

Towards Successful Seniority™ From Family Leave to Work

Participant's Workbook

Salla Toppinen-Tanner, Pia Pulkkinen, Paula Pajunen,
Tommy Larvi, Mikko Nykänen, Heli Kuitunen, Jukka Vuori

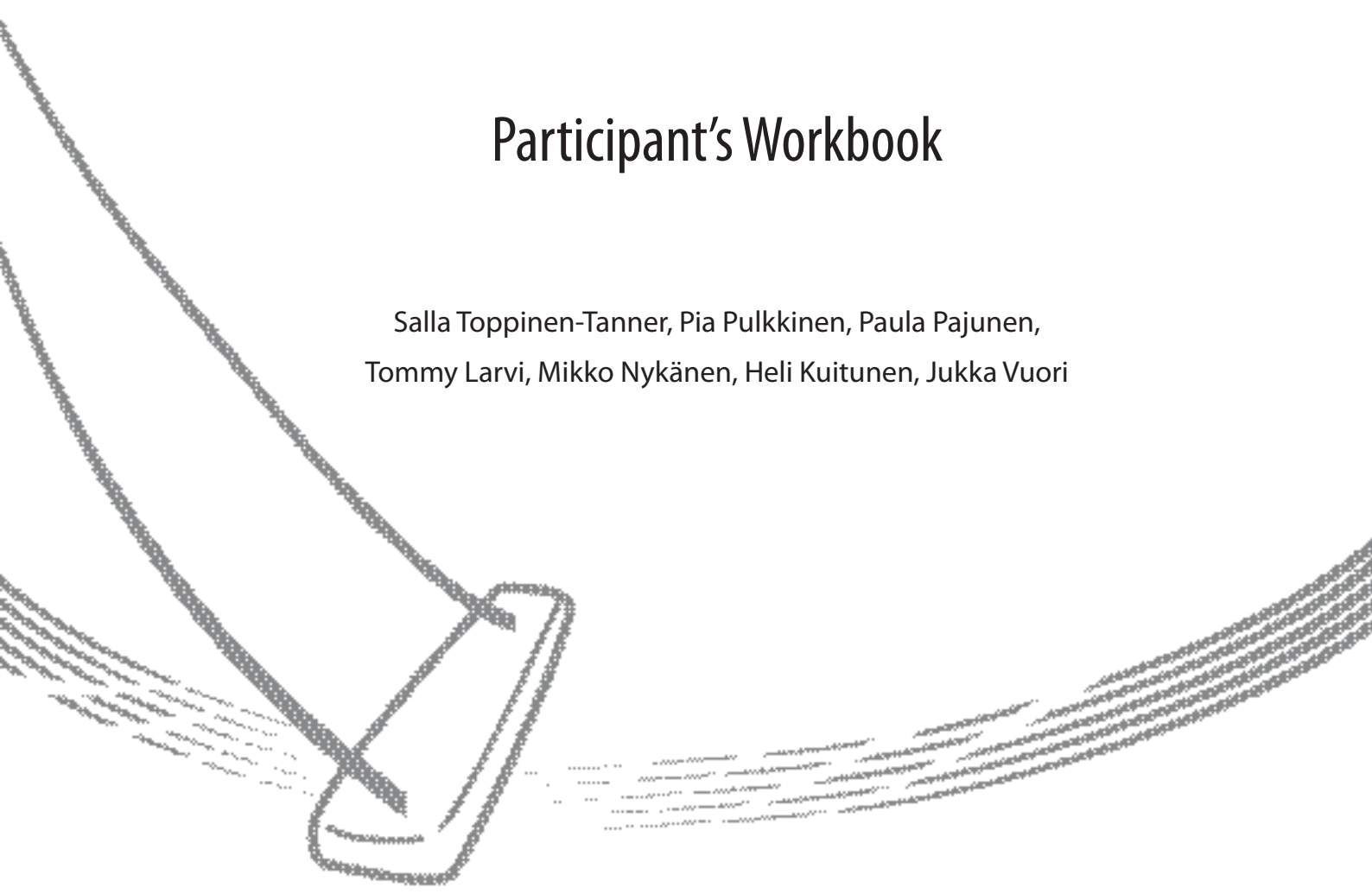


Finnish Institute of
Occupational Health

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Finnish Institute of
Occupational Health
FIOH Bookstore
Topeliuksenkatu 41 a A
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Tel. +358 30 474 2543
Fax +358 9 477 5071
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Dear From Family Leave to Work programme participant

Welcome to the group! We have created the From Family Leave to Work as a tool to assist in returning to work or applying for a job after a leave or break spent looking after family members. The programme is based on the Towards Successful Seniority™ method, and it aims to assist in career management, maintaining personal resources, expertise development, stress management and the reconciliation of work and family life. In planning the contents of the method, we used expert information and research related to continuous learning, coping at work, motivation and the promotion of general well-being. The topics examined during the programme support the drawing up of a personal plan of action to help you achieve your work life targets, the starting point for which is the identification of your existing strengths and development opportunities.

