TNO | Innovation for Life

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Internalizing core values as a fundament for workers' health, well-being and safety in a changing world of work

Organizational culture is a health influencing factor at work. Moreover culture is a relative stable construct in a rapid changing world. Internalizing of core values is suggested as health promoting strategy in companies

INTRODUCTION

Social environments are well recognized as major health influencing factors (Brug et al 2005, 2006). Likewise organizational culture is recommended as relevant health influencing factor in companies (Goetzel et al 2007, Golaszevski 2008). Organizational culture, however, is not widespread in workplace health research. Contrastingly in safety research a tradition on safety culture exists (Guldenmund 2000) and may be useful in health research as well.
Moreover organizational culture is a key issue for business success (Leka et al 2010) and therefore a main managers' concern. Consequently organizational culture is key in company practice and in research as well (e.g. Schein 1992), while organizational culture, organizational learning (e.g. Senge 2004) and corporate social responsibility (CSR, Zwetsloot and Leka 2010) are closely interlinked. Addressing organizational culture therefore enables to serve both business and health interests, and combine different research traditions.
The aim of this study is to develop an organizational culture in which health, well-being and safety will be promoted.

METHODS

An iterative process of literature research and company involvement was used. Theory and practical knowledge on a) organizational culture, learning and CSR, b) social determinants of health and c) safety culture was combined. Ten companies participated.
The way companies characterize and promote organizational culture was investigated by websites, documents and semi-structured interviews with company representatives. Additionally a literature search was done to find underlying health promoting values.
Two multidisciplinary stakeholder meetings were held to verify and further explain our findings.

RESULTS

1) Defining, exploring and internalizing of core values is suggested to be valuable to create an advancing health promotion social context at work.

Organizational culture is explored by core values. Core values in companies:
- are important for identity and cohesion
- give meaning to company existence and status in society
- are drivers for social interactions, common language and behavior

Figure 1   gadgets representing the result of the process to define core values

2) Important theories addressing the values in relation to health, well-being and safety are:
- Social capital (Hasle et al 2007, Kouvonen et al 2008, Oksanen et al 2008)
- Social support (Karasek and Theorell 1990)
- Self determination (Ryan and Deci 2000)
- Dialogue, openness and information (Burke 2007, Scharmer 2007)
- Resilience (Hollnagel 2009)
- Sustainability and business ethics (Zwetsloot & Leka 2010)

3) The health and safety (H&S) value framework consists of 7 core values

Figure 2:   the health and safety value framework
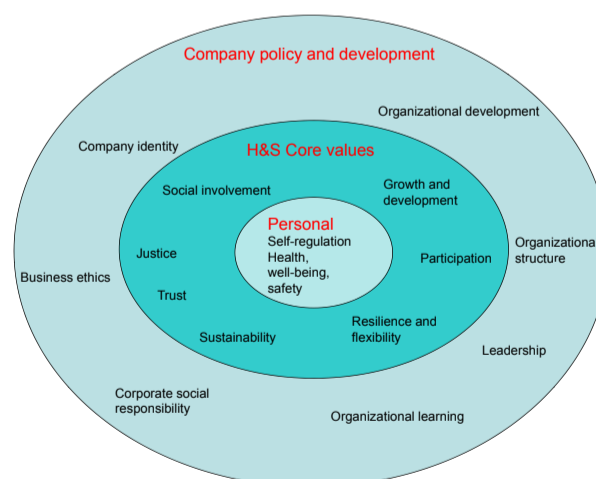
4) Stakeholders approved the reasoning of a H&S value framework to connect organizational culture and employees' health, safety and well-being. Social dialogue and collective learning are suggested to be useful working methods.

CONCLUSION:

Internalizing of core values is suggested as health promoting strategy in companies. Stakeholders and experts confirmed the use of the H&S value framework as useful to develop a healthy organizational culture. The concept of (core) values opens up new perspectives in psychosocial risk research and health promotion in companies.

Practical and research implications
- Internalizing H&S values opens up new perspectives for incorporating health and safety in companies. Experimental research is necessary to verify our assumptions
- This framework can be used to develop and evaluate tailor-made interventions on organizational culture
- Social dialogue, reflection and collective learning are recognized as vital working methods to internalize values

More information?
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Table 1:   an example of using core values as a framework for social interactions and behavior (Albert Heijn, a large retail organization):

Core values	Example of associations	Example of behavior
Respect	Respectable, honorable	To have full attention to each other
Trust	Reliability	Follow up of shared agreements
Collaboration	Involvement	Solving problems together
Purposefulness	Focus	Making choices and priorities
Inspiration	Energetic, vigorous	Being initiative
Renewal	Walk in front	Initializing changes