

Enhancing age management skills through peer learning – A randomized controlled trial among Finnish managers

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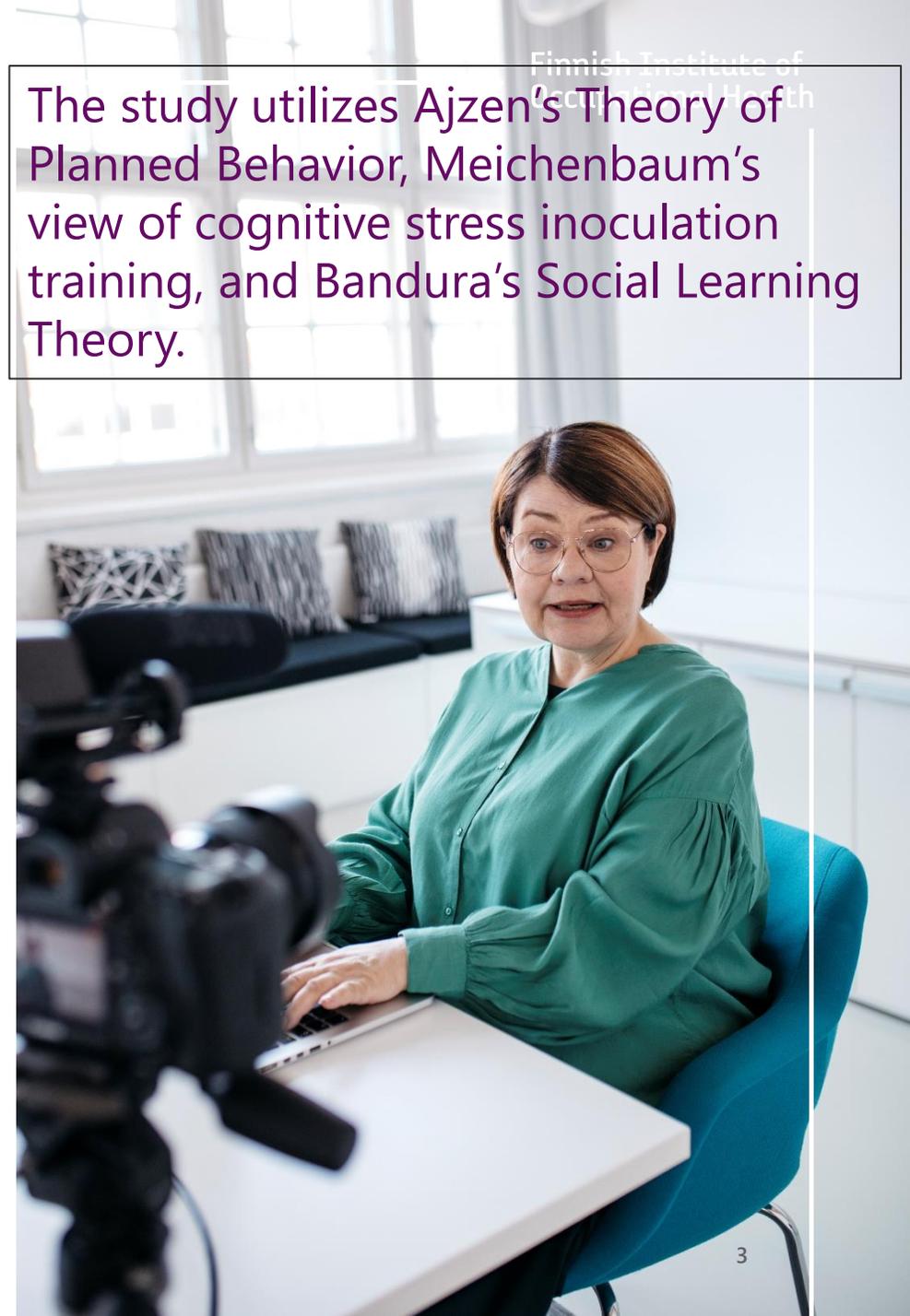
Study background

