

Improving future occupational health practitioners' competences for the management of techno-stress and excellence

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ABSTRACT

In times of steadily increasing numbers of burnout in European workplaces, we propose in the frame of the IMPRESS project (Project reference: 588315-EPP-1-2017-1-ES-EPPKA2-KA) a common assessment and intervention program for HEI students in occupational psychology focusing on excellent stress management. The program is based on results of an online survey that found similar work-related stress factors in the four participating countries. Following a scientist-practitioner model, HEIs as well as practitioners of these countries developed a training offering assessment, intervention and excellence-related competences for stress-management using online tools. A first pilot was carried out in the Bachelor of Psychology, subject Organizational Behavior (UB) with 18 bachelor and 10 Master students using an online assessment tool, seminars and case studies. Evaluation of the competences acquired, and the seminars and case studies showed satisfactory results.

KEYWORDS

Stress management, blended learning, global workplace, HEI, assessment, intervention.

Objectives

The objective of the EU project is to enable HEI and business professionals to gain a perspective on work related stress issues. This includes how they impact all aspects of the business including management style, cost of absenteeism, work organization and organizational structure, work-life balance, demographic changes, the upgrading of unskilled and skilled workers, information overflow, stress caused by poor fit with physical and mental health issues.

One major focus is on how young people have to be prepared in order to sustain their health and their employment until retirement in an economic situation where changing employers and sectors is becoming part of a regular employment history. The intention of the project is to develop and validate an innovative toolset allowing identifying and dealing with stress related issues in the organisations and to support them with new coaching and training materials in solving the identified problems. The project aims to incorporate this educational model into existing programmes for (young) professionals who work closely with personnel systems. An alternate implementation would be as a standalone programme for existing practitioners.

The particular objectives and the results are:

1. Develop a concept-based self-evaluation
2. Develop an education module based on experiences in industry that equips professionals working in industry with the necessary knowledge and skill sets needed

to deal with the work-related stress issues that occur in a continuously changing work environment.

3. Develop a suite of practical tools that can be used by suitably trained professionals to quantify stress levels in an organisation and at an individual level, especially with regard to the ability to work under pressure.
4. Design and pilot test an appropriate training approach for young people with the objective to enable them to cope with the challenges on the labour market by reducing the stress factors either before being employed or when they start their professional career.

The project is carried out in Germany, Spain, Ireland, Latvia in Higher Education and in Industry.

Theoretical foundation

Techno-stress can have severe consequences for individuals (Berger, Romeo, Gidion, & Poyato, 2016), organizations' human and economic capital. Survey results of European polls on safety and health at work show an increasing level and relevance of stress at work (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2013, 2014, 2018). Studies in the digitalized work environment which integrate classic as well as "new" stressors emerging from work 4.0 and at the same time investigate cross cultural differences are not yet existing. This is why a questionnaire based on a theoretical model by Reif, Spieß and Stadler (2018) and Demerouti and Bakkers (2011) Job Demands–Resources model was developed and tested in four countries.

Context of the application

A first pilot was carried out in the Bachelor of Psychology, subject Organizational Behavior (UB) with 18 bachelor and 10 Master students using an online assessment tool, seminars and case studies. Evaluation of the competences acquired, and the seminars and case studies showed satisfactory results.

Participation

We piloted first seminars for both bachelor as well as master students, and will carry out pilot seminars for practitioners in all countries before the date of the present congress.

Evaluation

For evaluation purposes, bachelor as well as master students participated each in a corresponding seminar with both theoretical and practical components: At bachelor level, theoretical competences about stress management were evaluated following a multiple-choice test design, evaluating the seminars with marks of 9,4 from 10 points. Practical competences were evaluated within a student group work, where students applied theory to a real company case, with marks of 8,9 from 10 points. At master level, the company case study was evaluated with marks of 8,7 from 10 points.

Results and conclusions

Within the scope of the project, several results and conclusions can be drawn:

1. Education for the management of techno-stress and excellence nowadays has a growing relevance and is needed: European reports, preliminary own surveys among students and practitioners, all suggest a demand and interest for deeper knowledge and competences in how to assess and intervene techno-stress factors at work.

2. Techno-stress and needed competences seem to be transversally and cross-culturally existent in similar ways and suggest a global training program: Similar results between the four assessed countries confirm the common assessment and prompt for a global cross-culturally available intervention, which facilitates localization of the developed learning modules.
3. Evaluation results show good theoretical and practical competences for both, bachelor and master students.

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