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## **Art, health promotion and well-being at work**

*"Only those who are aware of the diversity of the human creature will understand how strongly person's sense of well-being depends upon that individual's freedom to use and develop his or her own diverse potentials everyday, in the private sphere and in working life."*

*Helga Reuter-Kumpmann<sup>1</sup>*

### **Introduction**

This article deals with interactions between art, health promotion and well-being at work. According to the current Finnish Government's Health Promotion Programme<sup>2</sup>, culture and art can provide one possibility to increase well-being in different aspects of life. It is recommended to build an interdisciplinary health promotion programme between the different ministries. The Government's Programme recommends launching a special cross-sectoral project dealing with culture, health and well-being. This project should include also a module for development and evaluation of methods based on applied arts in enhancing well-being through culture.

The topic on art, health promotion and well-being provides new possibilities for research in art education. According to previous research various artistic working methods in social contexts can create new, effective ways to enhance health and well-being. Art and well-being at work is an interesting, multidisciplinary and innovative topic in the 'art and well-being' -context.<sup>3</sup>

Use of art in improving well-being at work brings a question of human needs and critical viewpoints towards the role of work in our society. The ethical questions of respecting the individuals' personal needs, the understanding of mutual values in new ways and the questions dealing with work and social responsibility need to be emphasized in this discourse. I am interested to ask a question whether art can help us to create a new understanding towards work and ethical thinking. My aim in this article is not to present ready-made answers but to increase discourse in 'art and well-being at work' -topic by creating new viewpoints and asking new questions. I present some art projects carried out in different countries in order to give a practical view into this topic.

### **Basic definitions**

The health and safety of employees is the principal objective of occupational safety and health (OSH) activities at workplaces. Maintaining working ability, health at work and preventing occupational accidents are the most important tasks in working communities. However, the modes of OSH actions are more versatile than before. In addition to well-managed occupational safety and health system, workers' health and safety depends on undisturbed progress of work, the good quality of products and services, an up-to-date production system, environmental protection and competent

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<sup>1</sup> Reuter-Kumpmann 2002

<sup>2</sup> Policy programme for health promotion 2007

<sup>3</sup> von Brandenburg 2008

management. Occupational safety and health is nowadays more and more integrated into the companies' all operations, and it is carried out in close cooperation with the management and personnel.<sup>4</sup>

Workplace health promotion (WHP) has been defined as the combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work. This is achieved through a combination of (i) improving the work organisation and the working environment, (ii) promoting the active participation of employees in health activities, and (iii) encouraging personal development.<sup>5</sup>

Well-being at work is defined as employees' capacity to manage and to cope their work tasks. Working capacity is influenced by the employee's physical, mental and social condition, the functioning of the work society and factors present in the work environment. An employee's well-being at work depends also on employment relationship, remuneration, employment contract, private and family life, economic status and life situation in general.<sup>6</sup> Safe and healthy working conditions create the basis for well-being at work<sup>7</sup>.

The work ability can be described as a construction of so called Work Ability House<sup>8</sup>. Health and functional capacity (physical, psychological and social capacity) are the basic elements in this framework. The second level of this framework contains professional competence (knowledge and skills). Values, attitudes and motivation are at the third level. The fourth level contains work, work conditions, work content and demands, work community and organization, supervisory work and management. Values, attitudes and motivation have strong connections to human needs of an individual.

### ***Ethics, human needs and well-being***

French philosopher Simone Weil (1909-1943) wrote about the importance of needs of the human soul.<sup>9</sup> Background for her thinking was the situation in Europe during the Second World War. Weil's aim was to create new ethics, which would provide a basis for a new, better and fairer society after the war.<sup>10</sup> According to Weil the society had changed, and culture had become more technological and instrumental.<sup>11</sup> Societal changes had strong influence on working class people and they had to cut away their roots. Weil compared them to immigrants in their own country. However, Weil stated that "to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul"<sup>12</sup>. By rooting a human being can lean back to context of life and tradition<sup>13</sup>.

Besides of this sense of responsibility, the ideas of respect to others and the idea of transcendence were important concepts for Weil. She stated that a person who does not need transcendence is arrogant. A man himself can not be a universal measure for everything. There has to exist something greater than a human being. This greater existence represents itself in various ways in nature and in spirituality. What is

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<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2007

<sup>5</sup> The European Network for Workplace Health Promotion 2006

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2005

<sup>7</sup> Forum for well-being at work 2008

<sup>8</sup> Ilmarinen Juhani 2006

<sup>9</sup> Varto 2005, 121

<sup>10</sup> Weil's main publication "L'Enracinement" was published in 1949 after her death.