As our expectations of work and the ways in which we replenish ourselves during leisure time vary and change according to our life situation, it is important to occasionally stop and examine our personal situation. We hope that you will share your expertise, experience and suggestions with the group. Through active participation in the discussions you can find new career-related perspectives and solutions, and reinforce your ability to deal with possible setbacks. You may forget some of the things discussed in the groups, so it is a good idea to write down the best ideas and insights in your workbook. In this way, the workbook can serve as your career guide after the programme. The form at the end of the workbook contains questions that would be good to discuss with your supervisor after the programme. Discussing matters and considering various solutions together is often helpful, even in more challenging situations.

Enjoy the From Family Leave to Work programme!

The authors

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Programme contents

Session 1

- The From Family Leave to Work programme.
- Identifying personal strengths and interests.
- Identifying transferable skills from one life domain to another.
- Practising how to emphasize your own strengths and skills.
- Your plans and expectations regarding your future career.

Session 2

- What skills would be beneficial to develop and how can I develop them?
- What changes might take place at work or arise when applying for jobs, and how should I deal with them?
- What opportunities could arise from changes?
- Information interview

Session 3

- What different roles exist in work organizations?
- What issues might cause social conflicts, and how can conflicts be avoided and resolved?
- What is social support and what is its significance for well-being?
- How can networks promote work performance?
- What networks do you already have and how could you extend them?
- How could you better manage your workload?

Session 4

- How do you know that you are well?
- What are the warning signs of stress or burnout and how can they be managed?
- What flexible working time arrangements are available to you?
- What are your goals in terms of work, development and well-being?
- An action plan for achieving your targets.

1.

What are the topics of the first session?

- » **The From Family Leave to Work programme.**
- » **Identifying personal strengths and interests.**
- » **Identifying transferable skills from one life domain to another.**
- » **Practising how to emphasize your own strengths and skills.**
- » **Your plans and expectations regarding your future career.**



Personal strengths and skills

The following is a list of personal strengths and skills that are beneficial in different ways in different work tasks. Tick all the strengths that describe you at this moment. You can add any missing strengths in the space at the end of the list.

I have:

- Organizational skills
- Planning skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Good written expression
- Good verbal expression
- Persuasion skills
- Leadership skills
- Motivational skills
- Customer service skills
- Logical reasoning skills
- Numerical reasoning skills
- Technical skills
- Mathematical skills
- Project leadership skills
- Decision-making skills
- Performance skills
- Good knowledge of human nature
- Language skills
- Interaction skills
- Group work skills
- Creative problem-solving skills
- Long experience
- Extensive knowledge
- Knowledge of procedures
- Induction skills
- Marketing skills
- Listening skills
- Negotiation skills
- Social skills

I am:

- Capable of learning
- Able to see the whole picture
- Tolerant of uncertainty
- Able to see the essential
- Able to make choices based on values
- Able to give good advice
- Able to give constructive feedback
- Able to work independently
- Able to co-operate
- Farsighted
- Able to resolve conflicts
- Flexible
- Thorough
- Enterprising
- Calm
- Energetic
- Reliable
- Conscientious
- Friendly
- Responsible
- Hardworking
- Service-orientated
- Honest
- Quick
- Systematic
- Patient
- Creative
- Realistic
- Alert
- Positive
- Efficient

- Physically strong
- Empathetic
- Innovative
- Methodical
- Precise
- Resourceful
- Composed
- Competent
- Economical
- Conciliatory
- Practical
- Spontaneous
- Diligent
- Convincing
- Cautious
- Enthusiastic
- Active
- Able to take the initiative
- Consistent
- Handy
- Genial
- Optimistic
- Quick-witted
- Careful
- Emotional
- Co-operative
- Competitive
- Self-confident
- Open-minded
- Lively
- Brave
- Inquisitive
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Transferable skills

1. What kind of different work tasks does your job involve? Describe them briefly below.

2. What kind of tasks do your current life situation or leisure time activities consist of?

3. Describe the strengths and skills that you need in the above mentioned tasks. You can use the Personal strengths and skills list to assist you.

4. Which strengths and skills could you transfer from one life domain to the other?

Emphasizing your own strengths and skills

An employer is interested in how their company can benefit from you as an employee. Your task is to convey this clearly and convincingly to the employer. One way in which to impress the employer is to give concrete examples of your strengths and skills.

For example: Strength/skill: "I am reliable"

When, where, how you have used this strength/skill:

"At my previous workplace, my supervisor had to go to hospital and I was responsible for client service for the two months he was away. I was the first employee to come in the morning and the last to leave in the evening. I checked every client order and made phone calls to the clients weekly in order to keep up to date with the situation."

Results

A positive result that followed from your strength/skill:

"Our clients suffered no delays or difficulties during this time. My supervisor was able to trust my initiative and ability to take care of the situation."

How does this relate to the new job you are applying for or to your current job?

