

# EXPECTATIONS OF EMPLOYEES ON THE EFFECTS OF THE WORKPLACE HEALTH MANAGEMENT AS A PART OF AN INTERNAL DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT - AN EXPLORATIVE STUDY

Matthias Reich, Csilla Czeglédi, Jürgen Fonger

## INTRODUCTION

In the near future the difficulties in finding skilled workers will exacerbate for Europe's companies especially as a result of the demographic change. Aging societies will lead to a reduced workforce and to a reduced supply of workers at the labour markets. Additionally, the economic pressure on European countries will rise, caused by the globalisation of the markets in general and particularly by the increasing economic strength of e.g. China, which has been extraordinary successful during the last decade, as well as many other emerging countries. These two aspects, among many more others, show exemplarily that it is necessary for the European companies to establish new ways to find and hire the staff with the needed skills and qualifications and to keep their body of personnel. The latter can be supported by several measures of a proper Workplace Health Management (WHM), which is in this part similar to measures of the Diversity Management. Basically, the Diversity Management respects the difference of every member of the organization and aims to use the social and cultural variety of a company to generate competitive advantages and to improve the work effectiveness and efficiency. It is common scientific sense that Diversity is a promising approach into that direction and it allows an "open spirit" within the companies which usually leads to a higher tendency to *entrepreneurship*. This *entrepreneurship* is highly correlated with the ability to be innovative concerning services or products and to improve and accelerate processes.

The conscious care of the body of personnel is a part of a solution for companies to avoid reduced staff capacities caused by early retirement or long-term illness. The WHM measures are an adequate way to encounter

problems followed by a lack of manpower, because they avoid absences from work. These WHM measures could accompany an operational Diversity Management and support systematically the self-care and health care of the employees. Thus the WHM can be seen as an advantage for the companies because it influences positively the perception of the company in general and increases the attractiveness of the company for potential trainees or employees.

Summarized there are many reasons to install WHM measures. However, a systematic process depends on a differentiated knowledge of the Management about what is needed, which processes need to be improved and so on. There are only very few data bases on research results and how the theoretical framework described above could be verified. Away from that, the Management needs detailed information about the concrete processes within its company. A good starting point to get some general, basic insights is to find out the expectations of the employees about which measures are considered to be successful. If the expectation of the employees about a concrete measure is that it will improve the cooperation, it is an appeal for action for the Management. This paper tries to shed some light on the expectations of employees on WHM measures by data which has been recently collected in a survey. By these results a piece of the gap between the theoretical framework and the expected impacts of the measures is filled.

## 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 1.1. Diversity management

The description of the Diversity Management approach and its aspects (Eger et al, 2012) has

been largely explored in nowadays science. Therefore the Diversity Management approach and its essential measures are described in a nutshell with the intention to point out the theoretical context of the survey.

In the scientific literature is no unique definition for diversity. Because diversity is a phenomenon of interest in biological science or social sciences in general each definition focuses on some elements or factors of the certain scientific field. Wagner made a basic, general approach to define diversity in conjunction with social sciences: "Diversity is everything, in which people can be decided from each other... both, externally perceptible as well as subjective differences. Races, gender, age or disabilities belong to the first category; education, religion and lifestyle to the second one." (Wagner/Sepheri, 1999). In conjunction with business management Stuber defines diversity "As a tool of a Companies' Management that includes the sum of measures leading to an acceptance and appreciation of differences by an organisation and to use this differences for the company's success. It is therefore an approach to purposeful internal and external consideration and implementation of all different stakeholders in order to increase the success of a company or organisation." (Stuber, 2004). Obviously one of the most relevant internal stakeholder or resource within a company is its personnel-body. In this sense diversity management measures can increase the success of a company if every member of the organisation is accepted without any prejudices. This leads to a high motivation of the employees and aims to support the willingness to identify with the company and its values. A high level of identification can lead to a high level of motivation and finally to a better performance which is showed in several recent studies (Gansser, Linke, 2013). To show the actuality and meaningfulness of the diversity approach in general, a recent study among the German thirty biggest companies limited by shares (DAX 30 companies) showed exemplarily that there is a strong convincement of the Management that diversity needs to be implemented into the companies. 22 of these companies provided a

central point of contact within the company; even 25 companies signed the "Charta of Diversity" which is a business initiative. By this signature and agreement on the diversity Charta the companies bind themselves to follow the rules of it, i.e. basically to accept the differences of all members of the company and to this as an advantage in order to improve the performance. (Köppel 2013); the patron of business initiative "Charta of Diversity" is the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany Mrs. Merkel and therefore ensures a high level of acceptance and political relevance.