- Although the labor status of older employees has improved in many countries, **negative attitudes and discrimination associated with aging still exist at workplaces** (e.g., Cebola et al. 2021; Pietiläinen et al. 2018).
- **Managers are not necessarily familiar with age (or career) management.**
 - Managers' skills to understand, support, interact with, and motivate employees in different career phases should be developed (Knies et al. 2015; Kulik et al. 2016; Kunze & Menges, 2017).
 - Working careers and work ability are typically supported by age management practices focusing on physical performance and health (Cloostermans et al. 2015; Ilmarinen, 2012). Much more could be done to support the other dimensions of work ability - namely competence and motivation.
- **Research on effective ways to enhance managers' skills in age management is limited.**
 - Previous intervention studies on managers' skills have mainly considered mental health and work-family balance and aimed either for increase in knowledge or change in attitudes (e.g., Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019; Dimoff et al. 2016; Hammer et al. 2011; Kawakami et al. 2006; Tsutsumi, 2011).

Study aim

- To examine whether managers' age management skills can be improved via a peer group-based training intervention.
- The training was developed in the first study phase and in the second phase its efficacy was tested via a randomized controlled trial (RCT).
- The intervention aimed to enhance managers':
 - self-efficacies regarding skills and abilities to lead older workers and teams with varied age structure
 - preparedness for dealing with obstacles in age management

The study utilizes Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior, Meichenbaum's view of cognitive stress inoculation training, and Bandura's Social Learning Theory.

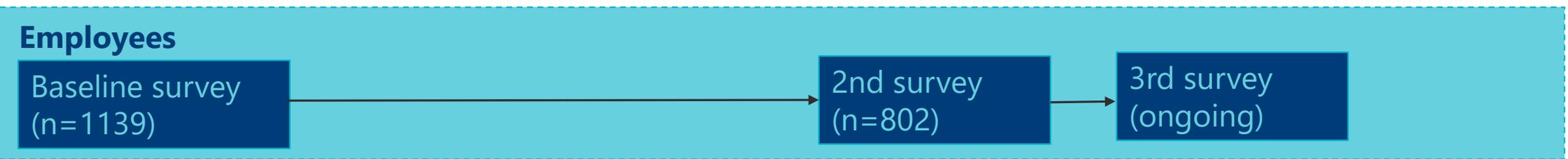
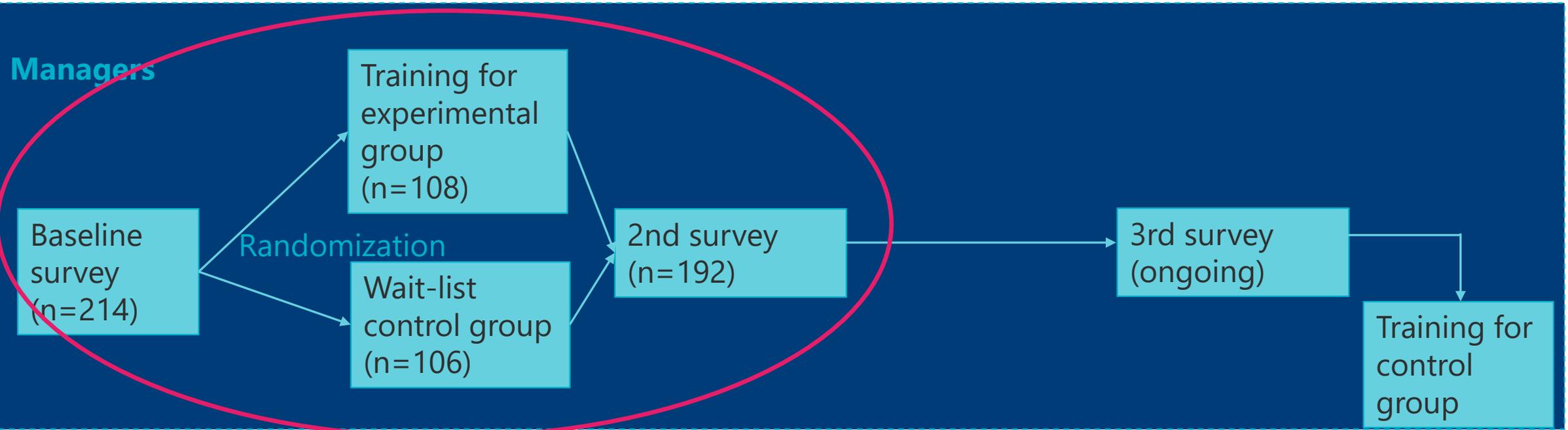