"I believe that my reliability will increase your company's positive client service image."



Write examples on the next page of the situations in which you have used your strengths and skills. You can write about your professional abilities, strengths and performance skills related to your studies, traineeship, work experience or other domains of life and life experience.

1. A concrete example of your skills

Strength/skill:

A situation when, where, how you have used this strength/skill:

Results:

A positive result that followed from your strength/skill:

How does this relate to the new job you are applying for or to your current job?

2. A concrete example of your skills

Strength/skill:

A situation, when, where, how you have used this strength/skill:

Results:

A positive result that followed from your strength/skill:

How does this relate to the new job you are applying for or to your current job?

The importance of goals in life

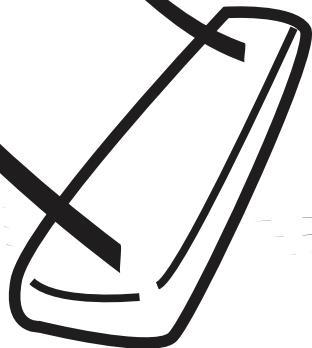
People have goals in their career and their personal lives that direct their activities towards the future and influence what they accomplish. Our goals also influence our well-being and how good our life is. When we set goals, they should be personally important but realistic and achievable. Goal-setting is also influenced by the people around us, our work life and other life events.

However, for one reason or another, we do not always achieve our goals. Sometimes our own targets change along the way due to, for example, changes in our life situation. When the achievement of a goal is interrupted for reasons beyond our control or made difficult by external conditions, it is good to redirect our goals. Rather than continuing to work endlessly on something, it is better to move on by setting new or revised goals that are more achievable.

2.

What are the topics of the second session?

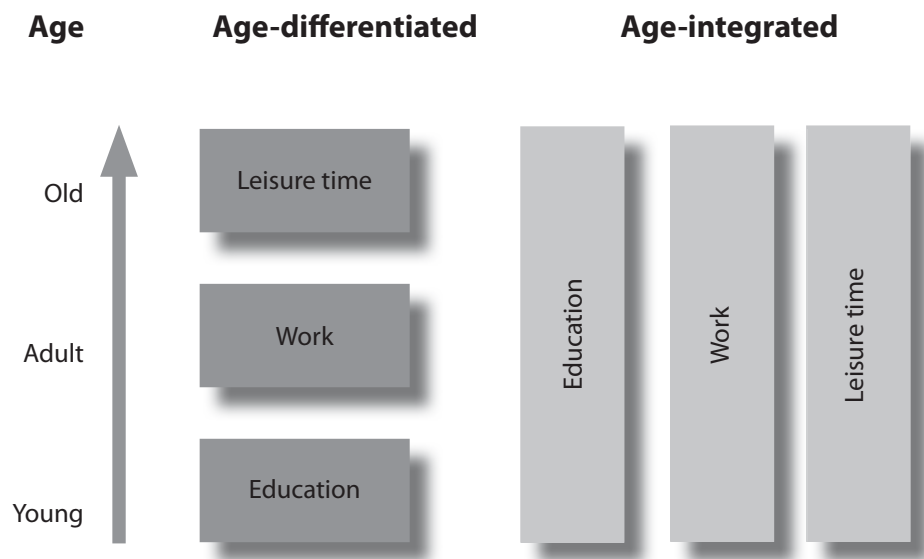
- » **What skills would be beneficial to develop and how can I develop them?**
- » **What changes might take place at work or arise when applying for jobs, and how should I deal with them?**
- » **What opportunities could arise from changes?**
- » **Information interview**



Studying, work and leisure time

According to modern thinking, studying and learning are no longer linked to a certain stage of life. Earlier it was assumed that life was divided into three stages: (I) studying when young, followed by (II) settling into work life and (III) retirement.

Today, studying, work and leisure time can alternate and be intertwined throughout life, depending on your work and life situation and your interests. Studies benefit you (better pay, new work tasks, maintenance of professional skills, mental development, etc.), your employer and society.



Source:

Riley MW & Riley JW Jr: Structural Lag – Past and Future. In: Age and Structural Lag: Society's Failure to Provide Meaningful Opportunities in Work, Family, and Leisure, p. 15–36. Ed. Riley MW, Kahn RL & Foner A. John Wiley & Sons, New York 1994.

Take a small test: How do you learn?

You are the expert regarding your own way of learning. What is the natural way for you to assimilate new information?

- In a group
- Independently
- By doing
- By watching
- By writing
- By listening
- By speaking
- By reading
- Quickly
- Slowly
- In small pieces
- In entities
- In the daytime
- In the evening
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Developing at work

1. Which **strengths and skills** would be both important and beneficial to develop in terms of your profession, performing work, or expectations and targets related to your career? Would you like to learn new skills or expand and update existing skills?

2. Choose 1 or 2 of the skills from the list above and think about **how and where** you could develop them. Consider, for example, whether these skills could be developed at the workplace. Is it necessary to take part in a course or other training? Would development take place independently or in a group?

