

Martine Townsend

To change or not to change.

A qualitative investigation into employees' experiences of a survey-feedback process in connection to an organizational level health intervention.

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Norwegian University of Science and Technology Faculty of
Social Sciences and Technology Management.
Department of Psychology

 **NTNU**
Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

Abstract

Organizational level interventions have proven habitually difficult to implement with successful outcomes. Recent process evaluations have identified key factors involved in successful outcomes such as participation, communication and manager behaviour. These factors have ultimately to do with fostering employee engagement and commitment to interventions. It is effectively up to the employees whether interventions achieve their goals or not. The objective of the present study was to investigate how employees perceive and experience an organizational level intervention with particular regards to the survey feedback process. Six interviews were conducted with employees that had recently been through a survey feedback meeting. The survey feedback meeting was part of a larger health promotive work environment intervention. The results of the analysis process showed that the participants had a positive view of the survey feedback process and the intervention, highlighting the participatory aspect and the role their line manager adopted. Despite a positive appraisal, the participants had little faith in the successfulness of the intervention in their department. This was mainly due to the department going through a major restructuring at the time, but the participants also failed to understand the need for or the relevance of the intervention. Possible suggestions as to how to increase employee engagement and commitment to the intervention are discussed in light of the results and previous evidence and literature. More research is needed to understand how employees' appraisals of the survey-feedback meetings relate to their appraisals and level of engagement toward the entire intervention process, and how this influences intervention outcomes. Gaining and maintaining employee commitment is crucial in an intervention process.

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Interventions

Most are aware of the importance of healthy organizations. It is become widely accepted that employee health and well-being is an integral element for healthy organizations (Wallis & Livorsi, 2015). Healthy organizations have the capability to constantly monitor their organizational climate, act and change to continue to maintain an optimal functioning (Ipsen & Andersen, 2013). Achieving a healthy organization is not necessarily straightforward, nor is it a one-time task. Being a healthy organization does not guarantee that it will stay healthy (Weick, 2001). Organizations need to constantly monitor and act to changes and potential threats. As such, many organizations adopt work place interventions as a form to tackle these issues. Interventions also have the quality of being preventive and proactive in their approach, aiding organizations to continue to thrive. Interventions are often recommended precisely for their ability to confront the sources of stress and promote well-being, if done successfully (Nielsen, Taris, & Cox, 2010b).

Despite the vast body of research, attempts to prevent and eliminate stressors at work still proves fragile (Biron, Karanika-Murray, & Cooper, 2012). Organizations are dependent on having a healthy workforce, especially in today's ever-changing market. Healthy workers are not just beneficial, in terms of economical profit and job performance. Healthy work environments also attract employees, which in turn may lead to competitive advantages for the company (Karanika-Murray, Biron, & Cooper, 2012). Due to this, many developed countries have introduced legislations and laws, stating the importance of work place health and point out the organizations responsibilities to reduce stress and other causes of ill health in the work place (Arbeidstilsynet, 2013; Kompier, 1996; Tetrick & Quick, 2003). As such, interventions aimed at improving the work environment and health are becoming increasingly popular (Dollard, 2012).

Intervention classification

Interventions are defined as “planned, behavioural, and theory-based actions to remove or modify the cause of job stress at work and aim to improve the health and well-being of participants” (Nielsen, Randall, Holten, & González, 2010a, p. 234). Traditionally, work place interventions have been divided into three types; primary, secondary and tertiary interventions. Primary interventions are usually defined as proactive interventions aimed at people who are not at risk yet; and are aimed at larger groups or whole populations. Secondary interventions are also preventive in nature; they are usually targeted towards

groups or individuals who are viewed as being in danger of developing injuries or illnesses. Finally, tertiary interventions are usually more restorative in nature, as in they are aimed towards those who already have experienced illness or another form of loss in health. These are usually at the individual-level (Tetrick & Quick, 2003). Secondary and tertiary interventions are definitely the most popular types of intervention, both in the field and within the research community (Caulfield, Chang, Dollard, & Elshaug, 2004). Although interest for primary interventions has picked up in recent years (Tetrick, Quick, & Gilmore, 2012).

Organizational Health Interventions

The benefits of organizational health interventions, which fit into the primary form of interventions, are becoming clearer. Cooper and Cartwright (1994) claimed that organizations, which succeed at effective health interventions at the organizational level, would have no need for secondary and tertiary interventions. Although this view may be slightly naïve, as it fails to take into account individual differences in health and background. Although, there is some evidence to support that interventions aimed at larger populations, requiring smaller changes are more effective at preventing illnesses than interventions for the few requiring large changes (Maclean, Plotnikoff, & Moyer, 2000). Unfortunately these types of interventions have proven to be fickle (Sørensen & Holman, 2014), and the majority of the research on the field has found little to no effect from organizational-level interventions (Briner & Reynolds, 1999; Hasson et al., 2012). In contrast to traditional organizational changes, such as mergers, restructuring and downsizing, organizational-level interventions do not force change upon their employees. Organizational level interventions, especially those that have a health focus, usually depend on the participants themselves choosing to change in accordance to the intervention. As such, a crucial part of organizational interventions is gaining employee support and engagement toward the intervention (Coyle-Shapiro, 1999). For example, if participants fail to understand the need for an intervention or if an intervention is a bad fit to the organization, participants will most likely not engage in intervention behaviour (Saksvik, Olaniyan, Lysklett, Lien, & Bjerke, 2015), which will lead to the intervention failing to achieve its goals.

Another reason the literature on organizational interventions has failed to find large effects can be due to, research on the topic still being in its early stages and as such, there are no unifying theories or perspectives as to what organizational health interventions should

entail (Tetrick et al., 2012). This has led to a shift within the research community as to how organizational health interventions should be studied (Nielsen, 2013; Nytrø, Saksvik, Mikkelsen, Bohle, & Quinlan, 2000). Instead of solely focusing on whether an intervention worked or not, it is also important to understand how and why they work, to increase our understanding of interventions.

Background and purpose of the present study

The inspiration for this study came about one year prior, as I was doing an internship with the ARK Intervention Programme. The internship was a course requirement as part of the master degree. During the internship, I was able to attend numerous survey feedback meetings. Survey feedback meetings are an integral part of the ARK process. I will return for a closer description of what the ARK Intervention Programme entails in the current section. I was surprised to discover that the survey feedback meetings I attended differed a great deal in quality. This spiked my interest as ARK provides a detailed guideline for the survey feedback meetings. Looking to the research on the topic of interventions, my curiosity was left unanswered. The employees' line manager, rather than an external facilitator, held the meetings I attended. Based on my observations from the numerous survey-feedback meetings, I came to the impression that the manager had a great deal of influence toward the quality of the meetings. Most of the managers were untrained in their facilitator roles, and they had varying degrees of knowledge of the purpose of the ARK intervention programme and its goals. Therefore it seemed as if their individual style and personality greatly influenced these survey-feedback meetings (Listau & Townsend, 2015). My thoughts and impressions in regard to managers' influence in an intervention process did find support in the literature (Nielsen & Randall, 2009; Nytrø et al., 2000; Øyum, Kvernberg Andersen, Pettersen Buvik, Knutstad, & Skarholt, 2006; Saksvik et al., 2015; Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005). Through process evaluation studies, research has pointed to certain topics and factors that are influential in an intervention process; such as participation, management and communication (Biggs & Brough, 2015; Biron, 2012). These factors are not distinct entities within an intervention, but they all influence each other, and ultimately influence participants' appraisals and assessments of an intervention. In my previous research, although the focus was on the role of the line-manager and their impact on the intervention, it seemed as though the line managers own behaviours influenced the participants and their level of engagement (Listau & Townsend, 2015).

There is still a lot of uncertainty about interventions, what makes them work, when will they work, and for whom? Interventions that prove successful in one instance may fail in another (Biggs & Brough, 2015). As such, more research is needed on the topic in order to answer the fundamental question, what works? This present study is situated within the growing field of research that examines the processes surrounding organizational interventions and how processes may influence intervention outcomes.

Research Aim

Process evaluations of interventions have, as a larger goal to uncover factors or characteristics that may lead to successful intervention outcomes. Simultaneously, process evaluations may also uncover factors that may lead to intervention failure. Both outcomes can lead to more knowledge and understanding of the topic. Whatever the purpose or goal of the intervention, they all require that the participants adopt and change in order for an intervention to be successful. As such, it is interesting to understand how employees experience such interventions, as ultimately intervention outcomes are up to them. Therefore, the main research question is; how do employees perceive and experience an organizational level intervention, with particular regards to the survey-feedback process?

Continuing from my previous internship it is also of interest to look at how employees experience the role of their line manager in regards to the intervention process, since the manager or leader has been found to play such an integral part in intervention processes in the literature. To gain an even larger understanding, this thesis will also examine how the line manager views his or her own role during a survey-feedback meeting.

The ARK intervention programme

The ARK programme is a working environment and working climate intervention programme, and targets psychosocial factors. It was developed for and by the university sector. The ARK programme came through a cooperation between the four of the largest universities in Norway; the project started in 2010, and was first applied in 2013. The Norwegian University of Science and Technology owns and manages the ARK programme, while the daily operations belongs to The Center for Health Promotion Research, in Norway. The ARK programme is also used as a research platform. All survey results are saved in a database, where the intent is to provide a rich material source for future research relating to work environment, health and stress. This common database also allows departments to compare their own results from the ARK programme at various points in time and keep track

of their own development and progress (Undebakke, Innstrand, Anthun, & Christensen, 2014).

The intent behind ARK was to develop a tool for systematic mapping of psychosocial conditions in knowledge intensive organizations, which would also fulfil statutory requirements of documented health and safety standards, as postulated in the Norwegian Working Environment Act (Arbeidstilsynet, 2013). The ARK programme and its theoretical underpinnings is strongly rooted in established empirical evidence, especially the Jobs Demand – Resource Model (Bakker, Demerouti, & Sanz-Vergel, 2014). Its aim is to address health-promoting resources at work, while at the same time keeping a stress prevention perspective. The ARK programme also emphasise the importance of the participative process, claiming that participation is not just vital but a requirement for achieving successful outcome.

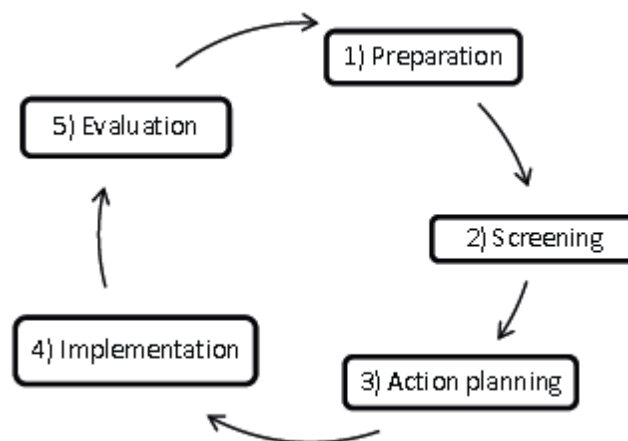


Figure 1. The five phases of the ARK process (Undebakke et al., 2014)

ARK is intended to be implemented biennially. As figure 1 displays, the ARK Programme consists of five phases. The initial phase is the preparation phase where the organizations get ready to implement the process, planning the different phases, timetables and getting acquainted with the ARK programme, its goals, and the possibilities for what the organization can accomplish. The second phase consists of the screening phase, beginning with the department managers completing Fact Sheet I, which consists of questions regarding department size, number of employees, department activities, and frequency of staff meetings and general organization of the department. After this, the main survey is send out to all

employees. The survey is called KIWEST, which stands for Knowledge Intensive Work Environment Survey Target, and was developed for ARK. KIWEST based upon already established, validated and standardized scales. The main themes in KIWEST are commitment to work, demands, and resources that are divided into individual level and task completion, in the colleague fellowship and in the organizational unit. The third phase, called action-planning consists of a survey-feedback meeting including all employees, and the development of initiatives and actions. Subsequently follows the implementation phase, and finally there is an evaluation phase. During the evaluation phase, the department managers fill out Fact Sheet II. Fact Sheet II consists of questions about the ARK process, such as what initiatives were developed and how they were implemented, the degree of participation and support among the employees, the managers view of the process; what was positive and what needs improvement along with their overall impression of the ARK programme. As figure 1 displays, the intervention is not finished after the evaluation phase, ARK and the work to improve working conditions should be seen as a continuous activity (Undebakke et al., 2014).

