Improving co-operation between the Unemployment Insurance Fund, the Regional Employment Service and the Swiss National Accident Insurance Fund

A case of the Suva

Suva
Switzerland
Summary

Co-operation and networking across institutions is an essential factor in successful occupational reinsertion. The customer (always an accident victim in the context of what follows) should be able to benefit from as comprehensive a service as possible from social insurance institutions.

When unemployment and accident come together accident victims are faced with an accumulation of problems. In Switzerland the situation is made even worse since in such cases several separate independent bodies have a role to play: the Regional Employment Service, the Unemployment Insurance Fund and the Swiss National Accident Insurance Fund. In the past there was scarcely any co-ordination between any of the processes, which led to an inefficient use of resources and dissatisfied accident victims. Insurance benefits were unnecessarily high because accident victims had to concentrate all their efforts on obtaining benefits instead of recovering the ability to work quickly.

To address this situation the processes of all the institutions were merged into a single process focussed on the accident victim. Aids for simplified electronic communication were developed, process owners were defined and staff awareness was promoted.

This improvement scheme enabled accident victims to benefit from unbureaucratic advice and support across the institutions involved, staff expanded their own knowledge through training courses and increased satisfaction, effectiveness and efficiency was achieved as a result of process improvements.

CRITERIA 1

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

A total of four problem areas were identified. They were legal, organisational, procedural and economic in nature.

Under Swiss legislation the Swiss National Accident Insurance Fund is now responsible for loss of earnings payments in the case of a person working in Switzerland who has suffered an accident, replacing the unemployment insurance fund that was previously responsible. This requires co-ordination between various institutions. A co-ordinated approach is also necessary if a person employed in Switzerland has an accident which makes it impossible for them to return to their original activity and new unemployment benefit has to be paid.

The three institutions involved, the Unemployment Insurance Fund (examination of benefit entitlement and payment of benefits), the Regional Employment Service (advice for the person seeking employment) and the accident insurance fund (responsible in case of accident) all have completely different organisational forms. The Unemployment Insurance Fund is organised on
an association basis, the Regional Employment Service is a cantonal administrative institution and the Accident Insurance Fund is a national statutory institution.

A person who is already unemployed or who becomes unemployed as a result of an accident needs rapid uncomplicated advice and support otherwise there is a risk of a delay in regaining the capacity to work. Since all three institutions up to then had defined their own processes and these processes took an internal administrative view they overlapped at various points and the overall view of the common aim of regaining the capacity to work was missing. Furthermore these uncoordinated ways of working led to dissatisfaction on the part of accident victims, were inefficient and had led to additional economic costs.

CRITERIA 2

What were the main objectives and the expected outcomes?

As described above, the primary aim was to standardise the differing processes in each institution and design the focus on the customer such that accident victims received simplified access to their information and benefits and regained their capacity to work sooner thanks to clearly defined responsibilities and co-ordinated processes.

Average costs per accident would thus be reduced and reinsertion rates, customer satisfaction and case-handling efficiency would be increased.

The process design was to meet data protection regulatory requirements and be understood, accepted and implemented by the staff of all three institutions as quickly as possible.

CRITERIA 3

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

After a working group was formed with representatives from all three institutions and a competent project leader was appointed, the first step was to analyse the existing situation. This entailed each institution documenting their processes and presenting them to the other institutions. Once the overlap points had been defined and the aims were clear, the three process sets were merged into a common customer-focussed process.

At this stage it was important that the representatives of each institution was prepared to lay aside their own administrative view and define the common process from the customer's point of view. On the basis of this process aids such as electronic data exchange possibilities were created, data protection agreements worked out and a hot-line created for simplified communication. Moreover both process and aids had to be implemented in all three institutions.
To increase acceptance, workshops were held in addition to training courses to clarify questions of co-operation and at the same time promote mutual understanding. Finally persons responsible for co-operation in each institution were appointed who were also responsible for the sustainability of the scheme. This is done though an exchange of experience every six months.

One fact was of decisive importance in the whole scheme: the support of the directors of the three institutions who showed the will to move in new directions and give up old approaches even against internal resistance. Without their conviction success would hardly have been possible.

The success factors in this scheme can be summed up in the following points:

- Merging three processes of different institutions -> common process as basis.
- Development of aids -> supporting measures
- Sustainability -> Responsibilities and exchange of experience
- Training courses -> Lessons learnt/increase in acceptance
- Supported by each of the directors -> 'Management attention' (senior management buy-in)

CRITERIA 4

Have the resources and inputs been used in an optimal way to achieve the set objectives and the expected outcomes? Please specify what internal or external evaluations of the practice have taken place and what impact/results have been identified/achieved so far.

Only staff from all three institutions were used (including the project leader). It was possible to keep the resource effort for this scheme small with a total of 28 working days (not counting training effort) and the ratio of effort to yield achieved (not only in monetary terms) is proving to be gratifyingly positive.

The successes achieved include the following:

- Through a common process accident victims are experiencing a lessening in the administrative burden and co-ordinated advice across all institutions. The initial positive customer feedback has confirmed this.

- The new process has reduced overlaps between the institutions to a minimum and led to a more thorough and continuous process. The new process also guarantees data protection.
requirements. Clearly defined responsibilities are leading to an optimisation in work capacity recovery and thus to lower costs through improved efficiency.

- Staff were able to expand to expand their own knowledge through the common training courses and workshops and have less of an administrative burden thanks to the mutual electronic exchange of data. Sustainability was guaranteed through the newly defined process responsibilities and the six-monthly experience exchange groups.

Result: in the canton of Berne alone 530 insured persons per year (nation-wide a potential of approximately 6,000) are benefiting from these results, 120 staff received further training through workshops and training courses, there has been increased efficiency through the optimal use of electronic aids, there is an improvement in quality through clear, standard, mutually accepted processes and quality assurance is guaranteed through the appointment of process owners.

It was possible to reduce the number of indemnified days lost by 4,039 from 2014 to 2015. This corresponds to an annual saving of approximately CHF 600,000 with a nation-wide annual potential saving of approximately CHF 6.8 million. These looked-for results were confirmed at six-monthly experience exchange groups.

CRITERIA 5

What lessons have been learned? To what extent would your good practice be appropriate for replication by other social security institutions?

In the initial phase, namely the analysis of the existing situation, it was found that assumptions by institutions about the other institutions were wrong to some extent, which had led to inefficient approaches in co-operation being adopted. In addition, gaps in knowledge about data protection became apparent, which were able to be plugged by involving the data protection managers.

However, the central finding was that each institution had been focussing on its own administrative tasks and concentrating on its own processes to the exclusion of the other institutions.

The idea that resources should be better used to help accident victims regain their ability to work instead of overcoming bureaucratic obstacles was not widespread. It was possible to break down this institution-centred thinking through the forging of a common process and focussing thinking on the customer.

The result, namely that institutions with specific legal missions and differing organisational models can adapt, co-ordinate and redirect their processes focussing on the customer on their own initiative, can serve as an example for many more similar improvement schemes. It shows what is possible when people are prepared to pursue a common overall aim.
The approach adopted would be suitable for any situation requiring co-operation across institutions. It is important that all institutions involved in an improvement scheme are equally represented, 'management attention' (senior management buy-in) is completely guaranteed in all institutions and management is also prepared to push the scheme through in the face of internal administrative resistance.