

# FIOH Life Course Management -concept as a good practice

Toppinen-Tanner, Salla and Vuori, Jukka

## Summary

The aim of the Life Course Management -approach is to produce more healthy and sustainable work careers throughout working careers by fostering individuals' career management in career transitions and linking these activities with the aim of improving workplace management. This is expected also to increase motivation, participation and productivity in working life. Life course management utilizes knowledge of life phases, age groups and career situations, but complements this with bottom-up approaches highlighting the proactive possibilities of individual employees in managing and controlling their own career as a central resource for well-being and productivity. For more than 20 years, FIOH has developed interventions targeted at different career phases and transitions, such as from unemployment to employment, from school to work, and support for career management and career motivation among middle-aged and senior employees. Results of the effects of these interventions show that these interventions were successful in supporting good-quality careers and well-being of individuals in education and at workplaces. Over the years, a comprehensive collection of interventions covering career phases throughout working careers has been developed, tested and disseminated at FIOH.

## Facts

FIOH has developed several intervention programs which can be used for supporting working careers of people in different career situations at the workplace level, especially during career transitions or changes (Table 1). Supervisors and management are encouraged to participate in supporting the effects of these trainings with information on different career phases and introduction of the basic idea on life-course management's bottom-up approach. Upper management is included in the strategic life-course management workshop including information on benefits of life-course approach, and practical support for implementing the employee-level methods as part of organizational activities. Supervisors also benefit from their own peer group activities, which can focus on developing their own role as supervisors or their own careers and well-being. These forms of strategic life-course management activities are provided by FIOH.

The results from the effects of the interventions show, that especially individuals in vulnerable situation benefit the most, thus addressing social inequalities This means that group programs may be implemented among vulnerable groups, for instance, employees facing changes at work. The

programs focus on individual employees and their resources which are strengthened during the group-based training. During the pilot trials, about 200 trainers have been trained, and the programs have been implemented among thousands of participants.

Table 1. Intervention programs and their aims and main results.

Program: Career phase	Target group	Aim	Trainers of the program	Effects of program (RCT design)
Towards Working Life: Transition to secondary education	Pupils graduating from primary school	Improves selection of educational path and mental well-being and prevents drop-out from education	Tutors/teachers at primary school	Decreased later symptoms of depression and school burnout among risk groups and strengthened the role of adult teachers in career management of pupils (Vuori et al., 2008; Jokisaari & Vuori, 2011)
From school to work: Transition from vocational education into working life	Graduates from vocational schools	Supporting good quality employment	Teachers at vocational schools	Enhanced employment especially in good quality jobs, and decreased symptoms of depression among risk groups (Koivisto ym., 2007)
Towards Successful Seniority: Risk of disability due to mental health reasons at mid-life	Middle aged (40+) employees in strainful career situations	Support for coping at work and early prevention of work disability due to mental health problems	HRM at workplaces (or respective support staff) and OHS	Decreased depressive symptoms, retirement intentions, especially among employees at risk of depression (Vuori et al., 2012) or with high job strain (Ahola et al., 2012). Decreased long sickness absences (Toppinen-Tanner et al., 2016).
Taidot työhön ( to be published in 2019): Risk of lack of competencies for employability at mid-career and beyond	Middle-aged (40+) employees in need of updating their skills and competencies	Enhancement of career planning and competence development at mid-career for sustainable employability	Career coaches at Universities or at Social partners, employment experts, HRM at workplaces	Increased self-efficacy for recognizing one's own skills and competencies and career planning, and preparation against setbacks related to employability (Toppinen-Tanner et al., 2018).
Work engagement for seniority years: retirement transition	Senior employees (55+) approaching retirement	Increasing work engagement at late career	HRM at workplaces (or respective support staff) and OHS	Decreased perceived age discrimination especially among less educated and those with younger manager. Increased work engagement and future perspective at work (Vuori et al., 2017)

The central influential mechanisms of the intervention programs focus on enhancing career management preparedness. This is enhanced by applying a training which focuses on individuals' career management self-efficacy and preparation for dealing with career setbacks (Vuori &

Vinokur, 2005). It is assumed that students or employees who feel confident with their own late career management skills and are emotionally ready to deal with setbacks, are well prepared and motivationally ready to manage their career (Vuori & Vinokur, 2005). During the training e.g. confidence is promoted by recognizing and optimizing participants' self-efficacy towards intervention-specific skills and competencies as well as helping participants to prepare to confront career setbacks and barriers. The training is based on active learning, problem solving and practising. In addition, peer support and positive feedback are essential elements of the training.

## Frame

The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH), is an independent public law organization operating as a research institute in the administrative sector of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. For over 70 years it has been working in research, development, and services to improve quality of working life and to increase health and well-being of employees. Working careers and enhancing work ability of employees are among the focal strategic aims of the FIOH.

The need to focus on measures to promote participation in working life relates to two demographic megatrends in Finland: aging and low birth rates. Finland has been among the first countries in Europe to face the rapidly changing age distribution of the workforce. The need to support sustainable working life has been acknowledged in many governmental programs during the last decades.