Thesis structure

To summarize, the main aim of this thesis is to understand how employees perceive and experience an organizational level intervention, with particular regards to the survey-feedback process. Within the larger aim, this thesis also sets out to address how employees experience the role of their manager in regards to the intervention process. A qualitative approach has been taken to shed light on this topic, in an attempt to garner an in-depth understanding from the employees' point of view. More specifically how they have experienced the ARK intervention programme. The line manager has also been interviewed about their experience, in hopes of attaining a greater understanding of the intervention process. Relevant theory and evidence will be presented in the following chapter. Then the methods section will be presented, including the reasoning behind the choice of method along with the process of data collection and analysis. The results of the data analysis will be described in the succeeding chapter. Subsequently the results will be discussed in light of relevant theory and previous literature. Finally, the thesis will conclude in the present study's position and implications within the larger field of studies on organizational level interventions, along with concluding remarks.

Theoretical Framework

This chapter will address the theoretical underpinnings for the present study. It begins with a brief history of the research on organizational level interventions, and a description of the shift from result evaluations to process evaluations. From this, factors that have been deemed as important according to previous process evaluations will be presented. Established theories within the field of organizational psychology will be presented with the aforementioned factors in an attempt to shed light on how and why these factors are influential to organizational level interventions. These particular factors and theories have also been highlighted because they all concern employee perceptions and appraisals of interventions.

Product evaluations and randomized control trials.

Traditionally, research on organizational level interventions has focused on measuring the effects of an intervention. Such as, whether the intervention brought about the desired results. This kind of research follows the traditional, positivist view (Biggs & Brough, 2015). By manipulating one or more variables through the intervention, it is possible to measure the degree of change in the variables, X lead to Y, due to Z (Olniyanl, 2014). By comparing an intervention group with a control group it should than be possible to measure the effects of the manipulation, in this case an intervention. This kind of research model, called randomized control trials has been the touchstone within the positivistic tradition for measuring cause and effect. Unfortunately, these approaches have led to rather disappointing results in regards to organizational health interventions (Biron, 2012). It is possible that randomized control trials could yield better results in a laboratory setting, but the fact of the matter is that most research is done in a naturalistic setting (Nielsen & Randall, 2013).

Organizations in our present day are characterized by constant change and development. Most interventions occur within these larger dynamics, and as such, it is nearly impossible to isolate any potential effects from the intervention, or be able to determine if any effects were due to the intervention or due to other confounding variables within the organization. If the intervention failed or succeeded, was it due to the intervention programme itself or due to something else going on in the organization? Was the intervention made a priority in the organization? Did the intervention's design fit the purpose of the intervention? A simple examination as to whether there was a significant change in the target variables after an intervention overlooks the complex nature where interventions occur.

Another presumption of adopting randomized control trials is that it assumes that work environment is an objective phenomenon, which can be manipulated through an intervention. It also infers that the employees or intervention targets are passive receivers that can also be manipulated by the intervention (Nielsen, 2013). This view is in opposition to other leading theories within organizational health. There is evidence claiming that both social and individual factors influence intervention outcomes (Nytrø et al., 2000). One example of this is that it has been documented that employees actively appraise the intervention, and their perceptions may in turn influence the outcome of an intervention (Nielsen, Randall, & Albertsen, 2007; Tvedt & Saksvik, 2012). This is in line with other prominent theories in the field, such as transactional theories of stress. Such theories postulate that stress is not constant, but there exists a continual appraisal between the individual and their environment. The individual assesses the potential threat, and his or her reactions and their own coping mechanisms (Lazarus & Folkman, 1992). As such, stress is not viewed as a constant, objective source, but will vary for different individuals, and be in a state of fluctuation. One potential threat may lead to negative stress for one individual, while another may not view the threat as a source of stress at all (Bond & Bunce, 2001). This can also contribute to the previous, negative findings in regards to evaluations of organizational interventions (Randall & Nielsen, 2012). According to randomized control trial models, the individuals in the experiment group should be equally affected by the intervention. In reality, according to stress theories, there will be large individual differences within the group (Semmer, 2006). As such, interventions that are targeted towards reducing specific stressors, may not be necessarily be viewed as sources of stress by the employees, and therefore, logically, will have little effect on the individuals.

Even with all the research on organizational interventions, a fundamental question remains; what works? (Randall & Nielsen, 2012). Inherent in this question also lies the desire to understand why interventions work. Are there key factors that guarantee success across situations? These questions remain largely unanswered. This has lead researchers to change their approach towards how one should study organizational interventions.

Considering process and context.

As previously stated, interventions occur within the larger organizational environment. This has lead researchers to recognize the importance of the contexts interventions occur in and to focus on the process surrounding interventions. The key

questions being asked now are how and why an interventions succeeded or failed (Nielsen et al., 2010b). Nytrø et al. (2000) have defined intervention process as “individual, collective or management perceptions and actions in implementing any interventions and their influence of the overall result of the intervention” (p.214), while context involves the existing environment where interventions occur (Biggs & Brough, 2015). Saksvik, Nytrø, Dahl-Jørgensen, and Mikkelsen (2002) claimed that the process surrounding the intervention could be just as important or even more than the content of the intervention. Similarly, Egan, Bamba, Petticrew, and Whitehead (2009) have asserted that it is important to evaluate the intervention process, as neglecting to do this may lead to researchers coming to wrong conclusion about the intervention. For example, researchers may conclude that an intervention has failed due to its form not being suited to its purpose, while in fact the reasons for failure were due to inadequate implementation. By paying attention to the processes surrounding interventions, it may help researchers to identify key factors involved in successful interventions (Egan, 2013).

Organizational interventions are fickle. An intervention may prove successful in one instance, while the same intervention fails in another. Focusing on process factors may increase transferability and aid replicability (Cooper, Dewe, & O'Driscoll, 2001; Egan, 2013). Unfortunately, research on process factors is still quite scarce. Biggs and Brough (2015) claim that process and contextual factors are usually overlooked, and only taken into account if interventions fail to reach their goals. However, a lot can be learned from process evaluations, even if the intervention failed to bring about the desired change. Understanding what may have influenced an intervention failure can help others to avoid potential pitfalls and difficulties (Noblet & LaMontagne, 2008). Nytrø et al. (2000) assert that one reason there is a sparsity with regards to process evaluations is that there still exists a bias in the research community towards not publishing unsuccessful research and negative findings.

Nielsen and Randall (2013) have suggested numerous questions or areas of interest one should consider when evaluating interventions. For example, what was the purpose behind the intervention and who initiated it? Egan et al. (2007) found evidence claiming that the reasoning behind initiating an intervention could affect the intervention outcome. When an intervention was initiated to improve the health or well-being of the employees it had a greater chance of success than when the intervention was simply due to being able to ‘tick the box’ to meet legislation demands.

Other questions of importance are; did the participants receive adequate information about and throughout the intervention? How was the information perceived? Did the participants have any influence over the intervention process? In regards to the first questions, communication has been found to be a key factor in regards to intervention outcomes (Nielsen & Randall, 2009). In a recent study, Saksvik et al. (2015) found communication to be the most influential factor in their process evaluation of an health intervention. They pointed out that information about relevance of the intervention was especially importance as the information received helped inform the participants' perceptions and appraisals of the usefulness of the intervention. In another comparative, process evaluation of six organizational health intervention, Sørensen and Holman (2014) discovered that the intervention that had achieved the most change was characterized by substantially higher degree of communication about the intervention.

Participatory Interventions

As mentioned above, a key factor is whether the participants have any influence over the intervention. Participation has proven to be a vital part of successful interventions (Nielsen, 2013; Nielsen & Randall, 2013). Participatory interventions mean that the employees or participants are actively involved in shaping the intervention (Heany, 2011). Participation can take various forms and different levels of involvement. For example, at the highest level, participants can be involved in all phases of the intervention from the planning phase to the evaluation, or it can just involve the development of initiatives (Nielsen et al., 2010a; Nielsen et al., 2010b; Sørensen, 2013). The main rationalization behind participation is that it is thought that if participants have more control and involvement in the intervention, it may, in turn lead to a greater commitment and engagement toward the intervention (Sørensen, 2013). By increasing participants' ownership of the intervention programme, optimistically, it will lead to participants feeling more responsible for guaranteeing the successfulness of the intervention. It is worth mentioning that just saying that an intervention is participatory does not necessarily lead to participation or success (Nielsen et al., 2007). Employees need to perceive that they actually do have influence over the intervention for them to participate (Slinning & Haugen, 2011).

Participation has been found to have many benefits. For example, Roskam (2009) found that participation lead to an increase in employee satisfaction and well-being, while Lines (2004) found participation to be positively related to commitment to the organization

and negatively related to employees' resistance to change. Nielsen and Randall (2012) have also found evidence to suggest that participation may lead to an increase in employees' perceived job control, autonomy and social support. Due to these positive effects, it has been claimed that participation can almost be seen as an intervention in itself since the mere act of participation can lead to so many positive effects (Mikkelsen, 2005; Nielsen et al., 2010a).

Participation, especially in regards to the development of initiatives may lead to improved fit of the intervention, as employees generally have a greater understanding of problem areas and can help in developing more accurate initiatives (Lamontagne, Noblet, & Landsbergis, 2012). Employees also have a greater understanding of what would work and what would not, in regards to initiative implementation. Opening up for a more bottom-up approach to organizational interventions, seems to also increase the likelihood of intervention success (Saksvik et al., 2002). Unfortunately in real life settings, participatory interventions seem to be "the exception rather than the norm" (Lamontagne et al., 2012, p. 28). Harden, Peersman, Oliver, Mauthner, and Oakley (1999) claimed after reviewing the effectiveness of organizational interventions, that only twenty-five percent of interventions targeted the specific needs of the employees, and as few as fourteen percent of the reviewed interventions adopted a participatory approach. This inclination towards adhering to a strict top-down approach, according to Nielsen et al. (2010b), may be due to, as previously mentioned, the view of employees as being passive recipients.

Line managers

Leaders, and especially the closest leader, or line manager has been specified as being the single most influential factor in determining intervention outcomes (Saksvik et al., 2002). Along similar lines, Nytrø et al. (2000) found, when looking into why an organizational level intervention failed, claimed that the leader was the most significant cause when explain why the intervention had failed. It makes sense that line managers play an important part in an intervention process, as they are often the one's in charge of implementing the intervention in their department and overseeing the intervention activities (Kompier, Cooper, & Geurts, 2000). Line managers have been found to influence intervention processes and outcomes, both directly and indirectly. In a direct case, Dahl-Jørgensen and Saksvik (2005) found that line managers hindered an intervention by not letting their employees have time off work to attend intervention work-shops. Randall, Griffiths, and Cox (2005) found that a particular stress-management intervention had failed due to line managers, in fear of the disruption to

their own working conditions, had neglected to communicate important aspects of the intervention to their employees. In regards to positive outcomes, Sørensen and Holman (2014) discovered that from the six interventions they studied, the one that reported most change had also taken greater steps in making the intervention visible. Line managers had produced leaflets and posters displaying the initiatives and actions, during the implementation phase, consequently sustaining employee awareness.

Line managers may also influence intervention processes and outcomes indirectly. Line managers own behaviours in an intervention process may influence the way employees perceive an intervention. Nielsen and Randall (2009) found that when line managers actively pursued the involvement of their employees and shown responsibility in the implementation phase, the employees perceived the intervention more positively. Employees often look towards their closest leaders and managers to gain an understanding of the values and goals of their organization, which in turn shapes their own beliefs. The way line managers relate to an intervention process may influence the perceived importance of the intervention, among employees (Zohar, 2002). Coyle-Shapiro (1999) found that the level of participation in an intervention rose when line managers showed a supportive behaviour towards the intervention. Along similar lines Olniyani (2014) found that when leaders were supportive towards an intervention, the employees also reported being more satisfied with the intervention programme as a whole.