<sup>11</sup> Weil 2007

<sup>12</sup> Weil 2007, 50

<sup>13</sup> Varto 2005, 108-109

important that it differs from everyday life routine and it is "somewhere else", stated Weil.<sup>14</sup>

In my opinion the concept of transcendence is an important aspect to art - but also to sense of well-being, however without being combined or compared with religion in any ways. Art can bring the concept of transcendence to everyday life, even at workplaces. Transcendence as artistic experience would combine art also to ethical thinking, where moral values become important. "*Without the human social competence of caring the others and without the need to also feel responsible for other people's well-being, humanity wouldn't be able to survive*", states Hermann Kinder<sup>15</sup>

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs<sup>16</sup> has been a topic for work-related well-being research more than 50 years with variable success. At the moment, it is again well-appreciated among some researchers. According to Maslow, the basic human needs (air, water, food and sex) are on the lowest level of this hierarchy. These needs Maslow named the physiological needs. The needs on the second level deal with safety, and on the third level with love and belonging. The next level of needs is esteem and the highest level of the needs is self actualization.<sup>17</sup>

Maslow seems to trust on human being's ability and willingness to make choices that deal with his/her individual spiritual growth, states Siitonen in his doctoral thesis. He adds that these choices can happen only in situations where respect to the others and positive and safe attitude exist. The possibilities to guide one's own life through these choices will support the creation of strong self and also increase empowerment. Siitonen continues that if a person cannot make these choices considering his/her own life, it will reflect on the personal development of self and the process of empowerment is hindered. Siitonen states that the choices done in safe situations will support self-esteem and abilities to respect one self. Healthy and self-actualizing people are looking for these situations in order to set their goals also further into the future.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Art projects at workplace***

Alexander Styhre and Michael Eriksson report insights from a Swedish project "*Artists in Residence (AIRIS)*", where different art activities were used during ten months period in workplaces. The aim of the project was to enhance creativity of co-workers. The project year 2005 showed only a limited effect on work place climate in a quantitative analysis, but the year 2006 project results were more positive.<sup>19</sup>

One recent development in business has been the growing use of arts-based learning, especially in skill-based training programs and in fostering creative thinking in corporations. Babson College in Massachusetts, Learning Lab Denmark and Danish University of Education have brought a new development in the field of 'art and business'. Danish researcher Lotte Darso has been a central expert in studying the impact of art programs on the businesses<sup>20</sup>. Darso has also been an activator of 'art and business' -topic to international forums. She facilitated a special workshop "If an

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<sup>14</sup> Varto 2005, 72

<sup>15</sup> Kinder 2002

<sup>16</sup> Maslow 1943

<sup>17</sup> Wikipedia: Maslow's hierarchy of needs

<sup>18</sup> Siitonen 1999, 124-125

<sup>19</sup> Styhre & Eriksson 2007

<sup>20</sup> The results of such research are included in a book by Lotte Darso called *Artful Creation: Learning Tales of Arts-in-Business*.

Artist Ran Your Business" at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland<sup>21</sup>. Although the results "in hard data is scarce", it has to be noted that there is still not enough of a critical mass of data for a critical evaluation in a quantitative analysis for "hard business" in corporations<sup>22</sup>.

A Queen's University arts education research team decided to have their own Wednesday morning art-making group on a weekly basis. The reason for starting the group was that the researchers of art education realised that they needed desperately art also for themselves. A study with semi-standardized interviews showed that the long-term (6 years) art-making practice has influenced their own personal and professional lives. The most interesting result of this study is that "the art-making was described as a form of caring for the spiritual, occupational, and recreational aspects of lives—it was not understood as a patch that is added on something already existing, but even more as a key component in academic work". Interview findings showed that the transcendent nature of art making and deepening and nurturing relationships as a sense of community and trust were the strongest benefits for the group. The group members were surprised how therapeutically they experienced art making. It was seen as a form of coming back to their core. One of the therapeutic aspects was laughter and storytelling. The transcendent qualities of art-making were described as a calming influence and a stronger ability to deal with stress. Art making was experienced as shared meaning making. It brought necessary break from work-related demands. According to the study "these themes resonate strongly with the scholarly literature and empirical work on embodied knowing, creativity, and non-formal adult learning".<sup>23</sup>