Skill 1:

How can I develop it?

Skill 2:

How can I develop it?

Managing changes

Example case J: Why does J feel uncertain in this situation?

J has been working at the same workplace for a long time. Now the workplace is implementing changes that mean that J would become a member of a work group. J has previously mainly worked alone. She feels insecure about her future.

Work and career changes

1. Think about possible changes at your workplace and in your future career. **What kinds of situations** might these changes create?

2. **What options** do you have? Who could you talk to about change-related issues, how could you prepare for the situation, and how would you act during and after these changes?

Information interview

A visitor will join the group to be interviewed. During the interview, group members will have the opportunity to ask about the visitor's decisions and future work life plans: Where do they work, how did they end up in their job, what does work mean to them, how have they dealt with changes in work life, etc. How have they managed to reconcile work and family life?

1. Think about the information that interests you and what you would like to ask the visitor.

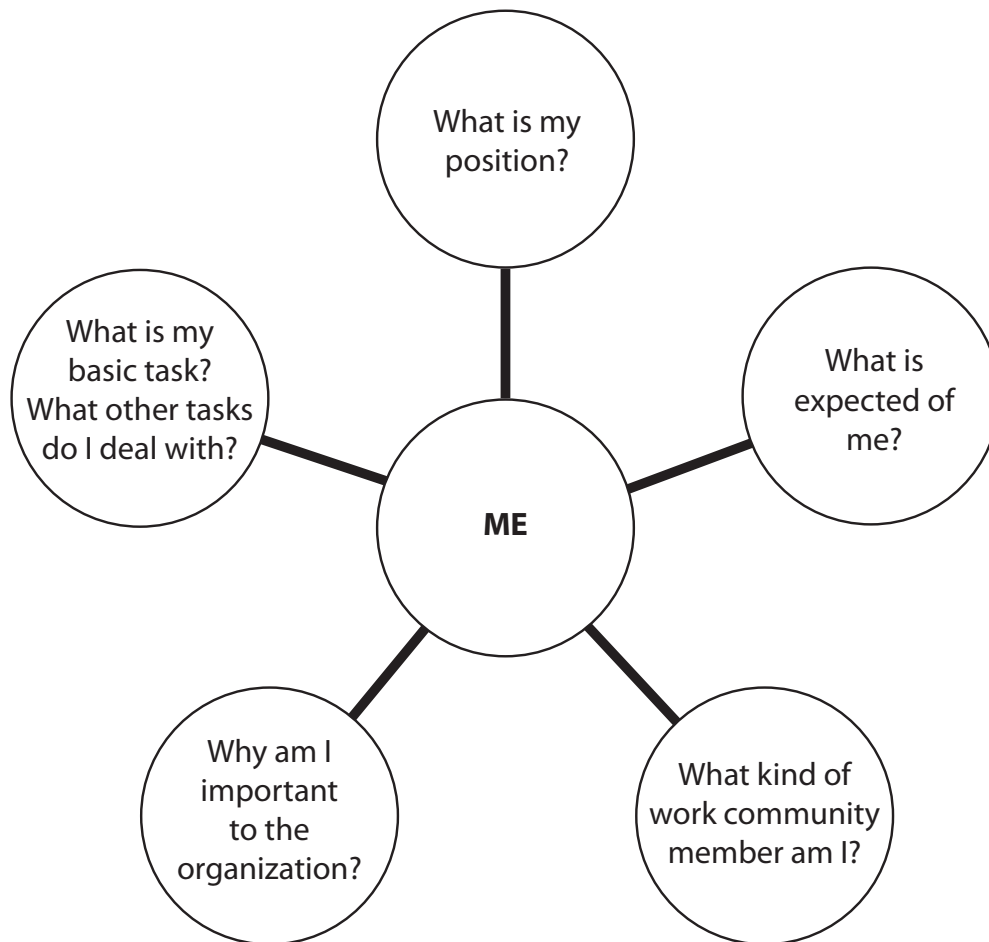
3.

What are the topics of the third session?

- » What different roles exist in work organizations?
- » What issues might cause social conflicts, and how can conflicts be avoided and resolved?
- » What is social support and what is its significance for well-being?
- » How can networks promote work performance?
- » What networks do you already have and how could you extend them?
- » How could you better manage your workload?



Me as a member of the work community and family



Resolving work community conflicts

Example case M: How did the conflict arise?

New employees joined M's department. One day M's supervisor assigned her a task that was challenging, but which she felt she performed well. Later M accidentally overheard colleagues wondering why the task had been given to her even though, in their opinion, she was not at all qualified for it.

Personal network

1. When you think about the past six months, **who have you talked to about issues related to your work life, return to work or applying for a job?** Write the names of the most important people in the space below. If you want you can outline your network on page 31.

2. **What have you discussed and what are the positive impacts** of the discussions in terms of your work? For example, have you received support in resolving a difficult situation?