The fact that line managers play such a vital role in organizational health interventions, is understandable since they play a vital role in the general working environment and toward employee health (Offerman & Hellmann, 1996). Line managers' behaviours can have a major influence on psychosocial working conditions. For example, they can often both hinder or promote additional stressors in the form of increasing work tasks, working hours and overtime, recognition and more (Lewis, Yarker, & Donaldson-Feilder, 2012). Unfortunately, employees often report that their relationship to their line managers is the greatest source of work-related stress (Tepper, 2000). At the same time, they also play a vital role in the recognition of potential stressors and threats, through their day-to-day dealings with their employees, staff meetings, and employee reviews (Thomas, Rick, & Neathy, 2004), which can potentially be a great source in the action-planning phase of interventions. It is important to keep in mind, especially in regards to interventions that tackle psychosocial factors, that the line manager may be a source of these stressors (Biron, Gatrell, & Cooper, 2010). If the line manager also has the day-to-day supervision of the

implementation of the intervention, it might lead to unfortunate consequences for the intervention.

Communication

Open communication throughout interventions is necessary for employees to commit to the intervention (Nytrø et al., 2000). A combination of bottom-up and top-down communication is one of the hallmarks of successful interventions (Nielsen & Randall, 2009). Saksvik et al. (2015) in a mixed method evaluation of a salutogenic intervention process concluded that communication was one of the most important factors, especially communication from line managers. The importance of communication was especially important in regards to two areas, communication about the relevance of the intervention and communication about the information prior to the intervention's start. Communication especially in regards to the relevance of the intervention is important for employee buy-in. If employees fail to understand the relevance or usefulness of a particular intervention, they will most likely not be willing to commit to change. Dahl-Jørgensen and Saksvik (2005) have identified certain critical phases when open communication is especially important in an intervention process, and these are during the action-planning phase and the implementation phase. In the aforementioned study by Sørensen and Holman (2014), the organization that had achieved the most change, had communication channels in place directly after the action-planning workshop, offering support to employees. On the other hand, the other organizations that were studied, which had not achieved the same amount of change, experienced a time lapse of two months between the action-planning workshops and further communication and information in regards to the intervention process.

Individuals can perceive information differently; as such, line managers need to monitor how the receivers are perceiving information. It would be credulous of organizations to believe that all information they send out is perceived identically by the receivers (Hill, Seo, Kang, & Taylor, 2012). Employees do not just evaluate explicit information; they also interpret the implicit information. In other words, it is important to consider, not just *what* is communicated about the intervention, but *how* it is communicated. All of these will influence how employees evaluate the intervention. This has a lot to do with employees' sense making of the intervention and the situation (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005).

Increasing engagement

The previously mentioned factors all seem to be influential in intervention processes, but it is important to acknowledge that they are not independent factors, but rather influence each other and the intervention process. Even if the line manager makes a conscious effort to facilitate the intervention process, ensures open communication and makes sure employees have the possibility to participate, it will not necessarily mean that the intervention is guaranteed success. Employee engagement and buy-in to the intervention is essential, since ultimately it is they who will have to change and adapt for the intervention to be deemed successful.

One major obstacle, especially in the case of working environment interventions, is that many employees already have a negative perception of them, even from the start. A common notion among employees, is that ‘you fill out a survey but nothing ever comes of it’ (Hoff & Lone, 2014). When employees are sceptical towards an intervention process, chances are small that they will put any effort into the intervention (Coyle-Shapiro, 1999). If they feel that the intervention has little relevance for them, or that the intervention is only initiated so the organization can tick the completed box, they will also most likely not engage (Egan et al., 2007; Saksvik et al., 2015), which in turn can lead to cynicism towards the entire programme (Reichers, Wanous, & Austin, 1997). All of the above-mentioned factors, participation, the role and behaviour of line managers, and communication play vital roles in increasing employee engagement. In the following paragraphs, I will touch upon different established theories that may help explain why these factors are important towards participants’ appraisal of intervention processes. Many of the theories share some commonalities, but may offer slightly different perspectives as to why and how employees’ engage in interventions.

Social exchange theory and perceived organizational support.

Social exchange theory is based on the norm of reciprocity. If employees feel that their interests, expectations, or well-being are not being met or not of importance, they will return by withdrawing from the organization (Saks, 2006). On the other hand, if employees feel that they receive favourable treatment, they will feel obliged to return thusly. In an intervention process, if employees feel that the line manager takes a genuine interest in their well-being and the intervention they will, in turn increase their engagement in the intervention process (Coyle-Shapiro, 1999; Nielsen, 2013). Neves and Caetano (2006)

examined social exchange theory, specifically the role of trust in line managers and organizational change. They found that when trust levels were high, the employees reported a larger commitment towards the change programme.

Perceived organizational support falls under the umbrella of social exchange theory (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Perceived organizational support goes slightly further in that it postulates that employees infer opinions of the organization concerning whether the organization takes a genuine interest in their employees' health and well-being (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The line manager is often seen as an icon or representation of the entire organization, thusly the line managers own behaviours and attitudes are a reflection of the entire organization (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006). As such, when perceived organizational support is high among employees, they will feel that they are important within the organization, and that their health and well-being is valued. Which, in turn will likely increase the chances for employees engagement and commitment to the intervention (Mathiue & Zajac, 1990).

Transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership is often highlighted as a possible explanation as to why line managers play such a vital role during interventions, in the literature (Tetrick et al., 2012). Transformational leaders are characterized by high levels of charisma, they foster employee' development, they inspire their employees, and are also capable of creating and inspiring visions (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership has also been linked to higher levels of employee well-being, and employees experiencing their work as more meaningful (Nielsen & Daniels, 2012). Transformational leaders may act as 'drivers of change' in an intervention process, as they inspire their employees to achieve change (Nielsen, 2013). They also inherent they quality of being able to inspire employees to abandon their personal goals and values, and realign them with the needs of, and for the sake of the entire group (Nielsen & Daniels, 2012). Information does not necessarily convince people to change, people convince people to change (Arnulf, 2013). As such, it is thought that leaders that have a more transformational style will influence intervention outcomes more positively than others will. In a study of thirty organizations, Herold, Fedor, Caldwell, and Liu (2008) found that transformational leadership resulted in a greater commitment to change among employees, rather that change-specific leadership. Transformational leadership can be learnt, Arnulf (2013) claims that by employing a few simple steps, leaders can

increase their charisma. Such tactics include among other things, adopting employees' point of view in an intervention setting, actively listen to their employees, and show reservation in regards to their own thoughts and feelings.

Affective commitment to change

Affective commitment to change is defined as “a desire to provide support for the change based on a belief in its inherent benefits” (Hill et al., 2012, p. 758). Employees with high levels of affective commitment to change, show positive attitudes towards the change, are willing to go further to guarantee success (Shum, Bove, & Auh, 2008) show active support, and encourage others to join (Hill et al., 2012). Fostering affective commitment to change may strongly influence intervention outcomes in a positive direction. Affective commitment to change has links to both managers and communication. Trust in management, which also resonates with social exchange theories, has been shown to foster stronger commitment to change (Michaelis, Stegmaier, & Sonntag, 2009). Open communication has also been highlighted as an important factor, especially bottom-up communication during a change process (Hill et al., 2012). Bottom-up communication resonates with the importance of participation in interventions.

Participation and job crafting theory.

It has already been touched upon previously in the current section that employees are active recipients and constantly appraise their situations and environments. One explanation as to why, which was briefly touched upon, is the aforementioned transactional theories of stress. However, there are also other leading theories in the field of organizational psychology that lends support to the importance of participation, and may even explain exactly why participation is such an integral part to successful interventions. One such theory is job crafting theory (Nielsen, Stage, Abildgaard, & Brauer, 2013).

Job crafting is defined as “the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work” (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001, p. 179). Simply put, it is the act of changing aspects of one's work to improve one's experience of work and increase its meaningfulness. Job crafting is essentially a proactive activity. Nielsen et al. (2010b) claim that job crafting theory can explain how participation positively influences interventions. For an intervention to be successful, the participants usually need to alter or change some aspects of their behaviour or work. Through intervention participation, especially in the action-planning phase, employees can collectively discuss and examine

established procedures. This may lead to both individual and collective reflection over potential problems and well-being. In instances where problems are identified, participants can jointly develop initiatives to tackle these problems (Nielsen & Abildgaard, 2012). On the other hand, if there are problematic issues that cannot be changed, the collective may decide to change the way they approach and perceive these challenges. Through participation, employees may feel a greater group coherence to their colleagues, which may increase social support, and in turn positively influence the intervention. Through group discussions, employees may come to understand and perceive that they are 'in this together', leading to a greater responsibility for the intervention, not just at the individual level, but also by helping their colleagues implement change (Nielsen et al., 2013). To my knowledge, there are no studies that have explicitly examined the relationship between participation and job crafting, nor interventions that have sought out to increase job crafting behaviour. Although, Hasson et al. (2012) found when comparing line managers and employees' experience of an intervention that employees registered more change than the manager. This can support the role of job crafting as the results might be due to the employees initiating their own initiatives through job crafting (Nielsen et al., 2013).

Methodical Framework

The current section focuses on the context and methods of the current study. A brief specification will follow, along with a description of qualitative research, the qualitative interview and thematic analysis. Following this, a closer description of the informants and the research context will be presented. A more detailed description of ARK's survey-feedback meeting is included. Finally, the analysis process is described along with ethical considerations.

Specification.

The aim of the study is to understand how employees perceive and experience an organizational level intervention, to answer this a qualitative approach has been taken. Six interviews were conducted with informants going through an ARK process, thematic analysis was used to analyse the dataset. This study has an exploratory design, which is the basis of the qualitative design. Although qualitative research and its methods can take many forms, the main purpose of qualitative research is to gain knowledge and understanding of the world or a specific phenomenon (Kvale, 2006). As in this study, which seeks to understand how the participants of the ARK intervention experience the process. While quantitative research usually adopts a theory-driven approach, qualitative research is not dependant on confirming established hypotheses but rather starts with a desire on the researcher's part to gain a deeper understanding of the research topic of interest (Mehmetoglu, 2004).

Qualitative research, although more of a collective term for different methodologies, has in common that it generally produces rich data that does not lend itself to statistical analysis, a qualitative approach usually entails a wish on behalf of the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, or certain features of a phenomenon. Data collection and the specific type of analysis may vary depending on the type of method adopted by the researcher, although interviews are by far the most common form of data collection (Howitt, 2013).

The qualitative interview.

The aim of this thesis is to understand how participants experience an organizational-level intervention, and interviews were used as a means of data collection. There is still a lot of uncertainty as to how organizational-level interventions work and as such more explorative studies are needed to understand how participants of intervention experience them. The

present study does not claim any preconceived hypotheses as to the experiences of the participants but rather seeks out to explore and understand the participants' own experiences and evaluations of the intervention. Interviews have the advantage in that it allows informants to elaborate and expand upon answers, thoughts and feelings, regarding the subject matter. Interviews also have the benefit of allowing the possibility and opportunity to explore factors that are unknown in advance, and are not limited by pre-defined categories or assumptions, such as for example questionnaires. As such, interviews as a means of data collection offers the possibility of gathering the most useful information needed to answer the research question.

Interviews are often designed and structured in a way as to encourage the informant to elaborate upon the topic of interest. Interviews are generally one-sided, in that the researcher generally takes a back seat, letting the interviewee dominate the conversation. A clear advantage of interviews as a mean of data collection is that the researcher gains an in-depth access to the interviewee's understanding of a phenomenon. At the same time interviews allow the researcher to gain both nuanced and varied information regarding the phenomenon in question from a relatively small sample size (Kvale, 2006).

Interviews as a method of data collection can take different forms. The aim of the research or the method of analysis may influence the composition of the interview. Most interviews fall on a spectrum in regards to structure. On one end, there are structured interviews. In these type of interviews, the researcher has predefined a list of questions and the questions are usually formulated in such a way that they elicit similar answers and responses. This type of interview can be useful if the aim of the research is to compare different responses and views on a specific phenomenon (Mehmetoglu, 2004). On the other end of the spectrum one finds unstructured interviews. In these types of interviews, there are no predefined sets of questions or interview guides, just a general topic of conversation. These types of interviews can be useful in that not having any predefined notions of how the interview should be or what it should consist of, may lead to completely new or different perspectives being brought forth, which in turn may lead to a greater understanding of the topic being researched (Howitt, 2013).

