



Guided Working Group

Brief Description

A Guided Working Group is composed of members of the target group and facilitated by an external person who is not part of the target group. In some cases, other relevant people who are in close contact with the target group (experts on the target group's lived experience) may take part in addition to target group representatives.

The so-called *Health Circle (Gesundheitszirkel)*, a health action group method used in occupational health promotion is the best-known and most common form of a Guided Working Group the health field in Germany.

The strength of this method is that it gives the target group the opportunity to define health problems and their causes as a group, and to develop solutions. The target group can also describe its own resources and strengths for health. Due to its high degree of self-determination, the Guided Working Group is a significant resource in itself.

Prerequisites

- A suitable venue where the group can talk without being disturbed
- Experience in facilitating group discussions

Applications

- Target group Needs Assessment
- Developing strategies for action

Process Overview

1. Recruiting participants from the target group
2. Organising a venue
3. Discussion (facilitation and documentation of results, repeated where appropriate)
4. Responding to outcomes

Resources Required

Time:

Recruiting members of the target group may take a lot of time. The participants should decide the frequency and duration of sessions and the overall lifetime of the group.

Personnel:

One worker is needed to facilitate the working group.

Materials:

Writing pads, pens, facilitation materials and a flip chart to record the discussion.

Other Costs:

Refreshments may also be served.



Detailed Working Steps

1. Recruiting Participants from the Target Group

Belonging to the target group and a strong motivation to participate in the process are the two most important criteria for choosing potential participants. Participation by members of the target group who have particularly good insights into their concerns because they are well connected or in a position of leadership is an advantage.

2. Organising a Suitable Venue

A venue that is conducive to discussion should be chosen for the group sessions. It should be a place where participants feel at ease and one that offers good working conditions. Public places such as parks or restaurants are not excluded here as long as they allow for a group discussion to take place undisturbed.

3. Discussion (Facilitation and Documentation of Results)

The task of facilitation is not just to lead the discussion but also, and primarily, to enable an exchange among participants on the group's topic. The more participants can organise the group themselves, the better it is for its development. Participants should determine the ways in which the outcomes of discussion will be documented. These may include audio recording, notes on a flip chart, visualisations using cards or just verbal summaries by members of the group.

4. Responding to Outcomes

Objectives and strategies developed by participants may not necessarily have to be put into practice by the participants (alone). Depending on their scope and focus this will require the involvement of others, e.g. certain decision-makers or service organisations. Neither are facilitators responsible for putting objectives and strategies into practice, only for supporting the group to clarify the necessary implementation steps.

Please Note:

- In contrast to a Focus Group, the facilitator does not determine the topics of a Guided Working Group. The task of facilitation is to enable constructive communication among participants so that they can jointly define problems and develop potential courses of action.
- The Guided Working Group is an open-ended process that supports a target group to take charge in improving their circumstances. If a service organisation is looking for specific information to improve existing services or structures, other methods (e.g. Rapid Assessment, Focus Group) are more suitable.
- The Guided Working Group is not an educational method, but one aimed at self-determination. It is not about teaching a target group particular behaviours or information, but about promoting self-efficacy or empowerment through the experience of self-determination.



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Further Advice

- The idea of a working group may not be interesting to many target groups initially, because the connection between this form of collaboration and potential improvements to their own life or health situation is not self-evident. A Focus Group may offer a no-obligation, time-limited entry point to a discussion of common problems that may then motivate participants to establish a working group.
- A time limit on collaborating in the form of a working group (as is the case in the original concept for the German *Gesundheitszirkel*, the Occupational Health Action Group) can be a motivating factor because it makes the required effort seem manageable. However, depending on the participants' wishes, a working group may meet for an extended period.
- A health problem raised as a topic by the target group may provide the impetus for establishing a working group. Such a direct connection between a problem already recognised by those affected and the opportunity of dealing with it collectively is a promising starting point for committed collaboration.
- Experience from occupational health promotion shows the advantages and disadvantages of including participants who are not target group members in a working group (in the German workplace example: *Gesundheitszirkel*, Occupational Health Action Group). In many workplaces there are "mixed" Occupational Health Action Groups that include not only employees (the target group), but, for example, team leaders, management and company doctors. The participation of people not belonging to the target group may be an advantage if they can decisively influence the target group's living or working conditions. However, especially such mixed groups must ensure that members of the target group can express themselves and develop ideas and suggestions to improve their situation without fear of reprisals or other negative consequences. This may be achieved, for example, through the opportunity to work out their positions in separate meetings for target group representatives only.

Authors: Block/Unger/Wright

Further Reading and Links

Faller, G. & Meier, S. (2002). *Gesundheitszirkel für Studierende. Ein Modellprojekt.* Düsseldorf: Landesunfallkasse Nordrhein-Westfalen.

(Faller, G. & Meier, S. (2002). Health Action Groups for Students: A Pilot Project. Düsseldorf: State Accident Insurance North Rhine-Westphalia. (In German))

Slesina, W., Beuels, F.-R. & Sochert, R. (1998). *Betriebliche Gesundheitsförderung. Entwicklung und Evaluation von Gesundheitszirkeln zur Prävention arbeitsbedingter Erkrankungen.* Weinheim: Juventa.

(Slesina, W., Beuels, F.-R. & Sochert, R. (1998). Occupational Health Promotion. Development and Evaluation of Health Action Groups for the Prevention of Work-Related Illness. Weinheim: Juventa. (In German))



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Sochert, R. (2000). Gesundheitszirkel: Evaluation eines integrierten Konzeptes betrieblicher Gesundheitsförderung. In A. Schröer, A. (Hrsg.), Betriebliches Gesundheitsmanagement und Prävention arbeitsbedingter Gesundheitsgefahren (S. 79-94). Essen: Bundesverband der Betriebskrankenkassen.

(Sochert, R. (2000). Health Action Groups: Evaluation of an integrated concept of occupational health promotion. In Schröer, A (Ed.), Occupational Health Management and the Prevention of Occupational Health Hazards (pp. 79-94). Essen: Federal Association of Company Health Funds. (In German))

Helpful links for definitions of Health Action Groups (German sites):

- <http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/Universitaet/Einrichtungen/Zentrale%20Institute/IWT/FWG/Gesundheitszirkel/Definition-Gesundheitszirkel.html>
- <http://www.gesamet.de/12gesundheitszirkel.html>
- <http://www.infoline-gesundheitsfoerderung.de/ca/j/hej/>
- <http://www.hamburg.de/contentblob/116910/data/bgf03-pdf.pdf>

Preußer, I. (2003). Betriebliche Gesundheitsförderung durch Partizipation. Eine qualitative Studie zu den individuellen Voraussetzungen für eine Beteiligung an Gesundheitszirkeln. Dissertation, Universität Hamburg. http://deposit.ddb.de/cgi-bin/dokserv?idn=971234884&dokvar=d1&dok_ext=pdf&filename=971234884.pdf

(Preußer, I. (2003). Occupational Health Promotion through Participation: A Qualitative Study on Individual Prerequisites for Participation in Health Action Groups. PhD Thesis, Hamburg University. http://deposit.ddb.de/cgi-bin/dokserv?idn=971234884&dokvar=d1&dok_ext=pdf&filename=971234884.pdf (In German))