



**School of Business,  
Economics and Law**  
UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

# **The Interaction between Health Promotion Providers and their Users**

## **-A Study of Nine Swedish Companies-**

**Bachelor Thesis in Business Administration,  
Management Accounting**

**School of Business, Economics and Law,  
University of Gothenburg.  
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Elin Nordbris

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Gothenburg, the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, 2009

# Abstract

**Bachelor Thesis in Business Administration, Management Accounting. School of Business, Economics and Law, at University of Gothenburg. Spring 2009**

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**Title:** The Interaction between Health Promotion Providers and their Users – A Study of Nine Swedish Companies

**Background & Problem Discussion:** The extent of ill health is an alarmingly concern in Sweden today. Health promotion is a method of maintaining and improving individuals' health and might be a contributory factor in order to reverse the negative health trend. Worksite health promotion implies the work of health and creating a healthy workplace. Hence, it can be seen as an interaction between two actors; health promotion providers and health promotion users. Today we know little about the interaction, therefore, we consider this topic of current interest and see an opportunity in investigating it further.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this thesis is to illustrate investments in health promotion from two opposite angels. That is, to elucidate the interaction between health promotion providers and health promotion users and to clarify possible benefits a company can achieve by investing in health promotion.

**Delimitations:** In this thesis we will merely focus on the physical aspects of ill health, and not discuss the impact of poor psychological health.

**Methodology:** A qualitative approach is used in order to elucidate the interaction between health promotion providers and their users. The empirical data is collected through semi structured interviews with respondents from nine different companies and is evaluated in the analysis.

**Results and Conclusions:** The study shows that the interaction between health promotion providers and health promotion users is of great importance since they are dependent upon each other. Many companies are in need of help from health promotion providers to be able to create a healthy workplace. However, since it is difficult to measure the outcome of investments in employee health, some companies cannot see the value in investing, hence, they see merely costs. Further, the providers are in need of companies investing in health promotion to pursue their business activities. Hence, it is their challenge to show the benefits and motivate companies to invest in health promotion.

**Suggestions for Further Research:** When writing the thesis focus has been on companies that are doing some kind of health promoting investment. One suggestion for further research would be to examine companies that are not investing in health promotion, and try to explain their reasons for not doing investments.

## Glossary

**Couch Potato:** A person who spends most of his or her free time sitting or lying on a couch.

**Folkhälsoinstitutet:** Swedish National Institute of Public Health.

**Försäkringskassan:** Social Insurance Office

**Health:** Physical, psychological and social well being.

**Health account:** Way of accounting health investments.

**Health coach:** A person giving guidance, advice and coaching regarding health.

**Health contribution:** Monetary contribution in order to promote health activities.

**Health examination:** Analysis of a person's physical and/or psychological health status.

**Health investment:** Spending money on employee health.

**Health promoting company:** Used as a synonym of health promotion provider.

**Health promotion:** The process of maintaining health and preventing ill health.

**Health promotion control:** Adjustment and management of health promotion.

**Health promotion provider:** A company offering health promoting services to other companies.

**Health promotion user:** A company investing in health promotion.

**Healthy:** Being fit or lack of illness.

**Ill health:** Lack of health caused by bodily or mental disease or an unhealthy lifestyle.

**Morbidity:** State of illness.

**Physical inactive person:** A person who does not fulfill the universal recommendations of physical activity.

**Skatteverket:** National Tax Board

**Worksite health promotion:** The process of maintaining health and preventing ill health of the employees.

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# 1 Introduction

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*The purpose of this opening chapter is to give the reader an introduction of the subject of this thesis and to give reasons to why health promotion at the workplace is a present topic of interest in today's society. Through the background we want to create an understanding of modern-day ill health. Our problem discussion, which is based on statements in the background, forms the basis of the thesis' purpose and has the intention of explaining the approach which constitutes the foundation of this thesis.*

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**“Those who think they have no time for bodily exercise will sooner or later have to find time for illness”**

–Edward Stanley  
([www.health.harvard.edu](http://www.health.harvard.edu))

## 1.1 Background

There have been great changes in the human being's way of living. People who lived during the stone-age had to exert themselves physically to chase and collect their food. Eating was an act to survive and physical activity was naturally a part of people's everyday life. Today, a big part of the population, especially people living in developed countries, goes by e.g. car or bus to their, often sedentary, works. They eat lunch in front of their computers and when the workday is over they go home and spend the evening in front of the television or computer. Even though the way of living has changed substantially, the human body still has the same need of physical activity. One further concern can be identified, while people are getting less and less active they eat even more, which in combination indicates an unhealthy lifestyle. (Ljusenius & Rydqvist, 2004)

The above mentioned physical concerns, in combination with increasingly psychological pressure, are alarming threats to society health. In Sweden today, ill health is a present topic of interest. Ill health is for example reflected in the fact that a large number of the Swedish population is overweighted, suffering from obesity or psychological dissatisfaction. Furthermore, an unhealthy lifestyle is a contributory factor to several diseases as for instance, type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. ([www.socialstyrelsen.se](http://www.socialstyrelsen.se)) The cost of ill health has escalated during the past two or three decades, causing health to become a priority for governments and their policymakers (Roslender et al., 2007). Ill health is affecting the whole society, directly or indirectly, thus, it is of social interest to find a solution to the problem.

Physical activity is in general a main part of health promotion and has, just like a healthy lifestyle, proved to be a contributory factor to reduce the risk of many of our national diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes and obesity. Physical activity can also improve an individual's well being and psychological health. Despite the positive impact exercise has on health, not more than 40% of the Swedish population, aged 18-64 years, exercise on a regularly basis (Bolin & Lindgren, 2006). Further, more than one third of the Swedes are completely physical inactive and 45% of the population is overweight or suffer from obesity, according to a survey made by the Folkhälsoinstitutet in 2008 ([www.fhi.se](http://www.fhi.se)). Consequently, an increase of physical activity might decrease ill health and reduce the number of sick leave. (Schäfer Elinder & Faskunger, 2006)

A dilemma threatening society in general, but also its companies, is the gigantic costs of ill health. The Swedish society's cost of physical inactivity is about 6 billion SEK a year

including costs of decline in production and medical costs (Bolin & Lindgren, 2006). To many people, the workplace represents one of the most significant places in life. A person capable of working spends about one-third of its time at work. Studies indicate that as much as 50% of the morbidity and 3% of the total loss of life years may be attributed to working conditions (Roslender et al., 2007). Further, it is important that employers act responsibly and put effort in creating a healthy workplace. In order to achieve a sustainable improvement in health, according to Roslender et al. (2007), it is indispensable for companies to have a participative approach that intends to enable employees to increase their control over the determining factors of health. According to Andersson et al. (2004), it should be of employers' interest to invest in employee health, since people with poor health can imply a high risk and large costs to the company. However, many companies are for profit, hence, before investing they want to make sure that there is a possible outcome for the company. Consequently, it can sometimes be hard to motivate companies to invest in employee health since it is difficult to measure and prove the financial benefits. Thus, in an ordinary annual report, usually there is only an account showing the costs of the investment and no one showing the revenues it generates. (Andersson et al., 2004)

There are different ways of investing in employee health, thus, one method is to use worksite health promotion. One can consider worksite health promotion as an interaction between two actors; health promotion providers and health promotion users. Health promotion providers are companies offering health promoting services to other companies, and health promotion users are companies investing in health promotion. Health promotion can imply different kinds of services as for instance, physical activity, dietary coaching, stress management, alcohol and smoking cessation, and weigh loss programs (Angelöw, 2002).

## 1.2 Problem Discussion

The previous presented background illustrates the alarming extent of ill health in today's society, thus, action needs to be taken in order to reverse the negative health trend. Since many people spend an essential part of their time at work, the workplace plays an important role concerning the health of individuals. Hence, the employer needs to act responsibly in order to overcome the threat.

The fact that many companies are doing health investments could mean that they see an opportunity in the investments, that is, the investment can create positive outcomes for the company. However, there are still companies not investing in health promotion. One reason for not investing might be the complexity and the difficulty in finding proper incentives to invest in health. Since it tends to be hard to distinguish the financial outcomes related to specific health investments, it is a complex issue showing the financial outcome of the investment.

Today there are plenty of health promotion providers offering health promoting services to companies and aiming at helping them create a healthier workplace. Many health promotion providers have the belief that a well designed and structured investment in health promotion most certain will generate revenues to the company. Further, there are different kinds of health promotion providers offering a variety of health promoting services. Some companies specialize in physical activity and dietary coaching, while others have a wider concept also including for example medical care, psychology and alcohol and smoking cessation.



However, today we know little about the interaction between providers and users and there is little research made on the topic. Therefore, we consider this issue of current interest and see an opportunity in investigating it further.

### 1.3 Research Questions

Regarding to what was mentioned in the problem discussion, the following research question and its four belonging sub questions, have been composed:

How is the interaction between health promotion providers and their users?

- What health promoting services are offered?
- How do health promotion users invest in health promotion?
- How do health promotion users control their health investments?
- In what way are health investments by health promotion users considered to be beneficial?

### 1.4 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to illustrate investments in health promotion from two opposite angles. That is, to elucidate the interaction between health promotion providers and health promotion users and to clarify possible benefits a company can achieve by investing in health promotion.

### 1.5 Delimitations

When reflecting upon ill health, it is possible to distinguish between physical and psychological aspects. In this thesis we will focus on the physical aspects of ill health and not, in detail, discuss the impact of poor psychological health. Further, the study is limited to discuss nine Swedish companies, of which four are health promotion providers and five are health promotion users.

### 1.6 Outline of the Thesis

*Chapter 2* describes the methodology in order to evaluate the chosen approach of the thesis and show how it was conducted throughout the process. This is followed by *chapter 3*, which introduces the theoretical framework in order to make the reader comprehend the context of the thesis. Furthermore, the first empirical data gathered, which contains summaries of the first four interviews with the health promotion providers, is presented in *chapter 4*. The following empirical data, gathered from interviews with companies using health promoting services is found in *chapter 5*. In *chapter 6* the reader can acquaint itself with the contents of the analysis of the gathered theoretical and empirical information. Furthermore, *chapter 7* presents a conclusion of the results from the analysis and also contains a subchapter with further research within the research field. Finally, the reader can find the list of references in *chapter 8*.

## 2 Methodology

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*This chapter aims at describing how the thesis will be conducted throughout the process. The chapter explains why the qualitative approach was chosen to investigate the purpose of the thesis and how the primary and secondary data are managed. Furthermore, the interview process is described and the chapter is concluded with a discussion concerning the validity and reliability of sources.*

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### 2.1 Choosing the Topic

When looking for a suitable topic for the thesis, we first and foremost wanted to explore something we both found interesting. Health is in the interest of both of us, and we consider it a topic of current interest since a lot of companies have realized the importance of investing in the employees. Our opinion is that companies are increasingly finding it beneficial to invest in the personnel. The companies need to do more in order to reach their objectives, and investments in health promotion is one way to achieve them.

### 2.2 Research Approach

Methodology is, according to Halvorsen (1992), a systematic way of discovering the reality. It is about doing discoveries in a world created by humans. By using different methods there is a chance of improving one's ability to do discoveries. When improving the way of doing discoveries, one can better see the reasons behind the occurrences, the opinions behind the actions, but also the collective or social structure's importance to individuals' and groups' opinions and actions. (Halvorsen, 1992) The research method we chose will have an impact on what we will discover in the empirical data. Consequently, a research method able to describe and analyze the health promotion phenomenon and the interaction between two actors; health promotion providers and health promotion users, is chosen. In the study nine Swedish companies are investigated and analyzed to find out about the interactions.