In the middle of the spectrum is what is called semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are the most common type of qualitative interviews (Mehmetoglu, 2004), and is also the form of interview used in this particular study. Semi-structured

interviews usually have a set of predefined questions in the form of an interview guide, but are also flexible in that the researcher does not have to strictly adhere to the interview guide. The researcher has more flexibility to follow-up on arising topics and delve into topics that are not necessarily included in the interview guide (Howitt, 2013).

Thematic Analysis

As mentioned, the design of this thesis utilizes thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is at its core a method used to identify broader themes and categories that encapsulates significant features of the data being analysed (Howitt, 2013). It can be seen as a form of pattern recognition (Feredy & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). It is particularly relevant to the research question as a key aspect of the research aim is to discover if there are commonalities between the informants in their appraisals of the ARK process. A major advantage of thematic analysis is its flexibility. It is one of the few methods within qualitative research, that is not bound to a strict theoretical or epistemological stand, (Harper & Thompson, 2011). Qualitative researchers are often, broadly speaking, divided into two camps, a positivistic or realist stand, or constructivist camp. While the first usually presumes there is an objective reality and the participants experiences, thoughts and meanings reflect their reality, the constructivists are more concerned with how meaning is constructed through social processes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis involves a number of steps. The first step generally starts with familiarizing oneself with the data. The next step is to start to generating codes for the data, which later form the basis of themes. This is a circular process as codes and themes need to continually be checked against the data, there is constant reviewing and refining involved throughout the analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). One can initially take two different approaches towards identifying themes, an inductive or deductive approach.

This thesis adopts an inductive or bottom-up approach, meaning that the developing themes will come from the data itself, in contrast to a top-down or deductive approach where the themes often developed to fit into a predefined coding system or by theories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As the aim is to understand the participants experience of an intervention, especially the survey-feedback meeting, valuable information might possibly have been overlooked if the data were to be analysed into predefined codes and themes. While the analysis process will be guided by the initial research aim, the analysis process and the results will be firmly rooted in the data itself.

ARK's survey-feedback process

The ARK intervention programme offers a structured guideline for the survey-feedback meeting. The meetings start with a brief introduction of ARK, and its purpose. After this a brief explanation of the theoretical underpinnings of ARK follows, including an explanation of what is meant by psychosocial factors and an introduction to the job demands resource model. This is done to give the participants a greater understanding of the purpose and importance of the ARK intervention programme, and to give the participants a common set of mental models and frame of reference (Undebakke et al., 2014). The participants are then asked to discuss amongst themselves what they deem the most important demands and resources in their own working environment. The results from the KIWEST survey are then presented. The results are presented in as bar graph. The bar graphs show the departments' average score and standard deviation for each factor. After the result presentation, the participants are then tasked with discussing their results in groups; this section usually takes up the majority of the survey-feedback meeting. The participants are asked, while discussing in groups to decide on three areas or factors that they view as in need of improving, and three factors that they deem positive and that should be maintained. A short presentation of the in total six factors are presented for all present. These factors form the basis of the development of initiatives that are to be implemented.

In this particular department, a steering group were put together, consisting of one employee from each division. They were tasked with further developing the topics from the survey-feedback meeting and turning them into concrete initiatives. By the time of the final interview, the steering group had completed two meetings. One with just the steering group present, and a second meeting where the line manager was also present, although a final action-plan was still not in place at the time of the interviews.

Informants and design.

The sample consisted of employees from a large Norwegian College. The sample consisted of five employees from a non-academic department, along with their department manager, meaning six interviews in total. Length of employment varied from one year up to twenty years, and have more or less similar positions and work tasks. Although all the informants come from the same department, their physical workplaces are geographically separated from each other meaning that the employees do not interact that much with each other on a daily basis. The department had partaken in the ARK process and had recently

undergone the survey-feedback meeting, in the spring of 2015, which was held by an external facilitator. The department leader was also present but merely as an observer.

The interviews utilized in this particular thesis, were undertaken as part of a larger research project regarding health promotion at work. The head researchers for the project were allowed access to the department while they were undergoing the ARK process. As such, I did not partake in the recruitment process beforehand, nor the actual interviewing process. I was given the possibility to transcribe the interviews for the researchers, due to my previous internship and knowledge of ARK, and that the ARK intervention programme was the focus of this thesis. At this point in time I was currently working on a potential interview guide for my own data collection. Through discussions with one of the researchers, it became apparent that my potential topics for the interviews were very similar to the topics in the already completed interviews, that I were to transcribe. As such, I was offered the opportunity to use these interviews in my own research, which I accepted.

The two researchers adopted an action research approach towards the process, observing the survey-feedback meeting as well as attending follow-up meetings with the employees during the following months. At the time of the interviews, two additional meetings had been held after the survey-feedback meeting. These meetings consisted of a smaller group of employees that had been tasked with further developing the topics from survey-feedback meeting into initiatives and action-plans. The employee group held the first meeting, while the line manager had also been present at the second meeting. The researchers will continue to follow the department throughout the implementation phase. Although it would be interesting in regards to the research topic, to be able to follow the department through the intervention process, due to the scope of this thesis, I will only be focusing on the survey-feedback meeting, and the following months during which the interviews took place.

It is important to note that the department and the college where at that time on the verge of a large merger, with two other Norwegian colleges and a large Norwegian university. The official date of the merger was 1. January 2016. There was a lot of uncertainty as to how the merger would affect the informants and their work. As such, the merger was a recurring topic of discussion in all of the interviews. Although the merger is not central to the specific research question in this thesis, it would be imprudent to ignore the topic completely as it plays such an integral part in the informants' experiences of their daily working life.

The Interviews

The informants were interviewed one by one, and were held between one week and two and a half months after the initial survey-feedback meeting. The interviews were held face to face, at the informants' work places. Both researchers who had been present at the survey-feedback meeting held the majority of interviews. There was one interview where only one researcher was present. The informants had been informed of the aim of the research and their rights, in regards to anonymity and confidentiality prior to the interviews. The interviews lasted between 45 and 70 minutes. All interviews were tape recording for later transcription. The interviews had a semi-structured design. The researchers developed two interview guides, one for the employees and one for the leader. They were relatively identical to each other. The main difference being different wording of the questions for the leader, to reflect their different roles during the survey-feedback meeting. The interview guides (attachment 1 & 2) consisted a relatively few, open ended questions. The questions were formulated as to gain knowledge of the participants own experience from the survey-feedback meeting. The questions were formulated as «*can you tell us how you experienced...*», and the informants were asked more specifically about different aspects of the survey-feedback meeting, such as the result presentation, the role of the facilitator and the role of the line manager. Follow up questions were included where needed, such as «*was there anything that you felt was confusing, what was positive, was there anything you missed during the survey-feedback meeting?* ». They were also asked their thoughts about the purpose of ARK, and what kind of benefits they themselves and their work can gain from ARK. The questions were formulated as to elicit extensive answers from the informants, regarding both their thoughts, feelings and opinions surrounding the survey-feedback meeting, both at the time of the meeting and afterwards. By asking about specific aspects, such as the result presentation, the facilitator and the line manager's role it was possible to get a more detailed account of how the informants perceived these specific factors, and it aided in gaining a more thorough impression of the informants total experience of the ARK survey-feedback meeting. All interviews were conducted in Norwegian, as such all references and quotations included in this thesis will be my own translations.

Data Analysis

Transcription. The first step in the analysis process was to transcribe all the interviews. The process of transcribing is to transform the spoken word to written text. This

gives the researcher a better overview of the data and provides structure to the material (Kvale, 2006). All transcriptions were done by myself, and as such, this provided an excellent opportunity to familiarize myself with the data since I was not present during the interviews. Transcription has been said to be an integral part of the analysis process as it gives the researcher an in-depth understanding and familiarization of the data which is key in qualitative research (Howitt, 2013). It can also be said that the process of transcription is a first step in the analysis process, since the written word will not be an exact duplicate of the oral word (Howitt, 2013). Some information is lost in the process, and the researcher has to make choices during the transcription process as to what level of detail to include in the written transcriptions. The most important aspect is that the transcriptions are true to their original sources, and retains enough information needed for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interviews in this case were transcribed on a verbatim level; in addition, I included notes where, for example the conversation died out, interruptions, and overlapping talk. This was done to retain information and richness from the original interviews. The first step of anonymizing the data was done in this phase, as all names of people and places were left out of the written data. All data transcriptions were done with the aid of Microsoft Word, and resulted in 114 pages of material, the length-range was between 12 and 24, with the average interview being approximately 19 pages long, with double line spacing. It was also at this stage that I started memo writing and jotting down notes, pertaining to my own thoughts and ideas about the idea, and possible ideas for theme development

Initial coding. The next step in the analysis process was generating initial codes of the data. This step involves identifying features of the data, and a way of organizing data into meaningful groups or segments (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such, coding can be seen as a form of data reduction (Tuckett, 2014). At this step, the codes can be seen as purely descriptive of the particular content, and the codes produced are usually quite close to the original data source. The coding process was done using the software programme, NVivo 11. At this initial stage, codes were applied quite freely to the data. At this stage, I made a conscious effort to keep the initial codes as close to the data as possible, in-line with an inductive approach to analysis. Codes were applied both on a line-to-line level and to larger segments, and some segments received multiple codes. An example of coding at this level is the section “we have three different changes happening on top of each other”, which was simply given the code of “change” The majority of the interviews included a large section, where the informants talked about their academic backgrounds, previous employment and

general background information about themselves. These sections were not included in the coding phase, as I did not deem it necessary in regards to the initial research aim. One advantage with NVivo 11 is that it automatically collects all segments that receive the same code into one document. This allowed me to easily, get an overview over the content of each code. I used this feature of NVivo in regards to information pertaining to the leader. As I am especially interested in this aspect, all references towards the leader, were first coded as 'leader', within the initial coding of the entire data set. This was done to collect all the information about this topic in one place, for then to code these sections further.

Theme development. The next step in the process was to sort through the initial codes and start placing them into larger themes. This stage can be described as sorting similar codes into meaningful groups of codes (Howitt, 2013). This stage is a further level of data reduction and abstraction. Codes and their content, are scrutinized, and compared to other codes. Similar codes may be grouped together to form larger themes, or subthemes, while other codes may not fit into any themes. This aim of this stage is to gain a sense of significant themes, although the final themes may not be similar to the ones produced at this stage (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An example from this stage were codes such as; 'change', 'overwhelmed', and 'unsure about the future' were all grouped together to a larger theme, at this point termed 'the merger'.

Defining and refining themes. The next steps are refining the existing themes. This step entails reviewing the existing themes, both their content and how they fit with other themes. The codes within each theme should correspond meaningfully with each other (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although the whole analytical process is a circular one, this stage especially involves a constant comparison between the themes and the coding extracts, and to the original transcripts. Do the themes accurately reflect the content of the dataset? Do the themes appear meaningful? Is there logic to the themes developed?

As an aid in this process, I made a physical 'thematic map'. Themes and codes were written down on pieces of paper, along with illustrative quotations for each theme, from the dataset. This let me get a quick outline of the themes and their content. It also aided in getting an easy overview over the themes as a whole how they related to each other. This made it easier to move around codes and change themes where needed and thus further refining the themes. It was at this stage themes were split into subthemes and larger themes. For example, the themes titled 'relevance to daily work' and 'usefulness' became subthemes of the larger

theme 'belief in ARK'. While these themes were slightly different from each other, they still essentially related to the participants perception of the ARK process, and as such, it gave more meaning to group them into one larger theme. This stage can potentially be infinite, with constant refinement and definition of themes; it is a subjective decision as to when this stage is completed. I followed Braun and Clarke (2006) suggestion, when you feel you have reached the end of the analysis process you should be able to "describe the scope and content of each theme in a couple of sentences" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92).

Ethical Considerations

The project was notified to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, before initiation. The informants were informed about the project and its purpose before the interviews. They were given enough background information before consenting to participate. They were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could pull out if the project at any time, without any consequence and all data regarding them would be deleted. They were ensured that all data would be confidential and that they would not be recognized in the material. To ensure confidentiality, all names, locations and personal background information has been left out of the analysis process. Only the researchers responsible for the larger project and myself had access to the audio recordings of the interviews. These were stored on a password protected external hard drive, and deleted upon completion of the transcriptions. All further data such as transcriptions were deleted upon completion of this report.

