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Meet the Authors: Session report

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Title of the book: Life skills to overcome difficulties; Introduction to SOC

Names of the authors of the book present at the session: Ryoko Ebina

In her book “Life skills to overcome difficulties: Introduction to SOC” Ryoko Ebina has developed a method for managing and overcoming various difficulties in work life based on the salutogenic concept of Sense of Coherence (SOC). In this book, Ebina presents an introduction to the method she has developed and demonstrates how she has applied this method in her work with management companies (e.g., IT) in Japan. In this work context, the method is applied as a way to address the particular problems employees of these companies were experiencing, such as depression and suicide.

In her presentation at the *Meet the Author* session, Ebina, a sociologist by training, described how the development of this framework began while she was doing her PhD research in post-war Croatia. During this time she realized that despite the extreme stress that many people had experienced and though many had developed mental health problems, some people did not suffer as much from mental health problems. In her research, Ebina asked herself why this was the case and came to the conclusion that some people were able to find a ‘sense of coherence’ (SOC) in their world, despite their incoherent and devastating surroundings. Ebina followed this up with a description of SOC as made up of three principle elements: understanding, managing and meaningfulness. Ebina described that in her book she set out to examine how these three elements came together in a management company (e.g., IT) workplace and used this system as a model of SOC. A few examples of how companies have attempted to apply the SOC principles included workplaces paying for their employees who may be very stressed and unwell to travel to visit their families on weekends or to pay for one-on-one lunches for employees with their bosses as a way to have informal and more intimate meetings.



During the *Meet the Author* discussion with Ebina, comments from the participants focused mainly on how SOC could be used in their own social and cultural contexts (e.g., Indonesia, Thailand), as well as on examples of how this could work in different life situations and on ways of addressing the problems they encounter applying the principles of SOC in their own work. For instance, one participant from Indonesia inquired as to whether the paid visits for employees to their family might not be a resolution to a problem if one sees work as an outlet from other, perhaps more stressful, life events (i.e., family stress). In some cultures, this participant suggested, working a lot is equivalent to gaining greater happiness and that the work environment might not be the only source of stress and depression at work. This participant suggested that it would be important to take into consideration the context of the employee as well, adding that SOC might be a way to help employees with their family situations, if these were what was causing increased stress. Another participant from Thailand said that in her experience with youth smokers who were trying to quit smoking, withdrawal often resulted in stress and depression, and that these youth also used smoking as a way of coping with stress. She suggested that SOC could be a potentially fruitful way of helping people to cope with these situations. One last comment came from a participant who suggested that the elements of SOC fit particularly well with the principles of Buddhism, and thus it would be easy to understand SOC also within the context of certain forms of spirituality. Overall, participants agreed upon the fact that SOC was a clear and easy concept to understand and therefore also useful.

Ebina's book is still only available in Japanese, but she hopes she will be able to have this translated at least into English to reach more practitioners wanting to apply the principles of SOC outlined in her book.

Participants in the session were mostly public health practitioners, doctors and nurses. The number of participants varied, some left early, some joined later. The total number participating was approximately 7 or 8.