### 2.3 Choosing a Qualitative or a Quantitative Method

There is no definite difference between the quantitative method and the qualitative method. Both serve the same purpose, that is, to give a better understanding of the society today, and also to describe how individuals, groups and institutions act and affect each other. However, the fundamental difference is manifested in the fact that quantitative methods convert information into numbers and quantities, from which statistical analyses are made. Within qualitative methods, on the other hand, it is the researcher's understanding or interpretation of the information that is of importance. (Holme & Solvang, 1997)

The advantage of the qualitative method is due to the fact that it gives the researcher a comprehensive picture, a picture that increases the understanding of social processes and contexts. Another advantage is its flexibility. The qualitative method of investigation can be changed during the investigation in contrast to quantitative studies, which bear the stamp of structure. Quantitative methods on the other hand have the strength of being able to explain different phenomena and, through different statistical techniques, do generalizations. (Holme & Solvang, 1997) The purpose of the thesis is to illustrate investments in health promotion. That is, to investigate what health promoting services providers are offering, but also to understand what expectations the companies that invest in health services have, consequently,

we have chosen a qualitative approach. Due to the fact that we are dependent on our respondents' experiences and interpretations, we find the qualitative approach the most suitable for this thesis.

## **2.4 Primary and Secondary Data**

After having chosen the fundamental design of the research, namely the qualitative approach, it is time to choose the most suitable method of data collection. Two main techniques concerning collection of data can be identified, either the gathering of new data, which is called primary data, or the use of material that has already been collected, that is secondary data. Furthermore, one can collect data in three different ways, through observations, through interviews or through experiment (Arbnor & Bjerke, 1994).

In this thesis primary data is collected by the use of interviews. Interviews are used as the form of primary data in order to see how five different companies use health investments and to clarify their point of view. We also aim at interviewing four different health promotion providers in order to elucidate their reflections about offering health promotion and in what manner it can be beneficial for companies to invest in employee health.

In order to give the reader an overview of the earlier research made in this field and connect the problem discussion to theory, secondary data was collected. Plenty of information regarding health is to be found. However, secondary sources concerning the interaction between health promotion providers and their users are hardly found. We have tried to use the secondary sources as objective as possible to be able to present a trustworthy picture to the reader. The work of collecting secondary data was initially done through the University of Gothenburg's electronic databases in order to find articles and publications related to the study, and also to receive support and suggestions to create a suitable problem discussion. Furthermore the libraries of the University of Gothenburg have been of great help when it comes to finding appropriate sources.

The thesis' theoretical framework is first and foremost based on published scientific articles and research papers and reports. However, there is also suitable literature concerning this research field which has been used with particularly objectivity. The interested reader is referred to the list of references at the end of the thesis where one can find a complete list of the secondary sources.

## **2.5 Interviews**

In order to carry out the study an interview method was chosen. Since the interviews were given to one or two respondents, and not a whole group, we could choose among three different types of interviews, that is, structured interviews, semi structured interviews or unstructured interviews (May, 2001). Since the thesis aims to investigate and analyze the interaction between health promotion providers and their users, we need to deepen the interview questions by asking sub questions depending on the situation and also by letting the respondents answer the questions rather freely. Consequently, in this case it is most suitable using the method of semi structured interviews. According to May (2001), the interviewer, when doing semi structured interviews, has a greater opportunity to develop the respondent's answers and also to deepen them in a way that is not possible when using a structured interview with standardized questions. Nevertheless, the semi structured interview is still

more structured than the unstructured interview, and thus can create comparability between the different interviews. (May, 2001)

### 2.5.1 Selection of Companies

The selection of health promotion providers was about finding a mixture of companies to get a wider view of the topic. On the one hand we wanted to interview companies focusing on a wide concept including both company health care and health promotion, and on the other hand we also wanted to get pure fitness clubs' point of view. The overall criterion, mostly regarding the fitness clubs, was the fact that the companies should offer some kind of health promotion adjusted to companies. The providers we chose to interview were Previa, Clarahälsan, Feelgood, and Sportlife.

When selecting health promotion users for interviews, the primary focus was to find accessible companies, that is, companies having respondents that would be able to meet us in person. Another criterion for the selection of companies was the fact that the companies should do clear and distinct investments in health. The users we chose to interview were Stena Bulk, Volvo Trucks, GDL, The School of Business, Economics and Law at University of Gothenburg and Sparbanken Gripen.

### 2.5.2 Respondents

It is of great importance to choose the most suitable responders in order to get the preferred answers. When contacting the companies we requested to interview respondents with enough knowledge of the company's investments in health promotion. The respondents of the companies being interviewed are presented in figure 1.

**Tabell 1** Respondent Overview

<b>Company</b>	<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Position</b>
Previa	Mirko	Head of Department
Clarahälsan	Viktoria Gunnar	Physiotherapist Company Nurse
Feelgood	Birgitta	Head of Department
Sportlife	Jamie	Head of Business Relations & Executive Assistant
Stena Bulk	Ulf	President & CEO
Volvo Trucks	Pernilla	Health Coach
GDL	Jerker	Head of Department
The School of Business, Economics and Law, University of Gothenburg	Eva	Administrative Secretary, Responsible for HR-Questions
Sparbanken Gripen	Bo-Gustaf Christina	Director of HR HR Scientist

### **2.5.3 Designing the Questionnaire**

When designing the questionnaires intended for the health promotion providers, the main purpose was to create questions which would elucidate what kind of health promotion they could offer companies. The questionnaire would also find out on what grounds the health promotion providers marketed their services, if they in their marketing were referring to an increased profitability when investing in health.

The important questions, when designing the questionnaires to the health promotion users, were concerning the companies' expectation of their health investments. However, it was also important to discover how they manage to make all employees participate in the activities offered, that is, to ascertain that they would make use of the opportunity in for example exercising for free.

Due to the fact that the companies being interviewed are Swedish and the respondents are Swedish speaking, we decided to write the questionnaires in Swedish. Even though the thesis is written in English it would neither be appropriate nor respectful to ask the respondents to be able to answer the questions in English. Moreover, we have decided not to translate the Swedish questionnaire into English since we consider that a translation would not increase the understanding of the empirical chapter.

### **2.5.4 Interview Process**

In order to give the respondents the possibility to be prepared, the interview questions, which are shown in Appendix I and Appendix II, were sent to all respondents in advance, with one exception. Since the first interview was set at very short notice, the first respondent did not receive the interview questions in advance. In general, the length of the interviews was set to one hour. During all of the ten interviews the respondents' answers were transcribed on a computer. Immediately after the interviews we had an overlook of the typed material to be able to gain a better interpretation of the material. In order to avoid misinterpretations, the respondents were consulted when doubtfulness concerning their answers appeared. Since we considered we could type fast enough on a computer, in order to register our respondents' answers in a satisfactory way, we decided not to use a recorder. Given the fact that the thesis' time period is only ten weeks, the recorder would only create extra work without adding value to the thesis.

## **2.6 Criticism of Sources**

### **2.6.1 Validity and Reliability of Primary Data**

Validity is about doing the right things, that is, collecting the data relevant for the problem discussion of the thesis (Halvorsen, 1992). Regarding interviews, to attain validity, the question being asked in an interview should measure what the question is suppose to measure. During qualitative interviews the aim often is to find out what the respondent really means and to ascertain oneself in what way he or she register a word or a phenomenon. (Troost, 2005)

Reliability is about doing the measurements correct; it refers to how trustworthy ones measurements are (Halvorsen, 1992). According to Troost (2005), reliability involve four

components; congruence, precision, objectivity and constancy. Congruence concerns the similarity between questions that intend to measure the same things. Precision deals with the interviewers' way of register interview answers. Objectivity refers to how different interviewers reflect about what is being said during an interview. The objectivity is considered high if the interviewers register the same thing. The fourth component, constancy, emphasizes the time aspect and assumes that the phenomena will not change.

In qualitative interviews, constancy is not of as current interest as when it comes to quantitative studies. When doing a qualitative interview your prime interest is in fact changes. Objectivity is of interest thus when reading a report one should be able to take side whether one interprets the meaning of the report differently. Further, to be able to achieve high reliability, the situation, in this case the interviews, needs to be standardized. (Trost, 2005)

One of the trickiest problems concerning qualitative interviews is its reliability. The problem is due to the complexity of showing the reader that one's produced research is credible. Therefore the thesis must clearly show that its data is collected in a way that makes the data serious and also relevant to the actual problem discussion. (Trost, 2005)

In order to achieve not only high validity but also reliability when carrying the interviews through, it is of great importance to ask the right questions and to assure ourselves that we have understood the answers.

### **2.6.2 Validity and Reliability of Secondary Data**

In view of the fact that the sources, from where the secondary data has been found, can be impartial, biased, and incomplete or based upon uncertain selection, it is of vital importance to have a critical approach towards the data (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999). Some of the secondary data, principally published articles and written reports, are not completely updated. For example most of the research made on the topic is based on the assumption that the Swedish sick leave is extremely high. That was however how the situation looked before the year of 2003. According to Försäkringskassan (2009), the Swedish sick leave has been reduced by about fifty percent since year 2003. On the other hand there is little trustworthy research made on the reasons of the great reduction of the sick leave.

Further criticism on secondary data can be imposed on the fact that there are difficulties in finding general validated information about when a sick employee is considered short term sick or long term sick. There are several different sources concerning short and long term sick leave, all with varying statements which makes the sources less reliable.

### **3 Theoretical Framework**

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*The following chapter will present the theoretical framework in order to give the reader an understanding of the context of the thesis and the theory behind. The chapter commences with an introduction to health and the health situation in Sweden today, it continues with regulations concerning the subject. Further, physical activity and its impact on health are discussed and the chapter is concluded by an examination of the health promoting work and its importance, health promotion providers and their users.*

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#### **3.1 Health**

In 1948 World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Due to the petition of complete well being this definition was criticized for being too utopian and difficult to achieve. Hence, in 1986 WHO expressed a new definition of health as “a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities”. In accordance with the definitions, health is a state of physical, psychological and social well being. (Schäfer Elinder & Faskunger, 2006)

##### **3.1.1 Swedish Health Today**

The Swedish society’s cost of physical inactivity is about 6 billion SEK a year including costs of decline in production and medical costs (Bolin & Lindgren, 2006). According to the national survey of 2008 made by Folkhälsoinstitutet, about 35% of the Swedes are completely physical inactive, 34% are overweight (of which 42% are men and 28% are women) and 11% suffer from obesity (of which 12% are men and 11% are women). (www.fhi.se)

In Sweden there have always been fluctuations concerning the figure of sick leave, hence, a clear connection between sick leave and the country’s financial situation is shown. When experiencing a period of prosperity the country shows a greater number of sick leave and vice versa. (Lag Ds 2004:16 om drivkraft för minskad frånvaro). Moreover, the number of sick leave has always been relatively high compared with other countries. Between 1997 and 2003 Sweden experienced a vast increase of sick leave. Especially the number of work related sick leave, long term sick leave and sick leave among women. However, statistics show that, since 2003, there has been a decrease in sick leave. According to a press release made by Försäkringskassan (2009-04-20) the number of ill health has halved since December of 2003 and has not been this low since 1982. What actually have caused the decrease is not yet confirmed.

#### **3.2 Swedish Rules and Regulations Regarding Health Promotion**

In order to act against ill health, the Swedish government introduced an action plan, including 11 paragraphs to improve worksite health, in the budget proposals of 2002. Moreover, some of the actions included in the plan were to establish worksite health objectives, financial motives for employers to prevent ill health, increase the amount of physical activity and propose health accounting. (www.riksdagen.se<sup>1</sup>). Today there are several rules and regulations encouraging the employers to invest in employee health and to create a healthy workplace. Hence, some of these are presented bellow.