My own feasibility study in 2003 aimed to explore new possibilities that artistic activities can offer to improve safety and health at work and to promote employee work ability. The project was commissioned by the Finnish Centre for Occupational Safety and it aimed to activate discussion about these topics in Finland and how to apply these new methods in the work place. The conceptual framework of the project was based on the Finnish model for Maintenance of Work Ability (MWA). In the project art was combined for the first time in this framework. A number of case studies collected specially from Germany were also introduced in the study report.<sup>24</sup> The English article based on the report was published in 2006<sup>25</sup>.

## ***Discussion***

For the first time art and culture are now officially included in the Health Promotion Program of the Finnish Government. Well-being at work is part of this political program. Until now physical exercises and healthy living habits have been seen as an efficient way to support health and well-being. Art and cultural activities are becoming a way to improve physical and mental health, which is comparable to sports and healthy ways of living.

Research on well-being at work deals with questions at different levels of organisation: the worker, the work organisation and the company as a whole. In addition, the work itself should be studied from multiple viewpoints. According to the positive psychology movement it is important to study also positive aspects of work-related well-being

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<sup>21</sup> Art for Business Forum 2008

<sup>22</sup> Arts & Business Council 2004

<sup>23</sup> Uppitis et al 2008

<sup>24</sup> von Brandenburg 2003

<sup>25</sup> von Brandenburg 2006

instead of focusing only on health hazards e.g. stress, fatigue and burnouts at work<sup>26</sup>. Can art-based methods contribute these aims by providing new, innovative ways for creativity and empowerment at workplaces?

There is a big difference in whether people at workplace are understood and seen as "*most important production tools*" or whether these human beings are valued as a human *resource* at workplace. Art brings human and ethical aspect to working life, which is sometimes rather hard. Art activities give people the opportunity for creativity and new experiments in being part of an work community. It enhances people's confidence and capacity to see and do things differently. Raised expectations, hope and a greater inspiration and motivation for learning can thus be supported by art-based methods.

Projects like AIRIS in Sweden showed that there is a promising potential in bringing artists into industry. This is one way in increasing sustainable development and social corporate responsibility. Improving well-being at work has a sound ethical basis. In addition, art and culture can increase social participation and human social capital. Human networks in art activities can even enhance a sense of control of one's life. According to research results art can produce both individual and communal experiences that can make the values and meanings of one's life clearer. For this reason it is very important to study this topic further.

We can anticipate that in the future workers' health and well-being will be taken better care, because there will be more competition to employ good workers. A healthy, safe, spiritual, social and physical working environment will be a part of good working culture in the future. This kind of working environment will promote an idea of sustainable development. It should be remembered that work itself will also improve health and well-being of workers. Nowadays there are already companies in Germany that have changed their organisation culture to a more human way through art. Art can change the organisation in a deep way. This kind of process can be understood as a deeply transforming art process, where art is not meant only to effect on company image.

Social responsibility is becoming an important factor for competitive advantage between enterprises, states American researcher Patricia Aburdene in her book "Megatrends 2010". Aburdene has together with her college John Naisbitt earlier predicted megatrends which have taken place, such as information society in 80s. The new megatrend is dealing with the growing importance of spirituality and the ethical responsibility.<sup>27</sup>

Art can have an important role in the discourse dealing with human needs. The reason for this is that art is combined in our soul in a way where it reflects deeper values of life. Therefore the question is not only related to activation of this process but also to our need of having these processes. This need is part of our life in growing up as human beings and part of spiritual growth that continues our whole life.

Art is slow. It needs much time. Therefore it is important in the future to have a sustainable economical funding system for the art activities including research of this topic in workplaces. This economical funding system could be similar as the "Culture in the working life"-fund in Sweden<sup>28</sup>. Sweden has also good results of mediation organisations working between artists and workplaces. In this way artists do not need to start their own business for this purpose and they can concentrate on their core activities. The art projects in working life need to be professional, which means that

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<sup>26</sup> Hakanen 2004

<sup>27</sup> Sinclair 2007

<sup>28</sup> Kultur i arbetslivet

there has to be an education system for artists in this profession. Art projects for improving well-being at work should be based on multi-disciplinary research work. The future work and the well-being at work should also be based on ethics respecting workers' human needs.

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