Through Communality to Success
– Guide to Developing Social Capital in the Workplace

Support to Extend Careers
2012–2014

Marja-Liisa Manka and Riitta-Liisa Larjovuori

Research and Education Centre Synergos of the University of Tampere School of Management
Rehabilitation Foundation
Contents

4 Background
5 Jamit Project
6 Social capital within the work community
8 Who benefits from communality?
10 Effects of social capital on the quality and productivity of work
12 Communality – social capital, where does it arise from?
17 Promoting social capital
21 ‘Let’s bury Somebody Else’
22 How to increase the sense of community?
Background

Our working life is undergoing major change. Public debate is characterised by negative things: global conflicts, constant hurry and time pressures, bullying at schools, depression among young people, employees’ mental loading, bullying in workplaces, lack of meaningfulness at work, lay-offs and too early retirement.

Although there are facts that support problem-centred discussion, such an approach easily gives us the impression that things cannot be influenced at all. This can lead to hopelessness, even learned helplessness, which has been found to increase passiveness, pessimistic attitudes and even the risk of falling ill.

It is in nobody’s interests – that of Finland, working life in general or people themselves – to see how we fall into a state of hopelessness or constant complaint. The language we use creates reality. Therefore, negative emotions derived from problem-centred attitudes prevent us from looking at things in a broad perspective and identifying new opportunities. We should thus pay attention to how we could promote positive attitudes.

Positive emotions enable us to expand our perception, thereby making room for new ideas, actions and relations. They also increase personal resources, such a sense of communality, a sense of control over one’s life, and even personal health and happiness.

Researchers have noted that it is people who are behind the success of every workplace. In particular, the value of the future is dictated by our ability to learn, be enthusiastic and innovative, and to look for opportunities and solutions in order to address our problems. This means that friendly colleagues and a good atmosphere in the workplace play a very important role as the sources of positive emotions and the joy of work. A positive atmosphere is also transferred directly into customer satisfaction.

Communality is thus a source of new power, because it seems that mutuality, confidence, common values and active efforts to everybody’s benefit increase the amount of social capital. The behaviour of the other party can be predicted through close and good interaction, which in turns strengthens confidence. All members of the work community feel like they are in the same boat and aspire towards a joint interest over the long term. Therefore, they do not have to use their resources to hide information or talk behind each other’s backs. What is best, promoting sense of communality does not even require any investments.

This guide seeks to answer the question of who benefits from communality, where it comes from and how the workplace and individual people can promote it.
JAMIT Project

We promote well-being at work & support work ability

The goal of Support to Extend Careers (JAMIT) Project 2012–2014 is to promote well-being at work, support work ability and develop practices and the working culture at workplaces. The idea is to have workplaces support work ability and to develop support practices for employees with partial work ability. The National Social and Health Policy Strategy 2020 states that all people of working age, including those with partial work ability, must have the possibility to participate in working life according to their resources. The development efforts pursued in the Jamit project involve the occupational health care organisation of the workplace and a regional rehabilitation service provider.

The aim of the project is to develop practices for promoting work ability and in particular for helping people with partial work ability to participate in work. Workplaces, in turn, focus on developing work ability management practices and strengthening sense of communality. The ability of employees to continue working or return to work and the quality of the required support are investigated and developed during the project.

The goals of the project will be achieved through developing cooperation models and practices in workplaces and in occupational health care and rehabilitation cooperation. The project is targeted at healthcare and metal industries and municipal workplaces. The development work is pursued by the Rehabilitation Foundation, Research and Education Centre Synergos of the University of Tampere School of Management, Avire-Kuntoutus Oy and Härmä Rehabilitation Centre. Other parties contributing to the development efforts within the project are municipal occupational health care service providers from Uusimaa and Southern Ostrobothnia. The project is funded by the European Social Fund and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.
Social capital within the work community

Social capital is an immaterial success factor characteristic of communities that work effectively. Social capital takes the form of shared values, norms and confidence, and appreciation between operators. Social capital stems from doing things together and from shared experiences. Therefore, its development calls for active efforts and mutuality. In fact, we can say that social capital is a system that feeds itself.