## 1.2. WHM Measures

The Workplace Health Management (WHM) is parted into three pillars (iqpr 2005). The first pillar is the occupational safety, the second the workplace health promotion and the third pillar is the corporate integration management (CIM). About the aspired goal (to examine impacts of the WHM on Diversity) and the purpose of the two other pillars of the WHM, the present examination is limited to measures in the area of the workplace health promotion. The object of the examined workplace health promotion is prevention. This preventive measures are supposed to change the behaviour of the employees toward „healthier lifestyle“ and in the ideal case to have positive impacts on the health of the employees. The measures are divided into behavioral measures and the situational prevention. In the area of behavioral measures among other movement exercises like sport groups, information events (e.g. nutrition), eye examinations, preventive medical check-up, vaccinations (e.g. flu vaccination) and stress management seminars or seminars for personal further development come into consideration (Baumanns & Münch 2010). The field of situational prevention pays attention to ergonomics at the workplace, management of working time, the organization of workflow, nutrition-related measures and health promoting constructional measures. The impacts of WHM measures vary: Obviously there is an impact on the participating employees. But also the public perception of the company is improved, because this

measures stress the intention of the Management to take care of their staff. Finally there is an impact on the perception of the employees who haven't (yet) participated: There will usually be a positive reaction as well.

To manage the diversity of a workforce in practice Roberge M.E. et al. (2011, p. 9) suggest five managerial practices. One part of the practices are training programmes and activities which include team building. The activities carried out in the context of the diversity management are very similar to the measures of the WHM. In fact in some cases they are identical (e.g. high rope courses).

### 1.3. Aim of the survey

The aim of this survey is to examine which actions of the WHM are especially suitable to bring together particular groups within a company. Based on a current study (Gansser, Linke, 2013) for use of the present investigation the following measures have been examined:

- Health care day
- Active breaks
- Back training
- Counselling (Food or life situations)
- Sport groups
- Anti-smoking programs
- Stress- and Self-Management
- Joint participation in competitions
- Fitness studio (financial support to the fee by the employer)
- Coaching (Sport / Fitness)

Most of the surveyed measures can be attributed to the behavioural measures. This is explained by the fact, that in case of the behavioural measures mostly interactions between the participants are necessary or at least possible. While the measures of the situational prevention could also be experienced as an individual. Since the intention of this survey was to find out the possible impacts of the measures on the cooperation among the different groups, the „individually experienced“ measures could be neglected.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The present data was gathered as a part of a survey which was done in Hungary and in Germany in the time between March 2014 and November 2014. Because of the framework of the survey, the data which this article is based on was collected only in Hungary. The survey was done among part-time university students with minimum some years of professional experience by the use of an anonymous online questionnaire which led to 224 evaluable responses (71 men and 153 women). All questioned students have been employees, not employers. The intention was to find out the employees' expectations on the impacts of several WHM measures on the companies. It is important to stress, that only expectations of the employees are relevant in this survey. Obviously this does not explain which measures are needed or considered to be successful after an implementation within the companies' organization. That doesn't mean that every participant knew each measure, neither. However, the expectations of the employees do have an important aspect: As being part of the "practical side" of the company the employees are usually able to estimate which measure would affect the company positively. They typically can also assess which measure might not have the wanted results, because the groups of employees which are addressed by the WHM measures don't want or need a certain measure like this; in the latter case a measure would be counterproductive. So as a first step the opinions or estimations of the employees seem to be a promising approach for the Management during the planning stage of the implementation or extend of a WHM.

Basically, the survey was divided into three parts. In the first part general information and data were gathered. The second part asked for the expectation of the participants at WHM measures that improves the cooperation among disabled and able-bodied employees. The third part dealt with the question, whether the indicated WHM measures are estimated to be a successful tool to improve the cooperation among younger and older employees or not.

