

## **The use of the Chronicle Workshop as a method for evaluating participatory interventions**

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**Abstract.** In the organizational intervention literature it has been stated that interventions need to be evaluated both with respect to outcome and process.

In an organizational intervention program we used the Chronicle Workshop in order to see if it was applicable as a process evaluation method. Surveys and interviews were used to evaluate on the outcome.

Our results show, that the Chronicle Workshop is applicable to validate some of the results of the intervention and that it gives insights into specific circumstances that have been important in the process.

**Keywords.** Chronicle workshop, process evaluation, participatory intervention, SME

### **1. Introduction**

Since the beginning of organizational intervention studies there has been much focus on outcome evaluation in order to establish whether the intervention has any effect. Cox and colleagues (2007) argue, that the traditional experimental approach from applied psychology is inadequate because it does not capture the complexity in organizations that continuously change (Cox, Karanika, Griffiths, & Houdmont, 2007). Their argument is supported by Semmer (2006), who state that many interventions fail because of implementation problems. Another intervention problem is, that the interventions seem to be carried out in another way than intended (Semmer, 2006).

The outcome evaluation contributes with information if the intended actions have an effect, but it does not give information about how and why the intervention is a success or a failure. Thus the need for a process evaluation is suggested (Cox et al., 2007). The process evaluation shall not replace the outcome evaluation but serve as a supplement in order to achieve other types of knowledge of the intervention.

The aim of this paper is to present a new method for process evaluation, the Chronicle Workshop (CW), and to present and discuss the findings from the use of CW as process evaluation.

This paper reports from an intervention study in four Danish small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). The four companies are within the IT or manufacturing business. All companies participated in a process where they tested the PoWRS (Prevention of Work Related Stress) program and its applicability.

#### *1.1 The PoWRS program*

The PoWRS program is a participatory primary intervention program. The primary approach to interventions is chosen because it approaches the underlying problems at the worksite, which can result in work-related stress (Hurrell & Murphy, 1996). The underlying idea behind the program is that the best result of an organizational intervention is reached when both management and employees have been involved in the entire process. The

program aims at creating changes which have a positive effect on both productivity and wellbeing. Furthermore the program tested whether employees with no facilitator training could be appointed as internal facilitators and be leading persons in the process.

The intervention program has three phases (see Picture 1). In the first phase the need for an intervention is assessed. It is also in this phase, that the project group is constituted. The project group consists of a project manager (it is required that the project manager is a manager) and two untrained in-house facilitators. If there are others interested in being a member of the project group it can be arranged, up to five people can be included in the project group.

In the second phase the intervention is started. First the work and the workplace is explored by conducting two FishBone workshops (Sørensen, 2010). There is a workshop for the employees and one for the line- and team managers. Despite the division focus is the same; what excites and stresses the employees in their work. Afterwards a “Multi-Voting” session (Gray, Brown, & Macanuso, 2010; Jungk & Müllert, 1981) follows. These two sessions make the basis for a final decision on which two changes the worksite chooses to focus on during the intervention. The intervention is initiated with a Kick-Off event.

The third phase is the implementation of changes and thereafter continuously evaluations and adjustments to the changes.