3. Think about **what issues you would like to or feel you should discuss with your supervisor.**

Expanding networks

Which people or parties would it be good to have more interaction with? Think about people who could be of assistance in your return to working life or who would have information about issues related to your work. These people can be important sources of feedback, or co-operation with them could further the completion of work tasks. List one to four people.

Person 1: _____

Why interaction would be important

How I could promote interaction

Person 2: _____

Why interaction would be important

How I could promote interaction

Person 3: _____

Why interaction would be important

How I could promote interaction

Person 4: _____

Why interaction would be important

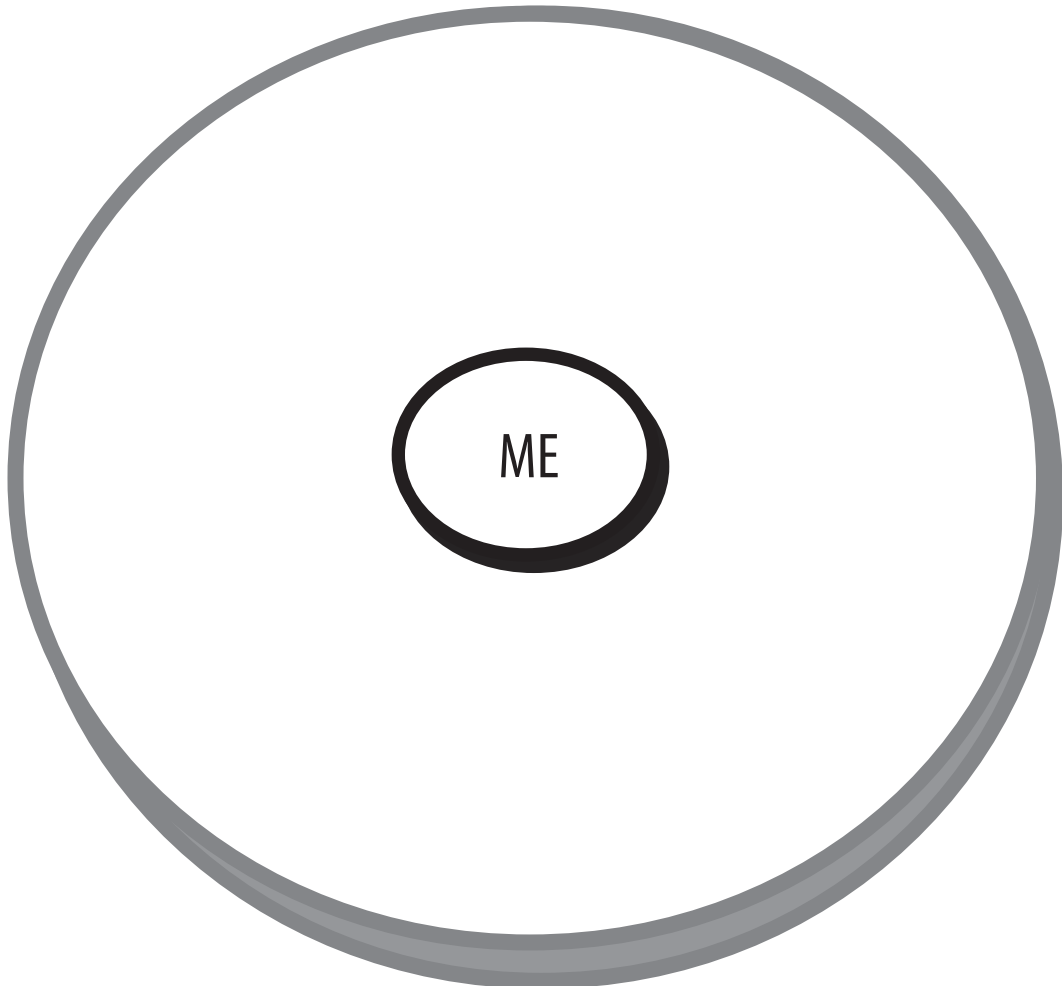
How I could promote interaction

My network

What does your personal network look like?

Draw a diagram of your network. Inside the circle add the names of the people with whom you currently talk about work or from whom you receive support regarding issues related to your return to work or your work. Who are they?

Outside the circle, write down the names of people you would like to co-operate more with. How could you make them part of your personal network?



Tips for making contact

The following points can help you contact different people:

- Find out who you could contact.
- Think in advance about what you want to say.
- Write down notes in advance.
- Practice the discussion if necessary.
- Keep the atmosphere positive.
- Ask whether you can contact the person again if necessary.
- Remember that most people like to help!

Controlling your workload

You are finding it difficult to complete all your work tasks on time. How would you react if your supervisor offered you more work?

Think about which issues you would bring up in the discussion in order to resolve the situation constructively. Write down some points to remember or a few short responses.

Supervisor: Hi, this report needs to be finished as soon as possible. How soon do you think you can do it?

Role of the observer

People often tend to view themselves critically. It is important to get positive feedback, because it helps us understand what we do well. Emphasizing someone's positive aspects helps them learn and change their behaviour more effectively than negative feedback.