The research was done for these two groups of employees, because these two groups of diversity are classified as demographic diversity and thus can occur in all companies and are mostly perceptible for other employees (Kearny, Voelpel, 2012). The group of „younger“ was defined as people aged 40 and younger. About what is meant by the terms “disabled” and “able-bodied” there was no specification within the questionnaire. This was important, because the aim was to examine what different groups exist in the perception of the employees. For instance for some people a “disabled” colleague is somebody who is sitting in a wheelchair, while for other people a colleague is already disabled when he has a visual handicap. About this we waived to fix limits for this group. Each of the two parts (2-3) was divided into two sections: one section was the question if the employees expect an action as suitable to improve the cooperation inside the company as a whole and the other question was about the improvement within the own work-unit. This distinction is important, because there may be differences between the cooperation improvement between different teams, which may have few contact to other teams in the normal work-environment, and the cooperation within teams with many contact between the team-members during the normal work.

For the two groups the same list of measures was given and the participants had to fill in if they agree, not agree or don't know if a certain measure is in their opinion likely to be successful in relation to improve the cooperation of the two groups of employees mentioned above. Therefore any question could be answered with “yes”, “no”, or “I don't know”. In the first part the survey (general information) among other things the type of ownership of the concerned organization was surveyed. For this purpose the participations had four options to answer: 1. “Fully or to a larger part state ownership”, 2. “Multinational company ownership”, 3. “Private ownership with headquarters in this country” and 4. “Other”.

The present study is an explorative study to get a first idea how to establish a consistent follow-up research. The gathered data were prepared with the help of Excel and the software “R”.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Expectations on the improvement of the cooperation among disabled and able-bodied employees

In the second part of the questionnaire the employees were asked to estimate their expectations concerning the cooperation among disabled and non-disabled employees within the companies.

Table 1: Crosstable Ownership / Improvement of the cooperation expected caused by WHM actions

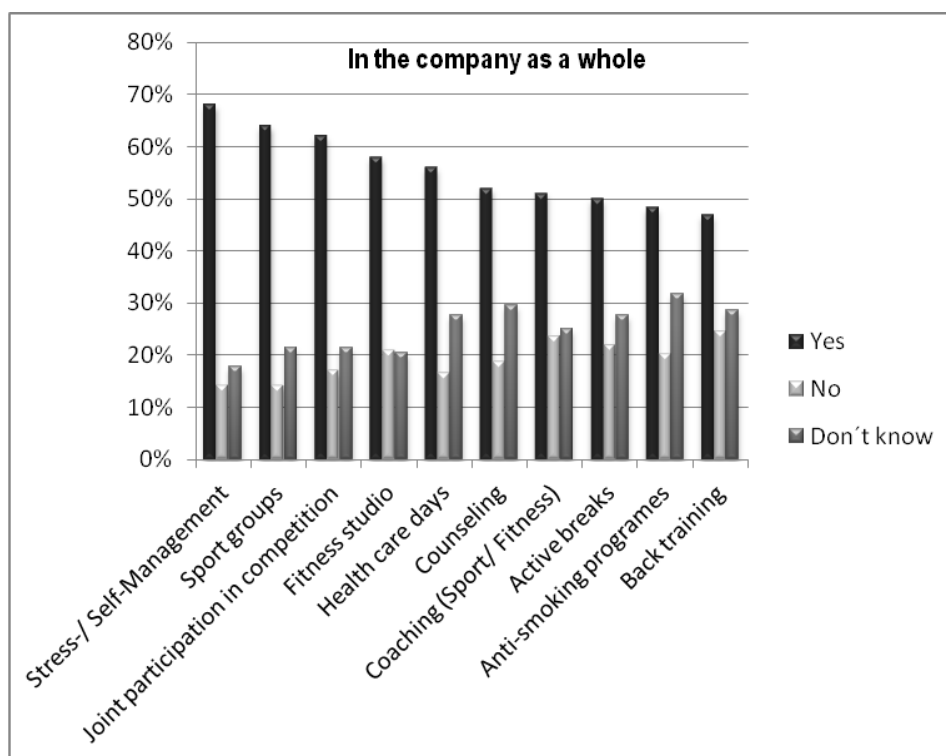
	Disabled / Able-bodied	Company as a whole							
Only "Yes"	Workplace Health Management actions								
Ownership	Health care days	Active breaks	Back training	Counseling	Sport groups	Anti-smoking programmes	Stress-/ Self-Management	Coaching (Sport/Fitness)	Joint participation in competition
Other	1 / 100,0 %	1 / 100,0 %	1 / 100,0 %	1 / 100,0 %	1 / 100,0 %	1 / 100,0 %	1 / 100,0 %	1 / 100,0 %	1 / 100,0 %
State	37 / 57,8 %	35 / 54,7 %	31 / 48,4 %	36 / 56,3 %	40 / 62,5 %	29 / 45,3 %	43 / 67,2 %	34 / 53,1 %	40 / 62,5 %
Multinational	31 / 47,0 %	30 / 45,5 %	31 / 47,0 %	32 / 48,5 %	42 / 63,6 %	28 / 42,4 %	44 / 66,7 %	34 / 51,5 %	41 / 62,1 %
Private	56 / 60,2 %	47 / 50,5 %	42 / 45,2 %	47 / 50,5 %	61 / 65,6 %	50 / 53,8 %	64 / 68,8 %	46 / 49,5 %	56 / 60,2 %
Sum	125 / 55,8 %	113 / 50,4 %	105 / 46,9 %	116 / 51,8 %	144 / 64,3 %	108 / 48,2 %	152 / 67,9 %	115 / 51,3 %	138 / 61,6 %
Chi <sup>2</sup>	9,0537	8,2420	3,1154	2,3877	5,1365	5,5163	3,0677	6,7921	8,0365
d.f.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
p	0,1705	0,2209	0,7942	0,8808	0,5264	0,4794	0,8002	0,3404	0,2354

