



Finnish Institute of
Occupational Health



Promo@Work

HEALTH PROMOTION @WORKPLACES IN PRACTICE



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HEALTH PROMOTION @WORKPLACE IN PRACTICE

Moving the goal of health promotion @workplaces (WHP) from disease prevention into promotion of work ability, recovery from work and safety at work is a great opportunity. Occupational context is an essential area to consider in health promotion as it might provide meaning and motivation for healthy lifestyles. Combined with knowledge from research it has potential to reveal the most important contents for the intervention. Besides the occupation tailored contents, the methods of WHP activities are important. Participatory group counselling methods have several beneficial features that might improve the effectiveness of counselling and promote healthy lifestyles, recovery from work, work ability and safety.

Social marketing for hard-to-reach groups: Use of humour and sense of communality

Professional drivers, female entrepreneurs and the unemployed constitute hard-to-reach groups as regards conveying traditional health information. Several factors related to culture, opportunity, cost, personal situation and the environment are partly to blame for problems in communication, which tends to be top-down, expert led and inflexible in design and delivery. In addition, the coverage of occupational health services and other health care services is limited within these groups. Thus, these groups benefit from social marketing activities, aimed towards promoting health and work ability, via the media.

In order to promote changes in the behaviour of the target groups, we used the transtheoretical change model to structure and guide the process of social marketing and related media outputs. The empirical material consisted of our experiences in practising social marketing with hard-to-reach groups in three different development projects. The social marketing media campaigns in these projects consisted of newspaper articles, the use of social media and collaborative events. The feasibility of social marketing was assessed via feedback questionnaires among the target groups at the end of each project.

The most important finding was that the underlying key features of the target hard-to-reach groups' communication culture need to be identified and used in social marketing campaigns to better engage the groups. As humour is a mechanism of activity development among professional drivers, we emphasized this in our social marketing by, for example, using sketch characters known by professional drivers in video and brochure outputs.

For female entrepreneurs and the unemployed, a sense of communality characterized our outputs. Feedback suggests that the target groups liked our social marketing campaigns.

The transtheoretical change model was considered suitable for structuring our media outputs because it takes into account the processual nature of behaviour change, and

leaves room for testing in different cultural environments. According to our experiences, it also seems to suit media use. However, we propose that when used in social marketing, the model should be modified by first identifying the communication cultures of the target groups. We also suggest that the use of media, humour and a sense of communality is a feasible social marketing tool for promoting health and work ability. However, it is questionable whether using humour and sense of communality as underlying themes in communication is suitable for other kinds of target groups. Thus, effective social marketing requires social and cultural sensitivity for successful interaction with target groups; we must speak their language and make mutual contact in order to produce behavioural change.

In conclusion, social marketing is not one shot, top-down event, but rather an evolving process of two-way interaction, requiring sensitivity towards the target groups' underlying values, culture and communication styles.

Groups are efficient in achieving behavior change

Permanent changes are achieved only through long-term effort. Group-based counseling affords an efficient and cost-effective way to motivate and offer support for advancing health promoting life-style.

Group based counseling:

- Is cost efficient
- Generates social support
- Generates reflection on own life-style
- Helps to understand the culture of the community
- Supports change on both individual and community levels

Group counseling affords processes of social support and social influence which essentially influence individual behavior change. Sharing experiences in a group generates peer support, which makes it possible to observe that others are facing similar challenges and to compare own experiences with others. Other group members may have found new ways to overcome the challenges. Listening to others makes possible to reflect upon one's own way of thinking, to question it, and this way change one's habitual ways of conduct.

Group discussion helps to adjust the knowledge based on health recommendations to the everyday experiences and opinions of group members about healthy way of life and how it can be achieved. On the other hand, group discussion may also strengthen the opinions and attitudes that work against the goal of the group. This is why the supervisor's important task is to carefully follow the conversation and redirect it when necessary.

At the workplace, group work helps to topicalize often unnoticed aspects of the work place culture. These include, for example, attitudes towards alcohol use, conventions attached to having lunch or taking breaks during work. Making these underlying cultural practices visible enhances possibilities to find common solutions to potential problems. Consensus about common goals increases commitment among the staff better than reforms launched from above.

Group work requires:

- A trained supervisor from the work community or outside it
- Time and space for joint discussion
- Planned and informed choice of ways of working to generate and direct discussion

Group-based counseling requires expertise and understanding of group dynamics and interaction processes that are specific to group activities. Group situation affords very different discussions in comparison to dyadic counseling. The supervisors need to observe where in the discussion their contribution or facilitation is required and when to provide more space for the group members' mutual conversations. Thus, the skills required are somewhat different from those in dyadic counseling.

“Aging is associated with progressive decrement in physical work capacity. Furthermore, in combination with aging, the increasing prevalence of inactivity and obesity contributes to decreasing work capacity of labor force.”

The supervisor may be a representative of the workplace, for example a human relations officer or a person elected to a position of trust. Such peer supervisors need support, training and supervision of work to secure best possible conditions for group discussion and to make informed choices with regard to suitable procedures to facilitate the achievement of the group's goals.