Tell the person what you liked and what you felt worked well.

Also tell them why you felt something went well.

You can write notes during the role-play in the space below.

4.

What are the topics of the fourth session?

- » How do you know that you are well?
- » What are the warning signs of stress or burnout and how can they be managed?
- » What flexible working time arrangements are available to you?
- » What are your goals in terms of work, development and well-being?
- » An action plan for achieving your targets.

Relaxation through breathing

Find a comfortable position. Close your eyes. Let your mind become calm.

∞

Concentrate on your breathing: breathe in and out. Breathing will help you stay in this moment, mindful of yourself, and as calm as possible.

∞

Slowly and calmly let your awareness expand from your breathing into different parts of your body, to the chest area, to your back, pelvic area, face and so on. Continue breathing at your own pace. Blow out all your “extra” steam.

When you are ready, return to your work tasks.

Stress management

Have you noticed warning signs indicating that you are overworked or stressed? Write down these signs in the table and plan how you could counteract each one.

Warning signs	Counteraction plan

Time management as a tool for managing stress

Time seems to be our most important natural resource today. However, although there is always more available, and everyone gets the same amount; 24 hours per day, there never seems to be enough of it. By planning our overall use of time and organizing what we do, we can have a significant impact on how controllable our time is.

The three main themes of time management are

1. setting objectives and priorities
2. the use of time management tools and
3. keeping things organized.

When we set targets and their priorities, we consciously decide in advance what to focus on, the order in which things will be done and what we will postpone for the time being. Not everything in life has to be done at one time or at full speed. When we can concentrate on one thing at a time, the sense of urgency often disappears.

There are plenty of time management tools available. One of the simplest methods is to make a timetable for daily and weekly jobs. A systematic approach is also important for time management. This means being orderly and consistent. The aim is to avoid wasting time on looking for and constantly pondering over things. This also helps bring order to your mind. A smooth everyday routine also helps with time management. In order to promote this, it is a good idea to try and resolve any problems that hamper your daily life.



What are your priorities? Do you have enough time for different jobs and issues? What arrangements could improve your time management?

Lifestyle as a way of maintaining well-being

Do you get enough sleep?

Sufficient, good quality sleep is important to a person's health. Sleep restores the body's functional capacity and alleviates physical tiredness. When you sleep well and sufficiently, your mind is refreshed and your mood is good. On average, adults need eight hours of sleep per day to maintain the brain's normal information processing capacity. However, the need for sleep is individual: some people naturally need more or less sleep. Therefore, as well as paying attention to the amount of sleep you get, it is also important to consider how you cope during the daytime. If you are not tired during the day, a smaller amount of sleep may be enough.

Sleep maintains our brains. This is why sufficient sleep is important for a person's functional capacity. Maintaining alertness, the ability to function in new situations, and learning and creativity are particularly important in the work of today's information society. A sleep deficit of even two to three hours has been found to significantly decrease brain functioning. A person suffering from sleep deficit finds it difficult to stay alert, think flexibly, learn new things, or think of potential solutions. According to research, a continuous sleep deficit also affects physical health. The consequences of sleep deficit in terms of metabolism include a weakened capacity to fight off infections caused by viruses, weight gain and a risk of developing high blood pressure, adult-onset diabetes or coronary disease.

A moderate, regular lifestyle helps promote good sleep. Stress, in contrast, is one of the most significant factors contributing to poor sleep. For example, the reduction of stress factors at work and the development of stress management methods play a key role in achieving good sleep.



Does your child wake you up many times during the night and does this affect your performance at work? What could you do about this?

Ensuring a healthy lifestyle

Heavy alcohol use is the cause of many health and work ability problems. Heavy drinking increases the risk of health hazards resulting from alcohol use. The greatest increase in alcohol use has occurred among women and young people. Alcohol causes organ damage more quickly among women than men.

Not smoking is one of the most important ways in which to promote the health of the population. More than half of those who smoke on a daily basis would like to quit smoking. Quitting smoking is one of the most important decisions a person can make to promote their health.

Exercise maintains physical and mental health in the same way as good nutrition. When you exercise, your overall quality of life improves as a result of mental well-being and better health. Two thirds of working-age Finns do not get enough exercise to have a positive effect on their health. Natural everyday exercise is especially important with regard to promoting weight control and health. Examples of such exercise include walking, gardening, shovelling snow, or cleaning.



How do you look after your own well-being? Is your current well-being at a sufficient level? What else could you do to improve your well-being?

Work content and related expectations

Example case L: How can L rise to the challenge of her new life situation?

L had been working as a nurse in a hospital for a long time. She was on family leave, when a head nurse's position she had always dreamed of opened up and L was asked to take it. L hesitated because it meant returning to work earlier than planned.

Temporary and permanent flexible working time arrangements

Flexible work and working time arrangements allow an employee to adapt work according to their life situation. Flexible working times make it easier to reconcile work and other life demands, and improves motivation and the atmosphere at work. These arrangements can increase well-being at work.

