Symposium proposal, IEA 2015

Psychosocial perspectives of work and organisation: which models to follow for preventive action?

Objectives
In the context of exchanges over the past several years, about the relations between psychosocial issues and work, and about the possibilities of intervening in workplace organisations, a francophone group made up of around thirty researchers (ergonomists, psychologists, physicians, epidemiologists) and representatives from occupational health institutions (Institut de Santé au Travail, IRSST, ANACT, INRS, French Ministry of Labour), from Belgium, Quebec, France and Switzerland has been constituted.

The main goal of this symposium is to further debate about the prevention of workplace psychosocial risks, by organizing a session to discuss studies carried out by French and Quebec researchers of this francophone network.

Conceptual framework
In recent years, media coverage of dramatic events at work led to the emergence of psychosocial risks as an issue of public debate. The recognition of the influence of work on health is a highly positive aspect of this social phenomenon. Yet, the way it has been dealt with by the media may have distorted the problem and made it more difficult to develop strategies for preventive action. Stress, mental workload, harassment, interpersonal conflicts, violence at work, psychological health are words used to express psychosocial risks. This may lead to two deadlocks:
- if the source of the problem is perceived to be the worker’s psychological fragility, this may lead to isolating the affected worker or to interpersonal conflicts, and solutions are focused on personal support or conflict management;
- if one uses a strictly occupational hygiene approach, identifying “toxic” components of the environment (such as management style, the number of tasks to carry out, relations with colleagues, working hours, etc.), solutions focus on modifying some of these factors and training the workers to take distance and better manage their stress.

Yet, work itself and the relation each worker builds with his/her work are at the root of understanding occupational health problems. Their prevention requires another approach, which allows for a connection between the interests associated with the production of goods and services and those associated with workers’ health. From this point of view, doing one’s job well is, for any worker, whatever his/her hierarchical level, a key issue.

An ergonomic approach towards these questions should consider that the work itself might be unhealthy. There is a need for confrontations of to confirm the occupational experience of workers (including managers): how they carry out their work, how they loosen some constraints, what is required to manage variability in order to do high quality work. It is an opportunity to recognize the workers’ experience and to modify the organisation (first the organisation of work tasks, and then, whenever possible, the company organisational system). There is no way of controlling these pathologies without discussing the quality of work, its assessment, and therefore the organisational system. This also requires the questioning of some managerial beliefs, (especially about performance evaluation of each individual workers), of some managerial methods or ready-made “recipes”. When mechanisms for feedback and verifying workers’ and supervisors’ experiences malfunction or are absent (Institut de Santé au Travail, IRSST, ANACT, INRS, Ministère du travail), they should be restored or introduced. The objective is to promote discussions about work, but under the condition that these discussions influence the organisational determinants that impede doing one’s work well. This requires an involvement of top management in order to question the existing organisation, and an involvement of the workers to rebuild work groups. An ergonomic approach requires possibilities to influence the organisation, in which workers might play a key role.

This symposium will foster a discussion of this approach to psychosocial risks on the basis of case studies, in different sectors, companies and countries, and by an examination of epidemiologic data on social inequalities associated with work-related psychosocial risks and their implications for intervention. The presentations should make it possible to identify similarities and differences in the intervention methods presented.
Session Format
This session will include 5 presentations and ample time for discussion:


2. S. Caroly, Pacte Laboratory, University of Grenoble, France. *Designing work organization based on “occupational” collectives and “inter-occupational” relations: methodological implications of ergonomic interventions to prevent psychosocial disorders.*


4. B. Dugué, Department of Ergonomics, Institut of Technology of Bordeaux. *Ethical stakes of corporate governance: ergonomic contributions to organizational redesign aiming at subsidiarity.*

5. F. Daniellou, Department of Ergonomics, Institut of Technology of Bordeaux. *Preventing psychosocial risks and improving safety culture in high risk industries: one common undertaking.*