Ensuring quality in qualitative research

Traditionally in regards to quality in research, focus has been on validity, reliability and generalisability. Being that qualitative research is fundamentally different from quantitative research, these concepts do not translate easily to qualitative research (Mehmetoglu, 2004). Quality in qualitative research is just as important, however there does not exist universally accepted criteria as to how to ensure this (Howitt, 2013).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) have proposed four alternative criteria more in line with qualitative research; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to whether the results and potential conclusions drawn are believable and trustworthy. Transferability has to do with whether the findings can be generalized to similar instances or other contexts. To increase transferability, it has been recommended to give a rich in-depth description of both the specific research context and the phenomenon being researched. This gives the reader a suitable understanding of the specific research and gives them enough

knowledge to be able to compare the research across situations, Dependability is, in line with reliability, to do with whether the results are consistent and can be replicated. To achieve this, a thick description of the research context should be given, so as to allow future readers to repeat the research, and to illustrate that correct research practice has been adhered to (Shenton, 2004). Confirmability regards objectivity, in other words that the results and conclusions are based in the data, rather than due to the researchers own bias or subjectivity. Researchers are not neutral when it comes to qualitative research, there is a certain amount of interpretation and choices made in the process, and two researchers may not arrive at the same results. By being mindful of, and documenting the choices made throughout the research process, confirmability may be achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mehmetoglu, 2004; Shenton, 2004).

In this section, I have attempted to give as detailed account as possible of both the context surrounding, ARK, the data collection and the analysis process. The steps involved in the analysis process have been described and I have chosen to accompany this section with examples from the analysis process. This was done to illustrate that themes are not something that just appear or emerge from the dataset, but involve active choices and interpretation from the researcher. In the following section, the results from the analysis process will be presented. The results will be accompanied by quotations from the informants. This is done both to help describe the content of the themes and to illustrate the rationale behind the themes, and increase credibility.

Results

In this section, the results of the analysis process will be presented. A description of the themes and their content will follow. Quotations from the interviews will be presented in light of their themes, to substantiate the themes. The main research question was to understand how employees perceive and experience an organizational level intervention, with particular regards to the survey-feedback process. This thesis also aims to understand how both employees and the line manager experience the role of the line manager during the survey-feedback meeting and the intervention process. The analysis process resulted in four themes, deemed relevant to the initial research aim. The four themes are 1) The employees' belief in the ARK outcome, 2) The role of the line manager 3) Communication culture and and 4) Participation. Employees' belief in the ARK outcome was further divided into three subthemes; a) usefulness, b) internalizing ARK and c) change overwhelmed.

The informants have been given codes, randomly from (A) to (E), while the leader has been coded with (L) to ensure confidentiality. This was done to distinguish the quotations from each other. In examples where it is relevant, the researchers are marked with (R), while the informants are marked with (I), to distinguish the different roles. Three dots in the quotations signalizes that some information has been left out, this was done either to maintain anonymity, or due to the information not being relevant to the context. As mentioned in the previous section, all quotations used in this section are my own translations. I have tried to ensure that the translations are as close to the originals as possible, as to retain as much information as possible. In some instances, I have taken the liberty to paraphrase certain quotations. This has been done in cases where certain Norwegian idioms and expressions have not allowed themselves to be directly translated, therefore the quotations have been slightly changed to the associated English expressions, and so the gist and context of the quotations stay the same.

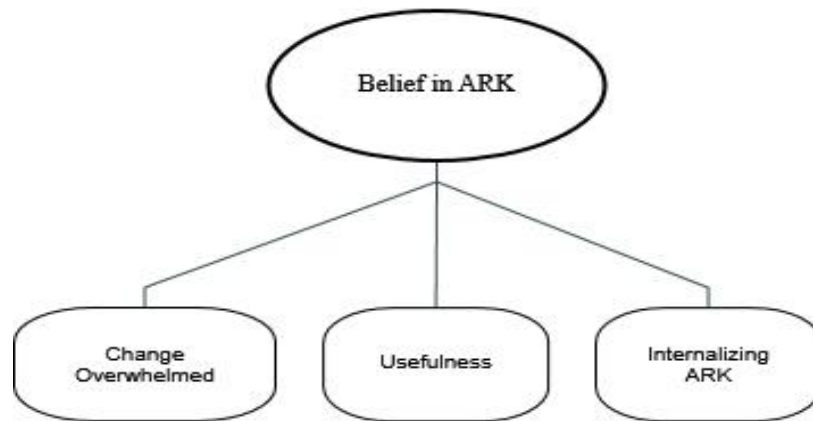


Figure 2. An illustration of ‘The belief in ARK’ theme and its subthemes.

Employees’ belief in the ARK outcome.

This theme is characterized by the informants’ faith and confidence in the successfulness of the ARK intervention programme. As mentioned this theme, is further divided into three subthemes (figure 2). The subthemes, in my opinion, may help shed light on why the informants feel the way they do. Although the informants had a positive view and impression of the ARK intervention programme, there seemed to be a general presumption that nothing would come about from ARK. The following quotation, regarding the survey-feedback meeting, demonstrates this.

«R: Did you experience that you all have faith in that this is something useful, or was it just another obligatory task?

I: No, I think that everyone thought it was very ok

R: But does it mean anything? That something will happen. That there will be consequences? Do you agree that this is something that will continue; is there an assurance about that?

I: I don’t know, no one has said anything.

R: What do you think?

I: But I might be, no, I don’t know, I do not think it will be followed up» (A).

Most of the informants were asked directly if they believed that ARK would accomplish anything. The informants answered along similar lines to the example above. The general gist, and my impression, was that they did not have much faith in that the intervention

would accomplish anything. Although they attempted to put a positive spin on their answers, such as *«if nothing else, we can compare our scores at a later date»* (D) and *«it's not that I'm negative, its just that I don't really have very high expectations»* (C).

In an attempt to uncover why the employees had so little faith in the intervention programme, there did seem to be a few common patterns that seemed to influence the employees perceptions. These patterns formed the basis of the three subthemes.

Usefulness

This subcategory, dubbed “usefulness”, has to do with the employees perception of the intervention programme and its goals. There seemed to be a genreal pattern in that the employees interviewed, did not see the point of themeselves participating in the intervention, for them. They implied that there was a general consensus among the staff that they had a good working environment. One particular interviewee claimed *« I don't take it too seriously, because I feel, like there is nothing here to be worried about »* (D), and later on, referring to the group discussions:

« The whole situation was slightly comical, because we knew we had to decide on areas for improvement and the like, but it resulteted in that we did it because we were tasked to, we didn't do it because we feel like there is anything we need to work on » (D).

This shows that there appeared to be an impression that the ARK process, was slightly futile as the employees did not feel that there was any point to it. Why go through a process to improve the working environment when there is nothing to improve? The aim of the group discussion were that each group should reach three areas of improvement and three positive areas to maintain. Their experience of having a positive working environment, was according to them, reflected in the results from KIWEST. This also led to many of them experiencing it as difficult and slightly time-squandering as they found it difficult to pinpoint areas, both to discuss and to form the basis of initiatives. Paradoxially, it would make sense that the group discussions should have easily resulteted in numerous areas to maintain, since they felt they had such a positive environment, but that did not seem to be the case either. *«We were all in agreement that we have a good working environment, but no one is able to say why we have it, why it's so good»* (A). As to why they may have felt difficulty in discussing the results and putting their opinions into words, spills over to the next subtheme; internalizing ARK.

Internalizing ARK

This sub category has involves internalizing ARK, and the understanding that the ARK intervention programme concerns the employees' working life. There seemed to be a distinct perception among the interviewees that ARK is an external factor and change programme. The understanding that the results from KIWEST and the following discussions and initiatives were regarding the employees' everyday working life, seemed to be slightly lost. Whether the ARK intervention programme would be successful or not was out of their hands, as the ARK programme was another change programme that is of no concern during their day to day working life. This assumption may be best exemplified by the comment; *«the merger will probably define our working day to a larger degree than the ARK programme»* (B).

One noticeable factor in all the interviews was that they all had a hard time remembering the content of the survey-feedback meeting, independent of the amount of time that had passed between the survey-feedback meeting and the interviews. It is reasonable to assume that the survey-feedback meeting and the discussions failed to make any lasting impressions with the employees. No one had any strong opinions or feelings towards the survey-feedback meeting. When asked to about their impressions from the survey-feedback meeting common answers were: *« What did I think was positive?, Yes, right, what was positive, I can't remember »* (D) and regarding the group discussions;

« R: Do you remember what you talked about in the groups?

I: No I don't, I have it written down, but no, I don't remember, but was it areas to improve and to maintain?

R: You can't remember the most important topics?

I: Not a chance, I don't remember » (E).

Another interesting aspect regarding the interviews was that when the employees were asked during the interviews what they regarded as important in their daily working life, most of them had no problem listing up multiple aspects.

R: If you were to say something now, what would you say?

I: But it would be, it's very personal things, like the fact that we have the same type of humour for example, at least we who work together at the same department, we have good rapport, and there is a low threshold to initiate new projects, "should we try a small workshop?" "Yes let's do that", things like that ...

I: They were good, specific examples

R: Yes, they were actually » (B).

It seems from the interviews, that aspects that the employees thought of as important, as from the example above, were not discussed or barely touched upon during the survey-feedback meeting. It might be possible that the survey-feedback meeting failed to elicit constructive discussions, because the employees were not used to, or comfortable with critically discussing their working environment. However, as the above quotation shows, the employees did have thoughts and opinions regarding their working environment and were quite forthcoming during the interviews. This again, gives credence to the notion that they failed to realize that ARK and the presented results was a reflection of their own day-day experience of their working life. The line manager, during the interview touched upon the mismatch of views.

« It is actually a process that everyone can contribute to, it's mine and the other department leaders responsibility to get the employees involved, but there is something about letting yourself get involved ... it is the employees themselves who create their working environment, but that also means that they themselves are responsible for their working environment. However, I also think that they do not necessarily realize that certain aspects are part of their working environment, that it's part of the process. You become conscious of certain things which may lead you to do something differently because you are conscious of it, but you fail to, you cannot see far enough to see the link 'this is actually what we talked about in regards to our working environment » (L).

Change overwhelmed

The employees and the organization at the time of both the survey-feedback meeting and the interviews were on the verge of undergoing major changes. The major change and the focus of the employees was the aforementioned merger that was to take place approximately 6 months after survey-feedback meeting. The employees spend a great deal of time during the interviews talking about the merger. Discussing their thoughts and fears regarding how it may potentially change their daily working-life. At the time of the interviews, there was still a lot of uncertainty and unanswered questions about what the merger would entail. It became apparent that the employees were feeling overwhelmed, uncertain and insecure in regards to the changes happening and the effect it would have on them. As they pointed out, the merger

had been decided at the government level, and because of this they felt that they had no control over the processes that were about to take place.

« There is nothing we can do about it, there is like someone in an office somewhere that has decided this, rectors and at the ministry in the capitol and things like that, so we don't really have a say in the matter » (B).

At the same time there was also other changes taking place within the organization, although not as major as the merger.

« With the merger and change and moving campus and getting a new operating system on top of it all, you can say that we have 3 changes happening on top of each other, so we feel slightly overcome, really » (B).

There seemed to be a feeling of helplessness towards all the change, especially in regards to the merger. As one of four higher education institutions becoming one large institution, and with them being one of the smaller ones, there seemed to be a prevailing negative, 'us versus them' perception. The interviewees gave the impression that the merger had been the major topic of discussion during the survey-feedback meeting. During the discussions there had been talk about what they viewed as positive aspects about their own work, such as a high degree of autonomy, and how this was not the case for the larger education institution. *«I'm very worried about what it will be like after the merger because they are very different than us» (B).* The employees were worried that since they were the smaller institution, they would have to abandon their own routines and culture and have to adopt to the larger institution, and they seemed to be under the impression that the working conditions were worse at the larger institution.

«Yeah, I'm very curious about what it's like there, because from what I've heard they've said, one to one, well it's not all peaches and cream, and that makes me wonder, is it like this, this or like this, do they even know that we have a good environment? » (D).

