

# Finland

## “Echo Project” in the Regional Tax Office of Uusimaa



**THE STATE TREASURY**

### **Ten years ago...**

The State Treasury is a multiple service bureau that consists of three profit centres: Finance, Insurance and Administrative Management. The bureau handles the State's internal finance and treasury administration, pension security and compensation, as well as military injuries and veterans' affairs. Besides, it works on the renewal of administrative control systems, produces personnel administrative support services, and contributes to workplace health promotion of the State's personnel. Ten years ago a workplace health promotion (WHP) model was put into use. The WHP model aimed to integrate occupational health and safety and rehabilitation more efficiently into the daily routines by developing network processes.

### **Ten years later...**

To test the WHP model of the company an “echo project” was started in 1999 at the Uusimaa regional tax office. The Finnish Tax Administration comprises of the National Board of Taxes and 9 regional tax offices. The Uusimaa regional tax office has centralised tasks. The staff consists of 1600 tax professionals. According to a questionnaire, the supervisors had difficulties, e.g. in reacting to unduly long working days for the employees, increased sick leave and decreased work competence. The echo project was part of the State government platform that emphasises WHP aiming to decrease the risks for early retirement.

### **Bringing up the threats of workability**

The objective of the preventive “echo project” was to bring up the threats of worsened work ability at an early stage and to launch supportive action or rehabilitation when needed. The participants were the personnel of one regional tax office consisting of 14 local offices. The implementation took place according to the project plan. The echo project lasted for 2 years and it was reported in May 2001.

### **Why the Uusimaa regional tax office?**

The Uusimaa regional tax office was chosen as the pilot office, because it already had good staff policy models regarding education, rehabilitation and improvement of professional skills. All state workplaces have educated coordinators for health and safety as well as for rehabilitation. The echo project was executed in co-operation (and with the purpose of improving co-operation) between the regional tax office of Uusimaa, the State Treasury and the occupational health care units.

Four persons formed the project team: one representative each from the State Treasury and occupational health care unit, one worker representative from the regional tax office as well as one personnel administration representative. Tax administration experts and problem-solving oriented experts were consulted.

### **The project features**

The State Treasury provided more financial resources for work ability

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FINNISH TAX ADMINISTRATION



assessments that were performed with “speed-up” time schedule in the rehabilitation unit of the Central Hospital. The personnel of the regional tax office were informed widely about the echo project to lower the threshold to bring up problems. Information was given once for all regional tax offices and in eight local briefings. It was emphasised that the aim of the project was to support the employees’ work ability, not to dig out problems. Also leaflets were distributed. During the project, its progress was reported to the executive group to increase commitment to the project. As WHP action a common follow-up model was developed for the occupational health care units (including sick leave, reasons for the problem-solving meeting, and participation in the echo project as well as early-stage rehabilitation). A model of bringing up problems was developed as a tool for the supervisors.

### **Looking at the positive results**

Co-operation, confidence and discussions between employer, employee and occupational health care increased. Rehabilitation was focused on measures to improve work ability, while a model of active, early-stage rehabilitation was developed in order to learn from each case. It turned out to be possible to prevent situations from worsening. Simply knowledge of a support option was helpful. Even if the employee did not need it, it increased the experience of work ability. The results were reported to the executive group.

### **Learning lessons for the future**

Management training regarding the recognition of the needs for support and the ability to discuss problems with employees is needed. Problem-solving meetings and follow-up measurements need to be developed. In the near future the “echo-model” will be implemented in the entire Tax Administration.