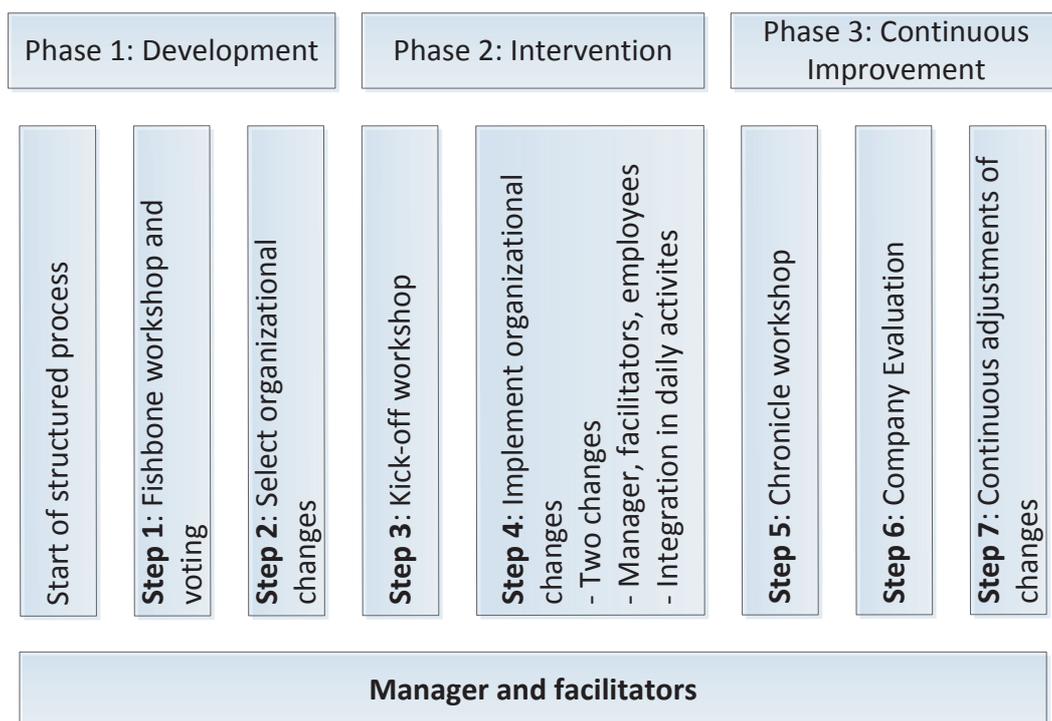


Figure 10: The PoWRS program

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 The Chronicle workshop - Background

The Chronicle Workshop was initially developed to portray a particular time in a specific organization with the aim of creating a common understanding of the organization among the members of the organization (Limborg & Hvenegaard, 2011). Initially it was the intention that it could be used before a change process because the Chronicle Workshop ideally would initiate discussion about norms and values in the organization in relation to

future changes.

There are two parts in the CW; developing some sort of time line and creating a coherent story, and linking the story to future developments.

The first part of the CW consists of three rounds; each round has a specific question related to the round. The questions can vary depending on the focus of the workshop. The first question is the most open and could be about important events in the organization over a fixed period of time. The subjective experiences each employee possesses are collected and a time line develops. Then a coherent story is created by the participants. First the participants are asked to split the time line into chapters, where each chapter should be given a title (which could be a metaphor or be humorous). In the second part the participants are asked to analyze a particular period with the aim of identifying supporting factors as well as obstructive factors.

### 2.2 *Adjusting the Chronicle workshop*

In order to use the CW as a process evaluation tool in the context of an intervention some adjustments were made. The most obvious adjustment is that the last part of the Chronicle Workshop, about creating a coherent story, is omitted. This adjustment was made because the CW only focused on the intervention period, which we considered to be too short and too present to go into an in depth analysis of.

The first question asked in the CW was: *Which important changes have occurred during the last six months that have affected your work?* After the question was asked all participants had approximately ten minutes to write as many notes as possible, each with one important change on it. After the ten minutes all notes was gathered and then one by one read aloud by the facilitator, each notes was then explained by the participant who had written it and afterwards the other participants commented on it. Each note was put onto a time line after it had been discussed. After the first question, two similar rounds were carried out with a new question in each round. The second question was: *Which important changes in your work have you discovered in relation to the two interventions?* and the third question was: *Which factors have impacted the interventions?* After the three rounds we gave room for some general comments about the intervention and also about the CW.

The first question was intentionally made very broad in order to see whether the intervention process would be mentioned without it being mentioned by the facilitator. The second question was developed in order to gain information about what the participants actually remembered as part of the intervention. The third question should reveal obstacles as well as drivers for the intervention.

