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S121: Sense-Making and Management: Why First-Line Managers Get Different Results in Organizational Interventions

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The overall aim of the current study was to investigate the outcomes associated with the PoWRS (Prevention of Work-related Stress) program including a range of methods designed to involve employees and managers in the development and implementation of a work-related stress prevention intervention. The intervention was undertaken in four Danish knowledge intensive (KICs) and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). During the intervention, our study showed that the first line managers approached the implementation of the intervention activities in different ways leading to different results. The aim of this paper is to investigate how the first-line managers and their department implemented the program and why they reached different results. Method: The PoWRS program includes a number of fixed collective activities to be conducted and offers a "blue print" of the intervention process. Yet, the content of the supporting activities are based on the in-house needs, knowledge and capabilities just as the goal of the intervention reflects the needs of the workplace. The managers and employees in each case consequently, partake in the whole intervention, where they, in a collective and collaborative process, re-design their work practices and organizational design and implement the changes. The research team followed the intervention process in all four companies by observing the planned activities and progression of the interventions at onsite visits. At the end of the intervention, the companies evaluated the intervention in a Chronicle Workshop. Analysis and results: In two of the companies, a handover of commitment and responsibility from top management to first line management succeeded regarding the aim and goal of conducting the intervention. In the two other companies it failed. In the successful cases the first line managers embraced the responsibility and stayed loyal to the intervention model. Our preliminary analysis shows that first line managers see the intervention as an opportunity to address some of their existing challenges and thereby frame the uncertain situation as meaningful. Consequently, they associate the intervention activities with the daily operations, objectives and KPIs. In the companies with the least implementation success, we observed that the first line managers failed in committing to the project. These managers prioritized daily operations rather than the intervention despite allocated resources and top management's attention. One explanation could be that they could not make sense of the intervention and consequently saw it as meaningless. Another explanation may be that they were working managers, meaning that they also had to bill hours and saw themselves less as leaders and project managers of the intervention. Our findings suggest that besides allocation of resources and top management support, the first line managers responsible for the implementation have greater success if they can make sense of the intervention and make a close association with the existing daily operations, objectives and KPIs.