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Sustainable management of job (re)design: A position paper on balancing competitive advantage and organisational 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 organisational performance and wellbeing. Worldwide, companies are beginning implement new ways of working and organising work that takes into account both employee wellbeing and organisational performance, also coined as sustainable management. The idea behind sustainable management is to be proactive to prevent stress and ensure wellbeing by adjusting how work is designed, organised and managed and ensure organisational performance. Pioneering organisations across industries offer some inspiring examples illustrating a combined focus on organising and managing both organisational performance and employee wellbeing. 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 wellbeing and organisational 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 organisational performance and employee wellbeing 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 organisational performance and employee wellbeing in practice by focusing on prevention, job design, organisational design and business models.

KEYWORDS

Job (re)design, stress prevention, organisational 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 wellbeing in workplaces and a need to see the problem in connection to organisational performance. At the same time, there is a growing realisation 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 seeks to assist the employee after stress has occurred.

Westgaard and Winkel (2011) state that sustainable production systems have a joined focus of employee wellbeing and organisational performance. Similarly, several scholars find that these are treated interdependently but would benefit from being managed in tandem (Ipsen, Hasson and

Karanika, 2018; Ipsen and Edwards, 2016; Edwards and 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 organisational performance to be sustainable as the perfect non-stress job (re)design that reduces organisational performance is of no use.

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

Many companies use the business model canvas by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) as a strategic tool to define, communicate and change their business idea. The canvas consists of nine building blocks describing the internal organisational performance and external competitive advantage. However, implementing a business model requires a concern for the organisational 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, and which elements are affected by a strategic change and have to be adapted to the new situation. Different organisational designs thus result in different behaviour 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 wellbeing and organisational performance. Future studies should aim to explore the redesigning of jobs and how this is linked to the organisational 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

Organisational performance and employee wellbeing are complementary and through organisational 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.