### 3.2.1 Tax Exempt Benefits of Exercise and Health Promotion

There are several employee benefits that are not taxable under certain conditions and of which benefits of exercise and health promotion is one. These are presented in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Swedish law of income tax. Current regulations imply that an employer can offer its employees physical activity under the terms that it is addressed to the whole personnel, and that it is of simple kind and to a low cost. Consequently, this signifies that the costs are tax deductible for the employer and the employees are spared from paying tax imposed on fringe benefits. Examples of approved activities according to the regulation are exercising at gyms, tennis, football and yoga. There is no upper limit of how much the tax exempt benefits of health promotion and exercise is allowed to cost. However, there are some activities considered too expensive to be approved such as golf, sailing and riding. Entry fees of competitions, for instance running races, are tax deductible when registering a team but taxable when doing individual registrations. ([www.skatteverket.se](http://www.skatteverket.se)). What is included in the regulation is more and more extended, as from January 1st of 2004 it was decided to approve massage, stress- and diet counseling as tax exempt benefits. ([www.arbetsmiljoupplysningen.se](http://www.arbetsmiljoupplysningen.se)<sup>1</sup>)

### 3.2.2 Obligatory Report of Sick Leave

In order to give companies a better view of their sick leave, the Swedish government introduced a regulation concerning obligatory report of sick leave. However, in accordance with the Swedish annual account act, chapter 5 18§, a company more than 10 employees, enclosed by the accounting law, with must report their sick leave in the annual report. The law came into effect the 1st of July 2003 and signifies that companies must leave information about the total absence due to sickness as a percentage of the employees' working hours. Further, companies must separate information about sick leave between men and women, between different age brackets, and in percentage specify the proportion of long term and short term sick leave. ([www.riksdagen.se](http://www.riksdagen.se)<sup>2</sup>)

According to the Swedish Parliament, the purpose of including information about sick leave in the annual report is to make companies more aware of their sick leave and how it is allocated in the organization. Furthermore, this knowledge might motivate employers to take action in order to decrease the sick leave. ([www.riksdagen.se](http://www.riksdagen.se)<sup>3</sup>)

### 3.2.3 Regulations concerning Motives to Decrease Sick Leave

This law came into effect the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 2005, and implies that the employer shall pay a health insurance fee of 10-15% of the sick allowance of the long-term sick listed employees. However, this is not necessary if the employee receives preventive sick allowance or compensation for rehabilitation. Further, the employer will not be responsible for financing the sick leave if the employee suffers from an illness implying high risk. The purpose of this regulation was to create financial motives for the employer to take action against long-term sick leave. Hence, it would be profitable for the employer to take preventive action against ill health, and invest in rehabilitation and other methods to facilitate the journey back to work for the sick listed employees. (Lag Ds 2004:16 om drivkraft för minskad frånvaro)



### **3.2.4 Rules regarding Health Insurance**

The 1<sup>st</sup> of July, 2008, new regulations concerning health insurance was introduced. The rules imply tighter demands on sick listed persons to return to the working life as soon as possible. In an early state of sick leave, examinations are made in order to state the individual's health status. The result shows if the person is ill enough to receive sick allowance and if the person is capable of returning to the job when feeling better. If the person is not capable of returning to the specific job, as for instance due to an injury, but the person is capable of doing another job, regulations request the person to start looking for another, more suitable, job. Further, examinations will show if the person might be capable of returning to the job and start working part time. (Wahlund, 2008)

### **3.3 Physical Activity**

According to World Health Organization (WHO) physical activity is defined as “any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that require energy expenditure”. Nevertheless, this definition signifies that physical activity not only is a matter of exercise, it also comprises activities such as cleaning, gardening and walking. Investments in order to increase the level of physical activity at work might imply many positive effects, hence, it may contribute to maintaining health, preventing ill health and treating already ill employees. (Schäfer Elinder & Faskunger, 2006)

#### **3.3.1 Recommendations**

Many people assume that exercise need to be high intense, but research show that even moderate-intensity exercise will contribute to the improvement of a person's health status. The recommended amount of physical activity varies between ages and personal circumstances. The recommendation for an adult (aged 18-65) is 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity 5 times a week or 20 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity 3 times a week. A physical inactive person is a person who does not fulfill the recommendations. (www.who.int)

#### **3.3.2 Aerobic Capacity**

One method of calculating physical capability is to measure a person's aerobic capacity, commonly known as condition. Aerobic capacity is a measure of a body's ability to assimilate oxygen. Oxygen is essential not only for bodily work but also for the brain to be able to work. Thus, even at a sedentary job, a low aerobic capacity will limit a person's performance. Aerobic capacity will generally decrease the older a person gets, but a person can improve it through regularly physical activity. Further, a person's physical condition affects its ability to utilize the maximal oxygen consumption. A person who is not exercising on a regularly basis can only utilize 20-25% of its maximal capacity during an eight hour workday; for a fit person this figure is 40-50%. Hence, by increasing its level of physical activity and start exercise on a regularly basis, a non fit person can increase its performance by 100%. This signifies that a physical active person has enhanced possibilities to be more productive and perform better at work than a physical inactive person. (Andersson et al., 2004)

### 3.3.3 Physical Activity and its Impact on Health

Besides the positive effects physical activity has on the aerobic capacity, as mentioned above, research also show that it is a contributory factor to reduce the risk of several of our national diseases and is a requirement to a healthy lifestyle. Hence, research show a clear connection between physical inactivity and the risk of diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, cancer and obesity. (www.sbu.se)

People who are completely inactive will benefit most from increasing the level of physical activity. If an inactive person starts exercising on a regularly basis at a moderate intensity level, it will most probably experience a great improvement of its health. (www.dh.gov.uk)

However, to achieve the beneficial effects, the activity should be on a regularly basis throughout the lifetime. To obtain the positive effects it is usually enough to follow the WHO recommendations, regarding the amount and intensity of the activity. There are many research results indicating the positive impact physical activity has on an individual's health. However, in the following six paragraphs we have chosen to present some effects in accordance with the report *At least five a day* published in 2004 by the Department of Health of the United Kingdom. (www.dh.gov.uk)

Regarding the connection between regular physical activity and cardiovascular diseases, research shows, that an inactive lifestyle might imply same negative effects as smoking cigarettes. The risk of dying from a coronary heart disease is almost twice as big for a physical inactive person compared to a person exercising on a regularly basis. Furthermore, physical exercise on a regularly basis is a contributory factor of preventing and treating stroke, high blood pressure, and peripheral vascular diseases.

A physical active lifestyle reduces the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. By starting exercise on a regularly basis inactive people can reduce the risk by 33-50%. Moreover, it is individuals with high risk of developing type 2 diabetes that can benefit most from an active lifestyle. Further, people that already suffer from type 2 diabetes will benefit from an active lifestyle, since it may alleviate the symptoms and diminish the risk of premature death.

Physical activity is one contributory factor of reducing the risk of overweight and obesity. Physical exercise itself is one method of losing weight or preventing weight gain, but it is usually more effective in combination with a healthy diet. However, obesity and overweight might lead to diseases such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, musculoskeletal ill health and cancer. Hence, by preventing overweight and obesity the risk of developing these diseases is reduced.

A physical active lifestyle also has positive effects on the musculoskeletal health. Physical activity increases the bone mineral density and invigorates the bone structure which can delay the development of osteoporosis, commonly known as brittle bone disease. Further, moderate intensity exercise can have beneficial effects on people with Osteoarthritis and low back pain.

Research also shows that physical activity can improve mental health and well being and is sometimes as effective as medicine. Physical exercise can reduce the risk of developing stress, depression and other mental illnesses and also improve the health status of people already suffering. Further, physical activity can contribute to developing a person's self perception, reducing anxiety, improving sleep, and enhancing well being in general. Some activities are

also a great practice of team building and makes people function better together with other individuals and in groups.

However, one should not withhold that physical activity also can involve some risks. Physical activity at a health promoting level usually signifies a low risk but regarding exercising and fitness on a high intensive level, the risk will increase. Too much or too intensive exercise may overexert the body and muscles which can lead to injuries and illness. Further, body obsession and eating disorders are more common among elite athletes than among other people. Hence, an increase of physical activity will not affect everyone in a positive manner. In some cases, such as for unnourished people, people with eating disorders, certain diseases or injuries, it can even be harmful. That is to say, physical activity can involve some risk but as long as the exercise is at a healthy level the risk is considered generally low.

### **3.4 Health Promotion**

Health promotion is a process of maintaining health and preventing ill health. Furthermore, it has a positive approach focusing on healthy aspects, strengths and possibilities instead of ill health, weaknesses and problems. The signification of health promotion varies, but maintaining and developing health are phrases commonly used to describe the phenomenon. Health promotion mainly implies physical activity, nevertheless, introduction of exercise at work, alcohol and smoking cessation programs, relaxation, massage, and weight loss programs might also be included. (Angelöw, 2002)

#### **3.4.1 Development of Worksite Health Promotion**

Nowadays many companies show a great interest in health promotion, and investing in employee health is usually considered as “trendy”. However, health promotion is not a recently constituted phrase, hence, it was introduced in several large companies during the 1970’s. At this time the concept was dominated by exercise and diet and was usually run by sport clubs or recreation consultants. (Rydqvist, 2004) Moreover, since the 1980’s the access to fitness and health centers has increased substantially. In the early 1990’s the Government subsidy of company health promotion was abolished, now companies stimulate every employee to take responsibility for its own health by offering means in the form of health promoting activities. Thus, the concept is developed and today it has a wider significance comprising both physical and psychological health. (Edenhall, 2008)

Today, society is based on information and knowledge, thus, the employees and their competence have become the most significant resource and it is through the employees many organizations are able to reach the company’s objectives. Hence, employers should take the employees’ physical and psychological needs into consideration. Employees feeling fine and satisfied and enjoy being at work generally perform well. Worksite health promotion is a way of taking care of the employees, thus, can be seen as a part of a company’s strategy. (Ljusenius & Rydqvist, 1999) However, worksite health promotion is merely one part of the work in creating a healthy workplace; organizational structure, leadership, communication, employees’ possibility of participating, affecting and making themselves heard, are also factors of great importance. (Angelöw, 2002) One can consider worksite health promotion as an interaction between two parties; health promotion providers and companies using health promotion.

### **3.4.2 Health Promotion Providers**

Today there are plenty of providers offering health promoting services to companies. Hence, there are different providers using different ways of offering health promotion. One example is the gyms and fitness studios offering health promotion mainly through exercise but also through e.g. relaxation and dietary coaching. Another example is companies offering a wider extent of health promoting services such as psychological coaching, nursing, medical treatment, physical exercise, dietary coaching. (Menckel & Österblom, 2000)

### **3.4.3 Health Promotion Users**

Today many companies have realized the great importance of taking care of the employees, thus investments in health promotion is common among companies. Ill health and discomfort among employees imply expensive costs for the companies, as for example sick leave costs, rehabilitation costs and employee turnover. (Andersson et al., 2004) One way of reducing the costs is to invest in health promotion. There are different ways of investing in health promotion and there are many providers offering health promoting services to companies. (Edenhall, 2008)

### **3.4.4 Relation between Sick Leave and Health Investments**

Given that health is a state of physical, mental, social well-being, and an individual's perceived health, it is generally a subjective estimation and therefore it can be complex to measure. Moreover, companies find it difficult identifying the outcome of their health investments since they are seldom exposed as assets in the balance sheet. A commonly used measure of health is a company's sick leave. Since many companies are obliged to report their sick leave ([www.riksdagen.se](http://www.riksdagen.se)<sup>2</sup>), it is a measure usually easy to access. Furthermore, investing in employee health and creating a healthy workplace can be a contributory factor of reducing a company's sick leave. (Andersson et al., 2004)

According to a report made by AFA Försäkringar, the most common causes of sick leave in Sweden are cardiovascular diseases, musculoskeletal diseases, psychological illness and injuries ([www.newsdesk.se](http://www.newsdesk.se)). As been discussed in an earlier chapter, through physical activity one can reduce the risk of three of the four diseases mentioned ([www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)). Hence, this connection indicates that by increasing the level of physical activity it is possible to reduce the number of sick leave. (Schäfer Elinder & Faskunger, 2006)

