Champions in workplace development

Sisse Grøn, Gitte Hübner and Hans Jørgen Limborg

TeamWorklife, Valby, DENMARK

1. Introduction
In many workplaces and workplace development projects, some employees are selected or volunteer to receive special training in an area, the workplace wish to promote and subsequently teach or train their peers in that area. The employees may be called ‘Ambassadors’, ‘stress spotters’, ‘coaches’ or ‘Champions’, the names are manifold. The method has been widely used in public health projects and in education. Lately we see many projects in workplace health and safety development use the method too, but the method is seldom described and the implementation seems random. The international literature confirms that the method often is detached from theory. Therefore, we have designed a project to study 10 cases, where a workplace project has used champions as a method for workplace development.

2. Methods
The Danish prevention fund issued us with a list of all the workplace development projects, which mentioned training for their employees in their application. We then obtained and read the evaluations of these projects. From there we selected the relevant ones and obtained and read their project reports. From those we selected ten projects that had trained champions in some form. Our selection contain workplaces of varying sizes, from the public and the private sector and from different sectors. Most projects of this kind are from the care sector, but we have included tourism and production as well. The aim of the projects we included are often to improve the psychosocial work environment, but some are health promotion projects too.

We have visited the ten selected workplaces and interviewed the project leaders separately, the champions we interviewed either separately or in focus groups and we interviewed a group of normal employees too in every workplace.

We are now in the process of analyzing the material.

3. Results
Our results suggest that the closer to the core task, the champions special area is, the better results they get. The method has a lot of potential: it is empowering for the champions and cost-efficient at the same time. It does however have some pitfalls too, for instance, it is crucial to support the champions and provide adequate training.

Sisse Grøn is an ethnographer and an occupational health and safety researcher; she has 15 years of experience in participatory methods to improve the health and safety of workers or/and develop their workplaces.