Primer
A workshop model for promoting well-being at work and work ability

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The most important resource in the workplace is personnel that feels well. For this reason, devoting time and money to the well-being of personnel is an investment that pays for itself. Promoting work ability increases the attractiveness of a workplace and commitment to work. The optimum situation is to have a management team that takes work ability into account and implements caring and concrete actions to promote work ability. Affordable, light and easy-to-use methods are needed for the promotion of well-being at work. To date, the promotion of work ability and health has played too small a role, particularly in small businesses. For instance, there are substantial differences in how occupational health care is arranged, and supplementary vocational training and business advisory services rarely look deeper into issues related to well-being at work.

The Primer workshop model for activities promoting work ability helps you – whether you are an entrepreneur, an occupational health care professional, an active association member, an HR officer or a trainer – to have an easy and inspiring discussion with employees or small business entrepreneurs. With the aid of the practical workshop, you get important information directly from employees and entrepreneurs, who are the best experts in their own work. The Primer workshop is a tool that provides information on the cornerstones of well-being at work as well as on issues that are already in order and issues that need development. It is a step on the path towards the joint development of the workplace and increasing employees’ opportunities to influence their work environment. The workshop can also be implemented by inviting sole entrepreneurs to participate. This creates an opportunity for peer support and dialogue with other entrepreneurs regarding the cornerstones of an entrepreneur’s well-being at work. As an operating method, joint development creates the sense of togetherness in the workplace and among entrepreneurs and offers staff an opportunity to realize that no-one is alone with his/her thoughts. The workshop model can be applied to various types of groups.

This workshop model ditches the concept of traditional meetings in which the focus is on documents. Instead, employees and entrepreneurs get a chance to draw and discuss in the spirit of positive development! Primer gets the creative juices flowing.

Have a good time through joint development!
Tips and more information: www.ttl.fi/en
### Objective:
The Primer workshop inspires participants to think about the different dimensions of their own work ability, their role as professionals and their working conditions. In the Primer workshop, the participants draw a car and use it as an aid in contemplating the characteristics of an entrepreneur or employee with a high level of well-being, for instance, describing them through the properties and components of the car. The workshop can focus on one or two different questions, such as “What makes an entrepreneur or employee who has a high level of well-being?”, “What makes a good supervisor?” or “What makes a good customer?”. The participants’ thoughts are analysed through discussion using the Work Ability House model, and the most significant factors influencing the issue are identified. The analysis can also include an assessment of attributes based on whether there are development needs related to them in the participant’s own work or workplace.

### Implemented by:
**Leaders:** Occupational health services, trainers, HR officers, association officers.

**Participants:** Small workplaces, entrepreneurs, teams, work communities. Participants may come from different companies and work in different positions. Familiarity with the principles of the Work Ability House model is required in leading the exercise. There is no single right way to lead the workshop. All workshop leaders bring their own expertise to the exercise. For occupational health services, the Primer workshop is a tool for instruction and guidance. This means that it is also possible to participate in the discussion by expressing opinions and giving advice. Information related to the different floors of the Work Ability House can be shared during the workshop. The facts that are shared should be linked to the workshop participants’ sector or the demands their duties place on their work ability.
Familiarize yourself with the Work Ability House and don’t be afraid to experiment.
The Work Ability House illustrates work ability and its different aspects. It consists of four floors, with the lowest three floors describing the personal resources of the individual and the fourth floor describing work and working conditions. The Work Ability House functions well and remains standing when the different floors support each other. The development of all floors is important throughout the working career. More information on pages 14–15.

Where: Well-being at work days, development days, meetings, training events, work coaching and in conjunction with starting new projects.

If the participants represent the same work community: The workshop leader should discuss the goal of the workshop beforehand with the participating supervisors. The leader’s task is to encourage the supervisors to be open to all opinions and perspectives expressed during the workshop.

Duration and number of participants: 2 hours, 10–20 participants.

Equipment: Flip chart, flip chart paper, felt-tip pens, the Work Ability House model template (can be printed from our website or reproduced yourself), ordinary sheets of paper, adhesive tape and/or Blu-tack, vacant wall space where flip chart sheets can be put up, a camera for taking pictures of the small groups’ output.


