

# Report of the national ELDERS-seminar in Finland

The seminar was held at:

Finnish Institute of Occupational Health,  
Topeliuksenkatu 41 a A  
Helsinki

10.9.2010 at 9:00 - 15:00

## **5.1 Pre-seminar findings**

Six representatives of both public and private sector (government, representative of employees/employers, etc.) who were invited to the national seminar were asked to give their opinion about the practices related to the way organizational changes are handled in Finland and if they see that the current practices cause inequality at the workplace between employees. Their answers were presented at the national seminar as a starting point of the joint discussions.

Those who answered to the open-ended questionnaire thought that:

1. The most important way to support employees (those who will keep their job and those who will lose their job) is *a)* to give enough accurate information about the changes, *b)* train superiors about the handle issues related to the change and *c)* to make clear plans how the changes are carried out in the work group level and how it will effect individual employees. It was also mentioned that it is important to give enough time to employees to adapt to changes. For those who will keep their job it is important to train them to their current (changed) tasks and to make sure that the tasks are fairly divided. For those losing their jobs it is important to treat them respectfully and support them for example in finding new work.
2. The pros of the current practices e.g. protection of the workers in the event of restructuring, "unemployment pension tube", is that they support individuals during the organizational changes. However, at the same time the goal is to get employees' to continue their working careers, but the current practices also support the retirement during organizational changes. It is also important to make sure that each individual chooses the "unemployment pension tube" voluntarily.
3. The current practices were also seen to cause inequality at the workplace, since for example, not all older or handicapped persons are not willing to retire, but would like to continue working as long as possible.
4. The current practices should be developed show that they would support individual solutions. The experience of elderly workers should be valued in the workplace.

5. It would also be important that all actors (TE-offices, occupational health care, human resources management, etc.) would not only work together but also together with the person facing organizational changes.

### ***Main findings of the seminar***

The Finnish national Elders-seminar started at four presentations: Specialized Researcher Tomi Hussi discussed about the role of age management during organizational restructuring. Finnish Institute of Occupational Health offers the training programme Agepower, which gives information and ways of action in age related issues; Senior Researcher Anna-Liisa Elo presented the recommendations of the HIRES (Health in restructuring: Innovative approaches and policy recommendations [http://www.ipg.uni-bremen.de/research/hires/HIRES\\_FR\\_090518\\_english.pdf](http://www.ipg.uni-bremen.de/research/hires/HIRES_FR_090518_english.pdf)) workgroup; Team Leader Krista Pahkin the main Finnish findings of the Elder-project (section 2 in the report and section 5.1); and Senior inspector Irma Hiltunen told about the change process of the Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy: the tools used and the role of ageing workers. The Ministry used nation-wide a specific training programme developed at the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health called Towards Successful Seniority which applies group mentoring in changing organizations.

34 representatives (for example, occupational health care personnel, human resources experts, development consultants, researchers) of both public and private sector participated to the national seminar arranged in 10<sup>th</sup> September 2010 by Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. In the workshop the participants discussed what 1) the society (authorities, policy makers, etc.), 2) management and supervisors, 3) Occupational Health Services (OHS), and 4) elderly employees themselves should do in case of a) work tasks are changed, or b) there is downsizing of the company and c) from the point of view of individual well-being.

Following recommendations can be summarised based on the discussions.

#### *Society:*

- More information about the protection in the event of restructuring (Ministry of Employment and the Economic)
- Restructuring are part of the every day work life nowadays, and laws etc. should be modified for changing situations:
  - Companies should be financially supported to use occupational health care services during organizational restructuring
  - Companies should be financially supported to offer occupational health care services to their former employees (for example, for one year after the employment had ended) to make sure that their work ability stays in good level
- More flexible, individual solutions on retirement is needed

#### *Organization's management and supervisors:*

- Co-operation with OHS is important when changes to the way work is carried out are done, for example they can help to evaluate the work ability of the employee, ergonomics etc.

- Co-operation with OHS, TE-offices and other actors is important when major organizational restructuring is carried out in the organization
- Supervisors (and other important actors like industrial safety delegate) should be trained to handle organizational restructuring process
- Different kind of support (information, discussion possibilities, training etc.) should be offered to everyone at the workplace
- It is important to discuss with the employees about the changes and give them possibility to influence to the decisions
- It is important to give information again, again and again

*Occupational Health Services:*

- Should participate to the organizational restructuring processes
- Should support individual to be responsible for her/his own health and for their future
- Should know what kind of other protection there is available in the event of restructuring, and advice organizations about it

*Elderly employees:*

- Should make sure that their work ability: health, well-being and know-how stays in good level
- Should actively participate to planning of the changes when possible
- Should use support available (it is not a sign of weakness to ask and receive support)
- Not feel guilty about keeping their job