Between four and six employees participated from each company. Unfortunately one of the four companies did not complete the intervention program and the CW was therefore cancelled by the company. The first author facilitated each of the CWs and the two co-authors were observers.

The participants for the workshop were appointed by the project groups. The project groups were asked to find participants that was not part of the project group. There should be both employees who had worked in the company for a long time and newly hired employees among the participants. At the same time the project group had to consider which employees they could do without in the hours of the CW. There were between 4 and 6 participants at each CW.

### 2.3 *Outcome evaluation*

The intervention was also evaluated on its outcome. The outcome evaluation was made by surveys among all the participants and by interviewing the project manager and the facilitators after the intervention was ended.

### *2.4 The process*

All four companies followed the model until phase 3 (see Figure 1). Each company found two changes they wanted to focus on during the process.

One of the four companies did not complete the third phase. They never really came to some supporting activities for their changes, and then it became difficult to actually implement the changes. The company decided to cancel the CW and the final survey. The data material for this paper therefore relies on the results from three cases that completed the intervention.

### *2.5 Analysis*

The data from the Chronicle Workshops were analyzed in a coding session with three authors of this paper. The notes from each timeline were coded into six or seven categories. Examples of categories that emerged in all three cases are the internal facilitators and management support.

## **3. Results**

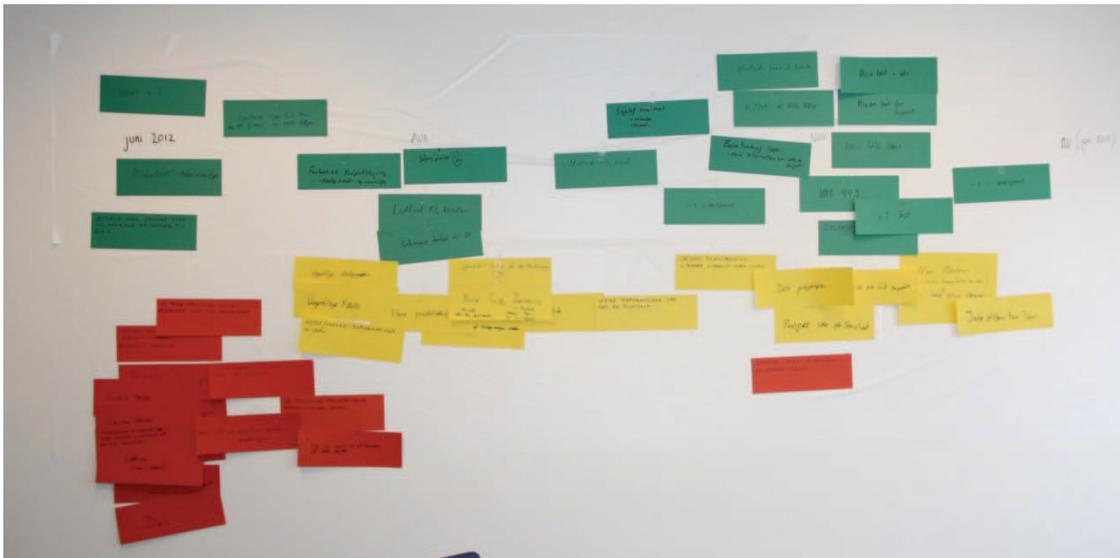
### *3.1 Results of the process evaluation*

In the first round the participants were asked: Which important changes have occurred during the last six months that have affected your work? In two of the CWs the participants actually referred directly to the intervention process in this round. In all three CWs the participants had written notes about some of the activities related to the intervention. In the cases where the participants referred directly to the intervention it was one or two of the participants who had remembered the intervention as such. The mentioned activities relate to the supporting activities, the companies themselves had developed and formulated.

