



Participatory ergonomics: Understanding the contributions of reflection groups in a hospital food service

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ABSTRACT

Aim: To identify how the methodology of Reflection Groups (RG) can contribute to approach social-psychological problems, so often observed as obstacles in PE efforts. The objective was also to verify the contributions from RG to the implementation of ergonomics recommendations, which were a starting point and organized group discussions.

Method: A concrete case was used as an illustration, and studied in depth: RG with administration and production workers' representatives from the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics of a cardiologic hospital in São Paulo, Brazil. RG are temporary thinking groups, taking place outside the workplace and having delegative and consultative participation. They make use of Operative Groups, an adapted form of tripartite group, activity as an instrumental resource, group dynamic techniques and videotaping. In 2007, 31 meetings took place during paid working hours with 7 groups of different composition, ranging from 1.5 h to 3 h.

Results: Additionally to the positive effects in communication and psychosocial environment, RG could also contribute to changes in interpersonal relationships, cooperation, personal and work behaviours. By dealing with aspects which could hinder the explicit task: fears, conflicts, and stereotyped beliefs and behaviours; resistance to change could be broken and group members could learn. RG allowed input about new risks; continuous information and feedback about ongoing ergonomics interventions so that immediate corrective action could be taken. The main form of participation was in administrative, organizational, and psychosocial problems which required a better clarification and identification of their real causes, commitment, and elaboration of strategies and negotiation of different stakeholders in their solution.

Conclusion: RG takes advantage of homogeneous and heterogeneous groups, in face to face communication. The interactions in the groups are task-oriented (explicit task) but attaining groups' goals depends on a relational interaction (implicit task).

Relevance to industry: Reflection groups can bring important contributions to ergonomics and industry because they favour the discussion, disclosure of problems and incorporation of solutions, enabling interventions in working organization, psychosocial environment and relationships in a collective and participatory approach, promoting health and social integration.

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1. Introduction

According to Levi and Slem (1995) team work has become a central issue for many corporations, and self-managing teams are

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often viewed as the goal of team work development programs. Teams/groups can also be used as a tool to implement changes in organizations. Examples are Health Circles (Aust and Ducki, 2004) in occupational health promotion and the Ergo Group (St Vincent et al., 1998; Van Eerd et al., 2008) and Ergonomic Change Team (Theberge et al., 2002; Laing et al., 2007) in Participative Ergonomics (PE).

According to Burgess-Limerick et al. (2007) participative ergonomics developed from Asian, European and North American