

Executive Summary

EAWOP Small Group Meeting on “Resource-oriented interventions at work: Designing and evaluating interventions to promote well-being and performance”

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Overview

The aim of this EAWOP Small Group Meeting (SGM) was to advance best practice in the design and evaluation of resource-oriented interventions in the workplace. To achieve this, the small group meeting brought together a group of international researchers focusing on two key areas: (i) optimal designs for resource-oriented interventions, and (ii) evaluating the short- and long-term effectiveness of such interventions. The first theme focused specifically on the resources that individual interventions that can be enhanced and restored, and included both intra-individual and inter-individual levels. The second theme focused on effective methods and tools that can be used to capture the effectiveness of resource-based interventions, including methodological and statistical issues.

Format

The small group meeting took place over three days at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. Thirty researchers from a wide range of countries participated (Austria, Canada, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Turkey, United Kingdom, USA). We received a total of twenty-six high quality submissions, which were independently reviewed against the theoretical and methodological criteria, as well as with their fit to the SGM topic. Subsequently, eighteen presentations were selected for presentation at the Small Group Meeting (SGM). The participants delivered presentations on their own research, which were organized into two parallel streams with four sessions. In addition, participants had the opportunity to further discuss their research at the poster vernissage, which included voting of the best poster.

Five keynote presentations were delivered from leading experts in this field: Prof. Sabine Sonnentag (University of Mannheim), Prof. Rob Briner (University of Bath), Prof. Eva Demerouti (Technische Universiteit Eindhoven) and Prof. Anne Mäkikangas. (University of Jyväskylä). In addition, a panel session on 'Publishing research on resource-oriented interventions' was chaired by Prof. Jonathan Halbesleben (University of Alabama).

To facilitate discussion between participants the SGM involved a variety of formats from traditional question-and-answer sessions, to interactive group activities in which participants engaged in discussions about the implications of the talk to intervention research. SGM topic which followed the keynote sessions. On the final day, an open space format was used to further develop key themes and insights from the SGM and to develop a program for future research directions in this area. During this time participants selected seven topics that they felt required further attention for the field to advance, and spent a number of hours discussing and brainstorming these topics.

Lessons Learned and Emerging Future Research Agenda

In summary, the following lessons could be learned from the Small Group Meeting. These lessons also map the emerging research agenda and future directions for the field of resource-based interventions.

1. Defining and investigating resources

Issues around defining resources as well investigating mechanisms and processes involved in the enhancement of resources need to be addressed more thoroughly and require immediate attention. Many studies that investigate the development of resources through the implementation of an intervention do not clearly define resources, nor do they describe the underlying mechanisms through which this can occur. This hampers a more complete understanding of how and why an intervention has the desired effect or not, and thus, is currently limiting our understanding in this area.

2. Guidelines for intervention research

There is still a lack of clear guidelines and criteria for the reporting of interventions, and this needs to be addressed. Similar to the reporting standards, which were developed for the reporting of meta-analyses, participants in the SGM felt that there was a need for clear and appropriate standards for the reporting of intervention studies. In a similar vein, these guidelines could further advance and facilitate an evidence-based approach. In addition, initiating systematic reviews of intervention research would advance the evidence-base also.

3. Delivery of interventions

From a practical perspective, the delivery of interventions, both in terms of the human trainers and technology used is an area that requires further attention. Issues that emerged were the perceptions of trainers and training material for engaging participants and motivating them to complete the intervention and associated measurement points. In addition, the use of technology such as iPads and smartphones was identified as being extremely beneficial in terms of facilitating easy completion, but one which requires quite a lot of careful planning, design and implementation to ensure that operationally the technology operates correctly.

4. Using mobile devices for day/week-level interventions

Using mobile devices to assess data or conduct the intervention at the day--? or week--?level provides the following advantages: (1) time stamp for data collection and time spent on the intervention can be collected, (2) reminder through repeating signals can be sent out, (3) mobile devices may serve as an incentive to participate (e.g. when internet access is provided), (4) options for collecting physiological data (e.g. blood pressure, heart rate, blood sugar) through devices that can be attached to smartphones or tablet PCs. Researchers need to carefully address issues of data security and anonymity of data, e.g. by consulting the data protection officer or lawyer of one's research institution and communicating information on data security to the participants. Ideally, mobile devices that have been specifically prepared for the purpose of the study should be handed out to participants instead of asking them to download apps to their own devices. The effectiveness of stand-alone virtual interventions still needs to be discussed. Other possible designs are using interventions with mobile devices in a blended-learning context with face-to-face and virtual units or to apply mobile devices to facilitate the transfer of learned behaviors into practice.

5. Designing an adequate placebo group

When designing interventions researcher's need to carefully weigh pros and cons for choosing a (waitlist) control or placebo group. In the case of placebo interventions, both groups know that they are participating in an intervention. When designing placebo groups the following challenges/ caveats need to be taken into consideration: (1) Debrief after the intervention to ensure that participants did not guess the purpose of the intervention, (2) perform a manipulation check and exclude those participants who see a connection between placebo and measurement, (3) consider that the intervention itself may provide benefits to the participants but may also be exhausting. This may lead to better outcomes on some variables in the placebo group, (4) Therefore make sure to pair the outcome measures for assessing effects with the content of the intervention and be sure to understand the mechanisms under study before designing the intervention, and (5) measure possible mediators of the effect to facilitate interpretation of possibly inconclusive results of the data later on.

6. Making interventions more evidence-based

The following suggestions were derived: (1) Take the time for context pre-screening (e.g. identify of the problem, collect qualitative information from the organization); (2) find the right context for the intervention; (3) work with professional bodies; (4) tailor interventions - but also design principles to adjust the intervention; (5) carefully choose outcome measures; (6) think about adequate effect sizes; (7) think about the generalizability of the data.

Outcomes

Special Issue in JOOP: A further outcome of the EAWOP SGM is an upcoming special issue on "Designing and evaluating resource-oriented interventions to enhance well-being, health and performance at work", which will appear in the Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology in 2015. The three organizers of the SGM (Alexandra Michel, Deirdre O'Shea & Annekatriin Hoppe) will be the guest editors for this special issue.

Evaluation: This small group meeting received excellent evaluations. Participants (N = 17) rated all criteria (e.g. finding the conference useful and enjoyable, having learned a lot, engaging in networking, organization of the conference, evaluation of facilities, food and leisure program) above 4 on a 5 point scale. The overall rating for the small group meeting was 9.24 on a 10 point scale.

Conclusion

From the small group meeting, it can be concluded the resource-oriented interventions are a growing topic for research. At the moment, there are a steadily increasing number of studies being conducted in this field. However, there is a need for further clarification of defining resources, and a need for adequate design and reporting standards for intervention-based research in work and organizational psychology.