Head of Physics at the ProHealth AG
Rinecker Proton Therapy Center

After leaving university I joined the private sector for a business project that was financially two orders of magnitudes larger than my university work. It was a huge and challenging project where nuclear physics and particle accelerator technology were utilized for the treatment of patients suffering from cancer. As head of the physics department of ProHealth AG, I reported directly to the CEO. I was the coordinator and central contact person for technological issues.

Building up and operating this, the first privately financed Proton Therapy Center in Europe, was a very challenging pioneer project in many respects: technological, administrative, and in terms of interaction with the vendor of the proton therapy technology. This was especially true in terms of facing and staying focused on ever-new solutions for difficult situations as they arose. The key implementation partner for the accelerator and medical technology was Varian Medical Systems – a large American player in the therapy systems technology market. For them our project acted as a pilot as they entered a new market. This led to a very close collaboration with Varian, and I gained a broad understanding of the inner workings of a major company innovating new technology. Together, we went through all phases of a large-scale, cutting edge medical device development and deployment project, from the design and planning phase through the production and installation stages to commissioning and final acceptance.

The proton therapy system has numerous interfaces between subsystems – most of them custom built for this pilot-project some commercially available. The most fascinating part of my work was handling unexpected issues and complex problems resulting from this intricacy. This helped to refine my talent for structured analysis and integrated thinking in technological and organizational contexts and supported developing solutions and implementing them effectively.

In 2009 – after several years of intensive work on developing, installing and commission – the therapy system was handed over to the clinical team so that they could start patient treatments. It was a pleasure and a stimulus of having made an essential contribution to this process, so that thousands of cancer patients have been treated using the most innovative technology in radiotherapy.

Subsequently, a growing number of entrepreneurial objectives were added to my project management tasks, for instance; optimizing service structures, resolving facility uptime issues and implementing customer complaint processes. After more than 12 very challenging and inspiring years I left the company to reach out for new goals.