In the second round the participants were asked: Which important changes in your work have you discovered in relation to the two interventions? The notes to this question were characterized by reporting on different activities such as weekly meetings or that the manager now said good morning to everyone before she went to her office. The arguments for the notes were primarily that it was positive activities and/or comments on how the activities have affected the participant's job. We could also observe that in some cases one of the intervention changes was more present in the eyes of the participants, because they wrote many notes about one change and very few on the other change.

In the third and final round the participants were asked: Which factors have impacted the interventions? The participants had many views on factors affecting the intervention and across cases it became clear that the in-house facilitators to a high degree were associated with the intervention and the changes. Also the project manager was mentioned as an important factor. In two of the cases the participants also included factors such as management support, that they were able to bill the hours spent on the project on a project number, and that they had been very busy in the period of the intervention.

The final result from one of the CWs is documented in Picture 1.



**Picture 1: Final result from a Chronicle Workshop**

### 3.2 Results of the outcome evaluations

The surveys revealed that in all three cases the employees experienced at least minor changes in relation to one of the changes. In one of the cases the survey showed that more than a third of the respondents did not experience any change in the other change. In the other two cases the majority of the respondents found that they had experienced changes in both of the two changes.

The interviews with the project group members gave some qualitative statements about the results. The results from the interviews showed some of the same results as in the surveys, that is, that it had not been possible in any of the three cases to succeed to the same degree in both changes. Particularly the in-house facilitators showed in the interviews, that they had more detailed knowledge about the results compared to the project manager.

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

### 4.1 Process evaluation

The CW showed that the intervention with the PoWRS program initiated incremental changes in the employees work, and it validated the findings from the interviews stating that the incremental changes had an effect on productivity and wellbeing. As researchers and program builders the tool is also helpful in order to gain insight into the organizational and individual conditions that influences the intervention. This is in line with what Nielsen and Randall have stated to be an important aspect of process evaluation: *to answer questions such as “which were the processes that facilitated the change”* (Nielsen & Randall, 2013). Using the CW it becomes very clear what the employees have perceived as drivers and barriers for the process. It is important to be aware of these conditions in order to make the intervention program applicable in different settings (Nielsen & Randall, 2013).

Another important aspect in relation to the CW is that it works as a tool that creates a joint reflection among the participants, who experiences that they get new realizations during the CW because it is a joint process. The realizations are special for the CW because single interviews do not create the same type of joint realizations.

In general it was very clear that the companies where the employees overall were more educated (IT) also produced more notes by themselves in the CW. In the cases from the

manufacturing industry, with skilled workers, the participants did not make as many notes by themselves. It was clear that they had more to write, than what had been written and therefore the facilitator ended up writing notes for the participants if new things came up during the discussions. It can therefore be necessary for the facilitator to be able to take on this extra function of writing extra notes if it shows that some of the participants are not comfortable about writing notes themselves.

#### 4.2 Outcome evaluation

The outcome evaluation showed that the two changes were not perceived to be equally successfully implemented. The outcome evaluation did not tell us much about how come it was like that. In the CW it was clear that the most successful change also was the one that the participants often mentioned. The CW therefore supported some of the results from the surveys and interviews. Furthermore the CW also made it possible to better understand the results of the intervention.

Looking at the survey results it can be difficult to see if there have been differences within the company, i.e. if one department has been successful and the other departments have not. In the CW it became very clear if there had been such differences because there were participants from each department. The differences were clear when the participants answered question two and three, because the participants who had experienced a positive change wrote positive statements on the notes, whereas the other participants wrote negative notes or no notes at all.

#### 4.3 Conclusion

To conclude, our results show that the CW can be used as a process evaluation method in organizational interventions. The CW gives input into what should be included and excluded in new intervention projects. The weakness of the CW is that it does not directly create added value for the company, although it proves to be a possibility to create joint reflection. The strengths of the CW are that it assesses the usability of the intervention program, it is an efficient tool and it validates other types of data. The challenge is to create an open atmosphere where the participants feel comfortable writing their experiences and opinions on paper.

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