



MOVEMENT IS MEDICINE

A GROUP OF LÄHITAPIOLA EMPLOYEES TESTED A NEW TYPE OF CHAIRS AND BALANCE BOARDS FOR SIX MONTHS. WHAT CHANGED?

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PHOTO: ESA AHDEVAARA / GSS LUCKY-DESIGN

Since every media outlet keeps heralding the health hazards of traditional office work, companies are starting to wake and consider the alternatives. An exceptionally extensive pilot project was undertaken by LähiTapiola, who involved a group of 90 volunteers to pay special attention to body positions at work. The employees received Back App working chairs and balance boards for six months to boost active work. The pilot project was organized in cooperation between Back App and Motivire.

The business manager of LähiTapiola Sari Seppi-Laitinen says that she became interested in the idea, when the managing director of Back App Finland Atte Salminen paid a visit to introduce the concept. The idea seemed close to heart, because the philosophy of LähiTapiola is to carry out and support together with clients such issues, which promote wellness and health.

"In the future we should contribute even more to services that prevent illnesses and accidents, and this pilot project is related to that," Seppi-Laitinen points out the outskirts of the project. She admits that there was some scepticism in the beginning: could the new way of working and the equipment really have such significant effects as were claimed?

Forming the group

People were invited to participate in the pilot project especially from workgroups, where work is mainly carried out at one's own workstation in the LähiTapiola Espoo campus. "Those who travel a lot, work from home or elsewhere in Finland, were excluded from the project. Anyone from these groups wishing to participate, could do so," Seppi-Laitinen tells.

Finally, in late August/early September 2016, Motivre and Back App organized two wellbeing mornings in LähiTapiola premises in Espoo. The goal was to stimulate employees' need for own wellbeing and to train them on the use of the Back App chair and balance board. The wellbeing training also provided anyone interested with Inbody-720 body composition measuring and the related supporting feedback lecture.

After fine-tuning the motivation, the people of LähiTapiola received Back App chairs and balance boards for daily use on workdays over the next six months.

Ditching the harmful routines!

The ways people used to work started to change little by little: for example, while three quarters (75.8%) of participants used to sit more than four hours per day, then at the end of the project there were 60% of those who sat more than four hours. Working while standing up sneaked into the routines of the group: while at the beginning 40% of employees were on their feet for more than an hour during the workday, then the figure doubled (87%) by the end of the project.

At the same time, back pain and other troubles diminished by half, fatigue eased up and work capacity improved markedly. Half of the people (50%) assessed their work capacity as excellent (grade 9 or 10) at the beginning of the project, but in two months from the beginning of the project the figure already increased to two thirds (66.6%).

Service Manager Minna Kontkanen told that she joined the project, thinking that the result could be nothing but improvement. The Back App chair also seemed promising to Kontkanen, so expectations were high. Not all chairs will do



for Kontkanen, whose back has been operated already twice, while hip and lower back pains have been the usual trouble.

"The saddle chair, which I used earlier, already made my tail bone painful and the normal office chair I have shunned for years. Normally I either stood on my feet or sat on an old saddle chair," Kontkanen says and adds that she had used the balancing board from time to time already before the experiment.

No more pain

At the beginning of the project Kontkanen – and a few others – had stiffness in the shoulder and acromial area, but the pain vanished soon after the start, as soon as the settings were changed. Then Kontkanen really fell in love with the chair:

"With this chair you can keep yourself in constant slight movement, and you no longer sit passively. I have no more pain, and instead all the pains have vanished either entirely or become substantially smaller", she tells.

According to Kontkanen, the balancing board as well is a decent contraption, especially when you keep it fully tilting. The challenges with using the balancing board are more to do with high heels, because it is sometimes bothersome to remove the shoes.

"In my opinion the balancing board makes standing up significantly easier."

More dynamic work

"The good results from the pilot project indicated that alternating working positions and Back App products were truly felt to improve energy levels and wellbeing," points out Sari



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"The idea is to increase activeness and motion in a simple way side by side with office work. In this we have had a remarkable success," he notes.

Salminen says that sitting as such does not kill – even though this is what we can read from newspapers – but staying motionless does. The obvious solution – standing up – is not entirely problem-free as well, because when a person stands still over a longer period, the backbone tends to bend a little (at ease posture).

"The core of the Back App ideology is to introduce small motions and balance training to sitting and standing," says Salminen and adds that the next position is always the best position.

Surprising feedback

Motivire and Back App have cooperated previously, so Tuukka Nieminen knew to expect favourable feedback. Nevertheless, Nieminen admits that he was a little surprised:

"I thought that the feedback will be good, but now the messages were exceptionally positive."

As many as 90% of participants in the pilot project wish to continue using the Back App products. Minna Kontkanen tells that the chair has kindled a lot of interest among colleagues – and her colleagues also keep testing the balance board while she is away. Kontkanen namely travels a lot or sits at meetings, but then again it is nice to return to the desk, knowing that there is more exercise waiting.

Plenty of work ahead

"Movement is Medicine" revolution will continue in LähiTapiola", thinks Sari Seppi-Laitinen. "Putting it into practice will be planned after the experiment," she notes.

Salminen and Nieminen see still plenty of work for the teams of this subject in Finland: development of own wellbeing at work is still in its infancy in many organisations.

"If we consider that back problems are the most common reason for absences from work, then the first thing to do is to take care of these sitting and standing matters," concludes Salminen. ■

Seppi-Laitinen. She herself stands on and uses the balancing board at her workplace quite a lot besides the chair.

"I think I have found the right position with both. My own challenge is that my work involves plenty of meetings and discussions, and the chairs used in meeting rooms are usually the traditional ones."

Tuukka Nieminen from Motivire Oy comments that the experiences of Seppi-Laitinen and Kontkanen are in line with the feedback received from the rest of the group.

"We can conclude that the working capacity experienced and targeted by the pilot group has significantly increased," he sums up.

The role of Motivire Oy is to awaken participants' interest in their own wellbeing, so that the enthusiasm would be unflagging throughout the entire longish product experiment. Nieminen is satisfied that the people of LähiTapiola "woke up on a single wake-up call" and became really excited about the experiment.

Motion matters

Atte Salminen tells that this has been the biggest pilot project undertaken with Back App products during the company's nine years of business. Salminen also says that everything has functioned like a well-oiled machine:

70 approved answers*		Before Number	After Number	Before %	After %
No lower back pain during a normal week (4+5)	1 to 5 (5 best)	48	65	68,5	92,9
Shoulder and neck pain almost weekly		39	24	59,1	35,3
Headaches before or after work almost weekly		18	10	27,3	14,7
Never feel exhausted after work (4+5)	1–5 (5 best)	34	48	50,0	69,6
Fitness for work (9+10)	1 to 10 (10 best)	34	46	50,0	66,6

*70 participants had given all information before and after the trial period