

# Employers' return-to-work experience of employees with cancer: A complex communicative pathway

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# Purpose

Work important for cancer survivors | Key role employers in RTW process

- Insight in:
  - Employers' experienced role and responsibility RTW (of empl. with cancer)
  - Implications for employers' need for support

*Part of the MiLES project: **Missing Link = Employer Support***

# Methods Interviews

- **30 in-depth interviews** (M=12, F=18) (63 cases)
- Position: HR (10), Line Manager (20)
- For-Profit (13): Cleaning agency, Counseling agency, Factory
- Non-Profit (17): Hospital, University, Municipality, Health care, Employee Insurance Agency
- Medium (100-500): 9 / Large (>500): 21
- Region: Limburg, Brabant, Zeeland, Zuid Holland, Utrecht, Friesland, Groningen (The Netherlands)

# Methods Analysis

- Grounded Theory
- Using QUAGOL (Dierckx de Casterlé et al, 2012): a systematic, non-rigid guide, based on GT principles:
  1. Case analysis, with individual narratives per transcript
  2. Conceptual reports for each narrative evolving in (3.)
  3. Common conceptual scheme representing all interviews, leading to list of meaningful themes/concepts
  4. Cross-case analysis using NVivo 10
  5. Discovering dimensions, characteristics, relationships leading to findings

# Results

Communicative pathway



# Communicative, phased pathway

1. Disclosure & impact in organization
2. Treatment & creating openness
3. RTW-panning and designing
4. Actual return
5. No return and employee's decease

*Trajectory demands managers' communicative skills*

# 1. Disclosure & Impact

- Showing empathy and understanding
- Carry on working yes/no
- Discuss replacement
- Informing the team

*Dealing with emotions*



## 2. Treatment & Creating openness

- Taking distance
- Respecting privacy
- Keeping in contact
- Creating openness and trust

*When to discuss work?*

Relationships





# 3. Planning reintegration

- Entering into consultation
  - With company doctor
  - With employee
- Having a good look at work adjustments
- Making concrete plans

*How to deal with different opinions?*



## 4. Actual return

- Starting in accordance with plans
- Informed and involved team?
- Observing and keeping in contact
- Reconsider in cooperation with employee and company doctor

*Attention needed for tailor-made measures*



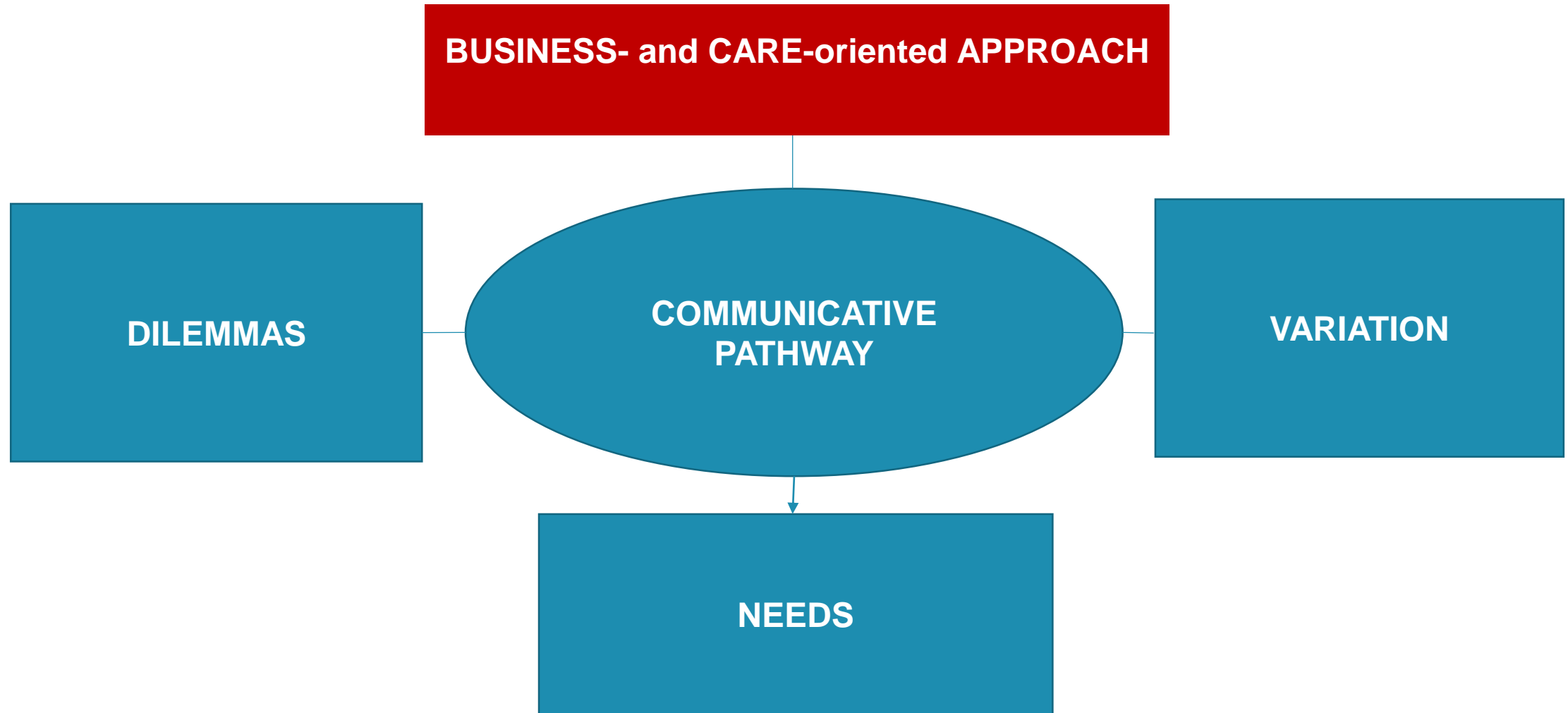
# 5. No return | Employee's decease

- Permanent limitations
- RTW not possible (anymore)
- Making 'death' a subject of discussion
- Huge impact, also on team