Good management and clearly formulated procedures in the work community promote social capital. Social capital should be developed and fostered mindfully in the work community.

The success of future organisations depends increasingly on their intellectual capital. Intellectual capital consists not only of social capital but also of psychological capital, referring to the individual's mental resources, and structural capital, which refers to organisational structures, the ability to reform and to the possibility to influence one's work. These, in turn, create a sense of having control over work.

The elements of intellectual capital interact with and support each other in an effective organisation. On the other hand, problems encountered in a particular sub-area easily reflect on other elements: e.g. an obscure, poorly justified organisational structure may undermine the sense of community.
SOCIAL CAPITAL = The condition of the community:
- the quality of the management
- the sense of communality

PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL = The employee’s mental resources

STRUCTURAL CAPITAL = The effectiveness and learning capacity of the organisation, control over work
Who benefits from communality?

For employer

The capital formed by the organisation’s employees, structures and policies, is intellectual in contrast to buildings, machinery and equipment, which are called material or physical capital. Intellectual capital plays a particularly important role in labour-dominated sectors, in which the share of personnel expenses can be more than a half of the organisation’s total expenditure.

Intellectual capital can be divided into three parts: effective structures, such as working methods and the possibility to influence one’s work; social capital, which stems from good management and good relations between employees, and psychological capital, which consists of the attitudes and mental resources of each employee.

It has been found that the development and efficient use of material capital only accounts for 10-50% of the organisation’s result, while the efficient use of intellectual capital is believed to account for 50-90%. Therefore, all organisations should consider how to take care of their personnel. Employees cannot do their best if overloaded and faced with hectic schedules.

Too little social capital prevents the flow of information, limits creativity and increases the risk of falling ill. A good team spirit allows people to try and even fail, which is the precondition for innovations. A lack of social capital and shared, internal norms makes the organisation rigid and bureaucratic, and it can be costly and difficult to motivate the employees to good performance.
For employee

The scope and quality of communality influence employees’ health. The quality of working life is the most important social factor influencing health. Among other things, this is shown in the fact that good occupational well-being protects health in challenging life situations, whereas problems in personal life do not necessarily impair wellbeing at work.

According to a study, in work communities with little social capital, the risk of impaired health was 30% higher and the risk of depression symptoms 30–50% higher compared with work communities with high social capital. People with little personal social capital had as high as a 1.8-fold risk of becoming ill.

Therefore, communality benefits employers and employees alike. It makes it easier to achieve goals and also tends to accumulate: the more it is used, the more it grows. However, social capital may also have negative effects. If communality does not withstand diversity, it can also be excluding and narrowing. Close social relations can result in unacceptable phenomena, such as bullying, jealousy and forming clicks.

To consider:

- In what cases can close social relations in the workplace turn from an advantage to a disadvantage?
- How can we prevent forming clicks in work communities?
Effects of social capital on the quality and productivity of work

According to research, careers can be extended from the middle and end by improving communal-ity and the operation of work communities. It is profitable to develop social capital, because the employees of workplaces with high social capital have less illnesses and they retire later. In fact, a good atmosphere in the workplace is the most important incentive for employees to continue at their current workplace – even more important than meaningful tasks or rewarding.

Employees with a greater level of well-being are capable of more high-quality performance, which also shows in customer well-being and satisfaction. The occupational well-being of school personnel correlates with better school success, school satisfaction and less absences among pupils. Hospital infections are more common at wards where the personnel experienced unfair behaviour, cooperation problems and stress and had to work more overtime.

Today careers are shortened by different types of mental problems, depression in particular. Unfair treatment by the supervisor increases the likelihood of depression among employees. If behaviour in the workplace is fair, employees on a long sick leave return to work more quickly, which can extend their careers by several years.

