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Good Practices in Social Security

Good practice in operation since: 2009

Information and Knowledge Platform of the BGHW: BGHW-INWI

A case of the Institution for statutory accident insurance and prevention for Trade and Merchandise Distribution (BGHW)

Winner of the ISSA Good Practice Award – Europe competition 2010

Institution for statutory accident insurance and prevention for Trade and Merchandise Distribution (BGHW)
Germany

Summary

The Information and Knowledge Platform (BGHW-INWI) of the Institution for statutory accident insurance and prevention for Trade and Distribution (Berufsgenossenschaft Handel und Warendistribution (BGHW)) provides its employees with effective support in their work. Managing the flood of information and knowledge in the way described makes the BGHW more effective and more efficient. And because it has valid information at its disposal, the BGHW can minimise production risks. The BGHW has made it possible for staff to access the knowledge they need to provide the services in the right quantity and quality, in a structured manner, and fast – within seconds.

In addition, the system described has made information and knowledge management a firmly established part of the work creation process, tying our workforce tightly into the knowledge circuit.

The most significant conclusion is that the Platform is accepted and perceived as valuable by those who use it. This is clear from the positive feedback and the many suggestions for its further development which are received from the workforce.

The model also shows that, with very little financial outlay, the experience and expertise of staff members can be harnessed to the considerable benefit of any organisation.

CRITERIA 1:

What was the issue/problem/challenge addressed by your good practice?

Information and knowledge management at the BGHW – A practical example

Information and knowledge are essential to the efficient and effective performance of tasks. The BGHW has devised a model for communicating information and knowledge successfully within the organisation.

As part of the "Information and Knowledge Management at the BGHW" project we analysed the starting situation and explored the relevant parameters. It was ascertained here that changes in the law were happening at an unprecedentedly fast pace and in ever-shorter cycles. These necessitated adjustments to business processes and the organisation's structures.

Against this background we realised that we needed an efficient system of information and knowledge management to help us provide a more effective and better customised service.

The priority aim of BGHW-INWI's project design is to make high-quality practical knowledge available to our employees rapidly. A further focus is on stemming the tide of daily information and compressing it.

One main reason for the success of our Information and Knowledge Platform, which has been operational and in use by our service personnel since 21 April 2009, is that all BGHW staff were

involved in developing the Platform and continue actively to shape it by their suggestions for changes and/or additions.

What are the challenges for administrative organisations?

Staff of administrative departments are exposed to an ever-increasing flood of information (circulars, amendments to laws, e-mails, etc). And information and knowledge are stored and managed in different ways within an organisation.

The main points of relevance here may be summed up as follows:

- explosion of knowledge, that is to say a constant increase in the amount of knowledge and information available;
- the useful life of knowledge and information is becoming shorter;
- information and communication technology is constantly evolving;
- information is often unclear, unstructured and too voluminous. There are no proper communication standards.

The Information and Knowledge Platform offers a tried and tested practical model which meets these challenges.

CRITERIA 2:

What were the main objectives and the expected outcomes?

Our aims

The BGHW came into being on 01 January 2008 as the result of a merger between the Institution for statutory accident insurance and prevention for the Retail Trade (BGE) and the Wholesale Trade and Warehousing (GroLa BG). It currently employs about 1,800 people nationwide in two head offices and twelve branch offices.

The introduction of an Information and Knowledge Platform, central here to the services we provide, had the further objective, in addition to easing the workload on staff and building their skills, of creating a common information portal around the time of the merger, which not only provided uniform information content and standards but also, through this shared project, helped to strengthen the identity of the new BGHW.

Against this background, the aims of the project may be defined as follows:

- to bundle the practical knowledge relevant to our organisation in one single medium;
- to provide a homogeneous knowledge base for our service personnel by moving from personal to pooled knowledge of the organisation;
- to speed up access to information and knowledge;
- to improve staff information security;

- to improve the quality of our decision-making and service;
- to promote a modern culture of knowledge (pooled knowledge rather than sovereign knowledge), freely exchanging information in-house and involving users as critical shapers of the model;
- to support our employees and lighten their workload; our model is user-driven;
- to make better use of our resources.

We have been able to achieve these objectives thanks to positive support from our workforce and a process of change management which typifies our corporate culture.

CRITERIA 3:

What is the innovative approach/strategy followed to achieve the objectives?