### **3.4.5 Costs of Ill Health**

Sick leave is usually a considerable cost for the employer and the expenses can be divided into direct and indirect costs. Direct costs include expenses that affect the employer in a direct sense, such as sick pay and health insurance fees. (Johanson & Johrén, 2007) Swedish regulations imply that the employee will not receive any compensation on the first day of sick leave, however, from day 2 to day 14 the employer is obliged to pay 80% of the wage. After the 14<sup>th</sup> day Försäkringskassan determines and accounts for the compensation, nevertheless the employer is still obliged to pay 10-15% of the sick pay. ([www.forsakringskassan.se](http://www.forsakringskassan.se)<sup>2</sup>) Furthermore, indirect costs are usually more difficult to connect to the specific case such as costs of decline in production, overtime, substitutes, employee turnover etc. Having an employee sick listed for one day will cost the organization approximately 10% of the amount

of the employee's monthly salary. Therefore, investing in health promotion in order to reduce sick leave will probably lead to lower costs for the company. (Johanson & Johrén, 2007)

Furthermore, many financial arguments indicate that the earlier the effort of creating a healthy workplace and investing in employee health is made, the more benefits the organization will achieve. It is usually less expensive investing in maintaining a healthy individual's health instead of paying for rehabilitation and medical care of an individual already suffering from poor health. Further, the possibility of achieving healthy employees is greater if a company invests in health promotion. Hence, less effort is needed to prevent the health and condition of the employees from getting bad, than trying to improve the health and condition of the employees who have been sick listed for a long time. Moreover, a company having long term sick leave usually imply heavy expenses such as decline in production, sick pay, decrease in efficiency and productivity and substitutes. (Andersson et al., 2004)

### **3.4.6 Health Promotion Control**

There is a risk that only the already physical active employees will make use of the health promoting activities offered at work. Hence, in this case the company will probably not experience any financial benefits of a health investment since the physical actives already have a favorable health status. In order to make the investment beneficial the company needs to control the health promotion, that is, to adjust and manage the activities to reach out to the whole personnel and get as many as possible to participate. What is of certain importance is to reach the completely inactive, that is the "couch potatoes". (Ekblom & Nilson, 2000) However, Andersson (2008) is questioning whether it is ethically correct to influence people's way of living in order to improve the society health. Furthermore, he asks himself who has the greatest interest in an improvement of the health; the individual or the society.

### **3.4.7 Health Accounting**

One explanation of why there are still companies that do not invest in health care is the difficulty of realizing the connection between health and its financial outcome. Health accounting is one method of making it easier for the management of a company to see the connection. The phrase, health account, was introduced by the Swedish Government in the action plan to improve worksite health and was launched in 2001. (Johanson & Cederqvist, 2005) In accordance with the regulations, various companies report their sick leave in their annual reports which can be seen as a first step to health accounting. Except the regulation of reporting sick leave, there are no rules of how to structure a health account nor is it obligatory. There are different models that suggest how to compose a health account, but they all imply the same purpose. The purpose of health accounting is to show the financial outcome of a company's investment in health promotion, and it is utilized as an instrument to elucidate the connection between the health status of the employees and the financial consequences. (www.arbetsmiljoupplysningen<sup>2</sup>)

## **4 Health Promotion Providers' Point of View**

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*The following chapter aims at describing the empirical data gathered from the interviews with four different health promotion providers. The next coming subchapters are put together of data gathered when interviewing the respondents.*

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### **4.1 Previa**

Previas is a health promoting company with approximately 1000 employees operating in 70 cities around Sweden. Previa Gothenburg consists of 75 employees divided into three centers; Nordstan, Gårda and Lindholmen. The staff consists of doctors, nurses, psychologists, social scientists, physiotherapists, work environment engineers, health pedagogues, and organizational consultants. In the following subchapters a summary of the interview with Mirko, Head of Department, at Previa is presented.

#### **4.1.1 Definition of Health**

Since health and health promotion are expressions used differently among people, there are many definitions and meanings. According to Mirko, health is achieved when employees of its customer companies feel fine, are satisfied at work and perform well; "it is the customers' definitions of health that matters" (Mirko). Companies define health differently and also find the importance of health diversely. Hence, to achieve a healthy workplace, Previa finds it important to identify every customer's exact definition of health. It is further essential to know the company's vision, valuations and expectations to be able to satisfy the customers and design health solutions suitable for every specific company.

#### **4.1.2 Selection of Health Promoting Services**

The main function of Previa is to improve the working environment at other companies. The company aims at achieving customer specific solutions that coincide with the company's objectives. Thus, the design of health programs is depending on what the customer wants to achieve with the investment. Previa customize health programs to the specific company by identifying the health status of every employee. To be able to give recommendations and advice, it is important to get an overall perspective of the individual's lifestyle, thus, questions about the person's work situation, spare time, family and social life are being asked. There are no fitness centers in the buildings of Previa, but since the owner of the company is also the owner of a Swedish fitness chain called SATS, the customers can use their gyms.

#### **4.1.3 Benefits of Investments**

"Health investments are profitable but not beatific." (Mirko) It is just a part of the act of making an organization profitable. For example, an investment in health promotion will not make a company profitable if the organization is miserable and the production is not working. However, employees that are healthy and satisfied at work increase the chance of making a better job and improve productivity.

One of Previa's greatest prioritizations is to show the connection between a company's investment in health promotion and its profitability. Together with university scientists, the company has developed a model that shows the financial outcome of health promoting

investments. The model shows, in numbers, how a specific health investment will affect the company financially. In order to make an investment in health promotion profitable, it is essential to identify if there are any specific health problems among the employees and what to invest in. Showing the connection between health investments and profitability motivates companies to invest in health promotion. However, the driving force is the company objective, thus, in order to create a healthy workplace it is fundamental that health promotion is a component of the objective.

Mirko states that, the earlier a company invests in employee health, the better. It is more profitable to invest in health promotion when the employees are still healthy, than account for rehabilitation and health care if the employees get ill.

In companies with a high level of employee turnover, investments in employee health may not be as profitable as, for example, at a nuclear power station where the personnel and its competence is of great importance and does not change as often.

#### **4.1.4 Importance of Controlling Health Investments**

According to Previa it is not always profitable for a company to invest money in trying to get the inactive employees active. A company where the majority of employees are physical inactive will most certain find it profitable to get the inactive to start exercising. However, in a company where the majority of the employees already exercise on a regularly basis and only a few are inactive, the costs of the effort of getting the inactive employees active will probably exceed the revenues it will generate.

However, it is also a question of ethics and moral, that is, a company's policy and attitude towards the employees. Is it right to decide not to put effort in getting the inactive employees participating in the activities only because they represent a minority?

According to Mirko, aiming at getting the completely inactive employees active is an objective hard to achieve. One can divide employees in three groups; physical active employees, employees who need incentives to get started and "couch potatoes". Investments usually imply motivating the employees who need incentives to get started. "Couch potatoes need to start exercise at really low levels and have a huge carrot at the other side." (Mirko)

## **4.2 Clarahälsan**

Clarahälsan is a health promoting company offering a wide selection of health promoting services to other companies. The company operates in Värmland and has 43 authorized health care employees such as doctors, nurses, work environmental engineers, physiotherapists and ergonomists. In the following subchapters a summary of the interview with Victoria, Physiotherapist, and Gunnar, Company Nurse, at Clarahälsan is presented.

### **4.2.1 Definition of Health**

According to Victoria, health implies a person's well being and capability of working, but also satisfaction concerning a person's private and social life. Hence, it is a person's overall well being that matters.

### **4.2.2 Selection of Health Promoting Services**

Clarahälsan offers a wide selection of health promoting services such as exercise at the gym, lectures about healthy diets and exercise, doctors, social scientists handling stress and psychological illness and physiotherapists handling relaxation exercise.

The structure of health promoting programs varies among companies and is usually a mixture of a company's demand, but can also contain suggestions from Clarahälsan. In some companies, a health examination is made in order to examine the health status of the employees. The results show if there are any specific risks among the employees as for example many smokers or overweighted persons. Thus, the result can be used to design group or individual health programs. On the other hand, there are some companies preferring a general health promoting program without health examination.

### **4.2.3 Benefits of Investments**

Clarahälsan's overall picture of worksite health promotion is that it is profitable for companies in general. A company investing in health promotion might reduce its sick leave and the related costs. Nowadays many companies are dependent upon the competence of their employees; hence, the absence of an employee will probably affect the company's performance.

One problem is the difficulty of measuring a company's financial outcome of its investments in health promotion. Victoria states that one reason is that it is almost impossible to prove what the employees' health status would be like if a company did not invest in health promotion. Physical activity is for example one contributory factor of preventing diabetes, but it is impossible to prove that the reason to why an employee does not suffer from diabetes is because the company invests in health promotion.

Even though it is difficult to prove the profitability of investing in health promotion, many companies know that having healthy personnel is favorable to the company. However, there are also companies that demand proofs of the financial outcome in numbers but, according to Clarahälsan, there is not a perfect way of measuring the outcome.



Merely an investment in health promotion will not make a company profitable, thus, it is the overall perspective of a company that is of importance to create a healthy and successful workplace. Health promotion is of course one essential factor, but company culture, working environment, management, harmony among the employees, and communication are examples of other factors needed to be considered in order to create a healthy workplace. A company not focusing on the overall picture will scarcely experience an improved profitability from an investment in health promotion.

Health promotion is a method of preventing health problems. Costs of health preventive work are in general less expensive than what costs of sick leave and rehabilitation would be. "It is cheaper to invest in health promotion and work preventive before it goes to the blazes and the company need to pay for sick leave and rehabilitation" (Gunnar)

#### **4.2.4 Importance of Controlling Health Investments**

"The most difficult part is at the same time the most important part, that is, to get the inactive employees start exercising." (Gunnar)

Clarahälsan finds it important to get the inactive employees start exercising. One of its greatest challenges is to come up with suggestions to make it tempting for everyone to participate. A company succeeding in getting their inactive employees active will probably find the investment profitable, since inactive people in general suffer a superior risk of getting ill. To achieve positive effects of physical activity one generally need to follow the universal recommendations, but an inactive person will probably notice some positive effects by just doing minor exercise. Therefore, it is important that the inactive employees participate even if it is to a less extent such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator or exercising a little during the coffee break.

In order to motivate the inactive employees Clarahälsan finds it important to offer a variety of activities and also to encourage efforts to a less extend. By doing health examinations and stating the employee's health status it is easier to design individual health programs and recommendations to every employee. In some occasions, it is enough to make persons aware of their health status in order to make them start exercising and realize the importance of being physical active, Victoria emphasizes.

However, not every person has a need of increasing its level of physical activity. Some employees would probably benefit more from relaxation and stress management of other kinds than exercise. Clarahälsan considers it essential to find the right balance and to offer the employees a variety of health promoting services. There is also a risk that introducing health activities will contribute to a bad environment at work, hence, it can make the inactive and uninterested employees feel like outsiders. And maybe the ones who really need it will feel even less motivated to participate.

### 4.3 Feelgood

Feelgood is a company offering health promoting services to companies all over Sweden. The company has about 750 employees consisting of authorized health promotion and health care staff. In the following subchapters a summary of the interview with Birgitta, Head of Department, at Feelgood is presented.

#### 4.3.1 Definition of Health

According to Birgitta, health promotion is about maintaining health, that is, to keep the healthy people healthy and avoid them from getting ill. Feelgood aims at preventing and averting health risks in companies. There is a connection between organizational structure, work environment, productivity and health. Hence, to create a healthy workplace it is important not only to focus on the individuals but on the company as a whole.

#### 4.3.2 Selection of Health Promoting Services

Feelgood Gothenburg is divided into different centers offering different health promoting services; for example *Lilla Bommen* which has a gym but also offers health care or *Hagabadet* with swimming pools, gym and a spa section.

Feelgood offers a wide supply of health promoting services and the company consists of health pedagogues, doctors, psychologists, and social scientist etcetera. In order to design a suitable health promotion program, the work usually starts with an examination of the health status of the employees. Subsequently, evaluations are made to appraise the results and to consider whether changes in the program need to be done.