Mental violence also has a negative impact on productivity. This can take form of bullying, harassment, exclusion or talking behind someone’s backs. It has been found that hospital employees subjected to prolonged bullying have a five-fold risk of developing depression as compared to others. In addition, employees bullied in the workplace take about 50% more sick leave. It can be estimated that in an average workplace with 250 employees, bullying reduces the company’s financial result by tens of thousands of euro in the form of sick leave costs alone.

The costs caused by problems in work community are further increased by the growing occupational health costs, weakened productivity and higher personnel turnover.
Increasing the employees’ possibility of influence and have control over their work improves the personnel productivity particularly in workplaces where there is a lot of work and the work is demanding. Employees suffering from mental symptoms are more likely to be on a sick leave in workplaces where the demands of work are considered high and the possibility to have control over work is small than in workplaces where the demands are considered reasonable and control opportunities are good.

Premature retirement can be prevented through good team spirit and fair supervisory work. Of the employees considering the situation with the management and/or work community to be poor, a much larger number considers premature retirement compared to those who consider the situation good. Particularly among senior salaried employees, the possibility to influence matters and a good social atmosphere in the workplace increase the desire to continue at work.

References


Communality – social capital, where does it arise from?

A positive attitude provides a framework

An employee with a positive state of mind is inventive, innovative and empathic. Negative and positive attitudes spread in the work community. A positive work atmosphere can also be felt by customers.

Positive emotions expand perception and thus also allow for the creation of new ideas and perspectives. A positively spirited work atmosphere supports creativity, gives room for difference and is connected with higher productivity and higher levels of confidence. Positive emotions and experiences strengthen our mental resources and help us better cope with challenges and act in a goal-oriented manner. Positivity has also been found to reduce the risk of illness and increase satisfaction with life.

Negative and positive emotions accumulate in the work community. Reflecting the emotional reactions of group members has supported the survival of mankind: we have had to stay alert in order to detect signs of danger in other people’s behaviour. Employees keep especially close eye on the actions and reactions of their supervisors, whose emotional expression thus plays an important role. Finns usually express their emotions neutrally. However, other people may consider neutral facial expressions and utterances negative, so it will not do any harm to be overtly positive sometimes.

On the other hand, it is good to have a time and place in the workplace where negative emotions, fears and difficult experiences can be handled safely and where they are allowed. For instance, ‘grumbling boxes’, ‘worry clinics’ and ‘complaint quarter hours’ have been set up in work communities. Discuss in the workplace what kind of a ‘relief valve’ would help you talk about your worries.

To consider:

- Everybody can influence the atmosphere in the workplace; start thinking what kind of energy you convey to your environment?
- How can you bring joy to your colleague’s day?
Good Management

I can trust my supervisor. / My supervisor treats employees thoughtfully and in a friendly manner. / My supervisor respects employees’ rights.

Good management is based on mutual exchange between the supervisor and the employee. This is characterised by mutual trust, respect and reciprocity. Employees then receive resources for their work, such as guidance and advice from the supervisor, where needed. However, they also have the chance to influence their work and do it independently.

Supervisor’s fair behaviour generates trust. Fairness can be viewed from three perspectives:

1. Fair distribution of the results of work, i.e. everybody receives what he/she deserves.

2. Fair policies: observed fairness of decision-making principles and procedures.

3. Fair treatment of employees: in what way does the supervisor interact with the employees when communicating about his/her policies and justifying decisions.

High-quality interaction not only predicts good performance, but also good work community skills: diligence, fairness, unselfishness and politeness. Reciprocity thereby increases the sense of community, or social capital.

The notion of employees about the quality of interaction is strongly connected with psychological empowerment, which relates to considering one’s work important, confidence in one’s competence, possibility to make decisions and influence things at work, and the right to independently choose the way of doing the work.
In research, the following principles have been proposed as the key features of fairness in working life:

- Each employee has the right to be heard in matters concerning him/her.