The aim of more sustainable careers has been widely acknowledged, but the focus of workplace-level actions was initially mostly on age management focusing on older workers (Ilmarinen, 2012). System-level changes, such as raise of statutory retirement age, put pressure on workplaces to invest in sustainable employability, because costs of disability pensions for the workplace were high. Since long careers were predicted by quality of working life, it seemed necessary to invest in developing working conditions and management in order to avoid early retirement due to work disability (Wallin & Hussi, 2011). These early phases of age management tradition emphasized investment in developing leadership and HRM activities, as well as, promoting work ability, lifelong learning and age-friendly work arrangements at workplaces (Ilmarinen, 2012). The purpose was to maintain the capability and willingness of workers to remain in work beyond ages at which they previously retired by focusing on maintenance or development of employability, motivation, and health (Kooij, 2010; Ybema, van Vuuren & van Dam, 2017). Several good practices on age management were recognized, although there was lack of evidence on their efficiency. Despite the

development of the approach over the years from mostly reactive workplace level measures towards more proactive and promotive actions (Baldauf & Lindley, 2013; Naegele & W, 2006; Wallin & Hussi, 2011), workplace level measures and practices (top-down) were however, still at the focus of age management practices. Even the most 'mature' and 'advanced' phases of age management, which included life-course approach taking into account all age groups and individual employees, was emphasizing the role of HR policies and practices in implementing it (Wallin & Hussi, 2011).

During the last few years it has become clear that changes in working life are not only structural but also increase demands for learning new skills and for self-management. These developments are changing the roots of contractual nature of jobs, which means that employment is more insecure than before, and employability is individualized so that everybody has to take more responsibility for their own careers. As a consequence, career management skills become even more important than before.

Therefore, complementing organizational measures with bottom-up approach building on individual resources and enhancement of individual agency entails possibilities for even more positive outcomes. The studies on the effects of the interventions for different life-phases show that in addition to increasing subjective well-being (Ahola et al., 2012; Vuori, Toppinen-Tanner & Mutanen, 2012) and strengthening intrinsic motivation (Salmela-Aro, Mutanen & Vuori, 2012) and work engagement (Vuori et al., submitted), intentions to participate or actual participation in work (Toppinen-Tanner et al., 2015; Vuori et al., 2012) could be increased with group interventions focusing on improvement of career management.

These group programs share some common elements. The training is implemented in schools or at workplaces, where trained trainers facilitate group discussions and run the program. The role of the facilitators is to encourage positive atmosphere, peer-support, and active participation of the group. Each program has a schedule and standardized manual for all the tasks implemented. In most of these programs, the manual is also available in English. In practice, there are two facilitators and about 15 participants in each group.

The FIOH Life-course approach supports the main goal of the EXTEND; which is to reduce social inequalities in extending working careers. The goal of the Life-course management approach is to strengthen sustainable careers and participation in working life, focusing especially on those

individuals at risk of dropping out or losing resources. The results of the effects of these studies show that these programs have been successful in decreasing risk of disability (Ahola et al., 2012; Toppinen-Tanner et al., 2015) and increasing work motivation, engagement, and future perspective (Salmela-Aro et al., 2012; Vuori et al., 2017) especially among those who initially were suffering from symptoms of depression or had lower basic education. The programs highlight resource-oriented perspective and emphasizes the development and change potential of employees.

## Findings

### SWOT analyses

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive concept and tools for workplace life-course management</li> <li>• Bottom-up approach</li> <li>• Efficacy proved in the RCT study</li> <li>• Benefits especially employees with less resources</li> <li>• Empowers both participants and trainers</li> <li>• Standardized manuals and training available even in different languages</li> <li>• Combination of research and development funding and productization guarantees continuity</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenging to apply in small organizations</li> <li>• Cost-benefit analysis has not been done</li> <li>• No web-based implementation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Web-based solutions</li> <li>• Transferable to different organizations and cultures</li> <li>• Cost-efficient due to group-based learning</li> <li>• Trained trainers can implement different programs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizations do not necessarily recognize the benefits of prevention</li> <li>• All employees in need do not necessarily participate</li> </ul>

Life-course management is *innovative* because it is a bottom-up approach focusing on finding solutions to employee-level problems in peer groups by enhancing individual resources. This kind of approach is unique and complements organizational top-down approach of investing in good policies to support employee groups and individual employees. This approach has demonstrated its efficacy in the randomly assigned field experimental studies (RCT), is continuously developing new applications to respond to needs arising from working life and has been transformed into service products thereby also increasing its *sustainable* (i.e., long-lasting) new development.

According to our experiences, the Life-course management -concept is *transferable* and can be used in both public and private organizations in different areas of business and in different countries and cultures. Thus far, the positive results of the program have been reported in wide variety of Finnish organizations representing public and private sector and different branches of economy and the programs have also been disseminated to some other countries.

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