According to Birgitta, Feelgood uses health pedagogues which is a specific method of maintaining what is healthy in an organization and to make the companies try to prevent illness. The health pedagogues work strategically to help people start exercising. Furthermore, they develop company health programs including for example lectures, exercise, and dietary advice.

The company focuses on nutrition and physical activity and believes that many of today's health problems can be solved through physical activity and healthy food. Feelgood uses FAR, Fysisk Aktivitet på Recept<sup>1</sup>, which is a popular concept that implies recommendations of physical activity as a part of a treatment and in some occasions even as an alternative to medicine. The person gets a personal trainer and receives a prescription with recommendations of exercise to follow every day. FAR is used to maintain a healthy lifestyle and prevent illness but also to treat already sick people.

Another method used by Feelgood is to replace a bad habit by a good one, in order to make it easier to achieve a better result. One example is to combine smoking cessation or stress treatment with physical activity.

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<sup>1</sup> English translation; Physical Activity on Prescription

### **4.3.3 Benefits of Investments**

According to Birgitta, companies seem to understand the importance of investing in employee health, consequently, there has been an increase in the demand of health promoting services. It is essential to make companies understand that ill employees cost more than healthy employees. That is, investments in health promotion to keep employees healthy are usually less expensive than paying for treatment and rehabilitation when employees get ill.

Being physical active on a regularly basis and a keeping a healthy diet will improve a person's well being. Physical activity increase a person's energy, thus, one will be capable of doing a better job and not be as exhausted of working. Furthermore, physical activities at work tend to create harmony and fellowship which are factors of job satisfaction. "An employee that enjoys being at work will not be as tempted to stay at home due to a minor ailment." (Birgitta)

Feelgood finds it difficult proving the connection between investments in health promotion and a company's profitability. The company tries to show the connection and motivate companies to invest in employee health by using words and examples from previously succeeded investments made by other companies. One method is to calculate a company's costs of sick leave and explain how an investment in health promotion can decrease the sick leave and therefore reduce the costs.

### **4.3.4 Importance of Controlling Health Investments**

Feelgood believes that if no adjustment or control is made, there is a risk that only the already physical active employees will take part of the health promoting services. It can be difficult to motivate the "couch potatoes" to start exercising but they are often the ones who need it the most. Hence, Feelgood finds it important to control health promotion in order to get as many of the employees as possible to participate.

In order to activate the inactive employees in the health promoting activities, is it essential that companies themselves take action and try to motivate their employees. Thus, Feelgood helps companies, for example, by making judgments of every employee's health status, to be able to see if there is anyone running the risk of being afflicted by poor health and to give individual recommendations and advice. "Couch potatoes need extra pep talk, incentives and help to start exercise." (Birgitta)

## **4.4 Sportlife**

Sportlife is an expansive chain of fitness centers founded in 1997. The company mainly offers various physical activities at 29 different fitness centers in western Sweden and in Stockholm. In the following subchapters a summary of the interview with Jamie, Head of Business Relations & Executive Assistant, at Sportlife is presented.

### **4.4.1 Definition of Health**

According to Jamie, the aim of Sportlife is to offer health promotion to improve public health. About 15% of the Swedish population workout at gyms, this number is 8-10% in the other Nordic countries. By creating an environment where everyone can find something they enjoy, the company will contribute to improve public health.

Health is not only a physical issue but it is also about psychological well being. "One has to find it pleasant to go to the gym or else there is a risk that the person will only exercise a couple of times and that's it." (Jamie) The impact physical activity has on health is temporary, hence, one need to exercise on a regularly basis to achieve the positive effects.

### **4.4.2 Selection of Health Promoting Services**

Sportlife offers health promotion mainly in the sense of physical activities at the gyms but also through solariums, relaxation, health events, coaching, lectures in health and nutrition. Sportlife focuses on the gym section but broaden its selection by offering gyms with different concepts, such as "exclusive" and "express". Exclusive are luxury gyms while express are smaller gyms with longer opening hours. Further, Sportlife usually design health programs to companies in accordance with the companies' demands and ideas and suggestions from Sportlife. When designing a health program to a company, the contact in person with the company is of great importance.

Sportlife offer company discounts on health promoting services. The amount of the discount is decided by examining the company's situation and possibilities of creating a healthy workplace. Hence, a company with great possibilities and where the employees most probably will buy a gym card will receive a larger discount. The examination implies the company's closeness to a Sportlife gym, the size of the company, ergonomics, interest in health among the employees and previous investments in health and work environment.

In order to create a healthy workplace Sportlife finds is important that the management has an interest in health and will spread it throughout the organization. Further, a company with health coaches generally has greater possibilities of succeeding in spreading the knowledge and significance of health, thus, creating a healthier workplace.

### **4.4.3 Benefits of Investments**

According to Jamie every single person needs to exercise. A lots of people are physical active when they are young but when they grow older they tend to decrease the amount of exercise. It is usually the inactive people that need it the most but at the same time they are the ones most difficult to persuade to go to the gym. Many companies have realized the importance of

investing in their personnel, consequently, there has been an increase of investments in health promoting services during the last years.

At Sportlife's website one can read that companies will experience several positive effects when accomplishing structured investments in health promotion. Examples of effects are fewer sick listed employees, improved quality of the products and increased productivity and motivation among the employees.

According to Jamie an increase of the physical activity will contribute to improving the performance and the capability of making a good job, that is, improving the company's result. Furthermore, through health promotion, companies will achieve healthier, stronger and fitter personnel. A fit person has a greater resistance against viruses and illness, the lung capacity is enhanced, thus, this will contribute to reducing the ill health and sick leave. Jamie also states that a fit person is more alert and capable of doing its job, thus, it will not suffer from stress as easily as an unfit person.

A healthier workplace will also contribute to a more satisfied and motivated personnel which will decrease the employee turnover. A low level of employee turnover signifies for example that little competence will leave the company, and that the company will have less costs due to substitutes and instructions of new employees.

#### **4.4.4 Importance of Controlling Health Investments**

Sportlife considers it important to control health promotion to get as many as possible to participate, thus, if the employees do not make use of the activities it will be a waste of money. There is a risk that only the already active people will participate in the activities. Sportlife finds it essential that the management of a company put up demands on the employees to get the ones with an inactive lifestyle to participate. However, investments in health promotion that only imply handing out gym cards will probably not get the inactive employees to start exercising.

Sportlife has noticed that companies spending the most money on health promotions also have the greatest participation from its employees. In companies that account for the whole cost of the gym cards, more employees make use of the offer than in companies which only pay a part. It is usually the companies making the greatest investments in health promotion that will achieve the most active personnel. However, according to Jamie, it is rare that all the employees start exercising, but with a structured investment usually about 30-40% of the employees participate. However, companies investing in health promotion only to make it look good, and not actually putting any effort in improving the health of the employees, will not experience any financial outcome of the investment, according to Jamie.

## 5 Health Promotion Users' Point of View

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*The following chapter aims at describing the empirical data collected from the interviews with five different companies, all of which in some way invest in health. The next coming subchapters are summaries of the data gathered when interviewing the respondents.*

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### 5.1 Stena Bulk

Stena Bulk is a part of the Stena Sphere and is one of the world's leading companies in tanker shipping. Stena Bulk provides transportations of crude oil and refined petroleum at sea and operates about 72 tankers. The company is situated in Gothenburg and has additionally six offices worldwide. In the following subchapters a summary of the interview with Ulf, President & CEO, at Stena Bulk is presented.

#### 5.1.1 Investments in Health Promotion

Stena Bulk has a busy schedule including lots of work, travelling, representations, restaurant food and alcoholic beverages. To cope with the busy schedule one must think clearly, something that is easier done when being in good shape.

In the case of Stena Bulk, the health promoting investments were in the interest of Ulf himself. He felt that he needed it and tried to get the others to join. In 1995 Stena Bulk actively started investing in health promotion.

Stena Bulk is offering its employees Nordic walking, running, swimming, free gym card and training suits. Friday afternoons are in general not that productive and one is often practically sitting yawning and talking about the upcoming weekend. However, at Stena Bulk the personnel are out running every Friday afternoon. "When running we have a participation of 65%, which I find very good. This is nothing for wimps, we are actually running between 7.46 and 9.32 miles." (Ulf) Since it is interval training in group, the whole department is running together. Stena Bulk is running Tuesdays and Fridays and if there is a race coming up, even on Sundays. Every spring Stena Bulk participates in two races, for example Göteborgsvarvet, Lerumloppet, and one marathon in the autumn like Budapest Marathon and Amsterdam Marathon.

To be able to take care of the employees before they get ill Stena Bulk has an agreement with the health company Medikus. Furthermore, Stena AB has several agreements with different health promoting companies such as Hagabadet and Feelgood.

Ulf has also implemented white months<sup>2</sup> at Stena Bulk. The white months take place in January after Christmas parties and in September after barbeques and crayfish parties. However, in the social life it is tricky having a white month, Ulf states: "It is neither good for business nor for the social life to say no thank you, many people find you boring, but I have learned a trick to make use of when people complaining about you being boring; sorry, I cannot drink I am on heavy medication."

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<sup>2</sup> A **white month** is any month selected by an individual or group during which no alcohol is ingested by said individual or group. This can be done for a number of reasons including detoxing your system, being able to remember where you live, or even trying to solve your own raging alcoholism. But most white months end up being just a few days. (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=White%20Month>)

### **5.1.2 Health Promotion Control**

According to Ulf there is always someone not wanting to participate in the running, however, he tries to get everyone to join but in some cases it is impossible. Some people suffer from phobias and hate training, in those cases he respect that fact. "But I have really tried to get everyone joining, I go as far as I can until I see that a person cannot push him/herself any more in the hills" (Ulf)

"Since I am participating in the running myself, I can control the number of participants. If I see that the number of participants starts decreasing, I send an e-mail saying that next time everybody shall join, I must set a good example!"(Ulf)

Out of 20 employees Ulf would guess 2-3 find it annoying having him nagging about the training. Those who cannot run or have no interest in it might feel little like outsiders, but since Stena Bulk benefits a lot from the health investments, Ulf continues encouraging the employees to participate.

### **5.1.3 Manner of Measuring and Accounting**

Once a year the employees at Stena Bulk are doing a health control at Medikus. Further, the ones running the marathon, the so called elite, are doing the health examination twice a year. Medikus register the health of the employees by letting them, among other things, do different fitness tests. The result is transferred to curve charts and analyzed and saved in a data system.

In the annual report of Stena Bulk, sick leave numbers are shown, however, further health numbers are not presented.

### **5.1.4 Benefits of Investments**

Without a doubt Stena Bulk finds its health investments profitable. Ulf would like to state that it might be their best investment. "Health promotion is a great investment! It creates team spirit and great harmony. I ask my employees who will join me running today and then we go by car up to the running track in Skatås." (Ulf) The team spirit is improved, when running side by side in the forest, the department gets together in a way it would not do at the office. "When running in the woods, wearing same outfits, we are all the same and become a team." (Ulf)

Financial effects are shown in Stena Bulk having less illness, hardly any illness at all, according to Ulf. The health promoting investments also bring indirect financial effects, such as the employees receive more energy and can easier stay alert in business. The studies Medikus has done together with Stena Bulk show that the physical activities being implemented at Stena Bulk have led to better condition and aerobic capacity among the participants.

A person with good condition works better than a person with poor condition, one think clearer, get more done and make the right decisions, simply becoming a better person. "If you ask me why our health investment is so important I would say it is about two things; firstly, your body needs it to cope with the workload, secondly, when fighting and sweating together team spirit is created, together one can jump over houses."

## **5.2 Volvo Trucks**

Volvo Trucks is one of the business areas of the Volvo Corporation. The company built its first truck in 1928 and is now one of the world's largest producers of heavy trucks and transport solutions. Volvo Trucks has 20.472 employees of which 2.594 are seated in Gothenburg. In the following subchapters a summary of the interview with Pernilla, Health Coach, at Volvo Trucks is presented.

