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Testing of the health circle method in Denmark

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How the health circles came to Denmark

- Idea: Why not try a method in Denmark that has shown good results in Germany?
- Context adjustment: The Danish workplace assessment (APV)!

Background

- In Denmark it is required by law that each workplace conducts a workplace assessment (APV) at least every third year or sooner if major workplace conditions have changed.
- The workplace assessment should consist of both, an assessment of the physical and psycho-social working conditions.
- Many workplaces have difficulties following through a workplace assessment procedure even though there are several methods and tools at hand.
- Especially the implementation of planned changes seems to be difficult and is often only partly reached or not reached at all.

The aim of the study

The primary aim of the study is to make work place assessments more effective, i.e. to conduct them in a way that leads to the improvements of working conditions and employees' health.

This will be done by using a practical tool (the **health circle method**), which has shown¹ to be highly effective in developing improvement suggestions and actually implementing them.

¹ Aust B, & Ducki, A (2004). Comprehensive health promotion interventions at the workplace: experiences with health circles in Germany. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 9(3), 258-270.

Project Overview

When?	What?
<p>Preparation Start: August 2006</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment of 4 municipalities/recruitment of 4 consultants • Information meetings • 3-day seminar with consultants • Questionnaire survey • Randomization of the 2 workplaces in each of the 4 municipalities • Install steering committee in intervention workplaces • Interviews and workplace observations in all 8 workplaces
<p>Intervention 2007</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-8 health circle meetings at the 4 intervention workplaces • Implementation of workplace changes • Continuous process documentation
<p>Evaluation 2008</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews/workshops/surveys (process evaluation) • Questionnaire survey (outcome measures) • Discussion of results with participating workplaces • Final evaluation and data analysis
<p>Dissemination End: July 2009</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific articles/conference presentations • Manual about the implementation of the health circle method • Seminar about the implementation of the health circle method

Necessary steps

- Translation of German materials into Danish and English! So that the German experts could teach the Danish consultants.

“Moderation is a craftsmanship, an art which helps to make the conversation between people meaningful and successful”

“Moderators are methodical helpers who are able to set aside their own opinions, goals, and assessments”

(Klebert/Schrader/Straub)

The tasks of the health circle moderator

- **Chairman of the health circle meetings**
- **Facilitate a constructive discussion at the health circle meetings**
- **Contact person for the nursing home in relation to the health circle meetings (structure, content, progress, etc.)**
- **Consultant for the steering committee**

Requirements for health circle moderator

- The heterogeneous composition of the health circle requires absolute neutrality from the moderator, e.g. the moderator should never take somebody's side.
- Moreover, it is important that the moderator possesses highly professional and social skills to allow the employees at the workplace to become actors in the planning and implementation process.
- Through his/her conduct and behaviour, the moderator affects the group atmosphere and the discussions in the health circle.

Adjustments

- No sickness absence report
- But comprehensive data collection
 - Questionnaire survey
 - Interviews
 - Work place visits
 - Analysis of variety of documents
 - Collection of sickness absence statistics (if available)

