

## **Realistic evaluation of interventions in the psycho social working environment**

Liv STARHEIM

*Department of Management Engineering, Technical University of Denmark*

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### **1. Introduction**

Interventions programs on improving the psychosocial working environment are difficult to evaluate. It is difficult to separate, what is the impact from the intervention programs itself, and what steams from other changes at the workplace or in the workplace context. Neither the classic experimental evaluation's focus on "Does it work", nor the constructionist evaluation approach on how are the changes perceived and experienced by the involved, may explain which intervention in complex social settings are plausible having connection to changed organizational behavior.

Realistic evaluation (Pawson and Tilly 1997) offers a middle way between these two evaluations perspective. In realistic evaluation the main question is 'What works for whom in what circumstances and in what respects, and how? Realistic evaluation at the same time includes the influence of the context, and keeps aiming at developing a generic theory of changes in complex social systems, by focusing on the exploitation of the active change mechanisms in the intervention.

"Intervention works when the resources on offer (material, cognitive, social or emotional) strike a chord with programme subjects. This pathway from resource to reasoning is referred to as the programme 'mechanism'" (Pawson 2008).

Inspired from realistic evaluation this paper will suggest a way of evaluating workplace intervention program from a realistic evaluating perspective (Pawson and Tilly 1997).

### **2. Methods**

The evaluated intervention study aims at developing a work environment assessment design based on the workflow analysis (Value Stream mapping) and other Lean inspired methods. The intervention design is theoretical inspired from Jody Gittels notion of improved psychosocial work environment as closely linked to high performance, when improving the coordination around performing the core task. The intervention design is to be developed, tested and evaluated in six hospital wards.

The evaluation design in this study is aiming at identifying and asses the main change mechanisms that implicitly makes the drivers in the program theory behind the designed method. First the program theory are described, then the evaluation methods are focusing on assessing the relation between the chosen activities and the program theory's expected immediately output and long term outcomes taking place at the workplace in the intervention period. This assessment will be based on video tapes of interventions workshops, individual and group interviews two month after the consultants has left the

workshop, together with observations of some of the follow up activities after two months. In this paper we will present the first step of this evaluation design: the programme theory, which describes the activities that are expected to make an output that in the end will lead to the intended outcome.

### 3. Program theory

The table shows the projects program theory, and how the expected outcome from the intervention activities is linked.

Project period	Activity	Change mechanism	Expected output
Motivation	Participating motivated through problems seen in wellbeing questionnaires, or through management pinpointing. Consultant emphasizing expected results	Visible problem Faith in offered process for developing solution	Workplace wish to work with their problems and invest time and energy in finding and implementing solutions
Project establishment	Head of department part of project group Making the project group competent through mutual seminars and consultants' support. Preparation through writing up project plan with clear means and measures together with consultant.	Competencies to make organizational changes present  Relevant knowledge and tools to implement change	The project group manage to go through with the improvements process and implement the developed solutions
Identifications of problems	1. Value stream mapping workshop of unsuitable work processes and undesirable consequences	Mutual understanding New insight	Shared knowledge on separate work groups' work processes. Increased mutual respect
Prioritizing and deciding improvement focus	Workshop identifies and project group decides the focus areas	Making I plausible that changes can be made solving these problems	Mutual opinion that relevant and important problems is prioritized.. Mutual aims
Problem analysis	Observations and quantitative registrations of daily work routine. 2. Workshop: Causes of the routines	Enthusiasm to insights and the concrete possibilities to solve problem	Facts gathered and reveal insight in the work processes Precise, and constructive communication Mutual knowledge and mutual respect
Solutions development	3. Workshop: Developing ideas on better work processes Developing ideas for measuring improvements	Obvious solutions emerge Vision on how to make improvements concrete and visible	Relevant solutions for the pinpointed problems Reflections on how to make solutions possible
Actionsplan	Project group draws up action plan together with consultants. Resources for the aims and activities allocated Setting goals for activities	Make the process manageable  Making realistic demand/resource choices	Realistic, concrete and workable actions plan is initiated.
Implementation and measuring targets through white board meetings	Better work processes implements Whiteboard meeting follows up Achievements of goals	Enthusiasm that this actually will work!	Improved work processes Improved well-being and job satisfaction

As the table shows, the key mechanisms are overly described as motivational and manageable, as it will create faith in the method and in the possibility to find solutions for the problems in the workplace. These hypotheses will be tried out in the following evaluation in the six intervention workplaces.