These feelings of helplessness seeped over towards the ARK process. Understandably, as one of the interviewees pointed out, it is difficult to talk about and plan initiatives and actions for their working environment when they had, at the time, no idea of what their working environment would be like six months down the road. The merger was the main issue for the employees and their feelings of helplessness appeared to cloud their

perceptions of the ARK programme. To them, the two are intricately linked with each other, and the successfulness of ARK was effectively out of their hands.

« We will obviously bear the stamp of being in such a large reorganization situation and that makes it hard to think of initiatives, we might be able to start with a few, but ultimately whether they are implemented or not, really isn't up to us» (B).

The role of the leader

The department leader, while present at the survey-feedback meeting, was merely an observer throughout the process. The interviewees were all in agreement about their leader not being actively involved was positive thing. The employees were all asked directly of what their impression of their leader was and how they viewed the leader's role during the ARK process. All but one of the interviewees focused solely on the leader's role during the survey-feedback. They were all pleased that an external facilitator rather than the leader had held the meeting. Their thoughts expressed were that they were worried that if the leader had held the meeting, it may have come across as biased towards the leader's personal thoughts and feelings. The only comment made in regards to the leader and the ARK process outside of the survey-feedback meeting.

« I think it was a good thing that someone other than our leader presented it; I think it is important in such a setting, because than you won't perceive it, well I'm only speaking for myself, you might experience it differently, it comes across as more neutral maybe» (C).

« R: What are your thoughts on the facilitator, since they were an outsider?

I: Yeah, it was short and straightforward information, you almost need to have someone in that type of role, because, well it would be weird if our leader were to do it for example

R: Why is that?

I: Because you would probably become clouded by their perspective, so I think that it's a good thing to bring in someone from outside our department, so it comes across as more neutral» (E).

The one employee who went further than just the survey-feedback meeting claimed that even though it was the employees themselves that were responsible for developing

initiatives and action plans, they would prefer it if it was the leader that enforced the initiatives, and that the implementation phase took a more top-down approach.

One of the employees, interviewed mentioned that they thought that the role the leader should adopt ought to be in relation to the role the leader has otherwise.

« It kind of depends what role you have on a daily basis, that will influence what kind of role you take in this kind of situation ... Well, you develop a different type of relationship with people you see every day, rather than with those you only see a couple of times a month, and we don't see our leader all the time, so yeah, maybe it, if I had seen them every day and eaten lunch with them every day and things like that it might be different. So yeah, I'm not sure, but it's a good thing that our leader is a leader... I mean, there might be some leaders that are even more distant, which you only see once a month, a couple of times a year or something like that, and that would be even stranger, if they were to suddenly come along and take a super active, participatory role in this, yeah because that would probably be weird, but if it were a leader that's very close to you and that you see every day and things like that, it might be more natural [i.e. to take a more active role] » (B).

As the above quote illustrates, the relationship between employees and their leader will influence the employee's perception of how the leader should relate to the ARK intervention and its process.

The leader's experience was much the same as the employees' in regards taking a more passive role during the survey-feedback meeting. The leader mentioned that by staying in the background, the employees would feel more freedom and confidence in both discussing their working environment and suggesting actions. The leader was more conscious of the process after the survey-feedback meeting, especially in regards to the implementation phase. Although the leader seemed unsure of their own position and how they should best behave in regards to involving the employees as the leader expressed a fear of possibly being perceived as nagging.

« I: I actually think these action plans can quickly be forgotten, and it will end up them not thinking anything has happened, and then you will have to remind them that 'it's so and so and so' ...

R: People have short memories

I: Yes but that's not just in regards to ARK

R: But as the leader, it is probably important to have the 'so and so and so' speech?

I: Yes but I feel that it is somewhat like, I feel like I'm nagging 'remember this and remember that', and it might be like 'oh they're fussy'» (L).

The leader was also worried about the employee's having unrealistic expectations in regards to what was possible to achieve through the ARK intervention programme. At the time of the leader interview, the steering committee had completed two meetings to further discuss and develop an action plan. The leader did mention in the interview that she was worried that the suggested activities would end up being unrealistic to implement.

« The meeting was a reality, well not check, that sounds so negative, but we might wish to do something but it isn't realistic; don't suggest something we won't be able to do, either because of the merger or our budget» (L).

The leader was under the impression that the employees did not quite fully understand the intention of ARK or the consequences of suggesting different activities. The leader expressed a concern that the employees thought that it would be enough to just suggest initiatives and actions and that they would just automatically happen; that the employees did not understand that there would be a process involving everyone afterwards. Although the leader expressed some concerns during the interview, it was not clear if the leader expressed these same thoughts to the employees during the meetings. These mismatches overlaps slightly to the next theme, general work climate.

Communication culture

This theme covers the general climate and interaction norms within the department and its influence towards the ARK process. Although the interviews focused on the ARK process rather than the employees' general working climate, the employees did allude to certain aspects of interest throughout the interviews. It is plausible that aspects of the employees work culture would also influence how they respond to, and perceive the ARK process and is therefore of interest in regards to the main research aim. The main feature within this theme is that it became apparent that the employees were not used to or did not have a culture for discussing their work environment. *«It doesn't come naturally, to spontaneously start talking about our work environment; we haven't really had any conversations about it» (B).* This may possibly have spilt over in the ARK process, and the

survey-feedback meeting. The interviewees did mention that the group discussions had tended to stay on a general level, not really scratching the surface of any major topics. This might possibly be due to the employees not being used to having these types of discussions. *«We mainly talked about the results being so positive, all around ...but we did not go into any specifics, if I remember correctly» (A).*

« I: We were slightly unsure during the group discussions whether we should discuss on a hypothetical basis, or if we should discuss our work specifically

R: What did you go for?

I: I think we went with the hypothetical, what we generally think may lead to a negative work environment» (B).

It could be possible that the employees misunderstood the aim of the group discussions and that is the reason the discussions stayed on a surface-level, but it is also possible that the existing culture also influenced how the employee interacted during the survey-feedback meeting. The researchers also seemed to touch upon the same thoughts. In this case, the interviewee was asked if the depth of the discussion was due to the instructions not being clear enough.

« I: It is slightly difficult in the beginning, because we were in a large group, and I think we need to warm-up a bit, we are quite modest and we're not used to being so critical

R: There are lots of 'nice guys'?

I: Well yes, maybe, well I've seen other work places and it's not like that there... I'm quite a sarcastic person actually, but not at work because I'm worried I'll be misunderstood ... so I think at our department it's, well I would say we feel safe but you wouldn't want to say anything negative, at least in the beginning... and definitely not anything critical towards management, no one says anything like that» (D).

The employees mentioned that instead of talking with each other, they just assumed that their colleagues shared their thoughts and feelings. This also seemed to be the case with the leader. It was briefly touched upon in the previous section, that the leader had many expectations towards the employees and the ARK process, but did not necessarily voice these thoughts. If it is the case that all the involved parties have many thoughts, feelings and expectations towards the ARK process, without putting these thoughts into words, either due

to the prevailing culture or some other unknown reason, this will naturally greatly impact the ARK process and its effectiveness.

Participation

The final theme regards the survey-feedback meeting and the employees' experience of participation. There appeared to be a unanimous agreement that the survey-feedback meeting and the following group discussions was a positive experience. « *It is good to be able to talk about it*» (A). This was not necessarily a main topic of discussion during the interviews, but thoughts surrounding the participatory style of the survey-feedback meeting was mentioned in all interviews. The employees interviewed understood the importance of the group discussion and they mentioned that the group discussions lead to a larger degree of engagement to the ARK process.

« I was part of one of the groups, so I was able to partake, so it was absolutely necessary, I think the group discussions after the presentation is just as important a process, that is when you get a chance to discuss things, properly, and people can say what they think» (E).

A few of the interviewees also mentioned that since it was they themselves that were responsible for developing action plans it lead to them having a greater belief and trust towards the process. Even if the ARK process ends up being successful or not, the employees felt that the survey-feedback meeting was a positive experience in itself.

« R: What do you think about the process so far? Is there a value to it or is it all just a waste of time?

I: I absolutely think it has worth to it, and I think that just the meeting we had where we could talk to each other is helps in bringing us all together, we get to know each other better, the fact that we can talk to each other about things like that, even if it is practical or not, so I feel, I had a really good feeling afterwards, I experienced it as positive» (A).

The interviewees mentioned that they found the discussions positive as it gave them a chance to open up to each other, and they felt they had the opportunity to say what they meant without feeling censored. This might seem in opposition to the previous theme, but

nonetheless whether the topics of discussion were consequential or not, the employees still experienced the meeting as an extremely positive experience.

Discussion

The aim of the study was to examine how employees experienced an organizational level health intervention, and especially the survey-feedback process. The employees responded positively to the ARK survey-feedback, and had a positive view of ARK as a whole. Unfortunately, even though they experienced ARK as both positive and beneficial, they had little faith that ARK would be successful in their department. It seemed that the larger process failed to make a substantial impression on the employees. The most apparent reason for this was that the forthcoming merger, that seemed to overshadow everything else. It could be argued that the timing for ARK was wrong due to the merger. Previous studies have shown that organizational level interventions are almost doomed to fail if there are competing changes and restructuring in the organization (Saksvik et al., 2002). While the timing may not have been optimal, the ARK process can still prove beneficial in regards to the merger and its effects on employee health, as the survey-feedback results give a good indication of the working environment that can form the basis for comparison later, post-merger. It is not unreasonable to believe that had the merger not been happening, the employees would also have a very different experience and impression of the ARK process.

Moreover, the employees belief in ARK also seemed to be due to their failing to understand the need of ARK and its relevance to their daily working life. It is possible that the general uncertainty and stress from the merger coloured their view of ARK. At the time of the interviews, there was still a lot of uncertainty surrounding the merger, on all organizational levels. A key consequence of major organizational change and uncertainty is the perceived feeling of loss of control (Bordia, Hunt, Paulsen, Tourish, & DiFonzo, 2004). Bastien (1987) noted that loss of control during organizational mergers lead to a shift in locus of control among employees, from within to an external source. Control is an important aspect, and heavily studied construct in regards to employee health. Loss of control and feelings of low control can have many detrimental effects, including lower job satisfaction, being overwhelmed by events and learned helplessness (Bordia et al., 2004; Martinko & Gardner, 1982). The employees seemed to view ARK as another change initiative rather than something regarding their day-to-day working life. Some caution should be taken in regards to inferring to large an effect, but it is plausible that their general feelings of loss of control also biased their view of the ARK process.

At the same time, the employees also reported to not understanding the need or usefulness of ARK in their department. Why do we need to change or improve when everything is fine already? They also failed to grasp that the ARK programme is not an abstract, external force but has to do with their everyday working life. These issues are not unique for this department, or this particular intervention. How can one get the employees to understand that the survey-feedback meeting was not a one-off, isolated event, but a process to be continued daily?

The result presentation

The form of result presentation may possibly have influenced the employees and their failure to internalize the results. As mentioned, the results were presented as bar graphs, showing the average scores and standard deviations of each dimension from the KIWEST survey. It was up to the employees during the group discussion to interpret the results themselves, and decide on what they deemed as positive or negative results. Letting participants take part in the result interpretation has been shown to be beneficial in creating engagement for an intervention (Björklund, Grahn, Jensen, & Bergström, 2007). However, it is also possible, in this case, that the results were too abstract and as such they failed to elicit a proper understanding of their connection to the employees' working life. It is important in a survey-feedback meeting that the results are presented in a way that is understandable, relevant and constructive to the employees (Nadler, 1977). There was some mention during the interviews that they did not fully grasp the results. For example, one of the dimensions was autonomy, but there was uncertainty about what autonomy meant in practical terms. What did having a large degree of autonomy mean for the employees in their day-to-day work?

There was also a time aspect involved, as quite a bit of time had passed between the employees answering KIWEST and the survey-feedback meeting. As such, they had trouble remembering the content of KIWEST and its relation to the results. One possible solution to this in future instances is that the facilitator or the person presenting the results spends enough time to explain the results and their content, making sure the employees fully grasp the meaning. This also entails that the facilitator has full understanding of ARK, and – or a knowledge of the target group's working environment so they are equipped to translate the results into examples and terms the employees' can recognize. Shortening the time between the questionnaire completion and the survey-feedback meeting may also prove beneficial.

There is usually always time constraints and restrictions involved in organizational interventions, but considering these factors and accommodating them may possibly prove beneficial to the intervention's success.