Source: Own Processing

In table 1 all answers with “Yes” are shown and correlated with the type of ownership of the companies. The total sum of answers (“yes” / “no” / “don’t know”) was 224 in each category. For each WHM action the total rate and the percentage of “yes”-answers is shown. The highest percentage was reached by the stress- and selfmanagement actions. They are assessed as suitable to improve the cooperation in the company as a whole from 67,9 % of the employees. In 68,8 % of the private owned companies the employees have this opinion, while in multinational companies 66,7 % and in state owned companies 67,2 % share this view. There were no significant differences between the different types of ownership of the companies and the WHM actions (in all cases:  $p > 0,05$ ), but we are able to show a tendency how the measures work in

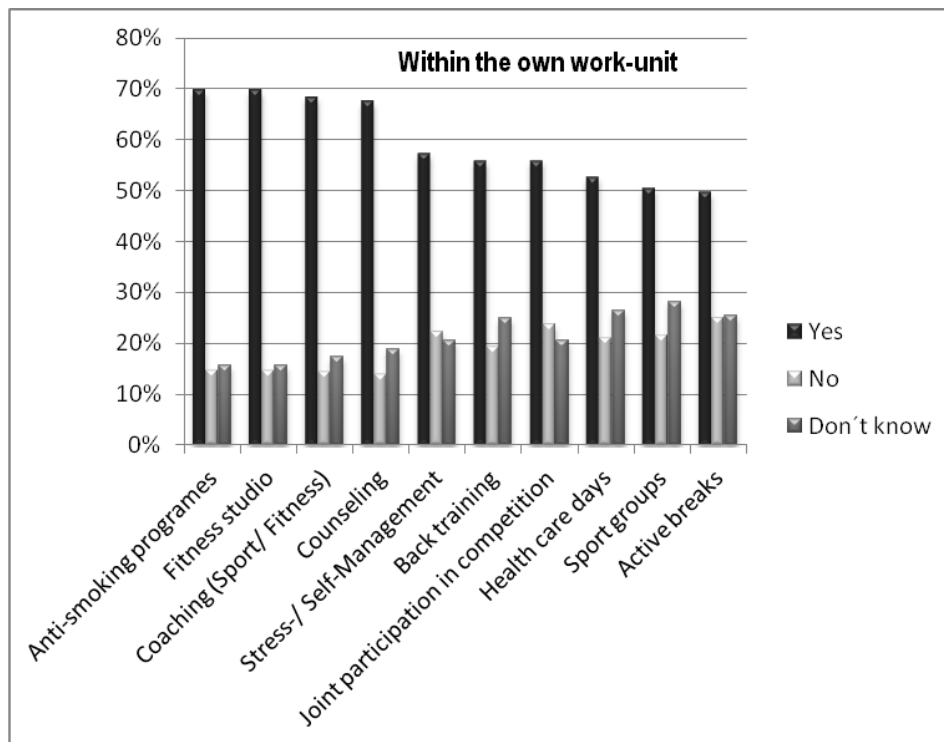
different kinds of companies. The rank of the actions is shown in addition in figure 1. The actions are sorted by the percentage of positive answers. In the case of the expected improvement of the cooperation for the company as a whole the actions in stress- and selfmanagement are the first rank. The next place is reached by actions in sport groups and the third are joint participation in competition. It is important to stress the fact, that in all three cases the opinion of the employees is nearly the same in all categories of companies. This is very different for health care days. While 60,2% of employees in companies with private ownership think this actions are suitable only 47,0 % of employees in multinational companies think the same (similar differences are observable in the measures “active breaks” and “anti-smoking programmes”).