Tip for supervisors: being open to the participants’ comments helps build trust in the community and highlight development areas that are perceived to be important.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop procedure: drawing, reflection and presentation of drawings</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☀ Before the workshop begins, the workshop leader prepares the workspaces for the small groups (at least 3 members per group, at least 3 groups) in appropriate places and for the appropriate number of people. The Work Ability House model is attached to the wall and blank sheets of A4 paper are attached next to each floor. The leader may also draw an illustration of the workshop’s procedure, goals and instructions on the flip chart.</td>
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<tr>
<td>☀ The workshop is carried out in small groups. The participants are divided into small groups of a minimum of three people. Each group is given one flip chart sheet and felt-tip pens. The sheets and pens can be distributed on the small groups’ desks ahead of time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>☀ The workshop leader introduces the workshop and explains its objectives and procedures. The leader then reads out his/her selected question, such as “What makes an employee who has a high level of well-being?” The leader provides an example of how the exercise can be carried out and draws a car on the flip chart. The leader points to the horn on the steering wheel of the car and explains how it could be considered to represent the employee’s alertness, for instance. The leader writes this information on the drawing. He/she may show and draw more than one example, if he/she wishes to do so (Examples 1 and 2 on Page 10). The leader can also think about the characteristics and parts of the car from his or her own perspective and share personal examples. The number of examples should be kept moderate to prevent the examples from excessively influencing the direction of the workshop activity. The leader then invites the participants to think about the question and the characteristics of the car from the perspective of themselves and their work. This helps with reflecting on one’s own situation, especially when the participants do not represent the same work community. The leader should remind the participants that there are no right or wrong answers with regard to the characteristics of the car drawn. Instead, the participants should be encouraged to include those characteristics that are important to them.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Workshop procedure: drawing, reflection and presentation of drawings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☀ Each small group selects a representative. The participants can also take this opportunity to introduce themselves to the other group members if they are not already familiar with each other. After this, the groups start working. The leader gives the groups approximately 20 minutes to complete the drawing. The leader gives encouragement to the small groups and monitors their progress. It is important that each participant contributes at least one characteristic to the drawing of a car produced collectively by the group. The leader should remind the groups to ensure that everyone makes a contribution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☀ When the small groups have completed their drawings, they are attached to the wall. The representatives of the small groups take turns presenting their group’s drawing to the other groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Workshop summary: analysis and assessment of the output**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>60 min.</th>
<th>15 min.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Break</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The leader introduces the Work Ability House model</strong> and explains its principles to the participants (Pages 5 and 12). The characteristics mentioned in the drawings are placed on the different floors of the Work Ability House. The characteristics are discussed one at a time and their placement in the House is decided through joint discussion. The participants are invited to highlight what they consider to be the most significant characteristics mentioned in the drawings. The leader should point out that everyone’s viewpoint is equally valuable and that perceptions can vary greatly between individuals, which means that characteristics highlighted by other participants should be treated with an open mind even if the person in question disagrees. As characteristics come up, the leader writes them down on the sheets of paper next to each floor. A characteristic may fit on more than one floor (Page 12). Not all of the characteristics mentioned in the drawings need to be placed on the various floors of the house.</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>If the participants represent the same work community:</strong> Following the placement of the characteristics next to the Work Ability House, there are two options:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Each participant is requested to assign priorities to the characteristics noted next to the floors of the house using the numbers 1–3. The characteristic perceived to be the most important or the highest priority for development is given the number 1, the next most important is given the number 2, and so on (Page 12). At this juncture, the leader should mention that if the participants feel that an important characteristic is missing, they can add new characteristics next to the floors of the house when they are assigning priorities to the characteristics.</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. The participants are each given three votes, which they can cast by drawing short vertical lines next to the characteristics they consider the most important or the highest priorities for development. The participants can give all three votes to one characteristic or divide the votes between multiple characteristics.</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Workshop summary: analysis and assessment of the output

It is a good idea to take pictures of the output for later use. The summary of the workshop is the shared view of all of the participants regarding the three most important issues related to well-being at work as well as on potential development areas. The leader then provides an oral summary of the characteristics that received the most votes ranking them as the highest priority or had the largest number of vertical lines drawn next to them. This is followed by a discussion of how to proceed from here and what will be done about these matters. The activity serves as a primer for collective discussion. The leader is responsible for ensuring that everyone has a clear understanding of what the next steps are.

