

**The ARK programme – bottom up organizational health interventions for improving well-being, health and productivity in the academic sector in Norway**

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Scientific and practitioners' research presentations

- a. Bottom-up and community-driven interventions
- b. Institutional interventions and policies
- c. Policy-Level insights

**Purpose**

The aim of this presentation is, by showing the results and experiences from the ARK-programme (Innstrand & Christensen, 2020), to suggest new and holistic approaches to tackle some of the challenges in the academic sector regarding mental health. The value of this presentation is to show promising experiences and results (Christensen et al., 2018) from a large-scale intervention programme for mental health in the workplace with a bottom-up profile. The programme includes a large databank of quantitative data and a unique opportunity to follow processes at over 20 universities and university colleges (using ARK for qualitative data collection and process evaluation.)

Considerable knowledge has accumulated concerning risk factors in organisations and their connections to occupational illnesses and injuries, comparably less is known about effective participatory interventions for reducing the risk factors and promoting resources in the workplace, and especially in the academic sector. Nordic countries have a history of pioneering research on the alienation of work and the dangers of Taylorism and a broader concern of work on democratization, tripartite cooperation between the parts in work life and

the state, and alternative ways of work organization. The Nordic model defines the elements of good work such as autonomy, variety, learning and participation in decisions. These contextual characteristics have been institutionalized as shared attitudes towards work, the responsibility of organizations towards employees and the focus on worker health and productivity. The ARK programme has therefore a special emphasis on participation and strengthening the psychosocial work environment in the organizational development processes.

### **Design**

ARK is an Norwegian abbreviation for “Arbeidsmiljø- og Klima undersøkelser ” (work environment and climate surveys), and is a comprehensive research based plan and tool for 1) systematic mapping of the psychosocial work environment and 2) development and implementation of interventions for improving well-being, health and performance in higher education in Norway (Innstrand et al., 2015). The objective of ARK is that it should be used as a leader tool that contributes to understanding and development of the work environment with a focus on both demands and resources. ARK ensures compliance with the working environment act on systematic HSE-work with psychosocial factors, it generates a basis for interventions in the work environment, it is an arena for participation and influence, it is founded in cooperation between the Parties of Working Life and it is made for the employee with a participatory bottom up approach. Nielsen, et al. (2010) developed a framework including five important phases of an organizational health intervention, together with the core elements that are to be reflected on under each phase. The phases are: 1) Initiation, 2) screening, 3) development of actions, 4) implementation of interventions, and 5) evaluation of interventions. Participation of the employees is important in all phases. The five phases are not orthogonal, but in a more simplistic way

illustrate complex processes of overlapping and interaction between the different phases (Nielsen & Randall, 2013). The ARK intervention-programme is built on, and all departments should follow, the suggested five phases.

The data from the questionnaire survey (KIWEST) is stored in a common databank and includes at this time over 45000 respondents. Over 20 universities and university colleges in Norway use the ARK intervention programme and it thereby gives us a unique opportunity to follow the processes for research purposes and uncover the success factors for improving mental health in academia.

## **Results**

One of the success factors for the ARK intervention programme that was found was the bottom-up participatory profile founded in the core of the Nordic model (Christensen et al, 2019; Helland et al, 2021). The advantage of this profile contributed firstly to put the psychosocial work environment on the agenda and establish a communication channel for the work environment between the leader and the employees. The safety representative and line manager of each department were obliged to sit together and fill in the forms regarding the implementation and evaluation of the interventions they had chosen and agree on the results. The interventions were further developed locally targeting special needs strengths and challenges. It also had success by focusing on resources and the motivational processes of the psychosocial work environment in addition to the demands and health impairment processes. Working on these two processes felt motivating and constructive for the employees when developing actions for mental health. The work within the ARK-programme has been contributing to an understanding and development of the work environment with a focus on both demands and resources. It has also ensured compliance with the working environment

act on systematic HSE-work with the psychosocial factors that are defined as elements of good work within the Nordic model.

## Implications

An “ARK approach” – as a comprehensive participatory plan/instrument for investigation and implementation of interventions, seems to be beneficial for the academic sector bringing knowledge of what constitutes a more healthy academic practice, and possibly be a win-win situation for both the employees and the organizations contributing to knowledge for a better world.

## Acknowledgments

The ARK research platform at HUNT [ARK - Arbeidsmiljø og miljøundersøkelser \(ntnu.no\)](https://www.ntnu.no/ark)

## Resources

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