- The rules followed in the workplace are consistent (people are treated according to the same principles, and the same rules apply today and tomorrow).

- Decision-making is impartial.

- Decisions are based on the most correct information available.

- Decisions can be corrected.

- Decision-making rules are as logical as possible and have been indicated to those whom the decisions concern.

To consider:

- What do you think about the above principles and whether they are implemented at your workplace?
Good team spirit

We keep each other up-to-date in matters concerning work. Members of the work community act together in order to implement new ideas. Members of the work community take into consideration others’ improvement proposals in order to reach the best possible outcome. Our aim is: ‘we act together’. Everybody feels understood and accepted.

Communality calls for reciprocity, in which the parties are the supervisor and the employee. As a result, one now also talks about work community skills, a type of competence with which one in a way exceeds the expectations related to his/her own work role. They concern both the employer and the employee.

At the level of the individual, work community skills appear as responsibility and commitment to work tasks, but in groups they take the form of actions promoting cooperation: helping others, fairness and the desire to work for the common good without complaining about trivial issues. They often include the obligation viewpoint: taking care of the pleasantness of the workplace, sensible use of resources, cooperation with colleagues and supervisors, expression of opinion to forward matters and active participation in workplace development.

At the organisational level, work community skills are connected with voluntary participation, for which no salary is paid. Skills can be regarded as behaviour which the employees are not obligated to under official agreements but which they are mentally committed to.
Promoting social capital

**Employer’s means**

- A shared goal: each member of the work community has a shared view of the goals, and the members act together in order to achieve them.

- Drawing up an occupational well-being plan, which sets out measures to develop occupational well-being and defines indicators and monitoring methods in order to assess the implementation of measures.

- A flexible structure allows freedom of speech and the free communication of information.

- Increasing the feeling of self-guidance and control over work.

- Appreciating everybody’s work and respecting difference.

- Competence development.

- Strengthening self-confidence, allowing experiences of success, and a culture of learning – by encountering colleagues and customers.

- Developing meeting practices so that everybody can participate or at least receive information on jointly agreed matters.

**Supervisor’s means**

- Fair organisation of work, i.e. the supervisor is fair and allows employees to participate in decision-making.

- Reliability and acting as an example. The supervisor follows ethical values in life and is logical and transparent in decision-making.

- Psychological and emotional support and emotional intelligence. The supervisor acts as a coach and provides both positive and constructive feedback, where necessary. Employees can turn to the supervisor whenever need be, as the supervisor will listen to them and be mentally present.

- Looking after employees, monitoring their mental and physical loading and interfering with the situation, when necessary.

- Authorisation and motivation to reach goals, showing creative thought and questioning one’s patterns of thought. The supervisor is intelligently inspiring.

- Leading optimism. The supervisor looks after a positive atmosphere in the workplace.
Employee’s means

We already learn in the daycare centre or in elementary school to say hello and thank you to everybody, apologise, wait our turn, help others and clean the mess we have caused. These are important, though not self-evident, work community skills.

It is important for the smooth operation of the work community that everybody in the workplace recognises their responsibility for the fluency of the work and for maintaining a good atmosphere. Today’s working life emphasises interaction and cooperation skills. A good team player knows how to give and accept constructive and encouraging feedback, and shows recognition to others if there is reason to do so. He/she can also be active and expresses his/her opinions in suitable situations. He/she seeks to promote a positive atmosphere through his/her own actions and does not talk behind people’s backs or spread malicious rumours.

A good work community member primarily works to reach the community’s goals and does not seek personal interests. However, one does not have to sacrifice one’s well-being for the work community: a good employee knows how to set limits to what he/she is doing, take time to himself/herself and look after his/her well-being to the best of his/her ability.

