

EVALUATING AND NEGOTIATING WORK ABILITY AND RETURN TO WORK AFTER SICKNESS ABSENCE

Oral presentation

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The presentation introduces a new research project concerning return to work (RTW) after sickness absence supported through a negotiation between the employee, supervisor(s) and representative(s) of occupational health services. The study explores how this multi-party negotiation as an established intervention of occupational health works for the evaluation of employee's work ability, possible workplace accommodations and return to work. The study is conducted in co-operation between the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and the University of Tampere during the period 1.8.2015 – 31.12.2018.

The data consist of five different kinds of research materials: questionnaires targeted to employees, supervisors and physicians before the negotiation, video recordings of the negotiation, individual interviews with the employees, supervisors and physicians after the negotiation, the negotiation minutes and the workplace's official model for supporting employee work ability. The research is based on a qualitative approach and relies especially on conversation analysis. In the study, we analyze the topics of discussion in the negotiation, participation in the decision-making process and the overall interactional structure of the negotiation. Further, the study explores the participants' expectations before and experiences after the negotiation.

As a result of the study a variety of interactional practices and modes of co-operation are described and their functionality in terms of their interactional outcome and applicability in different phases of the RTW process are evaluated. Description of the interactional practices enables an informed and deliberate development of return to work negotiation procedures. On the basis of the study results, open access digital learning environment is compiled and provided for employees, supervisors and representatives of occupational health services to support their co-operation in RTW process.