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Published in:

Proceedings of the Ergonomics and Human Factors Conference 2020

Publication date:

2020

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link back to DTU Orbit](#)

Citation (APA):

Ipsen, C., Edwards, K., Nardelli, G., & Kirchner, K. (2020). Sustainable management of job (re)design: A position paper on balancing competitive advantage and organisational performance to ensure healthy workplaces. In *Proceedings of the Ergonomics and Human Factors Conference 2020* (pp. 321-322)

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Sustainable management of job (re)design – a position paper on balancing competitive advantage and organizational performance to ensure healthy workplaces

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THE WORK IN CONTEXT

The risk of work-related stress and the high costs associated with it in combination with a proactive focus has initiated an interest from research and practice on "What works". Regarding potential solutions, this has also motivated a discussion on how to ensure a joined focus on both organizational performance and well-being. Worldwide, companies are beginning implement new ways of working and organizing work that takes into account both employee well-being and organizational performance, also coined as sustainable management. The idea behind sustainable management is to be proactive to prevent stress and ensure well-being by adjusting how work is designed, organized and managed and ensure organizational performance. Pioneering organizations across industries offer some inspiring examples illustrating a combined focus on organizing and managing both organizational performance and employee well-being. Companies such as V2C, IHH Nordic, and Pentia in Denmark and SAS Institute, Patagonia, Hilton and Cisco Systems in the US offer examples of initiatives focused on shorter workweeks or less overtime, initiatives linked to improvements in both employee well-being and organizational performance. While the interest is high, examples are few and there is a pressing need for new knowledge about how redesigning of jobs can include the concern for both organizational performance and employee well-being in tandem. This study aims to further the discussion on management of job (re)design. We focus on how managers and workplaces can ensure both organizational performance and employee well-being in practice by focusing on both prevention, job-design, organizational design and business model.

KEYWORDS

Job (re)Design, Stress prevention, Organizational Performance, Sustainable management

A brief outline of the work carried out

The annual costs of €450B for the European society has prompted a greater understanding of the scope and seriousness of the problem with work-related stress and well-being in workplaces and a need to see the problem in connection to organizational performance. At the same time, there is a growing realization that prevention of work-related stress must also take a proactive focus on

the sources of stress as an alternative to a reactive focus that often seek to assist the employee after stress has occurred.

Westgaard and Winkel (2011) state that sustainable production systems have a joined focus of employee well-being and organizational performance. Similarly, several scholars find that these are treated interdependently but would benefit from being managed in tandem (Ipsen, Hasson & Karanika, 2018; Ipsen & Edwards, 2016, Edwards & Jensen 2014). Sustainable interventions to prevent stress need to focus on job-(re)design in the pursuit of lasting preventive solutions (Murphy, 1988; Pfeffer, 2019). Preventive interventions focusing on job-(re)design must include concern for the organizational performance to be sustainable as the perfect non-stress job redesign that reduces organizational performance is of no use.

We propose a new approach for a combined focus that embrace all these aspects and provides insights into the characteristics of sustainable management We find that combining theory on organizational design form a valuable tool for bridging the gap to stress preventive interventions that aim to redesign jobs and ensure organizational performance and healthy workplaces.

Many companies use the business model canvas by Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) as a strategic tool to define, communicate and change their business idea. The canvas consists of nine building blocks describing the internal organizational performance and external competitive advantage. However, implementing a business model requires a concern for the organizational design. The Star Model (Galbraith 1975) describes five organisational dimensions. : strategy, structure, processes, reward system and people. They influence each other and have to be aligned in a healthy company. The model helps to analyse the current situation in a company, which elements are affected by a strategic change and have to be adapted to the new situation. Different organizational designs thus result in different “behavior” and “performance” results.

Findings/solutions (the outcome)

With this approach, we contribute to the field of sustainable management and the discussion of upstream management of preventing work-related stress focusing on redesigning jobs to ensure healthy workplaces by applying a joined focus on employee well-being and organizational performance. Future studies should aim to explore the redesigning of jobs and how this is linked to the organizational design and business model to understand the sustainable potential of the changes. Based on the inspiring examples we expect to find managerial actions that include a concern for both fields.

Impact

Organizational performance and employee well-being are complementary and through organizational design and business models, we can create a chain of benefits for both employers and employees and ensure a continuous competitive advantage and healthy workplaces.