It is possible to negotiate work time and flexible work arrangements for reconciling work and family responsibilities. These arrangements must be agreed on with your employer. Flexible working time arrangements can apply to both mothers and fathers.

Find out more information about

Family leave options

Benefits for families with children

Research results and information about flexible working time arrangements and reconciliation of work and family.

Returning to work life

Child care

It is advisable to find out about the range of child care options in your area whilst at home. The variety may surprise you. You can find information on the internet, for example.

Assistance in job searching

The Employment office can provide individual advice and information regarding the employment opportunities in your area.

Studying

If you are looking for a place to study, remember to update your knowledge regarding education providers and fields of study. The educational system changes over time and the information you receive from your friends and acquaintances may be outdated. Check the internet for information regarding studying, occupations and fields of education, and how to finance your studies.

Universities provide information on study options and studying on their websites.

Colleges, vocational schools and institutes also provide information about the study and career opportunities they can provide on their websites. They may also offer further education courses to maintain your professional skills or to participate in during leisure time.

Returning to your previous employment

If you have a job to return to, you should keep in contact with your employer or colleagues during your leave. By doing so, you can keep up to date on upcoming vacancies and changes that take place at your workplace or in your work tasks.

Work-related goals

Think about the goals related to work and well-being that you hope to have achieved six months from now.

Describe the target situation as accurately as possible. For example, you can consider your work tasks, working hours, work environment, skills, and relationships with other members of the work community.

What kind of work or career-related goals do you have?

Do you have goals related to reconciling work and other parts of your life?

Are there any changes expected in your work tasks or work community?

What kind of goals could you set for these changes?

How could you act in response to these changes?

What goals do you have concerning your well-being?

How could you promote your well-being at work?

How much time would you like to spend on exercise, rest or hobbies?

Action plan

What kind of action plan do you have to ensure that you reach your goals related to work and working life?

Write down interim goals that will help you reach your ultimate goals. In addition, write down the date by which you hope the necessary measures will have been taken.

Goals related to your work situation, work content and work arrangements

FIRST STEP taken by _____

What I will do:

SECOND STEP taken by _____

What I will do:

THIRD STEP taken by _____

What I will do:

Goals related to learning and self-development

FIRST STEP taken by _____

What I will do:

SECOND STEP taken by _____

What I will do:

THIRD STEP taken by _____

What I will do:

Goals related to your own well-being and leisure time

FIRST STEP taken by _____

What I will do:

SECOND STEP taken by _____

What I will do:

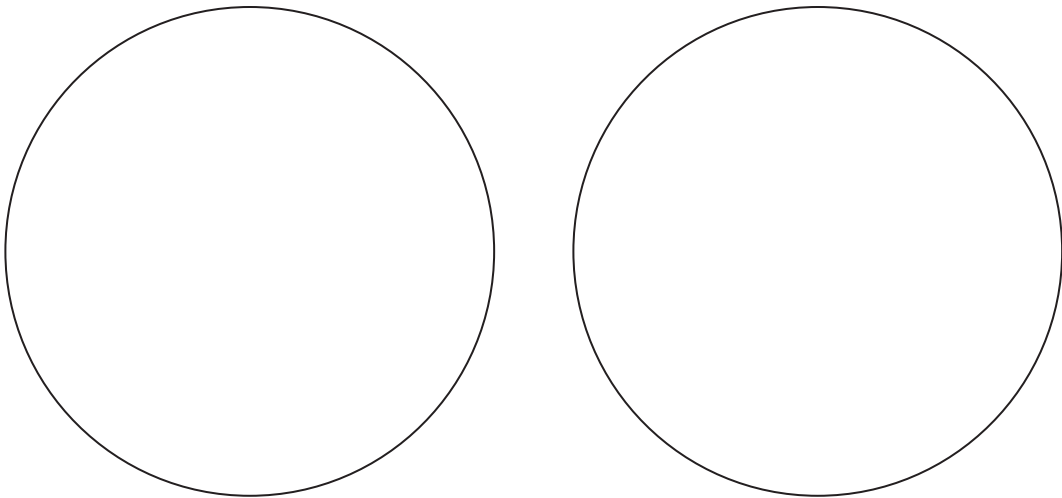
THIRD STEP taken by _____

What I will do:

Work + Family + Leisure time + Self

1. Divide the circle on the left into sectors reflecting how your current life situation uses your mental energy or capacity. Draw four sectors to represent the following life spheres: work, family / marital relationship / kids, leisure time / hobbies and you / your own time. For instance, if you use the same amount of mental capacity for each of these four spheres in your life, divide the circle into four sections of the same size. Note that you should base your judgment on the usage of mental energy, not time as such.

