

Peer Review

Review of: "Managing Work Activities on the Horizon of 2040: Which Challenges for Occupational Safety and Health at Work? A Foresight Study"

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Managing Work Activities on the Horizon of 2040: Which Challenges for Occupational Safety and Health at Work? A Foresight Study

This is valuable research on a most topical issue. It is hoped that an outcome will be the reflection on and initiation of the necessary adaptations of occupational risk prevention to changes in work organisations already occurring, let alone in the future.

The design fiction methodology is most interesting, as it is thought-provoking and not frequently used. It is well carried out here, and the choice of 2040 is good as it is not too far and far enough. The authors also stress the importance of the preliminary work carried out in France by the Red Team on future scenario building in defence.

However, early research on future scenarios carried out by Jacques Girin and others at the Centre de Recherche en Gestion, Ecole Polytechnique (see references below) could also have been mentioned and drawn upon, especially as they investigated scenarios of the use of IT in the future (at EDF): to understand better why there was employee resistance, they suggested inviting employees to project themselves into a different future and co-write short novels. A fictional country, Murcia, was imagined, in which to set these novels. Employees were asked to imagine life in a fictional 'Electricité de Murcia' and speculate on imaginable information technologies to help produce and distribute electricity. The experiment inspired organizational actors, and they engaged with debates around IT use. Issues first emerged in writing groups who produced stories, which were then circulated in the company and enabled

employees to exchange views and create a collective representation of the place of future IT in working practices. There is also a now well-established broader literature on the use of fiction in management research, which could have been incorporated.

The overall summary of management theories over the last century or so is well carried out, although not new; again, there is much existing literature in organization theory that analyses critically the various 'waves' described here, such as liberated, facilitative, neo-Taylorist, flexible, holocratic, network organisations, etc. Still, the trends identified, such as isolation, the intensification of work, individualisation, self-management (so-called), the gap between prescribed and actual work, algorithmic control, the changing role of middle managers, the delegation of monitoring and assessment to customers, etc., and their deleterious effects, are in line with the academic literature. The fictional business cases are fun, and the result that the fictitious companies imagined were dystopian is not that surprising, but the website screens are amusing and illustrative.

Not being an expert in occupational health, I cannot really comment on these aspects specifically. From my perspective, the high-level summary of management theories seems to take a lot of space, but perhaps the aim was to inform occupational health workers? The very difficult task of identifying clearer links between management theories and digital transformation (gig work, platforming, working from home, the use of AI, etc.) also seemed to take second place. I was also a little disappointed not to learn more about practices and trends in occupational health, safety, and prevention, in relation to 'new' IT-enabled ways of working.

Nevertheless, this text will probably be useful to occupational risk prevention practitioners "faced with the multiplication of management methods and their impacts on occupational health, safety, and prevention" as intended.

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Declarations

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