Realisation of the BGHW-INWI Platform was accompanied by numerous strategic considerations, essentially:

- "TOM" model (Technik, Organisation, Mensch): Technology (intranet) – Organisation (incorporating processes into everyday operations) – People (German Mensch) (developing a corporate culture which supports knowledge-sharing);
- procedures to make implicit knowledge explicit;
- push-and-pull mechanisms for the pooling of information and knowledge;
- incentives to motivate the project team and workforce;
- targeted use of knowledge tools (knowledge articles, yellow pages, knowledge maps, methods of best practice, etc.).

Our overall strategy for achieving our objectives is as follows:

The BGHW has introduced an "Information and Knowledge" unit into its organisational structure. This acts as a central control centre for communicating information and knowledge to the BGHW's service personnel. It is also closely linked to the other areas of the BGHW's activity, to ensure that these have information that is up to date.

An outline of its organisational structure is given below:

- Information sources (esp. employees, audits, legal rulings, etc.) are linked in, to ensure a broad flow of information.
- The knowledge manager (editor) for the Information and Knowledge Unit sifts through internal and external sources of information and identifies relevant information for our data processing staff. Contributions are regularly provided by our staff who learn and evaluate in the course of their practical work.
- The knowledge manager then places the new information on our Platform, presenting it efficiently (compressed and optimised for viewing) and in a manner geared to users' needs.

- All service personnel receive, from the whole flood of information, only that which is truly relevant to them. And our data processing staff are able to process new work information quickly and simply.

This lightens the workload of our workforce on a permanent basis! Unstructured information, imprecise references and randomly located bits of information are now a thing of the past.

The Knowledge Platform forms the heart of our operational model.

- On the Knowledge Platform BGHW staff have, jointly with the Information and Knowledge Unit, pooled their experience and specialist knowledge and arranged it for easy navigation (knowledge map).
- In this way we have smart linking (semantic networks) of numerous types of practical content and information sources which all service personnel can use intuitively.
- All BGHW staff can search, by subject areas and through databases, for hard information on which to act. As a rule we allow ourselves 30 seconds to come up with relevant information. This is made possible by a three-pronged search method:
 - structured search (intuitive, in a systematic context, and "ambient learning");
 - by keyword;
 - by document number.

CRITERIA 4:

Have the resources and inputs been used in an optimal way to implement the practice?

Here too the strength of our BGHW-INWI Platform project is apparent. The construction of our Platform has required few material resources, using overwhelmingly non-material resources instead. The project costs are thus very modest.

A brief list of how these resources have been allocated:

- By recruiting in-house the BGHW found 30 staff members from our branch offices who embody the expertise available within the BGHW and pool it on a shared platform. This heightened the feeling of "all pulling together" and enhanced the reputation of the individual staff members concerned.
- These staff members were not seconded specifically to this task, but performed it in addition to their routine work. This shows the high degree of enthusiasm for the project.
- Technical implementation of the project was via an existing intranet. There were no additional costs.
- Material costs were limited to travel expenses for business trips and modest bonus payments to the branch office staff members involved.

CRITERIA 5:

What impact/results have been achieved so far?

Our new Information and Knowledge Platform is a decisive factor in the BGHW's success! We find that the work of processing information is faster.

- this makes for a targeted, legitimate and fast service and enables staff to act independently on their own initiative;
- better use is made of the knowledge available (no reinventing the wheel);
- it avoids duplication and different ways of handling work processes;
- there is more time for innovative case management;
- staff ambient learning is intensified and their skills are enhanced;
- we make our knowledge uniquely transparent and motivate staff by enhancing their skills;
- we can integrate new staff members more quickly into our way of doing things.

This saves time, cuts costs, improves the quality of our service and enables us to be more innovative.

In addition, the positive feedback from our workforce and the many suggestions we have received from users for changes and/or additions make it clear that the BGHW-INWI Platform has arrived!

CRITERIA 6:

What lessons have been learned from the introduction of this good practice?

If a new product is to be accepted and successful it is very important that details of the project should be well communicated and that all staff members should be interconnected and involved in any innovative measure in-house. This also makes the job more fun :-)) and enables people to identify more closely with their employer. The financial cost is less important here.

CRITERIA 7:

To what extent would your good practice be appropriate for replication by other social security institutions?

Our model could be meaningfully replicated in any organisation where information and knowledge, as well as the usual production factors, are of decisive importance. What matters most is not technical or financial resources, but strategy-based action coupled with active change management and positive project communication.

Within the BGHW we have initiated another project entitled "Information and Knowledge Management for Prevention", which builds on the BGHW-INWI model. Similar plans are afoot, based on our success to date, for the BGHW's computer services. These too show that our model is eminently reproducible.