Figure 1: Improvement of the cooperation between disabled and able-bodied employees expected (in the company as a whole)



Source: Own Processing

Figure 2: Improvement of the cooperation between disabled and able-bodied employees expected (within the own work-unit)



Source: Own Processing

As shown in figure 1 and figure 2 most of the actions of the WHM are assessed as suitable to influence the cooperation of disabled and able-bodied in a positive direction by the employees. Nearly all actions are judged with “Yes” by more than 50% of the questioned people. The only two exceptions with less than 50% agreement are anti-smoking programmes and back training in relation to the improvement of the cooperation in the company as a whole. The three favourites of the employees in case of the improvement of the cooperation within the own work-unit are different to the best three actions for improvement for the company as a whole. For the own work-unit anti-smoking programs are at the first place, financial support for fitness studio training takes the second and coaching in terms of sport and fitness the third place. These differences may exist, because for the cooperation improvement in the company as a whole it is the most important thing to get to know each other. This can be achieved by being in the same group of self-management courses or in the same sport group. While being within a team the people are already familiar

with the team members, the actions can be more suitable for smaller groups only (like joint training in the fitness studio).

### 3.2. Expectations on the Improvement of the cooperation among younger and older employees

As the results of the questionnaire relating the actions concerning the cooperation of the younger and older employees improvement for the company as a whole show, the actions “joint participation in competition” and “stress-/selfmanagement” are again among the top-three positions (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4). And the action in sport groups, the third place action of the disabled / able-bodied part, is on the fourth rank. The differences between the different ownership types are large in the case of the “joint participation in competitions” (state: 75 %, multinational: 68,2 % and private: 63,4 %) (Tab. 2). What is strongly deviating to the same action within the group disabled / able-bodied (state: 62,5 %, multinational: 62,1 % and private: 60,2 %).

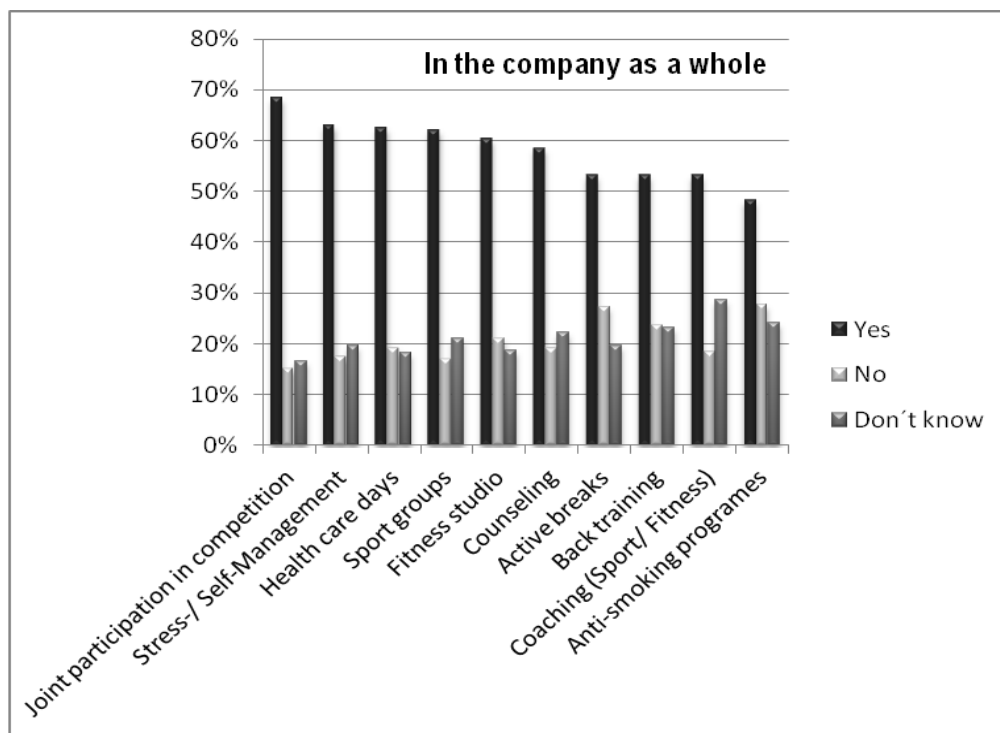
Table 2: Crosstable Ownership / Improvement of the cooperation expected caused by WHM actions