To maintain a good atmosphere, it is important to take up problems immediately and frankly with the parties involved. Disputes are part of normal life, but it is in nobody’s interest if they remain unsettled. When taking up a matter, it is necessary to ask for wishes and proposals on how it could be settled, not to look for guilty people or explanations about why a specific matter could not be done.

What can I do to promote the sense of communality?

- Taking care of my basic tasks and looking after my skills.
- Fairness and politeness, greeting, saying thank you, but also apologising, when necessary.
- Actively helping and also showing interest in others’ work.
- Taking care of the pleasantness of the workplace and of the sensible use of resources.
- Cooperation with colleagues and supervisors: I ask if I don’t know.
- Giving and, where necessary, requesting feedback if it has been forgotten.
- Stating one’s opinion in order to forward things, also taking up problems in a solution-centred manner.
- Active participation in workplace development.
- Promoting a positive atmosphere – not talking behind anybody’s back.
What can we do as a work community in order to promote good team spirit?

- We foster a positive atmosphere.
- Friendliness, gratefulness, sharing good news and highlights with our customers.
- Learning cooperation skills.
- Openness, fairness, helping others, activeness.
- Appreciating everybody’s work

Intellectual approaches:

- At times we stop to think as a team about the things that are in order and those that require development.
- Preparing ‘joint rules of the game’.

To develop mutuality:

- Stay vigilant: also identify wordless messages, be attentive to tones of voice and recognise the emotional state.
- Show that you are listening by nodding and uttering. Try to put into words the emotional state that you perceive in others. For example, if somebody wrinkles his/her forehead, you can say ‘I see that you are wrinkling your forehead. I might not have explained the matter well enough. Would you like to hear more?’
- Encourage the person to tell more, but be patient and remain silent.
- Repeat in your own words what you hear so that the person knows that he/she has been heard. This also allows you to make sure that you have understood the matter correctly. However, never omit anything from or add anything to what the person has said.
- Ask for more information: ask for confirmation or clarification, construct open questions and avoid asking why.
‘Let’s bury Somebody Else’

In a training event, a nurse told me about an email message she had received, entitled ‘Condolences’. She was shocked by the news and opened the message, which read ‘Welcome to the funeral’. First we spend time in silence and then bury Somebody Else. The presence of all employees is necessary.’

A colleague had sent the message after having become tired of filling empty shelves after others.

The idea could be freely circulated, because then miracles would happen. The stapler in the copying room would be refilled, there would be no paper jams in the copying machine, there would be enough paper inside it, and the last colour cartridge would have been replaced with a new one.

If there is no Somebody Else in our team, I will put dishes in the dishwasher in the kitchen, wipe the table clean and switch on the coffee machine to make fresh coffee. I would do things that are important in my workplace in order to perform the work smoothly.

When coming to work in the morning, I would also think about the emotions I bring with me: grumbling or joy. I will greet my colleagues without waiting to see whether somebody will bother to say me hello in return and, if not, I will not dwell on it thinking why he or she again did not greet me. I also see my supervisor to ask for feedback, if he/she has forgotten it.

If I am bothered by something, I will talk to the person in question about it and won’t lock myself in my best friend’s room to complain about the behaviour of other people, I will not keep the matter to myself either, pondering late at night how wonderful it would be to say what I think about the person – or even quit my job.

I will not wait for the good fairy to appear in the form of a consultant and wave their magic wand at our workplace and solve the eternal quarrels. Instead, I will ask what we can do about it. If I notice that my colleague has far too much work to do, I will ask whether I can help. Perhaps he/she could help me if I happened to be trouble.

Column of Marja-Liisa Manka, Professor of Well-Being at Work, at the ‘Slow Life’ blog on 30 January 2012 hidastaelamaa.fi
How to increase the sense of community?

‘Talk, negotiate involve everybody. This could translate into a better atmosphere. Do not leave your colleague alone if you see that he/she is being discriminated. Hopefully you can tell whether a colleague is being discriminated.’ – A person bullied 20 years ago.

