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CSR Case Study
Family-Orientated
Personnel Policy
(VAUDE Sport GmbH & Co. KG)



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Mainstreaming
CSR among
SMEs

CSR focus

Compatibility of career and family

Company

VAUDE Sport GmbH & Co. KG a family business with about 240 employees and its registered office in Tett nang (Lake Constance) produces and sells mountaineering, bike and water sports equipment. VAUDE is one of the leading mountain sports brands in Europe. Founded in 1974, with its high level of skill in textiles the company achieves constant growth rates and is able to successfully resist the trend towards concentration in the sector. 60% of its turnover is earned in Germany, 40% through exports all around the world. www.vaude.com.



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CSR prizes and awards

- “Beruf und Familie” (Career and Family) Audit certificate from the Hertie Foundation (2004)
- “Freedom and Responsibility” prize from the Federal President (2002)
- “Equal opportunities for men and women in business” prize from the Ministry of Economics for Baden Württemberg (2002)
- CSR Rating Foundation goods test



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CSR in practice

- CSR philosophy
Social entrepreneurship is practised at VAUDE especially with regard to children and the compatibility of career and family life. The trigger for this commitment is, as with most socially committed companies, to be found in a personal relationship of the owner of the company or the Managing Director. In the case of VAUDE this is clearly based on the child-friendly and family-friendly attitude of the Dewitz family. This is also reflected within the business. Over 50% of the other managers at VAUDE have three or more children. It is not just for this reason that, since the company was founded in 1974, VAUDE has stood for family-style relationships that created the term the “VAUDE family.”

At the same time VAUDE has stood out since its foundation because of its above-average proportion of woman. 67% of the staff at VAUDE are women, which in the past led to the situation where every year several employees left the company at the same time because of “parenting time.” The rural location of the company in Tettngang in Upper Swabia had a simultaneous double negative effect in this situation. For one thing, employees could not in general return to the company, even though they wanted to, because of a lack of child-care. For another there was always a great effort for VAUDE associated with finding new staff since firstly there were no large towns or colleges in the area



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and, secondly, the well-paid industry on Lake Constance dominated the available labour market. The loss of valuable know-how and the high costs of recruitment to fill the vacancies created were the result.

- "Kindergarten" CSR project

So the idea of setting up the provision of childcare came readily to mind. In 2001 the VAUDE kindergarten was established. In order to guarantee even capacity utilisation, the solution of a semi-public institution in the form of a public-private partnership (PPP) was sought from the start. Whilst VAUDE has taken on the funding of the premises, the construction and expansion of the kindergarten and the running costs, the staff costs are covered by contributions from the parents plus a subsidy by the town (and previously a state subsidy). The kindergarten therefore takes in both children and grandchildren of the employees and "external" children. The establishment itself was designed as a "family service provider." This all-day and all-year care and service facility was to be as flexible and tailored as possible to the individual needs of each of the families. The service provided today by the kindergarten to over 30 children is correspondingly varied and can be used on an individual basis as regards the times. Besides the mixed group which currently includes children from 1 to 10 years old (2/3 VAUDE, 1/3 external children), there is a toddlers' group two days a week that specialises in looking after children of 1 to 3 years old and a further infant group for children between six months and three years old. In cooperation with the nearby school the kindergarten provides core hour care. During holiday periods the kindergarten provides additional childcare. Even when emergency childcare situations occur for employees' children, the kindergarten lends a hand. Lunch is provided not only for the children but also, if



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required, for their parents in the kindergarten.

Stage by stage, parallel staff policy measures have been introduced that fit in with the kindergarten service: flexible working hours and the most varied working hours patterns allow a trouble-free return to work as well as teleworking, job-sharing options and contact maintenance and qualification programmes for parents. But even these measures were not perceived to be far-reaching enough. The reason, in this context too, was that the number of employees had grown at above-average speed since the end of the Nineties. The family-style relationships that had to date distinguished the working atmosphere at VAUDE in a positive way were now being pushed to their limits. The clearest sign of this was that many of the employees no longer knew each other personally. In the company they therefore looked for appropriate modern strategies to revive and support the “VAUDE family” long-term that were suited to the firm’s increased size and the new situation.

- CSR development

A suitable procedure for further development turned out to be certification by the “Career and Family” audit by the Hertie Foundation. Here close cooperation was initiated between business management and personnel management and employees who were involved voluntarily and this resulted in three long-term working groups: “Information and Communication,” “Business Operations” and “Service for Families.” In these working groups, the following aims have been converted into measures in recent years: increased flexibility of working hours and place of work for all employees was implemented by means of various part time schemes, flexitime and seasonal accounts, part time for pre-



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retirement and time off for family matters. Improved internal information flow was achieved with measures such as the introduction of an intranet, an employee newsletter, blackboards with the photos and functions of all employees, routine departmental meetings, a company suggestion scheme, guides for the induction of new employees and central scheduling of EDP. The central focus of service for families was for one thing the company pension scheme which led to measures for the set-up of a pension fund and informative presentations about employer's contributions to tax-saving schemes. For another, the provision of sports and leisure opportunities for employees and members of their families was also expanded. An overarching current topic is the set-up of a staff development service which is as comprehensive as possible and under which, among other things, training courses for employees and also external seminar services are provided in the VAUDE Academy. Besides the classic employee-related topics, activities are also being developed in the working groups for the improvement of processes and quality and these activities will in turn lead to more efficient management of working hours and to greater job satisfaction.



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CSR benefits

The benefits that result from the commitment to employees are

- to the company,
- to the employees and
- to society.

The benefits to VAUDE are to be seen in surprisingly great competitive advantages in staff recruitment, reduced loss of know-how, increased job satisfaction for the employees and lastly a further reduction in turnover and sickness ratios. In addition, with these measures VAUDE has ensured that it will continue to remain a “living company.” It supports and nurtures not only employee identification with the company but at the same time their involvement by this same means. Employees work together with commitment and voluntarily on the implementation of their idea of a work situation tailored to their needs. Dissatisfaction can therefore rapidly be channelled and used constructively instead of leading to withdrawal or to resignation or actual termination. And commitment is also bearing fruit externally. VAUDE can benefit from a positive image as a “good corporate citizen” which, among other things, shows in the positive attitude of the surrounding region.

For employees there is the immediate benefit of a more relaxed working atmosphere and an improved work/life balance. Employees feel appreciated as people because of these company measures.



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In the long term, with the opportunities provided e.g. with an easier return to work, they create greater market attractiveness, less loss of income and fewer breaks in careers.

Last but not least VAUDE contributes to the solution to one of Germany's most serious economic problems: demographic change. Whereas others wait for public handouts that have to date not solved the problem, the problem with VAUDE is reversed with a birth-rate four times higher. And lastly this applies not just in the company but also to employees in neighbouring companies.

We would like to thank Mrs. Antje von Dewitz, VAUDE Sport GmbH & Co. KG for information and text extracts



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Tasks

Work out

1. the business arguments i.e. the link between the benefits to the firm and to society,
2. the strategic approach i.e. the link between the CSR strategy and the company strategy and
3. the communication approach i.e. the use of formal and informal communication channels.

II.

1. What other CSR activities would you recommend to this company for a comprehensive CSR concept?
2. Where is there potential for improvement in the CSR communication?