	Younger / Older	Company as a whole							
Only "Yes"	Workplace Health Management actions								
Ownership	Health care days	Active breaks	Back training	Counseling	Sport groups	Anti-smoking programmes	Stress-/ Self-Management	Coaching (Sport/ Fitness)	Joint participation in competition
Other	1 / 100,0 %	1 / 100,0 %	1 / 100,0 %	0 / 0,0 %	1 / 100,0 %	1 / 100,0 %	1 / 100,0 %	1 / 100,0 %	1 / 100,0 %
State	43 / 67,2 %	38 / 59,4 %	36 / 56,3 %	40 / 62,5 %	45 / 70,3 %	33 / 51,6 %	41 / 64,1 %	32 / 50,0 %	48 / 75,0 %
Multinational	36 / 54,5 %	34 / 51,5 %	31 / 47,0 %	40 / 60,6 %	39 / 59,1 %	28 / 42,4 %	42 / 63,6 %	38 / 57,6 %	45 / 68,2 %
Private	60 / 64,5 %	46 / 49,5 %	51 / 54,8 %	51 / 54,8 %	54 / 58,1 %	46 / 49,5 %	57 / 61,3 %	48 / 51,6 %	59 / 63,4 %
Sum	140 / 62,5 %	119 / 53,1 %	119 / 53,1 %	131 / 58,5 %	139 / 62,1 %	108 / 48,2 %	141 / 62,9 %	119 / 53,1 %	153 / 68,3 %
Chi <sup>2</sup>	4,1839	3,3718	2,651	5,8119	4,7962	2,9410	4,0932	6,8375	4,9993
d.f.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
p	0,6517	0,7609	0,8510	0,4445	0,5701	0,8162	0,6640	0,3361	0,5438

Source: Own Processing

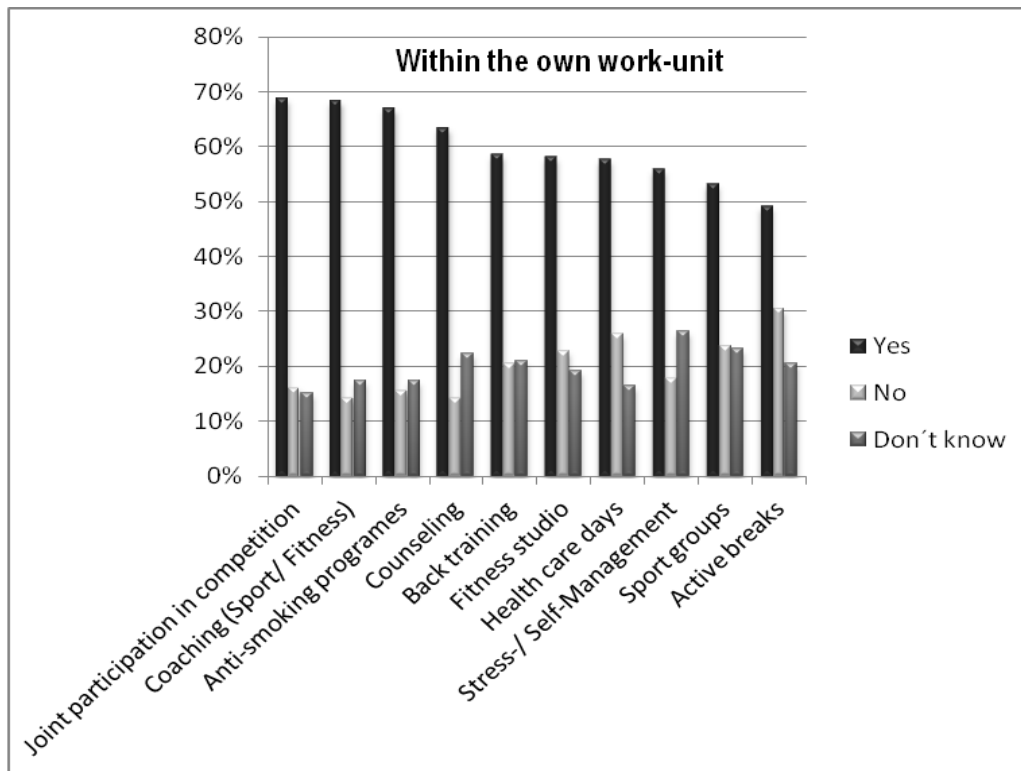
Nearly all actions are more distantly separated between the different types of ownership than the same actions in relation to the group of disabled / able-bodied. Why the employees of the different types of companies think different in these two cases could not be answered at this stage of examination. As in table 1 in table Figure 3: Improvement of the cooperation between younger and older employees expected (in the company as a whole)