### **5.2.1 Investments in Health Promotion**

Volvo Truck's ambition is to get as many "long term healthy" as possible, their goal is to make employees last very long. According to Pernilla, the term "long term healthy" implies an employee without any sick leave during two years.

Volvo AB owns three centers with gym equipment and hired instructors in the area of Gothenburg. In these centers employees at Volvo can workout at the gym or attend classes, such as spinning and box, for free (except at one of the centers which is run by a high school where employees at Volvo only get a discount). Volvo Trucks has also agreements with other health promotion providers, for instance Lundbybadet, where employees get a discount. Furthermore, there are several associations within the company, such as ski clubs and tennis clubs.

In excess of the above mentioned, Volvo Trucks also offers its employees a health contribution to a sum of 1000 SEK a year. Since the company already offers its employees to work out at the own centers there has been a discussion concerning the amount of the contribution. One alternative discussed was whether the company should stop offering health contributions and invest the money in developing its own centers instead. However, Volvo Trucks finds it important to entice as many as possible to take part of the activities and therefore the company realized it would be easier achieved with a wider possibility of choices.

Volvo AB is one of the main sponsors at Göteborgsvarvet, hence, it has its own starting team and the employees run the race and attend the competition's activities for free. The company also participates in other competitions and runs internal competitions, such as step counting.

### **5.2.2 Health Promotion Control**

It is always optional to participate in or make use of the offered health promotions, however, by widen the expression health promotion, Volvo Trucks is trying to enable the employees to find something appropriate in compliance with their own backgrounds and goals. Hence, the health coaches are trying to widen the supply of health promoting services and find activities that can attract even the inactive employees. The active personnel work as drawing cards or advocates. Furthermore an e-mail containing sensible advices and motivation is sent out every week.

### **5.2.3 Manner of Measuring and Accounting**

At the moment there are ongoing discussions concerning the best way of measuring the health investments. Further, Volvo AB has come forward with proposals regarding a sort of health account. However, at the moment only figures of sick leave is presented in the annual report



but one can also find written information about working environment and how Volvo AB is managing health and wellbeing.

#### **5.2.4 Benefits of Investments**

Health has always been a part of the Volvo Way, hence, it is a part of the company culture being an attractive employer and fulfill its objective. The managers at Volvo AB have changed their attitude towards health. From having given the employees a health contribution and told them to use it on their spare time, to have realized the importance of investing in health and also perceived the fact that the health promoting activities could be done at work. The managers have started to see the financial value in the investments, but “since it is all about money, it would be great to be able to show what value, expressed in monetary terms, the health investments create.” (Pernilla)

Volvo Trucks considers its work with promoting health and helping its employees to feel better as an investment. “Every year we are investing in machines and equipments, but that is not enough, we also have to invest in the people operating the machines.” (Pernilla)

Volvo Trucks and Volvo AB are both fully convinced that there is a connection between the health promoting investments and profitability in the Volvo Corporation. A measureable effect of the health investments so far is the fact that the sick leave has decreased.

Since Volvo AB is deeply affected by the current financial crisis, no extra money can be put into developing the health investment services at the moment. However, Pernilla emphasizes that when the weak financial climate will reverse, new investments in health will take place, especially in different measurements.

### **5.3 GDL**

GDL is a transfer company offering logistic solutions within industry, trade, facility and agriculture. The headquarters is situated in Helsingborg and has 60 employees. GDL has no own truck drivers, however about 300 drivers are tied to the company in order to perform hauling services. In the following subchapters a summary of the interview with Jerker, Head of Department, at GDL is presented.

#### **5.3.1 Investments in Health Promotion**

GDL's way of defining health is by aiming at balance in life, thus both mental and physical health is of great importance. Balance in life consists of own time, family and work and is supposed to look like an equilateral triangle. However, the equilateral triangle can easily be destroyed due to a disproportionately long work angel. The logistic trade is very stressful and therefore there are lots of problem regarding burnout. Furthermore, GDL defines a healthy workplace as a workplace with a low number of sick leave.

GDL wants to adapt the health investments to its employees: "Our employees have different interests, one prefers running, another want to play bowling and a third person would like to go to a gym". (Jerker). Every employee gets a health contribution of 4800 SEK, of which they have entire disposal of, in accordance with the directions of Skatteverket. Nearly all of the working staff are using the contribution, since massage and chiropody are included more than 90% use it.

The contest, GDL Promotion, was introduced at the company a couple of years ago. Every employee has a card where one point is being registered every half an hour one is being physically active. At GDL activity often takes place after lunch. The employees are out walking together and are still able to work with a notebook and the mobile phone. When the card is filled with 20 points it is handed in and once a month there is a drawing with two winners. The department managed to gather the most points during a year wins the challenge trophy called *Hurtbullen*<sup>3</sup>, a cup with a cinnamon bun upon.

#### **5.3.2 Health Promotion Control**

Through GDL Promotion GDL is trying to control its health investments. "Within my department we try to motivate each other and try to encourage everybody to join for a walk after lunch. GDL Promotion has created harmony among the employees and one is walking without just talking about trucks." (Jerker) However, GDL emphasizes that in the end the outmost responsibility lies in the hands of the individual.

#### **5.3.3 Manner of Measuring and Accounting**

GDL do not use any measurements or calculations to measure the effects of the health investments. Nevertheless, the sick leave numbers are presented in the annual report. Due to a back injury and a burnout case, the sick leave numbers do not appear in the way GDL would want them to do. "When having employees sick listed for a whole year the numbers are badly affected, however the long term sick listed do not cause us high direct cost, it is rather the

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<sup>3</sup> *Hurtbullen*: Swedish slang for a sporty person.

short term sick listed that cost money.” (Jerker) It is difficult measuring the outcomes of the investments but GDL finds caring of its employees very important.

### **5.3.4 Benefits of Investment**

”The value of the firm is close to nothing if one would remove its employees and the brand”. (Jerker) Hence, GDL looks after its employees and realizes the importance of the team. During the nine years Jerker has worked at GDL the health investments has changed and nowadays the aim is more at physical activity. “If one is more physical active, one can easier handle the stressful work at the transportation departments”. (Jerker)

According to GDL, the purpose of the health investments is to become more efficient but still maintain the physical and psychological health of the employees. ”To be able to squeeze out as much as possible of every employee without killing them, the employees must keep a healthy lifestyle”. (Jerker) It is hard keeping the triangle mentioned above equilateral, but GDL have learned from previous mistakes. The burn out cases are tragical mistakes and cost enormous amounts of money. “We have had some cases of burn outs which have caused the sick leave numbers looking bad.” (Jerker)

“Sick leave is very expensive; the health contribution of 4800 SEK is peanuts in comparison”. (Jerker) According to Jerker, every logistic manager has invaluable customer contacts which make the created goodwill priceless, thus impossible for a substitute to keep up with. Hence, if a manger gets ill it would imply large costs for the company.

Since health investments are put into the balance sheet as a cost, it might be hard to see the revenues created. According to Jerker, GDL already spends a lot on the employees and spending more than today would probably not increase the profits. However, it is hard to measure the outcome of the health promoting investments and also to allocate the effects. “It is hard to tell what it would look like if we did not invest in health promotion”. (Jerker)

GDL also states that it is important having a good reputation. A workplace caring about its employees and investing in them is often considered an attractive employer. A company can most likely make good bargains with an unhealthy staff, but in the long term this is indefensible. Employees that get along with one another and are healthy can achieve very much. “The workplace is a chain and a chain is never stronger than its weakest link.” (Jerker)

## **5.4 The School of Business, Economics and Law**

The School of Business, Economics and Law is a Faculty Board area at Gothenburg University. The school offers undergraduate education, postgraduate education and research. At the school the number of full-time employees in 2008 was 400, of whom 40 were professors. In the following subchapters a summary of the interview with Eva, Administrative Secretary & Responsible for HR-Questions, at The School of Business, Economics and Law is presented.

### **5.4.1 Investments in Health Promotion**

According to Eva, The School of Business, Economics and Law has invested in health in contrast to other faculties at university of Gothenburg. "The health investments are definitely something the School of Business, Economics and Law does for a good reason. I think our Dean's intention with health investment is to make the school an attractive workplace. The employees should be proud of working at The School of Business, Economics and Law." (Eva)

The first idea of starting investing in health was introduced in the year 2002 by the head of Department of Business Administration. A survey was sent out to investigate the interest in physical activities and health promotion among the employees at The School of Business, Economics and Law. With sponsor help from Volvo it ended up in a salsa course and a weight-watcher course. The participants appreciated the courses but no further investments were made until the year of 2006 when power walks became popular. Our Dean figured out a new concept, power walks and stretching under the guidance of Annika Gard, a woman with several years experience of physical activities and company health care. Initially the number of participants was rather low; especially the interest in joining the power walks was diminutively since the walks took place early in the morning. The power walks were abolished, however, the stretching went on and today Annika Gard is in charge of stretching twice a week in order to lower the need of visiting a masseur. The stretching exercises last half-an-hour and take place in classrooms at the school.

In addition to providing stretching exercises, a health contribution of 1500SEK is offered to the employees, which is an increase of the amount since year 2008 when the contribution was 1000SEK. Furthermore, Eva has started organizing lectures with inspiring discoursers. Fredrik Paulún, one of Sweden's most famous nutritionist, visited the school in March this year and was much appreciated.

### **5.4.2 Health Promotion Control**

The School of Business, Economics and Law is trying to encourage physical activities by letting the employees use one working hour a week for exercising. "We are also trying to make the stretching little flashier and marketing it better." (Eva) There is a special web page containing the school's health promotions, but according to Eva uploading information on a web page it is not enough, one also has to e-mail the information to achieve results. Every Monday morning an e-mail is sent out containing different useful training hints and words of wisdom from Annika Gard. One needs a reminder of the importance of being physical active thus the e-mails are a part of the work trying to get people joining the stretching.

### **5.4.3 Manner of Measuring and Accounting**

Sick leave numbers can be found in the annual report, however, the numbers in the annual report do not reflect reality, Eva emphasizes. Due to the fact that the employees do not always report themselves sick, in reality, the sick leave numbers are twice as large as the numbers presented in the annual report. This is an example of the so called academic freedom, in which teachers often consider themselves not obliged to report absence due to illness since there is no one else doing their job. "This place of work is not like any other, here one owns its time, however, there is a difference between administrators and teachers." (Eva)

### **5.4.4 Benefits of Investments**

Eva interprets that health promoting investments are made in order to increase the employee satisfaction. Another reason for investing in health promotion is the benefits the investments can create, however, the primary goal of the School of Business, Economics and Law is to make the personnel feel better and enjoy their workplace. "I think our Dean, from the beginning, put on his employee hat and started thinking about how The School of Business, Economics and Law in the best way could support its employees." (Eva) On the other hand, the stretching has automatically led to a fellowship between the different departments, an effect not thought of when implementing it.

## **5.5 Sparbanken Gripen**

Sparbanken Gripen is a freestanding, independent bank situated in the northwestern Skåne. With its twelve offices and 200 employees, Sparbanken Gripen offers full rank bank services for private individuals, small and medium sized business enterprises, agriculture, municipalities and organizations. In the following subchapters a summary of the interview with Bo-Gustaf, Director of HR, and Christina, HR Scientist, at Sparbanken Gripen is presented.

### **5.5.1 Investments in Health Promotion**

According to Christina and Bo-Gustaf health has always been a matter of course for Sparbanken Gripen, who started doing health investments a long time ago. The only differences concerning the health investments have been the design of the activities.

Sparbanken Gripen offers its employees an annual health contribution of 2400SEK per person to use for health related purposes. The subscription must be used in accordance with the Swedish law concerning worksites benefits. In addition, Sparbanken Gripen also offers to pay 50% of the cost of massage.