If the discussion on a given issue is clearly not finished, it is a good idea to agree on when it will continue. Sometimes group discussions can leave thoughts simmering under the surface. For this reason, it would be a good idea to provide a channel for the participants to communicate their thoughts and feedback after the activity. This can be achieved by using feedback forms distributed at the end of the workshop and other similar instruments.

If the participants are entrepreneurs or represent different work communities and/or sectors: Each participant receives a blank sheet of A4 paper for writing down the three most important characteristics or development areas with regard to his/her own well-being or work ability. For development areas, the participants are invited to also write down the first thing they intend to do with regard to development in the area they consider to be the most important. The participants can share their most important development area with the other participants if they wish to do so. It is important for the workshop leader to encourage the participants to think about who they should ask for support in development. The participants should also engage in discussion on what kinds of resources help in the implementation of solutions. Each participant takes his or her notes with them at the end of the workshop.
Examples of drawings and reflections

**Example 1:**
What makes a good supervisor?

- **Engine**
  - good physical condition
  - fast and agile

- **Rear-view mirror**
  - is up-to-date
  - drives safely

- **Horn**
  - alert
  - sociable
  - customer service oriented

- **Headlights**
  - ensure that visibility is good

- **Exhaust pipe**
  - no stomach problems
  - eats healthily
  - knows how to relax and get rid of excessive emotional baggage

- **Gears**
  - drives economically and conservatively

- **Tyres**
  - stays on the road

**The make of the car**
- good professional identity
- lives responsibly
- feels a sense of professional pride
- is proud of his/her expertise
- the make of the car is a guarantee of reliability and durability

**Example 2:**
What makes an entrepreneur who has a high level of well-being?

- **Engine**
  - professional competence
  - work ability
  - know-how

- **Rear-view mirror**
  - keeps up-to-date

- **Good seat**
  - support and anchor

- **Headlights**
  - observes the operating environment, keeps his/her eyes open

- **Exhaust pipe**
  - “stress pipe”
  - does not let problems stew and boil over

- **Brakes**
  - knows his/her limits
  - recognizes his/her own imperfections
  - does not work until exhausted

- **Gears**
  - drives economically and conservatively

- **Tyres**
  - stays on the road

- **Engine**
  - professional competence
  - work ability
  - know-how

- **Rear-view mirror**
  - keeps up-to-date

- **Good seat**
  - support and anchor

- **Headlights**
  - observes the operating environment, keeps his/her eyes open

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  - does not work until exhausted

- **Gears**
  - drives economically and conservatively

- **Tyres**
  - stays on the road
## Examples of drawings and reflections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Car characteristic or part</th>
<th>Good supervisor (example 1)</th>
<th>Entrepreneur who has a high level of well-being (example 2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>engine</td>
<td>good physical condition, fast, agile</td>
<td>professional competence, work ability, knowledge, skills, available peer support network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>horn</td>
<td>alert, sociable, customer service oriented</td>
<td>alertness, quick reactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>headlights</td>
<td>ensure that visibility is good</td>
<td>observes the operating environment, keeps his/her eyes open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brakes</td>
<td>takes a break every now and then, knows how to relax, recognizes his/her own resources</td>
<td>understands his/her resources, knows his/her limits, recognizes his/her own imperfections, does not work until exhausted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good seat</td>
<td>determined, in control of the situation, does not get stressed out</td>
<td>support and anchor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exhaust pipe</td>
<td>eats healthily, knows how to relax and get rid of excessive emotional baggage</td>
<td>“stress pipe”, does not let problems stew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>petrol, oil</td>
<td>fuelled by healthy food</td>
<td>fuelled by healthy food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gears</td>
<td>drives economically, conservatively</td>
<td>flexible, adapts to situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tyres</td>
<td>stays on the road, is up-to-date</td>
<td>stays on the road, stays in the entrepreneur community, guides in the right direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rear-view mirror</td>
<td>keeps up-to-date, anticipates what is to come</td>
<td>keeps up-to-date, anticipates what is to come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the make of the car</td>
<td>identity of the work community, commitment</td>
<td>has understood his/her role, own professional identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>airbag</td>
<td>manages the finances to ensure that there is work for everyone going forward</td>
<td>insurance and finances are in good order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the body of the car</td>
<td>operational objectives are up-to-date, job descriptions are clear</td>
<td>business plan and budget are up-to-date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples of the analysis and assessment of the output