*Dealing with unfavorable prognosis*



# Results Approach



# Business & Care-oriented approach | Mix

- Business-oriented
  - Consequences for organization?
  - Focus on mobility and quick return
- Care-oriented
  - Consequences for employee?
  - Focus on future availability



*Approach type depends on the context: variation in employer, employee and organization (slide 16)*

# Results

Dilemmas and variation (context)



# Dilemmas experienced

- Balancing interests
- Dealing with unfavorable prognosis

*“...And that is a huge problem, as an employer it gets you to the point where you think: well, I don’t want to send him home, because I cannot do that to him, but I can’t keep him either...” [LM]*



# Variation | Context

- Differences at organization level
  - Culture | Company size
- Differences between employers
  - Cancer and RTW experience | Communication skills | Approach
- Differences between employees
  - Attitude | Seriousness of illness | Motivation





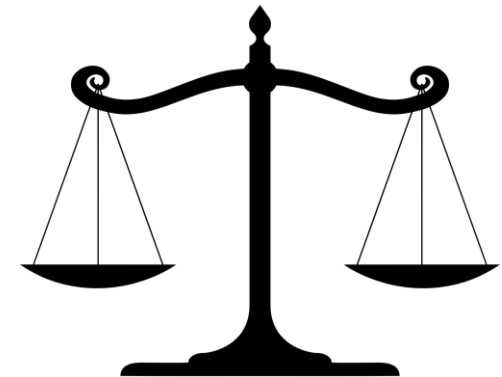
# Results Needs



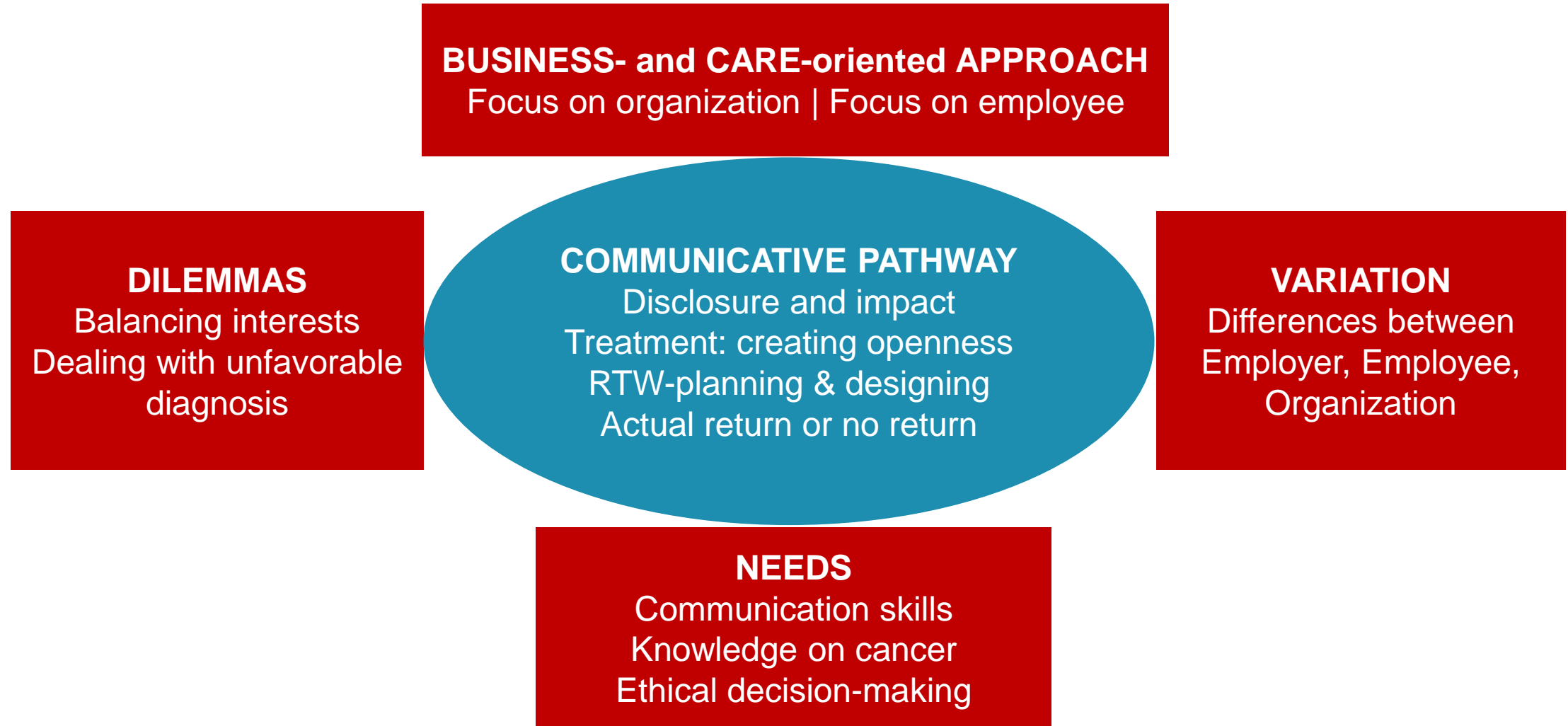
# Need for support

- Communication skills
- Knowledge on cancer and consequences for work
- Ethical decision-making: weighing interests

*How to be a good employer?*



# Employer experiences and needs





Thanks for your attention  
Thanks to the KWF

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