

## **Towards successful seniority – A group method for promoting career management and mental health in changing organizations**

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The Towards Successful Seniority group method was developed to promote career management preparedness, work ability and mental health among employees in changing organizations. The proximal aim of the method is to strengthen preparedness for career management. This comprises both self-efficacy and inoculation against setbacks during career changes. Preparedness and effective coping may be seen as motivators in a process whereby individuals adjust to working environment, make plans and set goals for their future and evaluate their possibilities and competencies in achieving these goals. Based on previous studies, this is assumed to lead to better work career quality and mental health in the long run. A more general aim of the method is to provide tools to companies for primary prevention on individual level by combining the knowledge bases from occupational health services regarding stress and health, and from human services management regarding occupational competencies and work careers.

The intervention was carried out in 17 organizations, both in the public and private sector. The effects of the intervention were investigated in a randomly assigned field experimental study (RCT study) during 2006 - 2008 with 718 voluntary participants. Altogether, 368 (51.4 %) of the individual participants were randomly assigned to the experimental group and 349 (48.6 %) to the control group. Those in the experimental group were invited in one of the 34 groups arranged in organizations during the intervention phase and controls were given a literature package on the same topic. The mean age of the participants was 50.5 years (SD 6.5) and 88 % of them were women. The randomization succeeded well and there were no significant differences between the groups in background variables or studied measures in baseline. The activities during the 20 hour intervention comprised topics such as identifying own interests and skills, life long learning, managing organizational change, getting social support, managing conflicts, career management, and committing to a concrete career goal. In all content areas, self-efficacies and inoculation against setbacks were enhanced 1) by identifying work life goals and barriers, 2) identifying solutions to them, and 3) by practicing these solutions in small groups. The intervention applied principles of active learning process, group support and trainer referent power. The results on the effects of the intervention are based on three questionnaire measurements: T1 just before the randomization procedure and T2 just after the group activities and T3 7 months after the intervention.'

The immediate impact was a significant increase in career management preparedness among the group participants compared to controls. Work life goals and intrinsic motivation towards these goals increased significantly among group participants. The follow up after seven months showed that the intervention significantly decreased symptoms of depression, especially among those participants who were in risk of depression at baseline. The 7 month follow-up results also showed a conditional increase in work engagement.

This study demonstrates that employees' preparedness to manage their work career can be strengthened with resource-building group interventions in the changing work life.