Living together does not always need to be smooth, but edges are part of development. Differences can be converted into new solutions to everyday problems. Therefore, it is quite normal that conflicts occur. However, it is never hopeless to take up problems. When a problem that has been consuming the work community’s energy for years is finally solved, energy and joy will come pouring down.

Think about your own workplace with the help of the following questions:

- Are discussions held in a positive or negative spirit?
- Are the discussions enthusiastic?
- Are both positive and negative things taken up in the discussions?
- Do people drink coffee together or in their own offices?
- Is there clicking between employees?
- Are office doors open?
- Does the workplace arrange shared activities and events, e.g. office parties?
- Is there laughter in the corridors?
- Is appropriate language used in the workplace?
- Does everybody greet each other?
- Is humour permitted and is it acceptable to everybody?

To consider:

- What would increase communality at our workplace?
- What undermines communality at our workplace?
The view of the members of a workplace about matters promoting or destroying communality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promotes</th>
<th>Destroys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transparency – discussion about how a matter has proceeded/been dealt with</td>
<td>Hiding, not talking about things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty, also taking up problems</td>
<td>Jealousy, underrating, gossiping, unfriendliness, clicking, talking behind someone’s back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing experiences</td>
<td>Looking after one’s own interests, competition to achieve personal goals, looking for personal acceptance through deeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help and guidance, respecting and listening to others</td>
<td>Teams: mutual competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared activities and events</td>
<td>Not receiving help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good colleagues</td>
<td>Unfair actions / attitudes of the management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good professional skills</td>
<td>Ignorance and irresponsibility, not taking other people into consideration (does not concern me, not part of my job description, somebody else will do it)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciating one’s work</td>
<td>Bullying and scapegoating people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to shared procedures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support, praising, approval, having a good time together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smiling, laughing, being friendly, patience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table on the opposite page contains matters that can be included in workplace and team policies. The policies should be constructed together so that each member of the work community and all professional groups have a genuine possibility to influence them.
## Team policies

### Task management
- Goals
- Basic tasks and responsibilities
- Extra tasks and their allocation
- Management, responsibility for decisions
- Flow of information
- Meeting practices
- Competences
- Scheduling
- Assessment and feedback

### Communality
- Shared vision, target state
- Shared values
- Team agreement
- Team spirit and cooperation
- Development of skills
- Meeting practices
- Team roles
- Harnessing the strengths and special skills of members

### Customers
- Who are our customers?
References


Support to Extend Careers
2012–2014

JAMIT

Project

yhteistyössä:

Rehabilitation Foundation

Tampereen Yliopisto
Johtamiskorkeakoulu
Synergos

Avire Kuntoutus

Härmän Kuntokeskus
Communality supports health, well-being, learning and productivity at work. The sense of communality and interaction between work community members gives rise to social capital, which can be understood as features strengthening the operation, confidence, mutuality and networking in the community. A key element in building confidence is belief in the usefulness of being together, in the importance of common benefits and in being confident about receiving help and support. The scope and quality of communality influence employees’ health and thus also the productivity of the operations.

This guide was compiled as part of Support to Extend Careers (JAMIT) Project. The guide provides information on the elements of communality and how communality can be fostered and developed in workplaces.

**Support to Extend Careers (JAMIT) Project 2012–2014** promotes occupational well-being and work ability. The main goal is to have workplaces support work ability and to find means for helping people with partial work ability continue at work. Another aim is to develop cooperation between municipal occupational health care service providers and other operators to promote work ability. The project is funded by the European Social Fund, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health through its ‘Healthy and Competent at Work’ development programme. The project is administered by the Rehabilitation Foundation, Research and Education Centre Synergos of the University of Tampere School of Management, Avire-Kuntoutus Oy and Härmä Rehabilitation Centre. Other parties contributing to the development efforts within the project are municipal occupational health service providers from Uusimaa and Southern Ostrobothnia.