

Implementation of the DGE quality standard for meals in an university canteen

Factors of (non-)continuation

Corinna Neuthard, Melanie Schneider, Katja Schneider, Petra Lührmann

Abstract

Expert interviews identified effort, employee motivation and sales figures as key factors that obstruct the implementation of the DGE quality standard in university canteens. The implementation of the DGE quality standard requires explicit change management, which would be facilitated by simplifications.

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Dr. Corinna Neuthard^{1,3}

Dr. Melanie Schneider²

Prof. Dr. Katja Schneider¹

Prof. Dr. Petra Lührmann²

¹ Heidelberg University of Education, Institute for Social Sciences, Im Neuenheimer Feld 561, 69120 Heidelberg

² Schwäbisch Gmünd University of Education, Institute for Health Sciences, Oberbettringer Straße 200, 73525 Schwäbisch Gmünd

³ neuthard@ph-heidelberg.de

by the Student Services at the suggestion of researchers at the university. The conversion process was scientifically monitored by the researchers. Two years after successful certification [3], the Student Services decided not to continue. During the implementation phase, a STUDY&FIT menu consisting of a main and various secondary components was designed and offered at lunchtime. On a weekly average, this corresponded to the reference values of the standard [3] at nutrient level. A discount of 20% was granted to canteen guests who selected the complete menu proposal. STUDY&FIT snacks supplemented the offer. As part of the investigations, factors were to be identified that impede a longer-term offer or promote discontinuation.

Methodology

After the end of the project and discontinuation of the offer (2018), eight standardized expert interviews on the implementation of the standard were conducted with those involved in the Student Services (management and kitchen practice). A further interview with the lead academic supervisor was conducted in 2023 in order to integrate an overarching reflection on the implementation process. The results of the interviews were supplemented as part of an external evaluation in the form of an inductive, structuring qualitative content analysis [4] and evaluated using elements of grounded theory [5]. The content analysis provides insights into the (perceived) experiences and attitudes of the interviewees [4], while grounded theory iden-

Background and research questions

Communal catering in various settings such as daycare centers, schools and workplaces offers particular opportunities with regard to health-promoting and more sustainable nutrition. One promising approach to improving eating environments is the implementation of the DGE quality standards [1, p. XVII]. In the scope of university and company catering, the number of certified catering services is stagnating [2], although new certifications are continuously being issued. This indicates that successfully certified company caterings are discontinuing their offerings. In this study, a university canteen that has introduced a catering service certified according to DGE quality standards was exemplary examined. The decision to introduce this in a canteen was made

¹ Current: DGE quality standard for meals in companies, public authorities and universities (2023) [9], survey date: DGE quality standard for company catering (2013) [3]

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a qualitative research method for developing theories inductively from empirical data. In the variant of Strauss and Corbin (1996), particular emphasis is placed on a systematic, structured approach. The aim is to generate an object-related theory that is closely oriented to the data collected [5].

tifies key factors (factors within the data on which other factors depend) and correlations between the processes [5].



Fig. 1: Perceived effort according to the position of the interviewees

Results

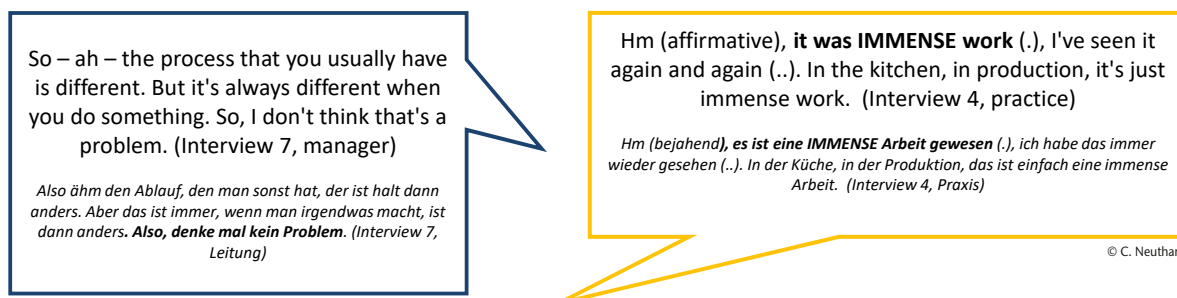
The termination can be explained as a combination of various factors at different levels. At the level of food production, the perceived increased (initial) effort for recipe creation due to the weighing of ingredients during preparation and changed processes in the serving area should be mentioned. In addition, there were increased challenges in procurement. Among others, the requirements of STUDY&FIT had to be reconciled with the established supplier relationships of the Student Services.

At the employee level, attitudes and motivation towards the program, the lack of employee participation in the changeover process (e.g. regarding the meaningfulness of the changeover), interactions with each other (e.g. in the case of extra work and with guests, as well as job tenure were identified as influenc-

ing factors. The scope and nature of the training and preparation was sometimes rated as too low and therefore as an inhibiting factor. With regard to the perceived effort (♦ figure 1) or the perceived participation (♦ figure 2), there were different perceptions between actors with different responsibilities.

According to the employees, factors at the guest level were the design of the offer, e.g. the possibility to choose individual components or an entire menu, and the associated pricing, as well as their accompanying communication strategy, e.g. with regard to the discount scheme for the purchase of a complete menu. The identified factors are partly linked to each other in complex multicausal interactions via chains of effects and feedback loops and led to the discontinuation of the offer after the introductory phase in this study (♦ figure 3).

Key factors in the functional interaction in the Schwäbisch Gmünd canteen were low sales figures, declining employee motivation and high implementation costs, which led to the termination of implementation.