Besides the investments on a regularly basis the company has accomplished health campaigns. In the year of 2008 two competitions between the employees and departments were announced. One of the competitions was carried out during springtime and the other during the autumn. It was step walking contests with the purpose of walking as many steps as possible; hence the employee and department who/which had succeeded in walking the greatest numbers of steps were rewarded. In 2008, Sparbanken Gripen had a staff party with a health theme and in connection with the party a happening day was arranged together with Friskis & Svettis (F&S). The personnel went to a newly opened F&S center and got the chance to try out 13-14 different activities. Later at the party all the employees received three free exercise tickets to use at the different centers of F&S.

### **5.5.2 Health Promotion Control**

Nearly 50% of the 200 employees at Sparbanken Gripen take advantage of the health contributions being offered. However, one has to keep in mind that, due to Swedish regulations, this is not a perfect reflection of the extent of physical activity among the employees. Not all kinds of physical activity are allowed to be subsidized; hence practicing of sports such as running and golf will not be shown in the statistics.

One purpose of the investments in health promoting campaigns is to show the employees that exercise does not necessarily need to be a sweaty training session at the gym. When demonstrating the variety of possibilities, the personnel gets the chance to try out different sorts of exercise. Random inspections show that many of the employees, who take advantage of the contribution, normally exercise in their everyday life; hence, they would probably exercise even if they did not receive a contribution.

The health campaigns are an attempt to reach out to the employees that does not exercise on a regularly basis and show that there is something suitable for everyone. Sparbanken Gripen wants to create opportunities for every employee to achieve a healthy lifestyle but Bo-Gustaf

and Christina point out that the individual itself carries the main responsibility for its health “we cannot hold our employees hands and push them to the swimming-pool”. (Christina)

### **5.5.3 Manner of Measuring and Accounting**

Sparbanken Gripen is included in the law concerning obligatory report of sick leave and consequently sick leave is presented in the annual report. In 2007, total sick leave as a share of the ordinary working hours was 1.48% and in 2008 the figure was 2.07%. The increase of almost 0.5% can be explained with two different cases of illness. However, Sparbanken Gripen would rather talk about a healthy presence at work instead of sick leave

### **5.5.4 Benefits of Investments**

”To a great extent a company itself decides the size of its sick leave.” (Bo-Gustaf) Sparbanken Gripen expects their health investments to pay back, but states that health investments are just one part of the work in creating a healthy workplace, and that the most important factors are a functional organization and a good leadership. According to Sparbanken Gripen a company cannot lower its sick leave just by doing health investments, like handing out gym cards for free. For example, Stina aged 62, will perhaps not take the opportunity to work out for free. However, since the organization is prosperous, Stina can still be healthy. To make health investments profitable you have to concentrate on a well functioning organization and a good leadership. To create, but also to maintain, a low sick leave, an organization needs to have a clear and distinct vision and goal. One has to be able to communicate a leadership that focuses on its employees and also to make ones employees part of the organizational decisions. “Health investment is one piece in a jigsaw puzzle, but one needs all the pieces in order to lower sick leave and create a healthy organization.” (Bo-Gustaf)

”We are working as preventive health measures, we cannot afford a high sick leave. If you have machines, you make sure to keep them in repair, we have to keep our employees in repair.” (Bo-Gustaf)

## 6 Analysis

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*In this chapter significant findings in the empirical data are combined with the theoretical framework and formed to an analysis.*

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### **How is the interaction between health promotion providers and their users?**

During the interviews we have discovered a common understanding among the users and providers. They all agree on the importance of companies taking care of their employees and find it as essential as maintaining the machines and inventories. Health promotion is considered one part of the work of creating a healthy workplace and taking care of the employees, thus, can be seen as a part of a company's strategy (Ljusenius & Rydqvist, 1999). Consequently, health promotion providers and health promotion users are dependent upon each other. Companies need health promoting services offered by health promotion providers in order to maintain the health among employees.

### **What health promotion services are offered?**

As appears from the theoretical framework, the access to fitness and health centers has increased substantially. Hence, today there is a considerable number of providers offering a wide extent of health promoting services. The theory states that plenty of health companies offer health promoting services in various ways to companies. (Edenhall, 2008) This is in accordance with the providers being interviewed, who generally offer a wide selection of health promotion services. The providers look at a company's total working environment in which health promotion is a part of the work. Since different companies have different needs, it is of great importance to customize the health promotion to every specific company in order to maximize its outcome. The providers are examining the customers, the so called users, to form their own opinion of the customers' needs and what steps is needed to be taken to fulfill the desideratum. Thus, the providers can evaluate in what way a health investment would be beneficial for the user, and what sort of health promotion would be suitable for every specific company.

Previa, Feelgood and Clarahälsan are companies offering health promoting services from a wide spectrum, having teams consisting of authorized health care and health promotion staff. Since the teams, among others, consist of health pedagogues, doctors, psychologists, and social scientists, they can be consulted with a wide number of issues. On the other hand, Sportlife has different approach, in which they primarily are offering physical activities and dietary coaching at different fitness centers.

### **How do health promotion users invest in health promotion?**

Companies use different strategies to invest in health promotion. According to Angelöw (2002), health promotion can imply physical activity, introduction of exercise at working hours, alcohol and smoking cessation programs, relaxation, massage, and weight loss. When investing in health promotion, many companies engage health promotion providers to help them create a healthy workplace, while others, especially large companies, also employ or educate their own health promotion experts. All of the companies being interviewed have to different extents some sort of agreements with health promotion providers. Volvo Trucks has not only interaction with different providers, but also its own health coach.

It is of great interest that, besides working together with different health promotion providers, the companies invest in health in other ways. When comparing the different users one clearly see differences in how they invest. On the one hand there is Stena Bulk, where the CEO has a



great interest in health, which is manifested in the fact that most of the department is out running together twice a week. On the other hand there is the School of Business, Economics and Law where health promotion consists of stretching. Nonetheless, we have observed great enthusiasm in physical activities at all of the companies. There is an interest among the companies being interviewed to create own health promoting activities, like GDL Promotion at GDL and different step counting contests. At Volvo Trucks there are also different sport clubs within the Volvo Cooperation where employees can join.

Current regulations imply that an employer can offer its employees physical activity on the assumption that it is addressed to the whole personnel, is of simple kind and to a low cost. Consequently, this signifies that the costs are tax deductible for the employer and the employees are spared from paying tax imposed on fringe benefits. ([www.skatteverket.se](http://www.skatteverket.se)) All the companies being interviewed distribute health contributions of different amounts to their employees in accordance with the Swedish regulations concerning tax exemption. The employees have the opportunity to unimpededly choose how to make use of the health contribution as long as it is lawful. The most frequent way of using the health contribution among the employees of the interviewed companies is at different fitness studios, on massage or podiatry.

Furthermore, Stena Bulk and Volvo Trucks are companies belonging to large cooperations who participate in different running competitions and sponsor their employees' participation. In accordance with the regulations, entry fees of competitions, for instance running races, are tax deductible for companies that are registered as a team, but taxable when registering individual employees ([www.skatteverket.se](http://www.skatteverket.se)). Stena Bulk and Volvo Trucks have for example teams put up in the Göteborg Half Marathon. AB Volvo is also one of the partners of the Göteborg Half Marathon, sponsoring the event under the slogan: "Volvo invests healthy"<sup>4</sup>. This is reflected in what the respondent of Sportlife mentioned during the interview. He emphasized the fact that large firms often do greater investments since they, relatively speaking, tend to possess more working capital than smaller firms. A further reflection upon the reason why larger companies are investing a lot in public health events, as for example the Göteborg Half Marathon, might be the increase in goodwill those events can create.

### **How do health promotion users control their health investments?**

According to Ekblom & Nilson (2000), there is a risk that only the employees already being physical active will make use of the health promoting activities being offered at work. The theory further states, in order to experience a positive economic outcome it is of great importance that the health investments are addressed to all kinds of employees. The interviewed companies agree on the just mentioned and find it important to control the investments to get as many of the employees as possible, especially the inactive persons, to participate. In other words, the essential in order to achieve alteration in companies, is to be able to reach the "couch potatoes". Employees that already regularly exercise will not make a difference to the company if their employer will start handing out gym cards to them. Furthermore, the respondents expressed that just distributing gym cards to persons who normally do not exercise and especially to persons who are not interesting in working out at a gym, will neither make a difference, hence, the employer needs to be able to reach out to all types of employees. One way of reaching all types of employees, is by offering the personnel a variety of health promoting services, at all levels, thus, offering activities suitable for all kinds of employees.

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<sup>4</sup> Our translation of the Swedish slogan of Volvo: "Volvo Satsar Friskt"

An interesting question arisen from the interviews and which is also brought up in the theory by Andersson (2006) is at what price a company should try to get all the employees to start exercising. Is it ethically right to force an employee to participate in health promoting activities just because the employer consider it necessary for the employees health and has invested a lot of money in it? One of the companies being interviewed that discussed the ethical dilemma in an appreciable way was Previa, who discoursed company policies and attitudes towards the employees, and questioned whether it is right to decide not to put effort in getting the inactive employees participating in the activities when they represent a minority. That is whether a company has an ethical responsibility saying that it has to help the inactive employees start exercising, even if the inactive represent a minor group.

However, one can reflect upon the above mentioned issue even further. If there is an uninterruptedly nagging from a company's point of view, about the importance of participating in the physical activities being offered, and the pressure of being healthy is too great, there might be a risk the ones not enjoying exercising will feel left outside. Hence, in some manners the investments might harm the fellowship and harmony among the employees and worsen the working climate.

Whether the management in a company has an interest in health and health promotion is of great importance when it comes to the creation of health promotion and also its outcome. All of the respondents we have been talking to have in one way or another had an interest in their health. We have noticed the fact that in a lot of companies it is the interest of the CEO that is being sponsored. If the company has an active manager with a devotedly interest in health, like Ulf at Stena Bulk, then there are great chances of a favorable outcome.

The companies want to support and promote employee health but they point out that every individual itself has the utmost responsibility of its health. None of the companies are forcing their employees to take advantage in the health promoting services being offered, however they are using slightly different methods of encouraging the employees.

### Measurements

Except the regulation of reporting sick leave, there are no rules of how to structure the health account, nor is it obligatory ([www.arbetsmiljoupplysningen<sup>2</sup>](http://www.arbetsmiljoupplysningen.se)). The companies interviewed agree on the fact that there is need of developing a reliable measuring instrument able to show how much a company investing in health promotion will earn in economical terms. Nevertheless, today there is a way of evaluating the outcome of health investments, namely by using health account. In order to improve worksite health the phrase, health account, was introduced by the Swedish Government in the action plan that was launched in 2001 (Johanson & Cederqvist, 2005). However, none of the companies being interviewed are using health account.

A debatable issue is the question why none of the respondent companies are using health account. One reason might be the fact that there are different models of how to compose a health account, which can cause confusion and doubts about the method's reliability. Since the law provides a presentation of sick leave in the annual report, the companies already got the numbers ready to present, however, when doing a health account one needs further information that might be time consuming to gather and results in omitting health account.

The requirement of a good measuring instrument to be able to measure the outcome of a health investment, mentioned above, is much sought after among the companies and needs further emphasis. What is required is a measurement of the costs and revenues of health investments. It is easier to persuade a companies' board of directors the importance of the health investments when being able to present an actual number showing the outcome of the investments.

When having actual numbers of the outcome of health investments to present, it is possible to implement further information in the annual report. Not only can further information be of interest to stockholders and other interested parties, but above all, among employees that have an interest in a future employment within a company. When reflecting upon adding more information to the annual report we would like to assert that our generation not only is interested in the fact that a future employer will pay a sufficient salary, but also in knowing how labor conditions are and what nonmonetary incentives are offered. Today there is a greater awareness of other factors when evaluating a company, among those other factors health investments play an important part. When reflecting upon this, we believe in the fact that companies investing in health benefits from it in a wider way than expected and will gain even more in the future.

