Challenges in the cooperation of return-to-work professionals in Finland

Jyri Liukko, senior researcher, D.Soc.Sc. Finnish Centre for Pensions

Reykjavik, 5-7 September



Background

- The concept of work disability has expanded
 - Work disability is not only an individual medical condition but thoroughly a social, organizational and judicial phenomenon
- A fair amount of simultaneous unemployment and working capacity problems
- Challenges for the cooperation of professionals and organizations in this situation
- Not much research on the *whole* network of institutions

The situation in Finland

- Work disability management and vocational rehabilitation system is fragmented
- The number of stakeholders in work disability prevention and return-to-work practices is high
- Various stakeholders: insurance institutions, rehabilitation providers, public employment services, municipal social welfare, primary and special health care, occupational health care, and employers
- Complexities of the cooperation > uncertainty

Research question, data and methods

- Qualitative study on the functioning of the network of institutions and professionals involved in work disability prevention and management
- What kind of problems do return-to-work (RTW) professionals face in their <u>cooperation</u> with each other?
- 23 in-depth interviews of RTW professionals in Helsinki metropolitan area and in smaller localities in Eastern Finland
 - Interviewees: rehabilitations counsellors, pension experts, social workers, work ability coaches, HR managers, occupational physician
 - Institutions: rehabilitation providers, earnings-related pension providers, Kela (the Social Insurance Institution of Finland), Public Employment Offices, Labour Force Service Centres, special health care, occupational health care, employers (personnel administration)

1) Communication

Daily interaction: who to call?

Problems particularly in the communication with Public Employment Offices

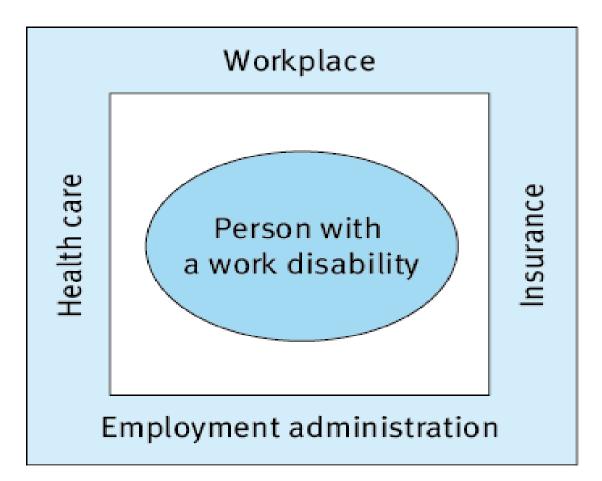
- Small towns vs. metropolitan area
 - In smaller localities communication seems to be smoother
- Lack of comprehensive joint IT systems



2) Distribution of responsibility

- Lack of long-term overall responsibility for individual clients
- "Double clients" in cases of simultaneous unemployment and disability
 - Distribution of responsibility between public employment offices and vocational rehabilitation covered by insurers doesn't work
 - » clients slipping through the net





Main professional systems in the management of work disability in Finland

(modified from the case management model introduced by Loisel et al. 2001 and 2005)

Improvements proposed by the interviewees

- Distribution of responsibility: more personal RTW coordinators who could support clients in the complex system > comprehensive responsibility
- Communication: better IT systems and contacting methods between organizations and professionals
- More informal (but systematic) networking and cooperation
- More training on RTW interventions for professionals in health care, especially for physicians

Conclusions

- Unclear distribution of responsibility creates inequality, especially between employed and unemployed persons with working capacity problems
- The study argues for the importance of systematic interorganizational <u>networking</u> and stresses the role of public employment services in the multi-actor management of work disabilities
- The role of case managers (RTW coordinators etc.) is gradually increasing > <u>expansion of (social)</u> <u>expertise</u>
- Liukko, Jyri & Kuuva, Niina (2016) Cooperation of return-to-work professionals: the challenges of multi-actor work disability management. *Disability and rehabilitation*. Published online 3 July 2016. <u>http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09638288.2016.1198428</u>