Training in a nutshell

- The web-based training consists of 3 x 3 hours group meetings, and two independent and short assignments completed before and between the training sessions.
- All pair and group discussions and assignments are executed on the online platform of the training.
- The training includes case examples and descriptions of challenging situations, which are considered from both employees' and managers' perspective.
- The topics are first discussed in small groups, and thereafter insights are shared in the whole group.
- Participants have workbooks (printed or online), and trainers follow a detailed manual.
- In each group there are two trained facilitators.
- Each organization has their own groups.



Study design: randomized controlled trial in 10 work organizations in 2021-2022



Baseline for all participants (T1)

Proximal effects for managers (T2)

2-month follow-up for employees (T2)

6-month follow-up for all participants (T3)

Study participants (managers)

Baseline survey (T1)

- Women 59 %
- Average age 48 years (range 24-66)
- The most common education: bachelor's degree (32 %)
- Working years in a managerial position 11 (0-38)
- Working years in the current organization 15 (0-43)
- Working hours per week 40 h (36-60)

Degree of participation

- 92 % of the managers who were randomized into the experimental group participated in the training.
- The response rates of the 2nd survey were 89 % in the experimental and 91 % in the control group.
- The participants in the experimental and control groups did not differ from each other statistically significantly in terms of socioeconomic background variables at the baseline.

Immediate effects of the training intervention

Method: GLM for repeated measures

Intervention effects on managers' self-efficacies:

In relation to older employees, how capable do you perceive yourself to...?

Sum scales (Cronbach's alphas T1)	Experimental group (n=96)		Control group (n=96)		Main effect of the intervention
	T1 (M)	T2 (M)	T1 (M)	T2 (M)	F-test
understand older employees and their situations at work ($\alpha=.86$, 3 items)	5.25	5.84	5.25	5.33	21.6, $p<.001$
take into account older employees' strengths and work-related goals ($\alpha=.77$, 3 items)	5.28	5.81	5.35	5.40	25.0, $p<.001$
support older employees ($\alpha=.88$, 4 items)	4.76	5.51	4.87	4.90	42.5, $p<.001$
discuss work ability and working career with older employees ($\alpha=.89$, 3 items)	5.22	5.89	5.23	5.33	17.9, $p<.001$
utilize organizational practices to support older employees' work ability ($\alpha=.73$, 2 items)	4.54	5.27	4.57	4.62	16.0, $p<.001$
improve co-operation between employees of different ages ($\alpha=.88$, 6 items)	4.92	5.65	5.04	5.01	51.6, $p<.001$