Readiness to change

For any type of intervention to be successful, change is required from the participants. The first step in any kind of change is that the participants need to realize and understand the need for change. Oftentimes participants do not fully feel the need to change and in such cases, the interventions will be doomed. As mentioned in the results section, it appeared as though the employees did not see the need for change as everything was fine, according to them. The participants' thoughts and beliefs should be taken into account in the planning of an intervention. The line manager or person responsible for the initiation of an intervention needs to convince the participants of the need to change before an implementation phase. One possible means of this is targeting the participants' readiness for change. Readiness for change has been defined as "organizational members' beliefs, attitudes, and indentations regarding the extent to which changes are needed and the organization's capacity to successfully make those changes" (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993, p. 681). Readiness is a mental mode and the first step towards the behaviour of either supporting or resisting change. Readiness for change is a state that is possible to create and manipulate. Creating readiness for change contains a number of steps, the first and most important involves the message that is sent to the employees. The message needs to contain two distinct characteristics; the targets need to believe they have the capacity and abilities to change, and that there exists a discrepancy between the current state and the goal state (Armenakis et al., 1993).

The message. Participants need to understand that there is a mismatch between the current situation and an end situation, which is why an intervention has been implemented and that there, is a need for change. In this specific case, employees did not understand the need for change, since there were no dire circumstances in their working environment they believed everything was fine. When there are no obvious issues or problems, how do you convince participants that their current situation needs changing? Communication is important throughout an intervention process, but it is not just what is said that is of importance but how things are said. One possible solution is how one frames the questions to the participants, especially, during the presentation section of the survey-feedback. Asking

questions like ‘Imagine one year from now: everything about your work is perfect, and you wake everyday looking forward to going to work. What would be different?’ Framing questions like this may open up for participants to reflect around their own situations and working life. It also shifts the participants focus from the present state towards the future, and potentially realize that there is a discrepancy between their current situation and a desired future situation, thus realizing that there is a need for change. Shifting the focus from the present, or past when the survey was completed, to the future may potentially help motivate the employees to partake in the intervention.

Another possible approach is increasing focus on the health promoting aspect of the intervention. While health promotion and positive psychology has received a surge of interest in the research literature, these concepts are still foreign in the public domain. Learning about health promotion and what it entails, may lead to employees’ viewing the intervention in a different light. The ARK intervention programme and many similar wellness interventions are not just concerned with discovering and eliminating stressors (Undebakke et al., 2014). A common misconception is that the absence of negative stressors and ill health in the workplace equates a positive workplace and positive health. Positive psychology has taught us that positive factors are not just the opposite of negative factors but are fundamentally different (Christensen, 2011). Positive psychology focuses on facilitating positive health, personal growth and happiness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), in the workplace it entails adding and sustaining positive factors. This is why, during ARK’s survey-feedback meeting, participants are not only asked to identify problematic areas, but also identify positive factors, that they want to maintain. A more thorough explanation of the health promotion concept may lead to a greater understanding of the group tasks during discussion and a greater understanding of the intention behind the intervention. Conveying the message of not just wanting the workplace to be fine or ok, but be the best working environment they can be; a source of energy and positive health, may increase employees engagement toward the intervention. Understanding the intention and rationale behind the intervention may help the participants see its usefulness and increase employee buy-in (Cox et al., 2000). By focusing on the health promoting aspect, signalizes a proactive approach towards employee health that also sends the message that the organization is concerned with their employees’ health and well-being.

The sender. The source of the information and message influences how the message is perceived among the recipients. In this particular case, the survey-feedback meeting could

have benefited from the line manager delivering this message as an introduction to the meeting. In regards to readiness to change, communication has been found to be more persuasive when it comes from within the organization, such as from the line manager. This signals that the information being relayed is important enough to deliver themselves, rather than through the external facilitators. This resonates with affective commitment to change, which was touched upon in the theoretical framework. Personal, face to face communication has the largest impact in increasing affective commitment to change (Hill et al., 2012). This also allows the line manager to monitor how the message is received. Are the intentions behind the intervention understood, and do the participants seem convinced?

The role of the line manager

The line manager adopted an observer role during the survey-feedback meeting, and both the participants and the manager experienced this as positive. The fact that all involved parties were pleased with the slightly passive role the line manager adopted during the survey-feedback meeting does seem to slightly contradict previous research concerning process evaluations. As mentioned previously, the line manager has been found to play a crucial role in the successfulness of intervention outcomes (Hasson, Villaume, von Thiele Schwarz, & Palm, 2014; Nielsen & Randall, 2009; Saksvik et al., 2015). Active support and encouragement from the line-manager has been found to be especially important in creating employee engagement toward an intervention (Coyle-Shapiro, 1999; Olniyani, 2014; Sørensen & Holman, 2014). In this particular case, the informants mentioned that they thought it would have been strange if the line manager were the person leading the survey-feedback meeting. As to why this particular case contradicts, the literature is unknown. One plausible explanation is that this thesis focuses on the survey-feedback meeting, while the literature often focuses on the entire intervention process, particularly highlighting managerial support as important during the implementation phase (Coyle-Shapiro, 1999). At the time of the interviews, the steering group were still developing an action plan; as such, the implementation phase had not started. While purely hypothetical, it is possible that both parties; the line manager and the participants, might have felt differently if the interviews had taken place during the implementation phase. Another possible explanation is that the survey-feedback meeting required a high degree of participation from the employees. A high degree of participation has been linked to employees perceiving the intervention in a more positive light (Lines, 2004). The fact that the manager was not involved may have led to the

participants feeling more ownership over the survey-feedback meeting, which influenced their perception of the intervention.

Apart from one informant, suggesting that they wish the line manager is in charge of administering the implementation phase, the line manager was the only one of the informants that gave any thought to the continuing process during the interviews. The other informants focus was on the survey-feedback meeting. The line manager mentioned being worried about the participants forgetting about ARK shortly after the survey-feedback meeting, and their own role during the process, emphasizing how best to remind the employees and keep them engaged throughout the process. The line manager was worried about having to constantly remind them, and by doing this, they might be perceived as nagging or bossy.

One possible approach the line manager could have adopted in attempting to gain participant engagement is already mentioned above, taking a more active part in the introduction of the survey-feedback meeting. By taking time to focus on the intent behind the intervention, the health promotion aspect of ARK and the future of their working environment shows that the line manager is taking a proactive approach to their employees' well-being. This also resonates with transformational leadership. Focusing on the future as mentioned, rather than the here and now may also help the employees understand the need for change. A key aspect of transformational leaders is that they are able to create visions and ideas that motivate their employees and inspire them to realize the vision (Hill et al., 2012; Xu & Cooper Thomas, 2011). As previously mentioned, managers can learn techniques to become more transformational in style (Arnulf, 2013), for example by adopting the employees' point of view when discussing what the intervention. Furthermore, transformational leadership styles have a strong impact on followers' affective commitment to change, which can be important in gaining a continued engagement from the employees throughout the intervention process. In their research, Hill et al. (2012) proposed that transformational leaders have the largest impact on employee commitment at the beginning of a change process. Which can support the notion of the line manager taking a more active role during the survey-feedback meeting, before the implementation phase.

Both the employees and the line manager expressed concerns about appearing biased if it were the line manager himself or herself, who lead the survey-feedback meeting. By including the line manager in the introductory phase of the survey-feedback meeting, then

taking a step back while the facilitator handles the actual result presentation, any bias or partiality should not be an issue.

A key issue in all intervention programmes is keeping employee engagement throughout the entire process. The line manager mentioned concerns regarding how best to remind the employees of the process and fear that they would forget shortly after the survey-feedback meeting. It has been touched upon earlier in this thesis that communication is key, throughout the entire intervention process. Communication is especially important during the implementation phase (Dahl-Jørgensen & Saksvik, 2005). Incorporating communication about the intervention into already established communication channels such as emails and intranet systems is one feasible solution. Although any initiatives or action plans were not yet in place, one possibility could be to keep employees updated as to the progress of the steering group who were tasked in developing initiatives. Face to face, communication has also been shown to have the largest impact towards increasing commitment to change. The line manager mentioned that they already had monthly staff meetings out at the different work sites. This could be an ideal arena to talk about ARK, to keep the employees updated of the progress. It also allows the possibility for employees to express opinions and ask questions regarding ARK, ensuring two-way communication. Continuous communication and information will ensure that the employees are kept aware of the ARK programme and its process, which will hopefully reduce the chance of employees forgetting ARK. Sørensen and Holman (2014) found in their evaluations of six organizational level interventions that the most successful intervention was characterized by a high amount of continued communication, immediately after the action-planning phase and throughout the implementation phase. Although the line manager was worried about finding the right level or amount of communication, a continued focus on ARK shows that the line manager takes the intervention seriously, which is an important factor towards successful interventions (Coyle-Shapiro, 1999). When line managers appear invested in the intervention and actively involve employees in the process, the employees will view the intervention more positively and become more engaged which in turn leads to larger commitment to the intervention (Nielsen & Randall, 2009, 2012). As the intention of the ARK programme is to improve the psychosocial work environment, line managers who show responsibility and an active interest towards ARK, may also be perceived actively taking an interest in their employees' health and well-being. This resonates with perceived organizational support theory which has strong ties to employee engagement (Mathiue & Zajac, 1990).

Participation

All of the employees interviewed had mentioned that they found the participatory aspect of the ARK process as positive. This is in line with previous research and literature, stating that participation is an important aspect in organizational health interventions. As mentioned in previously, it is thought that among other things, participation leads to a greater engagement and commitment to the intervention (Sørensen, 2013). These thoughts were almost identical to the employees' impression, stating that they had a larger degree of trust towards the intervention when they themselves were responsible for developing initiatives. The participatory style of the survey-feedback meeting seemed to be the main cause behind the employees' positive evaluation of ARK. While the employees did not mention it specifically, it is possible to infer, in line with previous research that the participatory style lead to a larger degree of control over the intervention, among the employees (Slinning & Haugen, 2011).

It was mentioned in the theoretical framework that due to all the positive benefits of participation, the mere act of participation could be seen as an intervention in of itself (Mikkelsen, 2005). The interviews did lend support to this theory. The employees did mention that even if nothing came of ARK, they did not experience the process as a waste of time. There mere aspect of gathering all employees and giving them an opportunity to talk with each other was viewed as positive. The forthcoming merger was a major concern for the employees. Sutherland and Cooper (2000) claimed that large-scale organizational change is a major life stressor. As such, increasing social support, through the survey-feedback meeting, may help alleviate some of the stress caused by the merger (Lawrence & Callan, 2011). Increased feelings of social support and group cohesion may also have positive impacts on the general working environment (Wills, 1991), which is ultimately the main goal of the ARK intervention programme.

This particular intervention can be said to have a large degree of participation with the employees both interpreting their own results and through mutual discussion, developing initiatives and actions. The employees' impression and experience of participation does correspond with much of the theory on participation, but participation itself is not enough to guarantee a successful outcome. In this case, the employees still had very low expectations towards the successfulness of ARK in their workplace. This illustrates the complexity of

organizational-level interventions. Even though participation is a vital factor, it still interacts with other factors in the intervention, all influencing the outcome.

Acknowledging existing social norms and culture

When addressing employees in a survey-feedback setting, the involved parties should be aware of the fact that different workplaces have different social norms and cultures. In this department, some of the informants gave the impression that it was not normal for them to discuss psychosocial aspects of their work with each other and they were not vocal about any negative factors especially. This will naturally, impact the group discussions as the participants are not used to discussing these topics with each other. The ARK programme has considered this. One of the reasons the survey-feedback meeting starts with a presentation of the job demand-resource model is to give the participants a common frame of references to aid in the following discussion (Undebakke et al., 2014). As mentioned previously, with connection to the result presentation, it is important that the theoretical section of the result presentation be presented in such a way that it is relatable to the participants.

