

Employees' experiences from a participative organizational health intervention. (0208)
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The ARK intervention programme was designed as a tool for the development of psychosocial work environmental factors, for the Norwegian higher education sector (Undebakke, Innstrand, Anthun, & Christensen, 2014). A main objective for ARK is its continuous improvement, both in terms of research on psychosocial work environment factors, but also in terms of how to improve the practical implementation of ARK.

Organizational level health interventions, like ARK, have proven to be fickle. Research on interventions has still not been able to answer one of the most fundamental question, what works (Randall & Nielsen, 2012)? An intervention may prove successful in one instance, while the same intervention fails in another (Egan, 2013). It is vital to study the context and processes surrounding interventions in order to understand how interventions work (Nielsen & Randall, 2013). Process evaluations of interventions have, as a larger goal to uncover factors or characteristics that may lead to successful intervention outcomes. Simultaneously, process evaluations may also uncover factors that may lead to intervention failure. Both outcomes can lead to more knowledge and understanding of the topic. Whatever the purpose the intervention, they all require that the participants adopt and change in order for an intervention to be successful, as these types of interventions do not force change. As such, it is interesting to understand how employees experience such interventions, as ultimately the outcomes are up to them.

Method.

Six interviews were conducted in total with employees that were currently going through the ARK process. The sample consisted of employees from a large Norwegian College, working in a non-academic department. The College was at the time of the interviews about to embark on a large-scale merger with two other Norwegian Colleges and a large Norwegian University. This was the first time the department was undergoing the ARK process. The interviews were carried out within a two-month period, following the survey-feedback meeting. The in-depth interviews explored the informants' experiences and appraisals of the survey-feedback meeting, and their beliefs' in the intervention and its goals. A thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the transcribed interviews.

The ARK intervention programme offers a structured guideline for the survey-feedback meeting. The meeting starts with a brief explanation of the theoretical underpinnings of ARK, before the results are presented. The intention behind this is to give the participants a greater understanding of the purpose of the ARK intervention programme, and to give the participants a common set of mental modes and frame of reference (Undebakke et al., 2014). The participants are asked to discuss areas that they view as in need of improvement, and areas that they deem positive and that should be maintained. It is the result of these discussions that form the initiatives that are to be implemented.

Results

Several themes emerged surrounding the participants' experiences. Overall, the participants had a positive impression of ARK and the survey-feedback meeting, highlighting the participatory aspect of the meeting and the group discussions as particularly positive. They experienced a larger degree of trust towards the intervention when they themselves were responsible for developing initiatives. Having more control over the content of the intervention increased their enthusiasm during the survey-feedback meeting.

However, even though the participants had a positive experience of the survey-feedback meeting, a central theme within the results was that the participants had little faith in that the ARK process would accomplish anything in their department. It seemed that that the larger process had failed to make a substantial impression on the employees. The most apparent reason for this was the forthcoming merger. The participants felt overwhelmed due to the ensuing changes and complained of experiencing a loss of control over their working life and work environment.

Moreover, the employees' belief in ARK also seemed to be due to their failing to understand the need of ARK and its relevance to their daily working life. As they did not have, any major issues in their department they failed to understand the point of undergoing the ARK process. Simultaneously, they did not seem to grasp that the topics discussed during the survey-feedback meeting regarded their own working environment. This seemed to be due to the participants not understanding their own results, which were the basis for the group discussions. Letting participants take part in the result interpretation has been shown to be beneficial in creating engagement for an intervention (Björklund, Grahn, Jensen, & Bergström, 2007). However, in this case, the results were too abstract and as such; they failed

to elicit a proper understanding of their connection to the employees' working life. It is important in a survey-feedback meeting that the results are presented in a way that is understandable, relevant and constructive to the employees (Nadler, 1977). If employees do not understand the purpose or need of the intervention, chances are they will not engage or put effort into implementing changes.

This study offers insight into how employees relate and respond to an intervention in a natural setting. While the recent research on interventions and process evaluations has often focused on the implementation phase, it is equally important not to overlook the survey-feedback phase, as it is reasonable to believe that this sets the tone for the rest of the intervention. The results need to be presented in such a way that the employees are able to relate to them, the intentions behind the intervention should be made explicit and the employees need to understand the need for change. Employee commitment and engagement towards an intervention has been strongly linked to intervention outcomes (Nielsen, 2013), so gaining employee engagement from the beginning is crucial.

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