Counselling via Skype for Business provides new possibilities for promoting the health of female entrepreneurs

We have previously studied the feasibility and effectiveness of constructivism-based group

counselling via video-conferencing. To the best of our knowledge, our study is among the first ones that have investigated group counselling via Skype for Business. Almost fifty female entrepreneurs participated in group counselling via Skype. They responded to a web-based questionnaire before and after the counselling intervention to enable us to evaluate changes in perceived social support, health behaviours and work ability. The feasibility of the counselling via Skype was assessed by the questions of the web-based questionnaire, and by asking the participants: “How easy did you find participation via Skype?” at the end of each counselling session. The response alternatives ranged from “very difficult” (1) to “very easy” (5). The group sessions were video-recorded.

Five groups of 3-7 entrepreneurs participated in five group meetings. For three groups, the first group meeting was face to face and the





others via Skype. For two groups, all meetings were via Skype. The aims of the counselling were to increase skills in receiving and giving peer support and to improve skills in solving problems and enhancing optimism. The counselling also aimed to support lifestyle changes, and to promote work ability and health. Group session topics were: 1) work ability, 2) change processes, 3) problem solving, 4) good life and 5) evaluation of current situation and future plans. Homework was completed via the Moodle learning platform. The number of participants in the group sessions varied from 2 to 6.

Observations of the video-recorded group interactions indicate that group members have varied goal orientations. Some aim for health- or work ability-related change, some are more oriented towards enjoying peer support and sharing, with no clear goal orientation. Group

counselling seems to provide possibilities for both orientations to co-exist, and produces positive outcomes accordingly.

Most of the women were easily able to participate in the group sessions via Skype. The evaluation revealed that some had technical problems due to poor internet connections or equipment that did not support the Skype for Business application. However, the mean perceived feasibility was 4.2, which indicates that the women considered participation in group counselling via Skype easy.

Although the goal orientation of the participants varied, this form of counselling seems to enable both goal and peer support orientations to co-exist. Group counselling via Skype seems to be an easy, feasible way to deliver group counselling, although technical problems may create challenges.



Physical workload during working career – is it manageable?

Aging is associated with progressive decrement in physical work capacity. Furthermore, in combination with aging, the increasing prevalence of inactivity and obesity contributes to decreasing work capacity of labor force. Thus, we aimed to investigate the relationships between activity level and BMI by age with objectively measured physical workload among Finnish employees.

In total, 44 867 working days were examined with respect to background information data and an estimate of oxygen consumption based on recordings measured using wearable heart rate recorder. The results show that especially in women, overweight and obesity together with inactivity notably increase workload throughout the career even in low-intensity work.

Indeed, physical activity and good fitness, as

well as normal weight during the whole working career protect from excessive physical workload. Even in reasonably low-intensity work, regular exercise activity level (2 to 3 times, 1 to 3 hours/week) and normal weight (BMI<25) are beneficial to protect the employee from excessive physical workload throughout the working career.

Despite the importance of these results, knowledge alone does not enhance physical activity or provide success in weight management. Thus, an important question is how to help working aged people to improve their health behavior and enhance work ability and recovery from work.

Tailored and participatory methods improve commitment

Occupation tailored, participatory methods such as Firefit and Primer, seem to be promising in health promotion at workplaces.



FireFit -system is an assessment, follow-up and feedback system tailored for operative firefighters (FireFit). It takes into account firefighters' physically demanding tasks and occupational health risks and aims to maintain good work ability throughout firefighters' working careers. The method assesses the physical work capacity of firefighters in order to maintain good work ability throughout firefighters' working careers. It helps to construct a positive atmosphere and culture for promoting health and physical work capacity at the workplace. It motivates firefighters by creating a common goal of promoting their health and work ability. It provides an informal, experimental and social basis for actions at the workplace.

A workshop model – Primer – has been developed to support employees at small workplaces. The Primer model helps participants think about the cornerstones of

well-being at work, reflect on and improve the factors that affect work ability, and to recognize things that are already in order and those that need improvement. The model also enables discussions with peers which is particularly important for entrepreneurs, who might work alone.

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The Primer workshop guides participants to reflect on the different dimensions of their own work ability, their roles as professionals, their working conditions and various features of work. For example, drawing a car helps them think about the characteristics of a fit and healthy entrepreneur or employee by describing them through the car's features, parts and functions. At first, drawing may seem amusing to the participants, but drawing and laughing together are the social glue that joins the workshop participants together quickly and helps to deepen the discussions.

The Primer workshop was also tested on fire and rescue personnel and supervisors, whose work is physically and psychosocially demanding and who need new, flexible and participatory solutions to promote workers' work ability and health. The Primer workshop can help to awaken multilevel discussions on work ability, breaking down barriers created by existing roles. The opportunity to play a part in the development of one's own work is important in promoting work ability and motivation.

The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health is a specialist in well-being at work, which carries out research, and provides services and training. Together with our clients, we develop well-functioning work communities and support workers' work ability. Our clients include workplaces, decision-makers, individuals, occupational health units and other organizations that strive to improve well-being at work. Our vision is "Well-being through work", as it is healthy, safe and meaningful work that creates well-being. For more information, see [@FIOH](http://www.ttl.fi/en)

Evidence based health promotion @workplaces (Promo@Work) research effort focuses on workplace health promotion (WHP), integrated with safety at work and occupational health care services. It receives funding from the Strategic Research Council at the Academy of Finland in 2016-2019.



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