In this simplified example, arrows are used to describe the situation in which one characteristic applies to several aspects of work ability. For instance, “takes a break every now and then” may be related to working conditions but also to the person’s own attitude and values. In the actual workshop, the characteristics are written separately on every floor.

In the example picture above, the three development areas selected as the most important and numbered accordingly are as follows:

1. Health and functional capacity; nutrition, mental coaching
2. The strengthening of the employees’ role and professional identity; induction training, practices that support and develop competence, the values of the company
3. Separation of work and free time; sufficient rest and recovery

Sometimes the workshop is what gives impetus to, or serves as a primer for, the need to make changes. The aim of the workshop is to help the participants observe factors related to well-being at work and work ability. The participant may have a feeling of “is that it?” or “how do I move forward from here?” In this case, it is a good idea to think about who the people are and what the resources are that can provide support for making changes. An advanced follow-up exercise can also be a useful next step.
Advanced follow-up exercise: Finding solutions in small groups

Objective. The advanced exercise, “Finding solutions in small groups”, looks deeper into joint development and makes it more concrete. The aim is to jointly think up solutions with regard to the themes that came up in the Primer workshop, such as issues that are not yet functional in the workplace and need development. A second session is organized for the advance exercise. For the exercise, you will need the output of the previous session (the drawings of the car, the Work Ability House model with the characteristics) and sticky notes, pens, A4 paper and pieces of paper with two types of smileys: a happy smiley 😊 or a sad smiley 😞. The previous output is put up on the wall for review and to refresh everyone’s memory. If the output has been gathered in electronic form in the workshop, it can also be presented in electronic form.

Write down ideas. The participants are asked to write the ideas that the Primer workshop inspired in them or that otherwise occupy their minds on sticky notes. The issues can also be related to something other than the three development areas that were considered the most important ones and they can be more detailed. Each participant attaches his/her sticky note on the Work Ability House model or the car drawing, depending on which of them he/she considers best suited for the idea. The leader reads the ideas on the notes aloud and groups them thematically, aided by the participants.

Find solutions. The participants are divided into small groups of a maximum of six people. In each of the small groups, half of the participants each submit one issue that they wrote down on a sticky note for group discussion. The issues are phrased as problems that can be solved. Example: In the Primer workshop, it was noted that appropriate meals are important; “fuelled by healthy food”. For one of the participants, experience has inspired the thought that having meals during the night shift is challenging in terms of alertness. This is phrased as a problem that can be solved: “How should meals be arranged during the night shift so that we can stay alert?”. For each problem, there will be several solutions, one from each member of the group excluding the owner of the problem. The owner of the problem then decides on which of the proposed solutions appeals the most to him/her.

Assess the solutions. The selected solutions are presented to the other small groups. The other groups vote on the solution with the smiley cards, choosing the 😊 or 😞 smiley depending on whether they consider the solution to be feasible or not. If one of the groups disagrees on the solution, they justify their objection and the matter is discussed. The solutions may be very concrete: “Drink fresh water regularly.”, “Eat fruit and carrots.”, “Buy a cool bag and take some rye bread, cold cuts, yoghurt, quark and berry soup as a packed meal with you.”, “Give up eating greasy food.” and so on.