Further development of the health circle method

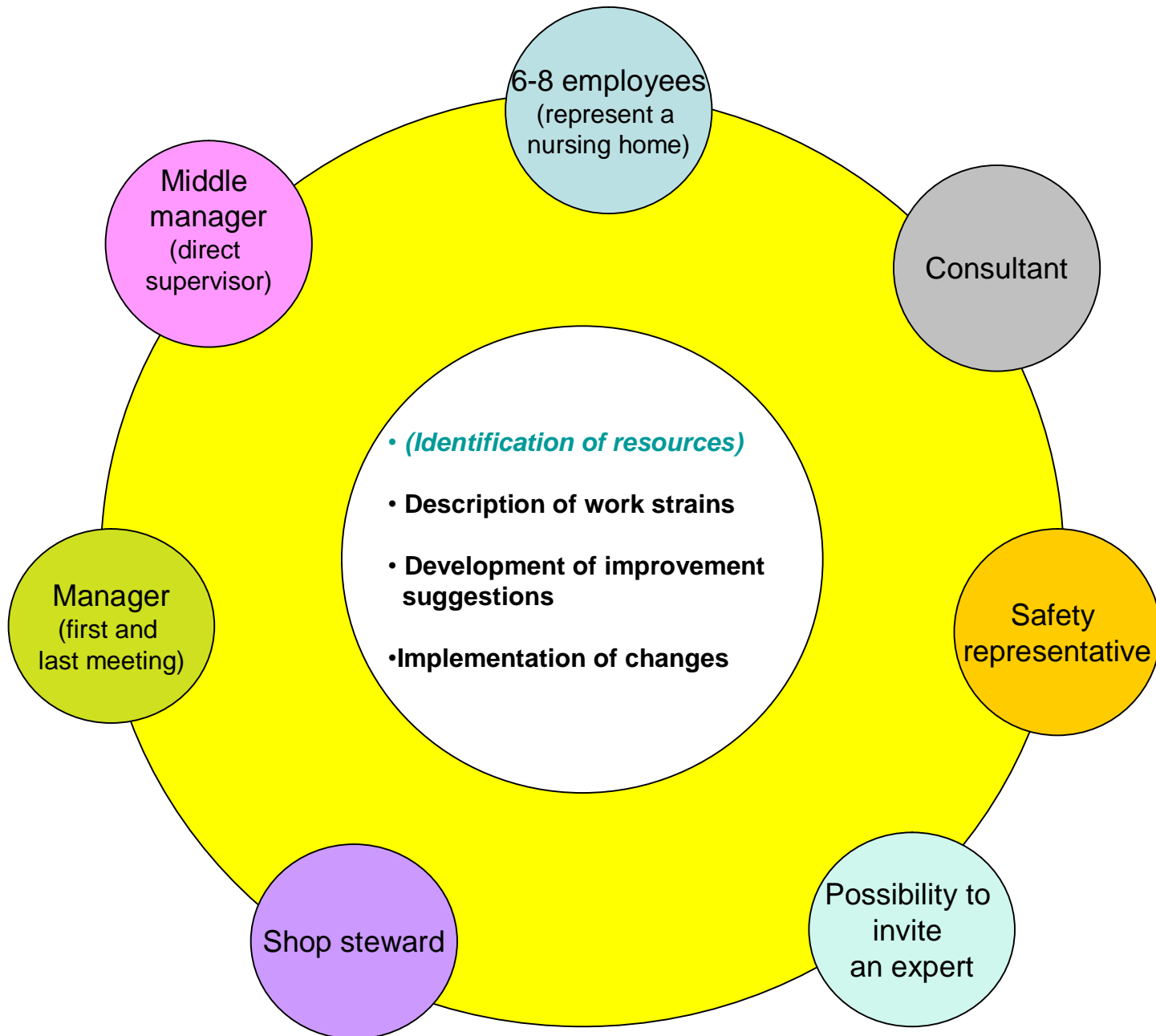
- Improved information flow from health circle participants to the other employees

Staff meeting about the health circle project



Involvement of employees

- Questionnaire survey
- Information at a staff meeting
- Participation in the health circle
- Workplace observation, interviews with representative
- Information on notices boards/flyers at the nursing home
- Post-box for suggestions



The first health circle meeting: prioritizing problems



Structured health circle meetings

- More or less set program for each meeting (the tasks and goals are clear)
- Agreement about how to work/discuss together ("Rules for cooperation")
- Metaplan to visualize the discussions and decisions

Key tasks in the health circle meetings

- Find out what the problem is exactly
- Find connections between strains and (health)effects
- Develop suggestions for change
- Decide on responsibility and deadlines
- Follow-up on progress



A list of working environment problems and proposals for improvement (attachment to meeting minutes)

Workplace exposures/problems	Health problems	Proposals for improvements/ measures	Responsible contact person	Status for the implementation into practise
<p>Physical</p> <p>Lifting of persons</p>	<p>Back and shoulder pain</p>	<p>1. More and better use of technical equipment</p> <p>2. Do back-training exercises as shown at the training course</p>	<p>Department responsible for technical equipment/trainer</p> <p>The individual employee</p>	<p>1. More technical equipment will be made available. New training sessions have started.</p> <p>2. Two employees have tried the back- exercises which have been satisfactory, the other will try them as well</p>
<p>Psychosocial</p> <p>Lack of work related information</p>	<p>Worry and annoyed</p>	<p>1. Produce newsletter with work related information for employees</p>	<p>Bente K.</p>	<p>1. Newsletter has been published once Bente K. is on maternity leave. New key person Mette S.</p>

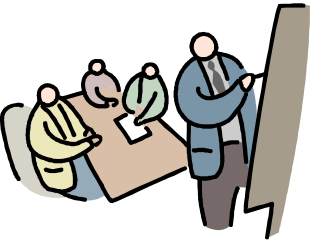
Experiences

- The health circle concept is not restricted to a specific type of problems (physical, psychosocial).
- This openness was experienced as an advantage, because it allows to discuss all types of problems – also those that do not belong to just one category

Mostly psychosocial work environment problems



The right mix of large and small meetings



Summary

- The health circle method can be used in Denmark – we found no general boundaries
- Overall the experiences in the research project have been positive – but the method needs to be tested under real life conditions!
- The consultants need more practical training
- The health circle method needs further development especially with regard to
 - Dealing with psycho-social problems
 - Involving the “other employees”
 - Information flow with managers/supervisors
 - A better mix of large and small meetings
 - Integration of positive factors at work (resources)

Thank you!



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