

Emphasize employee well-being as much as productivity, says study

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Workplaces that value employees' safety and well-being as much as company productivity yield the greatest rewards, according to a study done by researchers at Colorado State University and the Colorado School of Public Health.

The study, "Ergonomics Climate Assessment: A measure of operational performance and employee well-being," was published in *Applied Ergonomics*. The researchers describe a new tool they developed called an Ergonomics Climate Assessment, which measures employee perception of their workplace's emphasis on the design and modification of work to maximize both employee performance and well-being. The study was funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

The CSU co-authors were John Rosecrance, professor in the Department of Environmental and Radiological Health Sciences and a member of the Colorado School of Public Health, and Alyssa Gibbons, assistant professor in the Department of Psychology.

Ergonomics

Ergonomics is a method of increasing efficiency in the workplace by designing or modifying a worker's job to eliminate any job processes or hazards that increase the risk of employee injury. This is done by adapting work tasks to individuals' physical and mental capabilities.

Using ergonomic principles can result in what is termed a "positive ergonomics climate" with reduced physical and mental strain, lowered risk of work-related injuries and illnesses, as well as an improvement in work quality and efficiency.

The study evaluated the Ergonomics Climate Assessment at a large manufacturing facility. The researchers used data from focus groups of office and production [employees](#) and a review of ergonomic best practices to determine four common factors central to ergonomic climate: management commitment, employee involvement, job hazard analysis, and training and knowledge. After an initial pilot study with 130 employees, they identified 40 questions that best describe an organization's ergonomics climate.

The researchers studied the tool's relationship to employees' self-reported work-related musculoskeletal pain with 706 employees over a period of two years.

Equal emphasis

The researchers found that when the organization promoted productivity and employee well-being equally to their workers, and with a strong emphasis on both, employees reported having less work-related musculoskeletal pain. However, when workers perceived an emphasis on either performance or well-being unequally, regardless of which concept was felt to be more important, the researchers found workers reported greater levels of work-related musculoskeletal pain.

"Our study demonstrates that traditional arguments against workplace health and safety policies and practices just aren't true," said Krista Hoffmeister, a co-author, CSU alumna and research analyst with Sentis. "While employee safety and well-being are often seen as an obstacle to increases in productivity, this study demonstrates the importance of

aligning these values for a maximum result."

The trend of emphasizing worksite wellness and valuing employee health and well-being has been a focus in many organizations in recent years. This study adds new evidence to the argument that using tools such as ergonomics to increase employees' well-being in the workplace benefits not only the employee, but the business as well.

"On a practical level, the Ergonomics Climate Assessment can be used by businesses to assess their values for productivity and well-being, identify areas for improvement, and it acts as a benchmark for improvement goals," Hoffmeister said.

More information: "Ergonomics Climate Assessment: A measure of operational performance and employee well-being," *Applied Ergonomics*, Volume 50, September 2015, Pages 160-169, ISSN 0003-6870, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.apergo.2015.03.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apergo.2015.03.011)

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