Turn solutions into a practice. The aim is that the accepted solutions will also be implemented in the workplace in practice. For instance, in the future the employer pays for cool bags for the employees, occupational health care services focus on providing guidelines for night-time meals or an entrepreneur takes a packed meal with him/her to work. The execution, schedule and assessment of the solutions are agreed together.
What is the Work Ability House?

Work ability can be depicted as a house. The Work Ability House has four floors, of which the first three represent an individual’s personal resources and the top floor represents work itself, working conditions and leadership.

Influence of networks and the wider environment
The Work Ability House is surrounded by networks of family, relatives and friends. The significance of a solo entrepreneur’s networks is intensified in the absence of a work community. The structures and rules of society also affect an individual’s work ability. The operating environment creates the whole house’s framework. Responsibility for an individual’s work ability is thus divided between the worker, the organization and society.

Health and functional capacity are the foundations of the house, formed from the combination of physical capacity, psychological and social functional capacity, and health. Lifestyle habits play a considerable role in overall well-being, and through this, also in recovery from work and coping at work. In small enterprises, the health problems and sickness absences of employees or the entrepreneur affect the functioning of the whole work community. The working arrangements of partially disabled workers also affect the work community.
**Competence** is on the second floor of the house. Basic education, professional knowledge and skills, and earlier experience form the basis of competence. Continuous updating of knowledge and skills, i.e. lifelong learning, is important because new demands on work ability and new areas of competence are constantly emerging in every field.

**Values, attitude and motivation** form the third floor. On this floor, work life meets the other areas of life and a balance must be found. One’s own attitudes to working and entrepreneurship significantly affect work ability. Professional identity also affects attitudes and values. If an individual finds their work meaningful and suitably challenging, this strengthens work ability. In contrast, if work is uninspiring and fails to meet one’s expectations, work ability is weakened. The motivation of an organization’s personnel affects the whole work community. Attitudes to work and entrepreneurship may also change with age. Readiness for and tolerance of change, and the desire to develop, make changes in work life easier.

**Leadership, work community, working conditions and work** are on the fourth floor of the house. This floor concretely illustrates the workplace or organization. One can also work in many different places (at home, in cafés etc.), and a solo entrepreneur may have no work community at all. It is the responsibility and obligation of supervisors and directors to organize and develop activities to promote well-being at the workplace. A well-functioning, safe work environment, a good atmosphere, and a sense of community and co-operation are important. Systematic planning of work, a closely thought-out objective and a motivated supervisor are also essential for the well-being of workers.

**One floor supports the other**
Work ability is a matter of compatibility and balance between people’s resources and their work. The Work Ability House stays intact when all the floors support one another. However, changes in work and working conditions occur all the time. Moreover, age or illness may also cause significant changes in individuals’ resources, which are depicted by the lower floors.

**Responsibility and co-operation**
It is important to constantly develop all the floors of the house during work life and entrepreneurship. The aim is to secure work ability and well-being at work as both people and work change. Naturally, an individual is ultimately responsible for their own resources, but work and working conditions, i.e. the fourth floor are mainly the responsibility of the employer, entrepreneur and supervisor.

The best results as regards maintaining work ability and promoting well-being at work are achieved through co-operation between different parties and supporting organizations (including occupational health services and occupational safety and health committees). The employer and the entrepreneur can foster the development of resources in many ways, but it is important for the employee to also actively participate in the promotion of both their own and their work community’s well-being.

The Work Ability House is based on Professor Juhani Ilmarinen’s studies among others, which determined the factors that influence work ability.
This workshop model was developed in partnership with workplaces and entrepreneurs under the Women @ work – Working together with female entrepreneurs to promote their work ability and health at the workplace ESF development project co-ordinated by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and the Shape up your body and mind – promoting the work ability and health of people engaged in physically strenuous work at workplaces ESF development project carried out as part of the ESF consortium. The model has also been tested in the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health’s occupational safety officer course and with beautician teachers. The model is based on Hitting Home?, a model previously developed in the Young Driver Can! Promoting young professional drivers’ work ability and work life skills ESF project.

Tips and more information: www.ttl.fi/en