

Seminar on immigrants in the cleaning trade

Results from field studies with participant observation among immigrant cleaners

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Introduction

- ~ Presentation of methodological approaches
- ~ An empirical case . a short example from the field
- ~ Our general observations from the cleaning trade
- ~ Intervention ideas under development



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Main objectives

- ~ The immigrant point of view
- ~ Focus on the subjective experience of immigrant work life
- ~ Explore the way knowledge of the working environment is expressed and practiced
- ~ Investigate the development potential, seen through the eyes of the people in question



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The workplaces studied

- ~ Selection of field sites
- ~ The +good examples+ in the cleaning trade
- ~ 6 different workplaces
 - . 3 private companies and
 - . 3 municipal workplaces
- ~ Immigrants engaged in office cleaning, cleaning in schools, nursing homes, day care centres and at Copenhagen airport



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Methodological approaches

- ~ Anthropological fieldwork
- ~ Participant-observation
- ~ Informal dialogue interview
- ~ Our position in the field



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Who have we spoken to?

- ~ Primary focus on immigrants in the cleaning trade
- ~ Danish colleagues
- ~ Leaders at all management levels
- ~ Human resource personnel
- ~ Individuals and institutions involved in the development of the trade



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An example from the field by Niels Berthelsen
 Health care worker
 . mostly doing cleaning at a nursing home





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Example continued: Health care worker
 . mostly doing cleaning at a nursing home

- ~ Occupational injury
 - . instructions not given, or not understood !
- ~ Perception of the term **work environment**
 - . first day:
 - + like the fresh air in this area outside Copenhagen+
 - . a few days later:
 - +When you mentioned work environment the other day . you didn't mean the fresh air, but my work d ?+
- ~ Own suggestion for improvement
 - +my next job should not be in cleaning+

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The cleaning trade . in general

- ~ The Danish cleaning trade consists of public companies, a few large private companies and many smaller private companies
- ~ Many part-time positions
- ~ General problems with recruiting and retaining the workforce
- ~ General labour turnover of 100% annually
- ~ In 2003: 40% of the cleaners were immigrants

Source: The Confederation of Danish Commercial Transportation and Service Industries (HTS), 2003

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Work organisation in the cleaning trade

- ~ Solitary work in workplaces where the cleaners are not employed
- ~ Distant from employer and limited dialogue and feedback on work tasks
- ~ Require ability to adapt daily working routines to meet customer needs
- ~ Repetitive work tasks which can cause physical attrition and musculoskeletal disorders
- ~ Low influence in the job

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The cleaning trade . new conditions

Increasing challenges in handling cultural conditions

- ~ The generation of older Danish women in the cleaning trade are replaced by immigrants
 - . both men and women at all ages
- ~ 2008: We estimate the share of immigrants at the workplaces we have studied to between 70 and 90%

+We have to overlook the language problems to a certain extend. It can be a problem in regard to safety. On the other hand, we can not maintain the same language requirements as before, if we want to continue recruiting enough employees. +

(Manager)

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Initiatives at workplaces in the study

- ~ +Danish at the workplace+ . internship combined with weekly language lessons
- ~ Facilitating working environment through visual communication
- ~ Combinations of cleaning and other job functions
 - . reception, cantina, mail delivery, etc.
- ~ Education of service-managers with immigrant background
- ~ Improving the well-being of the employees

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General characteristics of immigrants in the cleaning trade

- ~ Heterogeneous group
 - . Culture, country of origin, number of years in Denmark
 - . Educational level and work experience
 - . Motivation for working in the cleaning trade
 - . Knowledge on occupational health and safety
- ~ First generation of immigrants dominate
- ~ Limited language skills and low educational level

*My children should not work in cleaning. They are born in Denmark and speak good Danish. They have a Danish education and an opportunity to get a better job.+
(Cleaning assistant)*

Limited Danish skills have implications for:

- ~ Introduction to the work
- ~ Communication of occupational health and safety rules and regulations
- ~ The understanding and use of knowledge achieved at courses (i.e. AMU courses = Adult Vocational Training Programmes)
- ~ Social relations and sense of community at the workplace

Different approaches to cleaning work

- ~ The process oriented worker
- ~ The humble worker
- ~ The fast worker
- ~ The transient worker
- ~ The indifferent worker

The process oriented worker

- ~ Puts honour in the work
- ~ Speaks her or his mind
- ~ Prioritizes working environment
- ~ Wants development in the work
- ~ Is ready for change

The humble worker

- ~ Prefers to work alone and unnoticed
- ~ Feels embarrassed by his or her bad language skills
- ~ Does not participate in social activity
- ~ Has little or no knowledge on occupational health and safety
- ~ Does not like change

The fast worker

- ~ Main goal is making money
- ~ Has typically more than one job
- ~ Works in a fast pace and take no breaks
- ~ Is not interested in occupational health and safety
- ~ Prioritizes the visible tasks in cleaning

The transient worker

- ~ Has typically an education from the country of origin
- ~ Works in cleaning while learning Danish
- ~ The cleaning work is a gateway to the Danish labour market
- ~ Is not in particular interested in occupational health and safety
- ~ Is open for change

The indifferent worker

- ~ Is typically recipient of financial aid
- ~ Is activated in an employment project
- ~ Has other social problems than unemployment
- ~ Sickness and pain dominate his work effort
- ~ Much absences due to sickness
- ~ Doesn't care about occupational health and safety
- ~ Not ready for change

Employee perception of organizational structure . hierarchical or flat

- ~ Perception of the roles of managers
- ~ Humble behaviour
- ~ "Yes, I have understood?"
New challenges at management level

"They answer 'Yes' even when they don't understand as they feel embarrassed to admit that they don't speak Danish very well. It is a problem that they don't tell me when the vacuum cleaner is broken. They also don't tell me when they are in pain." (Manager)

Summary of observations . 1

- ~ Limited language skills and low educational level
- ~ Low expectations to their own personal development in their work and the job in general
- ~ The immigrant ascribe low social status to the job
- ~ "Ethnic pains"
- ~ "Get the job done and go home" . work pace

"If I could speak Danish better, then I would do something else, but I can't, so I come here and do my job and then I go home" (cleaning assistant)

Summary of observations . 2

- ~ Wide-spread assumption that occupational health and safety is a luxury problem
- ~ Some are supporting relatives in their home country
- ~ Some have more than one job
- ~ Lack of individual consideration for the long term consequences of a bad working environment
- ~ Lack of readiness to change

SPIR intervention activities

- ~ The intervention activities are in preparation ð
ð in order to develop the job function, reduce attrition and to give the cleaning work higher social prestige

SPIR: Intervention catalogue ð

to be developed . the next days, weeks, months

A central element is involvement of the immigrants by using the immigrant networks

- ~ Three levels
 - . the cleaning trade
 - . the labour market in general
 - . the immigrant organizations

SPIR: Intervention catalogue ð

Preliminary ideas for intervention activities

- ~ Occupational safety and health ambassadors
- ~ Cleaning courses with interpreters
- ~ Visual communication
- ~ Workplace related language lessons
- ~ Training of mid-level managers with immigrant background
- ~ Organization of the work
- ~ Solicitude-dialogues between manager and employee
- ~ Focus on long-term consequences of a poor work environment
- ~ ~~Respect~~ *Respect for cleaning work*+or make cleaning work more noticeable

Concluding remarks

We have now finished our field studies and are in the process of analysing data and planning the intervention activities

Next step(s):

- ~ Publishing of a report on our field studies and suggestions for intervention activities
- ~ Engagement our contacts in the cleaning trade
- ~ Intervention ideas to be further developed and projects to be designed