All of the health promotion users we have been investigating account for sick leave according to the regulations stated by Skatteverket. In the beginning of the writing process we considered accounting for sick leave was very important and reflected, in a trustworthy way, the situation in a company. However, when doing the interviews new knowledge has appeared concerning the reliability of the presentation of sick leave numbers, perhaps the numbers do not say that much. One cannot draw direct conclusions regarding to how the general health or physical health in a company by just observing sick leave numbers. This due to the fact that the sick leave numbers is very badly affected by long term illness, that is to say, if a company has a couple of employees being long term sick listed the numbers increase. Furthermore, the long term illness cases do not necessarily need to be caused by the employees not being healthy or not taking part of the company's health promoting services, but be depending on other factors such as cancer, accidents or other injuries or illnesses that one is not able to affect oneself.

The sick leave dilemma becomes even clearer when looking at the sick leave numbers concerning School of Business, Economics and Law. Their sick leaves numbers are rather low, however, the numbers would not have been as low if the teachers had called in sick and not stayed at home correcting exams while being ill.

According to a press release made by the Försäkringskassan (2009-04-20) the numbers of sick leave is decreasing. Hence, there is not an obvious explanation of why the sick leave is decreasing. However, in Sweden there is a clear connection between sick leave and the country's financial situation (Lag Ds 2004:16 om drivkraft för minskad frånvaro). This might be one explanation to the decrease in sick leave, however, it is not a general accepted explanation. When reflecting upon further reasons towards the current reduction of sick leave, we would like to underscore that it might depend on the stricter rules concerning health insurance being established. Another reason to the current decrease in sick leave might be the new regulations, both mentioned in the theory and in the empirical findings, regulations stating that it is more expensive for companies not to act proactive before their employees get ill. We think this further indicates that a decrease in sick leave not necessarily is depending on people becoming healthier.

### **In what way are health investments by health promotion users considered to be beneficial?**

Andersson et al. (2004) claim that health promotion, in the sense of physical activity, might have a positive impact on an individual's performance for example in the matter of improved productivity and efficiency. The interviewed companies see a connection between investments in health promotion and a positive outcome. However, none of the companies investing in health promotion can tell, in financial terms, how much the investments generate or in what way the investments are profitable. Instead factors like satisfied employees, harmony and fellowship among employees, improved working climate and environment, happier and more alert staff, were brought up when talking about what impact the investments have had on the companies. However, the conception among the companies is that structured and controlled investments in health promotion generally generate revenues but there is a difficulty in proving the relation between investments in health promotion and a company's profitability.

According to Andersson et al. (2004) it is usually less expensive investing in maintaining a healthy individual's health, instead of paying for rehabilitation and medical care of an individual suffering from poor health. Hence, less effort is needed to prevent an employee from contract an illness caused by poor health (Andersson et al., 2004). Further, regulations in order to create financial motives for the employer to take action against long term sick leave have been established. The regulations make it costly for the employer having sick listed employees. (Lag Ds 2004:16 om drivkraft för minskad frånvaro) Since costs related to sick leave, such as drop in production, lost in competence, need of finding substitutes and rehabilitation are greater than the costs of investing in health, the companies being interviewed consider it cheaper acting before an employee falls ill. Hence, health promotion is a process aiming at keeping the employees healthy and preventing illness, a process that can help companies reduce sick leave and rehabilitation ([www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)). When interviewing the companies investing in health the common understanding among the respondents was that having sick employees cost them great amounts of money. Furthermore, since they consider sick leave as something one can often relate to poor psychological and physical health, they state that the costs related to sick leave can decrease through health investments.

Sportlife is using a powerful marketing strategy when marketing their health promoting services to other companies. By mentioning a number of positive effects on its website, which is achieved when investing in health promoting services, Sportlife promises that investments in health promotion turn out profitable for companies. Feelgood and Clarahälsan, on the other hand, have a gentler approach concerning the way the health promoting services are profitable for companies. At their web pages they state that health investments are lowering sick leave, which leads to lower costs. Previa, finally, is on its web page stating that a carefully prepared strategy of how to work with health in companies is a good investment for organizations.

Research show that physical activity can improve, or more exactly expressed, at least create the qualifications needed to improve, for example, a person's well-being, performance and efficiency. ([www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)) However, being physical active is not a guarantee for performing well at work, neither is it a guarantee for being motivated to one's work, furthermore it does not guarantee an increase of the company's profitability, or a decrease of the company's sick leave costs. The psychological health is just as important as physical health.

The overall conception is that a healthy workplace is financially beneficial to companies. However, many of the interviewed point out that health promotion is merely one component in the process of creating a healthy workplace. It is vital to consider the company as a whole and also endeavor a well functioning organization, leadership and management.

## **7 Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research**

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*This chapter aims at bringing the thesis to a close by highlighting the most important conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis in view of the formulated research questions. Finally, the reader can acquaint oneself with suggestions for further research.*

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### **7.1 Conclusion**

The intention of the thesis was to elucidate the interaction between health promotion providers and health promotion users and to examine the benefits a company might achieve by investing in health promotion. To be able to answer the purpose, a research question was formulated:

*How is the interaction between health promotion providers and their users?*

One conclusion that can be drawn from the study is that there is an important interaction between health promotion providers and health promotion users since they are dependent upon each other. Many companies are in need of help from health promotion providers to be able to create a healthy workplace. However, since it is difficult to measure the outcome of investments in employee health, some companies cannot see the value in investing, hence, they merely see costs. Further, the providers are in need of companies investing in health promotion to pursue their business activities. Hence, it is their challenge to show the benefits and motivate companies to invest in health promotion.

When interviewing the nine companies and assimilated the theory, we have come to the conclusion that a tricky part concerning health investments is to get all of the employees to participate. That is where the interaction between the providers and users really is required. The users need help in order to reach the inactive, and the providers can, among other things, place health examinations to the companies' disposal, in order to help the users to show its inactive the importance of physical activity.

What additionally can be concluded from the study is the importance of having a functional organization and a good leadership in order to create a healthy workplace. Without committed managers, it is close to impossible to be able to encourage the employees the importance of the health promotions in creating a prosperous company.

A further conclusion drawn from the study is the need of a suitable measurement instrument that is able to measure the financial outcome of a health investment. When there are actual facts and figures the credibility is increased.

Furthermore, there are lots of health promoting programs from employers, pushing and encouraging help from providers, but after all, when it comes down to it, in the end, the responsibility of living a healthy life lies in the hands of the individual.

The overall understanding, both from the theoretical framework and the interviewed companies, is that investments in health promotion are beneficial for companies. However, there are some factors making the issue somewhat complex. Hence, for the investment to be beneficial it should be well structured and controlled and the organization as a whole needs to be well functioning. However, there is not yet a flawless manner of measuring the financial outcome the investments bring.

## **7.2 Suggestions for Further Research**

When writing the thesis we have been focusing on companies that are doing some kind of health investment. Interestingly enough would be to examine companies that are not investing in health, ask them why they are not investing and what the reason for not doing it is. A second suggestion would be to investigate worksite health promotion from an employee perspective. To question whether employees find it important and appreciates it, but also to examine if the employees have noticed any benefits related to an introduction of worksite health promotion. Finally, it would be of great interest to examine whether the financial crisis has had any impact on companies' investments in employee health. That is, to investigate at whether a financial crisis tends to reduce health investments or have other influences.

Finally, we would like to underscore the fact that we truly recommend further studies within this field. Regardless of what research approach is chosen, there are plenty of alternatives that need further investigation. The attention needed towards the topic can be reflected in a quotation mentioned before, with which we would like to bring this thesis to an end:

**“Those who think they have no time for bodily exercise will sooner or later have to find time for illness”**

–Edward Stanley  
([www.health.harvard.edu](http://www.health.harvard.edu))

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Sparbanken Gripen,  
Director of HR (2009-04-15)  
HR Scientist, (2009-04-15)

GDL  
Head of Department (2009-04-17)

Sportlife  
Head of Business Relations & Executive Assistant (2009-04-21)

The School of Business, Economics and Law  
Administrative Secretary & Responsible for HR-Questions (2009-04-21)

Volvo Trucks  
Health Coach (2009-04-22)

Stena Bulk  
President & CEO (2009-04-23)

Clarahälsan  
Physiotherapist (2009-04-28)  
Company Nurse (2009-04-28)  
Feelgood  
Head of Department (2009-05-04)

Previa  
Head of Department (2009-05-08)

## Appendix I

### Interview Questions Health Promotion Users

1. Vad är friskvård för Ert företag?  
*-Hur definierar ni hälsa?*
2. Vilken form av friskvård använder Ni Er av i företaget?
3. Har Ni samarbete/speciella avtal med något speciellt friskvårdsföretag när det gäller Era friskvårdssatsningar?
4. Varför införde Ni friskvård?
5. När började Ni med friskvårdssatsningar?
6. Vad förväntar Ni er av friskvårdssatsningarna?  
*-Ekonomiskt, socialt, etc*
7. Ser Ni på friskvårdssatsningen som en investering?
8. Hur många av Era anställda använder sig av friskvårdsförmånerna?
9. Följer Ni upp vilka i personalen som använder friskvårdsförmånerna?
10. Försöker Ni ”styra” så att alla tar del av friskvårdsförmånerna?  
*-Gör Ni något speciellt för att få de inaktiva att ta del av friskvårdsförmånerna?*
11. Har Ni upplevt att friskvårdssatsningarna har haft någon effekt (både ekonomisk och icke ekonomisk effekt) sedan Ni införde friskvård?
12. Mäter/redovisar Ni på något sätt effekten av satsningarna?  
*-Kalkyler, hälsobokslut etc?*
13. Vilka upplysningar lämnar Ni i årsredovisningen om friskvård/sjukfrånvaro?
14. Som en sammanfattande fråga, ser Ni någon koppling mellan friskvårdssatsningar och lönsamhet i Ert företag?

## Appendix II

### Interview Questions Health Promotion Providers

1. Vad är friskvård för Ert företag?  
*-Hur definierar Ni hälsa?*
2. Vilken form av friskvårdssatsningar erbjuder Ni företag?
3. Hur länge har Ni erbjudit företagsfriskvård?
4. När började Ni se att det var lönsamt för Er att erbjuda företagsfriskvård?
5. Hur marknadsför Ni era tjänster till företag?  
*-Är det Ni som kontaktar företag eller kommer företag själva till Er?*  
*-Riktar Ni Era friskvårdstjänster till någon speciell typ av företag?*
6. Hur utformar Ni friskvårdsprogram för företag?
7. Finns det stora skillnader på utformningen av friskvårdsprogram mellan olika slags branscher?  
*-Efterfrågas olika tjänster?*  
*-Ser efterfrågan annorlunda ut mellan exempelvis tjänsteföretag och industriföretag?*
8. Hur anser Ni att satsningar på fysisk aktivitet bör utformas för att få alla anställda att delta?  
*-Få med även de som vanligtvis inte tränar*
9. Hur motiverar Ni företag att satsa på friskvård?  
*-Lägger Ni stor vikt vid de framtida ekonomiska fördelarna för företag, minskade kostnader etc?*
10. Anser Ni att friskvård är direkt lönsamt för företag?  
*-Hur kan i så fall företag som anlitar Er och använder sig av Era tjänster bli mer lönsamma?*  
*-På vilket sätt blir i så fall företag mer lönsamma?*
11. Vi har uppmärksammat att vissa friskvårdsföretag marknadsför sina företagstjänster genom att garantera företagen förbättrad lönsamhet om företagen satsar på friskvård. Vad är Era tankar kring detta? Anser Ni att man kan garantera en förbättrad lönsamhet med friskvårdssatsningar?  
*-Finns det undersökningar, vetenskaplig forskning som stöder deras påståenden?*  
*- Andra källor?*
12. Hur anser Ni att man måste styra/anpassa friskvården för att den ska bli lönsam för företag?  
*-Hur viktigt är det att alla deltar i friskvården?*  
*-Hur viktigt bedömer Ni det vara att även de så kallade soffpotatisarna deltar i friskvårdssatsningen för att den ska bli lönsam?*