It is not always easy for an external facilitator to know of the governing norms and culture in a particular department beforehand. Again, communication is vital in an intervention-process. The facilitator needs to explicitly inform the participants that the survey-feedback meeting is a safe space where participants can and should express their thoughts and feelings without fear of repercussions. This could be an area where the line manager is more actively involved. The participants might have more faith in the message when it comes from their own leader. The whole point of the group discussions is that the participants can talk about their work environment, but it can sometimes be taken for granted, just because they have the opportunity, they automatically would use it. By explicitly stating that there is no repercussions for expressing their thoughts, it might increase the likelihood that the participants will utilize the opportunity that lies within the group discussions. Especially in the case of the current department where it seemed frowned upon to say anything negative, according to some of the informants. The intent behind the group discussions needs to be explicit, that the group discussion is meant as an arena for the employees to discuss all aspects of their working environment, both positive and negative. If there are somethings the employees are dissatisfied with, they can and should use the forum to vocalize them, as that is exactly what the survey-feedback meeting is meant for.

Methodological Considerations

This study was based on six interviews with participants going through an ARK intervention, as a means to answer the question: how do employees perceive and experience an organizational level intervention, with particular regards to the survey-feedback process. I feel that the data collected through the interviews and the following analysis process gave a good indication and picture of the employees' experience. This study was also interested in how the employees experience the role of their line manager. By also including the thoughts and experiences from the line manager, it gave a detailed understanding of the intervention and its context.

I was not part of the recruitment process nor the interviewing. The recruitment and the interviews had been conducted prior to the initiation of this thesis. It is often recommended that researchers conduct their own interviews as it ensures familiarity with one's data (Howitt, 2013). Since I conducted the transcriptions of all the interviews, I believe I gained a close knowledge and familiarization with the data even though I was not present for the interviews. The fact that qualitative research and thematic analysis is a circular process meant that I gained a greater understanding of the data, as I consistently went back and forth throughout the analysis process and checked against the original transcripts. It is conceivable that I might not have gained the level of extensive and in-depth answers from potential informants were I to have conducted the interviews. Both due to my inexperience with conducting interviews and not being perceived as credible as the researchers, by the informants due to my position as a student.

Due to my previous internship with the ARK programme, I already had prior knowledge in regards to the subject area. Both familiarity with the literature on organizational-level interventions and practical experience from attending numerous survey-feedback meetings. I was conscious of my foreknowledge and attempted to not let myself be influenced, especially by my practical experiences in regards to the analysis process. I had a great focus on the data, and letting the data drive the analysis process and the results without interference from my own preconceptions. I felt the fact that I was not present at the survey-feedback meeting, nor the interviews aided me in the analysis process. Since I only had access to the tape recordings and the transcripts it made it easier to stay rooted in the actual data and not be influenced by any potential contextual factors. It should be mentioned that the interviews took place sometime after the survey-feedback meeting and as such, the

informants may have suffered from some recall-bias, which may have influenced the validity of the findings. It could be claimed that since all the informants came from the same department, this can decrease the level of transferability, since the results will be strongly affected by the specific context. On the other hand, any kind of process evaluations of interventions need to include context in their investigations. Contextual factors play a large part towards intervention outcomes (Biron et al., 2012). By acknowledging the unique context surrounding interventions it will, subsequently improve our understanding of interventions, and help in discovering factors that contribute to intervention outcomes. As previously mentioned, researchers can increase transferability by including rich, in-depth descriptions of both the context and the phenomenon studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I have attempted the best of my abilities, to give a detailed account of the steps I have taken, and the choices made as a means to ensure transferability, along with credibility and confirmability.

I believe I achieved a level of stability and connection between my results and the theories presented in the theoretical section. I had a certain degree of liberty in deciding which theories to include as there is, still a lot that is unknown in regards to organizational-level interventions and there are no mutually agreed upon models or theories. I choose to highlight possible theories that I deemed influential in regards to participant engagement and factors that may influence participants' experiences of an intervention, as I thought this would be the most fitting approach in regards to the research aim.

Practical implications

First of all, this study does support previous findings stating that major reorganization within the company will heavily influence intervention processes (Saksvik et al., 2002). As such, organizations going through major changes should be cautious in initiating simultaneous organizational interventions and expecting successful outcomes. On the other hand, modern day organizations are seldom static, there is always some form of changes going on and the notion of there being a perfect time to initiate an intervention may just be an illusion.

In regards to important elements towards successful intervention outcomes, the ARK intervention programme does seem to tick-the-boxes. They rely on a great deal of participation, the employees and their health is the focus point (Egan et al., 2007; Nielsen, 2013). Despite this, the participants in this study did not seem fully committed to the intervention. This demonstrates the complex nature of organizational level interventions and

that there is still no clear cut, easy solution as how best to execute an intervention. An important question remains how do we gain and maintain employee commitment to an intervention. In this study, the informants mentioned that they did not really understand the point of or the usefulness of the intervention since, as they claimed, everything was fine already. I have argued that increasing the focus on the positive, health promotion aspect of the intervention may be a viable option. Shifting focus from the here and now, to a desired future state may help participants reflect over their current environment and help them realize the need for change, which in turn may lead to larger engagement and commitment to the intervention. It is also important to pay attention to the survey-feedback meeting and its content as this sets the tone for the following implementation period. The survey-feedback should be presented in such a way that the participants fully understand what the results mean, and relate them to their day-to-day work. I cannot make any conclusions as to how the outcome of the intervention, since this study focused on the survey-feedback meeting and the following months up to the time of the interviews. Even though the participants did not show a large amount of commitment at the time of the interviews that does not necessarily mean that the intervention is doomed. An interesting area for future research would be to investigate how employees' appraisals of the survey-feedback meetings relate to their appraisals and level of engagement toward the entire intervention process. How important is the survey-feedback meeting for the entire intervention?

While the informants in this study seemed pleased with the passive role the line manager adopted during the survey-feedback meeting and the following months, I have suggested possible areas where the line manager could be more involved, as this might have helped in fostering employee engagement to the intervention. The literature on organizational health interventions cannot seem to emphasize the importance of the line manager and their involvement enough, especially in regards to creating employee engagement (Bell & Bodie, 2012; Nielsen & Randall, 2009; Nielsen et al., 2007; Nielsen et al., 2010b; Xu & Cooper Thomas, 2011). This does place a lot of pressure on the line manager, and entails that the line manager is fully on-board with the intervention and its intention prior to the survey-feedback meeting. Nytrø et al. (2000) argued that interventions could benefit from managers being educated about workplace stress, the mechanisms behind stressors, development and prevention. I suggest that this could be taken one-step further with line managers also receiving information about how they can and do effect intervention processes. How

information and communication strategies influence employee engagement and commitment more specifically could be a topic for future research.

In regards to the ARK intervention programme more specifically, since they already provide material, training and guidance, a possibility could be to include guidelines and information specifically for the line-manager. Along with information about how they can influence their employees, they could also include simple suggestions and guidelines as to how they can maintain employee commitment throughout the entire intervention process. Although more research is still needed on this topic, some things are known, such as continued communication and making ARK visible throughout the implementation phase. For example, Sørensen and Holman (2014) found, when studying an intervention in multiple organizations, that in the most successful intervention, the line manager had produced posters and leaflets illustrating the goals of the intervention.

Conclusion

The present study has sought to understand employee experiences of an organizational level intervention, focusing on the survey-feedback meeting. The informants all had a positive experience and impression of ARK and the survey-feedback meeting, highlighting the participatory aspect as particularly positive. However, the participants did not seem to have much faith in the ARK programme being successful in their department. The main reason for this seemed to be the ongoing merger. The employees reported being more concerned with the merger than with ARK, and that they found it difficult to plan initiatives regarding their work environment when they, at the time, had no idea what their working environment would be like in six months time. The survey-feedback meeting had apparently failed to make a lasting impression on the employees, and they reported not really understanding the need for the ARK intervention programme. This thesis was also interested in investigating how the employees experienced the role of their line-manager during the survey-feedback process. The line-manager had been merely an observer during the survey-feedback meeting. Both the line manager and the employees were content with the more passive role the line manager had adopted.

While the recent research on interventions and process evaluations has often focused on the implementation phase, it is equally important not to overlook the survey-feedback/ action-planning phase, as it is reasonable to believe that this sets the tone for the rest of the

intervention. The results need to be presented in such a way that the employee are able to relate to them, the intentions behind the intervention should be made explicit and the employees need to buy-in to the need for change

This study offers insight into how employees relate and respond to an intervention in a natural setting. Employee commitment and engagement towards an intervention has been strongly linked to intervention outcomes (Nielsen, 2013), so gaining employee engagement from the beginning is important. More research is needed in regards to how to gain and maintain employee engagement throughout an intervention process. Qualitative approaches are especially useful as they are suited at discovering and dissecting the different nuances and complexities involved in interventions. Further investigation into how employees experience the survey-feedback/ action-planning phase and how these experiences relate to the larger intervention context could be beneficial towards increasing our understanding of organizational health interventions.

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Attachment 1 - Interview Guide – Process evaluation ARK

Introduction	<p>Our names are... We work with/ we are concerned with, etc....</p> <p>Introduction of the project. Thank you for participating!</p> <p>The information gained from these interviews will be anonymized and any personal identification will not be able to be traced back to you or your answers. You can pull out from the interview at any point in time or choose to retract any information you have given.</p> <p>I will use a tape recorder and the interviews will be transcribed to text. Are you comfortable with this?</p> <p>Do you have any questions before we begin?</p>
Employment conditions	<p>Can you tell us a little bit, about what kind of job you have?</p> <p>Follow- up questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific work tasks – what do you do? • How long have you worked here? Hvor lenge har du arbeidet her? Otherwise; where have you worked beforehand?
Day to day work - description	<p>How would you describe your workday?</p> <p>Follow-up question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you give a more detailed description of a typical work day, routines etc.
ARK 1- general experience of the meeting	<p>Could you tell us about how you experienced the survey-feedback meeting regarding the ARK survey? The model + the results.</p> <p>Follow-up questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was there anything that was unclear or confusing? Was there anything you missed from the presentation? • What worked well?

	How did you experience the rest of the meeting? Practical execution etc.
ARK2- The role of the facilitator	Can you tell us a little bit, about how you experienced the facilitator, their role during the meeting? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What worked well/ badly? Why?
ARK3- The leader's role	Can you tell us about how you experienced your leader, their role during the meeting? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What worked well/ badly? Why?
ARK4- Purpose and benefits, group discussions, own role	What do you think is the purpose of this kind of survey? What advantages do you/ your workplace gain from a survey like this? Could you tell us a little about the group discussions you were a part of? What were you supposed to do and why? How did it work out? Did you discuss topics you felt were important? If not, why?
Closing remarks	

Attachment 2 - Interview Guide –Leader – Process evaluation ARK

Introduction	<p>Our names are... We work with/ we are concerned with, etc....</p> <p>Introduction of the project. Thank you for participating!</p> <p>The information gained from these interviews will be anonymized and any personal identification will not be able to be traced back to you or your answers. You can pull out from the interview at any point in time or choose to retract any information you have given.</p> <p>I will use a tape recorder and the interviews will be transcribed to text. Are you comfortable with this?</p> <p>Do you have any questions before we begin?</p>
Employment conditions	<p>Can you tell us a little bit, about what kind of job you have?</p> <p>Follow- up questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific work tasks – what do you do? • How long have you worked here? Hvor lenge har du arbeidet her? Otherwise, where have you worked beforehand?
Day to day work - description	<p>How would you describe your workday?</p> <p>Follow-up question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you give a more detailed description of a typical workday, routines etc.
ARK 1- general experience of the meeting	<p>Could you tell us about how you experienced the survey-feedback meeting regarding the ARK survey? Planning, follow-up meeting etc.</p> <p>Follow-up questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was there anything that was unclear or confusing? Was there anything you missed from the presentation? • What worked well?

	How did you experience the rest of the meeting? Practical execution etc.
ARK2- The role of the facilitator	<p>Can you tell us a little bit, about how you experienced the facilitator, their role during the planning, survey feedback and follow-up meeting?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What worked well/ badly? Why? • What could have been done differently?
ARK3- The leader's role	<p>Can you tell us a little bit about how you experienced your own role as leader during the meetings?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What worked well/ badly? Why?
ARK4- Purpose and benefits, group discussions, own role	<p>What do you think is the purpose of this kind of survey?</p> <p>What advantages do you/ your workplace gain from a survey like this?</p> <p>How do you plan to use the information from the results of the survey?</p> <p>Could you tell us a little about the group discussions you were a part of? What were you supposed to do and why? How did it work out? Did you discuss topics you felt were important? If not, why?</p>
Closing remarks.	