# Sick at Work

## **What is it all about?**

In the workplace, we have had extremely rising incapacity for work figures of up to 20% throughout the entire area over a long period of time. All the measures taken up to that point did not lead to a reduction in the numbers to normal levels. As a project manager from the operational area, I was then responsible for investigating the situation in more detail. In coordination with all supervisors, works council and HR, I was allowed to evaluate comprehensive, anonymized data from approx. 70 teams (larger than 5 employees) over 2 years. The result was very surprising for many, but also came to a clear conclusion

## **Facts**

The following aspects and their influence on the disease rate were investigated:

* Average age of the team
* Fluctuation in the team
* how many organizational movements were there in the team in the evaluated period
* how many supervisor changes have there been in the evaluated period?
* Leadership experience of the team leader
* Age of the team leader
* Satisfaction factor of the last employee survey
* Training rate per team
* Training rate of the team leader regarding leadership

One can summarize the result briefly, none of the **above factors was correlated**  with the **incapacity** **figures of the respective team**, not in the beginning and not with much imagination. The result was very surprising for everyone (for BR, HR, superiors and for the employees), as they had suspected otherwise.

A special partial evaluation was very interesting. Looking at the AU figures over time, one thing was very clear. If the number of incapacity for work in a team starts to increase, starting with incapacity for work of 1-3 days (without a medical certificate, with special patterns, such as Friday, Monday or important dates) and the team leader ignores this and does not start to deal with the numbers and the affected employees and the team and the team situation, then he has about 1-2 months before the disability figures completely run away. This was clearly evident from the evaluation. It seems that there is a dynamic in the team that needs to be recognized early, otherwise the situation will escalate.

Here are a few approaches as to why this is probably the case:

* It seems that the individual in the team does not feel seen and/or feels overloaded
* after a while, the whole team doesn't see each other and/or feels overloaded
* the work of the people who are in AU must be taken over by the others
* Bosses are starting to burden their top performers even more, because they assume that they will make it, they have always done it. But when they start to fail, their work has to be delegated to non-top performers, which often leads to complete overheating of individuals and the entire team
* the unseen, overworked employees then quickly become negative mood multipliers
* Team leaders throw themselves into the day-to-day business and do micro management and/or run from meeting to meeting and from one important appointment to the next

## **Conclusion**

* In difficult situations, the team leader should be 150% there for his people, the team will thank him or not. This means that when the pressure on the boiler rises, the team leader should not hide behind work, technology, meetings and appointments; now he is in demand as a leader. Supporting his people, coaching them and, as captain, giving them direction and perspective and not digging into the day-to-day business and driving everyone crazy. If the team leader is in the same situation with his colleagues at the same level (peers), it is not surprising if he loses contact with his people. In this case, the higher-level supervisor should think about whether everything is going right in his team of *his direct reports* and whether he is there enough for his people and supports them and does not mutate into a "meter reader" (exaggerated reporting). The solution to the riddle means that as a supervisor you are first and foremost "captain and coach", especially in difficult times, this will prove to be an advantage for everyone.
* There were 2 or 3 teams out of 70 teams that did not follow any rules, nor was there a certain pattern recognizable. After a more close, individual examination of these teams, it was finally possible to conclude that there was a certain, let's call it "non-compatibility" between team and team leader. In such cases, I think it is wise to reconsider the "mating".
* International teams in which the team leader is not regularly on site (remote management) also showed negative tendencies, which would be logical, since the team leader travels more than he can take care of his people. Ultimately, however, these affected teams were not conclusively investigated