk interventions are developed and implemented. Some examples include smoking cessation, weight management and physical activity interventions. Implementation on the spot is accompanied by Health Improvement Teams in which all parties concerned cooperate.

**Alcoa-Köfém**, a 100 per cent subsidiary of the aluminium producer Alcoa Inc., introduced an employee-oriented production and management system in a comparatively short period of time. *Alcoa-Köfém* offers – so *Istvan Miniska* – possibilities of competitive earnings and a relatively high employment security. According to *Istvan Miniska* the corporate values and objectives promote worker participation and form the basis for an active occupational safety and health policy within the company. The company is also involved at the communal level, cooperating with different city establishments and especially supporting local authority environmental protection programs.

On the basis of the extensive exchange of experience the European network "Enterprise for Health" has identified the following topics for its future work. At the same time they mark important challenges and milestones on the way to creating a corporate culture based on partnership and an in-company health policy.

## The contribution of culture and health to economic success

A corporate culture based on partnership and a health policy coordinated with it can currently only be found in very few companies in Europe. The insight that investments in industrial partnership and health constitute a contribution to value creation and social development is as yet insufficiently developed in many corporate decision-makers. Experience from the EFH member companies illustrates that there are indeed identifiable and quantifiable correlations between employee motivation, customer satisfaction and the economic indicators for the development of productivity and profitability. All the same, measures to improve health and well-being should not be measured exclusively by economic criteria.

## Simultaneous focus on "employee behaviour" and "conditions"

Health-promoting behaviour on the part of staff can only develop in the context of health-promoting working and living conditions. The EFH members therefore share the view that companies should first create the prerequisites for health-promoting employee behaviour especially by way of a personality-promoting design and organisation of the work processes based on a culture of trust and partnership. New forms of work and organisation create new stresses particularly in the psychological field while the old stresses caused by work and the environment are still around. At the same time employees are expected to assume a higher level of personal responsibility in the sense of being "entrepreneurs" in their own right. This includes personal commitment to health issues but also involves support from the company in the areas of "autonomy", "personality development" and "learning".

## Partnership and health at the workplace:

new challenges to management staff. Managers have a major influence on the way in which concepts of partnership and health promotion are implemented and filled with life in companies on a day-to-day basis. It is therefore not enough to convince only the senior executives. The departments responsible for personnel and health policy can – as shown by the experience of EFH member companies – render valuable assistance in integrating the targets of partnership and health into management practice.

## Designing tomorrow's working world today

The changes in the working world generate new topics and challenges that EFH will take up in the future. These include, for example, the need for new forms of work organisation to account for the increasing number of older employees, health-promoting personnel management, striking the right balance between work and private life (Work Life Balance) as well as the necessity to respond to the needs of different groups of employees (heterogeneous workforces in terms of age, gender, nationality, etc.). Added to this must be challenges resulting from mergers and acquisitions as well as the resulting restructuring operations in organisations.

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