1=not at all capable ; 7=very much capable

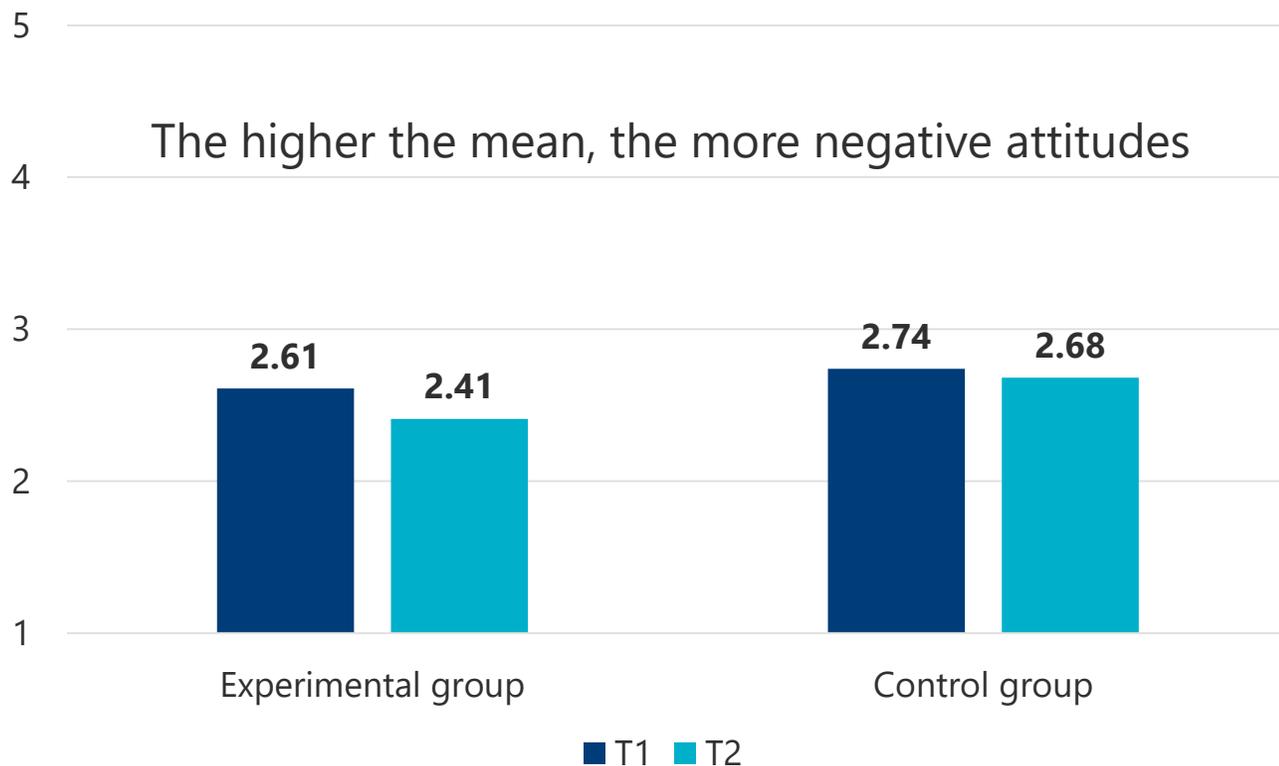
Intervention effects on managers' preparedness for dealing with obstacles

Item	Experimental group (n=96)		Control group (n=96)		Main effect of the intervention
	T1 (M)	T2 (M)	T1 (M)	T2 (M)	F-test
Do you have any plans or ideas for the challenges you may face in age management?	3.63	4.47	4.05	4.04	19.3, p<.001
Do you believe you can solve these challenges if needed?	4.81	5.49	4.87	4.98	11.5, p<.001

1=very little; 7=very much

Intervention effects on managers' age attitudes:

What do you think about the views related to older employees?



The intervention has a statistically significant **main effect** ($F=4.9, p<.05$) on managers' attitudes towards older employees:

Managers' negative attitudes towards older employees' capabilities and motivation to develop their skills decreased in the experimental group and stayed about the same level in the control group.

1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree

Conclusion

- The study showed that the **peer group (and web) -based training can be effective in improving managers' age management skills.**
 - The training enhanced managers' confidence in their skills to lead older employees and teams with varied age structure.
 - The training gave managers tools to deal with the possible challenges in age management.
 - The training affected positively managers' attitudes towards older employees.
- It is possible that improved capabilities (i.e., skills and self-efficacies) and motivation (i.e., attitudes) together with possibilities (i.e., organizational practices) affect positively managers' behavior in the long-term (Michie et al. 2011; Knies et al. 2015).
- The study has some **limitations:**
 - The training was voluntary, and thus it possible that only the most motivated managers signed up for it.
 - The participation alone may have affected managers' evaluations (i.e., uncontrolled novelty effect).

The next steps

- To study further who does and does not benefit from the training.
 - Preliminary analysis shows that the younger and less experienced managers and managers in organizations with poorer age management practices gain more advantage from this training.
- To examine the long-term main effects of the training, and the mediating effects of the improved age management skills on managers' and their employees' well-being and work- and career-related attitudes.
- To further implement the training at workplaces by starting a trainer's training.



Thank you!

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