

Kaisa Haapakoski & Leena Åkerblad

Realistic optimism and hopefulness: Perspectives of vocational rehabilitation partners on Finnish working life

In this article, we investigate the descriptions of Finnish working life in the context of the Finnish Social Insurance Institution's vocational rehabilitation. We focus especially on the positive working life descriptions and optimism in these descriptions. According to previous studies, hope and optimism seem to be significant in, for instance, promoting a return to work. The data for this article consisted of 47 interviews with service-users, individual counsellors in the service, and employers. All the parties gave positive descriptions that included, for example, their own competence-related optimism, hopes for a change in structure and

attitudes, and entrepreneur-centred optimism. However, the individual counsellors in particular emphasised concerns regarding the position of the partially disabled in working life. All the parties emphasized the importance of improving the situation of the partially disabled in polarised labour market and developing working life in a way that promotes equality and inclusion. The optimism of the parties in vocational rehabilitation could be termed "realistic optimism". Within this framework, hope concerning the future is possible, although the achievement of the goals may also require a change in the structural conditions of working life.