2 there also were no significant differences between the different types of ownership of the companies and the WHM actions (in all cases:  $p > 0,05$ ). But we are also able to show a tendency how the measures work in different kinds of companies.



Source: Own Processing

Figure 4: Improvement of the cooperation between younger and older employees expected (within the own-work-unit)



Source: Own Processing

Comparing the ranking of the actions in relation to the improvement of the cooperation “in the company as a whole” and “within the own work-unit” it can be shown that, as for the group of disabled / able-bodied, nearly all actions achieve a positive response of 50 % or more. Interesting is the fact, that the number one position for the company as a whole and within the own work unit is the same (“joint participation in competition”). While the number two (“stress-/selfmanagement”), three (“health care days”) and four (“sport groups”) positions take the last places in the graphic concerning the expectations for the own work-unit the same fact is obvious for the reversed case. About this a similar explanation like for the group disabled / able-bodied seems right.

## CONCLUSION

The expectations of the employees on measures of a WHM, which could support the diversity management, are that these measures will have a positive influence on the companies

in general, as well as on the working units. These expectations base on practical experiences the employees made and there are therefore most likely to depict the real possibilities. WHM measures have the order to be a successful improvement for the companies in general concerning the work atmosphere as well as for the efficiency within the companies. Additionally, it has to be taken into account that the perception of the companies’ environment will be positively influenced, too: customers or potential future employees for example would typically appreciate WHM measures. They show that the company is taking care of their employees in general and is willing to invest by spending time and money in organizing and realizing WHM measures. In a company with a diverse workforce the Diversity Management is a common practice to improve the solidarity of the employees. In many cases the WHM measures are very similar to the activities carried out in the context of the Diversity Management. The main object of this conducted survey was to examine if there exist certain WHM actions which are assessed by



employees as very suitable to improve the cooperation between different groups of employees and as a result support the Diversity Management. It can be stated that in the expectations of the questioned employees the actions of the WHM are very suitable for this purpose. The concrete results differ between different target-groups, different ownership types of the companies and between the cooperation improvement within a work-unit and the company as a whole. The results of this survey show that a manager has to take into account which groups of employees he wants to influence and in what kind of company he works because the impacts of the WHM measures on the employees differ. About the purpose of this examination as an explorative survey, the impacts have to be investigated closer in further studies. Beside the impacts on the employees, the implementation of WHM

measures might be a good possibility for companies to improve their competitiveness and to establish a positive perception by potential (new) customers. A very important aspect in this sense is to find out how to create a strategically approach that allows to use this advantages for the company which could lead to options e.g. for SME to compete at the market successfully.

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**EXPECTATIONS OF EMPLOYEES ON THE EFFECTS OF THE WORKPLACE HEALTH MANAGEMENT AS A PART OF AN INTERNAL DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT - AN EXPLORATIVE STUDY**

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**Abstract**

The expectations of employees on the effects of actions of the Workplace Health Management (WHM) as a part of the Human Resource Management are relevant for a successful implementation within the companies. The diversity approach can be able to improve the cooperation among different groups of employees. In this relation the measures of the WHM can support the existing Diversity Management efforts of a company. A successful Diversity Management has to meet the expectations of the employees. Therefore the Management needs to know what the employees expect from measures to be implemented in order to improve the performance of the companies. The theoretical framework of the Diversity Management in general, the Work Health Management (WHM) measures and the results of a survey carried out among Hungarian employees and their expectations on a WHM are depicted within this paper. As important diversity groups the expectation on effects of the WHM actions on the groups of disabled / able-bodied employees and the groups of younger / older employees are examined. For all groups the cooperation exchange within the own work-unit and in the company as a whole is surveyed. As a result for all groups the most recommendable actions, in consideration of the employees, could be determined.

**Keywords:** Diversity; Work Health Management; employees' expectations; Human Resource Management

**JEL Classification:** M1, M5