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Fig. 2: Perceived participation according to the position of the interviewees

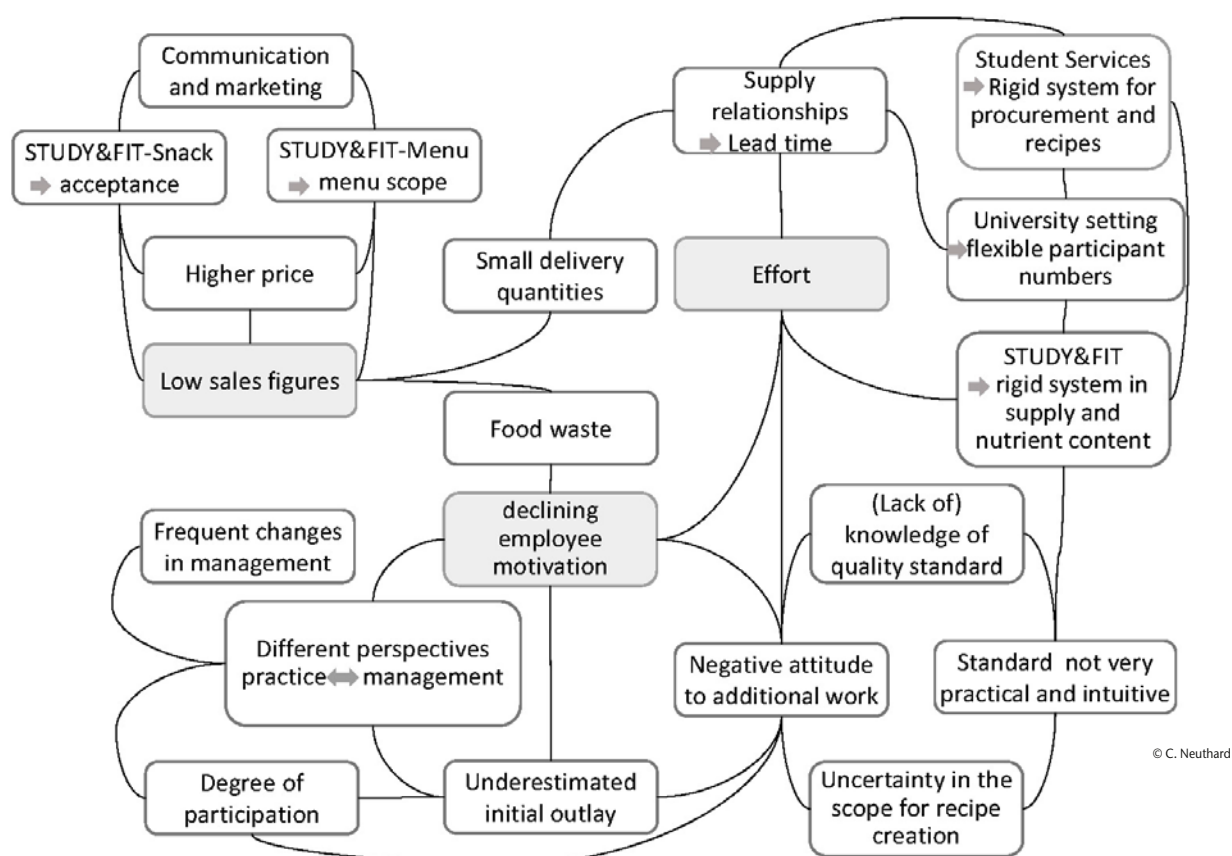


Fig. 3: Interaction of factors contributing to discontinuity (key factors highlighted in grey)

Diskussion und conclusion

Key factors that favored the termination of the offer in the present case are the effort involved, declining employee motivation and low sales figures, which is similar to international findings [6, 7]. The identified correlations indicate that various factors need to be addressed in implementation processes in order to ensure long-term establishment. These are certainly dependent on the operational constellation. In addition to the intended recipe optimizations, it seems crucial to involve and integrate all stakeholders at all levels through participatory processes. The complex processes associated with the implementation of the DGE quality standard therefore require explicit change management on the part of the food service company.

Implementing the DGE quality standard was a challenge for the canteen staff in practice. Despite the one-day training course provided by the DGE, employees did not feel sufficiently prepared for the actual implementation. It is possible that a simplification of the standard and target group-oriented communication for all stakeholders involved in the process could facilitate implementation. It should be noted that the present study was conducted several years ago and certification was carried out at nutrient level, which is no longer planned [8]. Uncertainties about the scope for recipes or product variants also proved to be an obstacle. With

regard to the specific handling of the standard, the interviews showed that intensive and sometimes unrealizable familiarization with the DGE quality standard [9] and certification guidelines [8] was required at all levels. Presumably, dietary patterns have changed since the study in the direction of a health-promoting and more sustainable diet.

As the economical pressure in catering establishments has increased at the same time [10], it would be all the more important to make implementation easier for interested establishments. These aspects should be explored in greater depth through research on success factors and barriers in the conversion process in different settings and initial conditions. In view of the fact that the importance of communal catering is increasing in the everyday eating habits of the German population, the considerable potential for health promotion and prevention as well as sustainable development could be optimally used in this way ([1] p. 6, p. 438).

Note: An abridged version of this text has already been presented as a poster at the 61st Scientific Congress of the German Nutrition Society. For quality assurance and validation of the results, external persons were involved in the evaluation of the conversion process. The data collection was coordinated by the participating researchers at the university. The data analysis was carried out through external persons. The authors of this article consisted of both the participating researchers and the external persons.

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Information on conflicts of interest and the use of AI

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest and that no AI was used in the preparation of the German manuscript. AI was used for the preparation of the English translation.

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