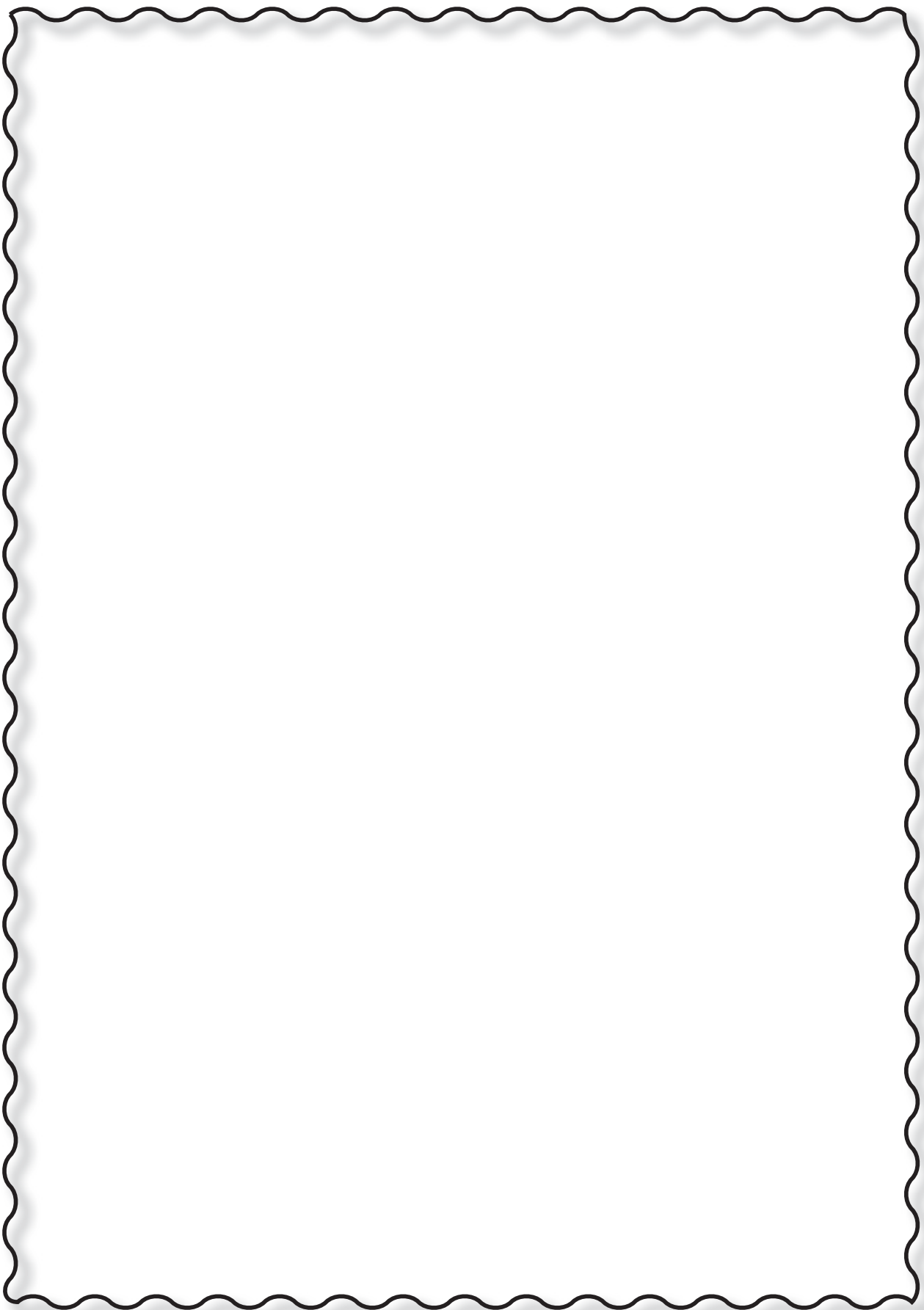
2. Do you feel satisfied with the current situation or would it be good for you to change it somehow in order to support your own well-being? Divide the circle on the right into sectors that represent the life situation you would like to have.



3. Think of the means you could use to realize your resources to achieve the situation you want. What steps do you need to take? How can you mobilize your social networks to help you? Think about as concrete ways as possible to either segment or merge these life spheres to help you to recover or replenish your energies. How can you prepare yourself against setbacks?

Hakanen, J. et al. Voiman lähteet. Työterveyslaitos, Helsinki.

Notes and drawings...



From Family Leave to Work is an application of the *Towards Successful Seniority*[™] group method and is designed to support the return to work, mental well-being and reconciliation of work and family life among those on family leave or caring for family members.

From Family Leave to Work is a group method during which the participants recognize their own strengths and needs for development, and set personal goals for their future careers. The group discusses ways in which to balance work, family, rest, and other life needs.

The Towards Successful Seniority[™] method Trainer's Manual, and its supplementary pages (available on the internet) provide the group method trainer with detailed instructions throughout the programme. The Participant's Workbook is a manual for each group member and helps the participants work on their goals during the programme.

The method can be targeted towards different subgroups, ranging from an organizations' personnel to groups in different family situations.

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