

Chapter 76

Exploring Blue- and White-Collar Employees' Well-Being at Work System: Differences in Indicators of Physical and Psychosocial Conditions of Occupational Groups

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to examine occupational group-related differences in well-being at work (WBW) indicators ranging from real accidents, absences and retirement to experienced pleasure at work. Occupational group included two categories: blue- and white-collar employees. The study is based on analysing national statistics or ones of various industrial sectors (Study 1), or bases on findings of questionnaires in Finnish case companies (N=7) (Studies 2 and 3). WBW questionnaires answered by 3500 employees. Analysis utilised data that employees of two occupational groups, or company and national statistics revealed about WBW. Analysis was based on factors related to employee, task, tool, organisation and work environment (traditional work system (WS)), psychosocial factors, and information and communication within WS. The biggest and statistically significant differences were emphasised in results and discussion. Although two groups' roles and tasks provide reasons for many differences, the ones should be measured, thoroughly discussed and consciously managed.

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INTRODUCTION

General Background

People in various roles, as well as their tools (e.g., technology), are the core elements of the jobs carried out within a work system. A fluent interplay of all system elements is necessary for successful work. The work system (WS) is a holistic concept that addresses all the relevant elements (employee, task, tool, organisation and work environment) and aspects of working (ISO, 2004). Organisations tailor WSs to fit various industries and services and to act as enablers of businesses; for example, they may be used as well for describing how to achieve desired outcomes for employees and patients in contemporary health-care (see Hignett, Carayon, Buckle & Catchpole, 2013). The relevant elements provide a framework for a system's outcomes and functioning including, in our version, psychosocial interaction, social skills, information, knowledge and communication (Figure 1). As Hatch & Cunliffe (2013) concluded, differences and changes in organisations, including technologies and management, affect social relationships, attitudes and feelings at work. This conclusion is an important basis for our approach.

Both the empowering and defending characteristics must be included in current and future WSs. The former function is broadly related to desired outcomes (Figure 1), i.e., high performance of employees, including happiness as part of well-being at work. The latter function addresses undesired outcomes, i.e., various types of ill-being, including complaints, diseases, accidents, injuries, absences, early retirement, losses, errors, non-conformities, deviations concerning quality and risks in general.

We use the following definition of well-being at work: “WBW means safe, healthy, and productive work in a well-led organisation by competent workers and work communities who see their job as meaningful and rewarding, and see work as a factor that supports their life management” (Anttonen & Räsänen, 2009, p. 17). This definition is primarily limited to the context of WSs in our study, i.e., home and leisure contexts and living conditions are excluded.

The scope of this study involves a diverse range of employee positions and roles as subjects and objects within WSs and organisations. We examine employees' experiences of their WS conditions, as well emphasising psychosocial factors and employees' skills, information and communication. On the other hand, based on statistical facts, employees' accidents at work, absences and early retirement are dealt with.

Diverse individuals in a WS can be divided into two occupational groups, categories: blue- and white-collar employees. The European Union's (EU's) general classification of occupations, which we utilise in this study, makes the following divisions: (1) managers; (2) professionals; (3) technicians and associate professionals (including science, engineering, health, business, administration, legal, social, cultural, information and communication professionals); (4) clerical support workers; (5) service and sales workers; (6) skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers; (7) craft and related trades workers (including building, metal, machinery, handicraft, printing, electrical, food processing and wood working); (8) plant and machine operators and assemblers (including drivers); and (9) elementary occupations (including cleaners, helpers, agricultural, forestry and fishery, mining, construction, manufacturing and transport labourers) (Statistics Finland, 2016). Categories 1 to 4 are considered white-collar occupations by us, whereas blue-collar occupations comprise those in categories 5 to 9.

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