

# Book Review: Workplace Innovation: Theory, Research and Practice – Aligning Perspectives on Health, Safety and Well-Being by Peter R.A. Oeij, Diana Rus and Frank D. Pot

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

‘Workplace Innovation: Theory, Research and Practice’ is targeted at a broad group of readers, namely policy makers, scientists and researchers, as well as workplace innovation practitioners such as representatives of employers and employees. This book also offers important practical contributions to solve a major set of new challenges in our global economy relating to psychosocial wellbeing at work.

The nature of work has changed significantly during the course of human history. However, the pace of this change has accelerated in recent years, largely due to digital technologies. New technologies are already affecting job definitions and work patterns. They are transforming the relationship between employers and employees, the organization of work, and the types of business models used. Many of today’s jobs and skill profiles did not exist a decade ago, while routine tasks are often vulnerable to automation or system. Competitiveness, flexibility, faster and faster time to market, continuous customized product innovation are characteristics of today’s organization challenges.

The need for Workplace Innovation (WPI) is obvious and enormous, but until now, it has mainly been excluded from the public, and technology-driven debate. This book contains 5 main parts; 1) policy, 2) theory matters & evidence, 3) research, 4) practice, and 5) conclusion. The book answers various fields to shed light on the question ‘what is the meaning of workplace innovation for’?, respectively for science, policy makers, employers and employees. WPI approach is to help employers improve productivity, create better products, and improve the health and well-being of the workforces.

## 2.0 CONTENT

What is WPI? It can be defined as evidence-based organizational or workplace practices and cultures which enables employees at all levels to use and develop their skills, knowledge, experience, competencies and creativity to the fullest possible extent, simultaneously enhancing business performance, engagement and well-being (Workplace Innovation Europe, 2020). It builds organizations in which people come to work to do two things; to undertake their functional tasks in the most effective way possible and, to improve and innovate the business and organization.

Such workplaces are likely to include empowering job design; self-organized team work; open and fluid organizational structures; delegated decision-making and simplified administrative procedures; a coaching style of line management; regular opportunities for reflection, learning and improvement; high involvement innovation practices; the encouragement of entrepreneurial behavior at all levels; and employee representation in strategic decision-making. WPI can lead to significant and sustainable improvements both in organizational performance (OP) and in employee engagement and wellbeing.

Part 1, for policy topic, WPI is gaining a higher profile as an emerging European policy embedded in a broader economic and social profile European Union (EU) policy to support organizational change in companies. The authors suggest that today's digitalization and robotisation offer opportunities for a more integrated EU policy. For example, the German Industry 4.0 policy to stimulate innovation, notably in smart and advanced manufacturing.

In industries throughout the world, there is a growing attention to **Vision Zero (VZ)** program - the ambition and commitment to create and ensure safe and healthy work and to prevent all serious accidents and occupational diseases in order to achieve zero harm. VZ has recently developed into a major issue in national and international policies for promoting occupational safety and health. Simply doing the same things better than before, is not a successful strategy to achieve zero harm or incident. Both technical and social innovations are needed as well as out-of-the-box thinking for solving existing problems. Zwetsloot et al. (2017) suggests six innovative perspectives of VZ as in Fig. 1 below:



**Figure 1 Six Innovative Perspectives of Vision Zero (VZ)**

In theory and evidence, WPI promises to improve organizational performance, quality of the working life and, consequently, wellbeing at work simultaneously. There is an emphasis on improving wellbeing via individual coping behavior. The book succeeds to explain the importance of WPI implement in the organization for business sustainability as well as appreciating the most valuable asset in the organization, its people. The discussion contributed to this result by highlighting the overlap and commonalities in theories of wellbeing (WB) balance and WPI in the workplace. It ended with a few recommendations for future research and practice.

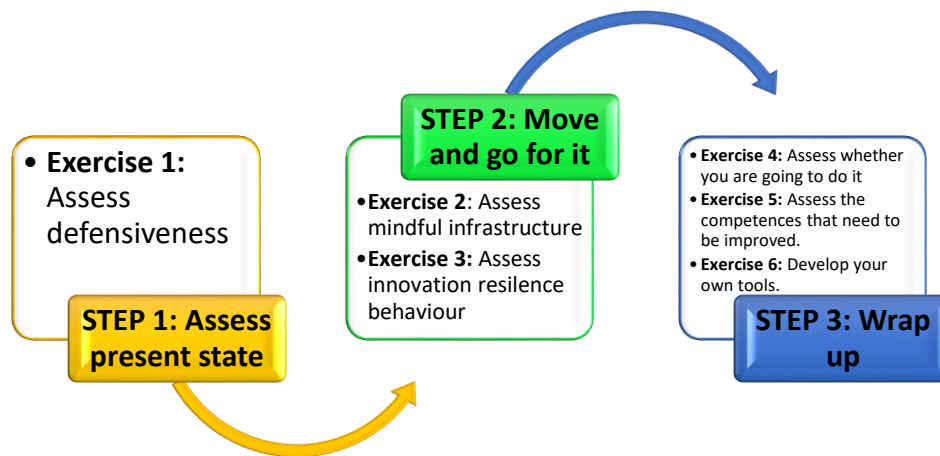
The research found out that there was a significant relationship between WPI and Work & Organizational Psychology (WOP) as well as job flexibility, quality of working life (QWL) and organizational performance (OP). Successful WPI implementation results from an interplay between management-driven business goals and employee-driven quality of work goals. One of the key success factors is constructive co-operation between management, employees and employee representatives. The whole-system approach focusing on the interplay between strategy, structure, and culture is most likely to lead to successful WPI implementation.

Meanwhile, there are five steps to develop WPI; 1) Why WPI, 2) A systemic approach, 3) Starting the change, 4) Guide to the elements, and 5) The process of change. WPI not only aims at fostering innovation capacities, it also allows businesses to remain innovative and adapt to change more quickly and smoothly. One of the WPI example is the Innovation Resilience Behaviour tool (IRB-tool), aimed at improving teamwork as an example of workplace innovation intervention (Fig. 2). The IRB-tool is mainly a diagnostic tool to assess the present situation regarding three aspects:

- 1) the presence of defensiveness, and thus insight into possible causes for risk-avoidance;
- 2) the presence of mindful infrastructure, that is, characteristics that facilitate IRB; and

- 3) the presence of IRB - the behaviours and competences to keep an innovation team on track and to get it back on track.

The primary advantage of applying the IRB-tool is the opportunity to boost entrepreneurship, intrapreneurship and innovation within the organization. The tool and its theoretical underpinnings reflect the vision that innovation requires employee participation. The tool basically deals with improving problem-solving behavior, and this could be relevant to other types of teams, to project management in general and to any project-based organization.



**Figure 2 Framework of IRB-Tool: Step and Exercise**

### 3.0 CONCLUSION

This book explores how WPI contributes to improving wellbeing at work and organizational performance. It also discusses the current state of European and national policies on workplace innovation, novel theoretical approaches to WPI, as well as international WPI case studies, and practical tools for the implementation of WPI. The summary of important statements from the book are:

- 1) Successful WPI implementation results from an interplay between management-driven business goals and employee-driven quality of work goals;
- 2) A consistent approach to shared leadership can stimulate employee empowerment and bottom-up, which, in turn, leads to successful WPI interventions;
- 3) Lean management methods can only be a successful tool for WPI if employees are actively involved in the process;
- 4) WPI should include the aspect of QWL otherwise low employee engagement will be the consequence; and
- 5) Institutional alliances are relevant for the sustainability of WPI activities within companies.

### 4.0 RATE THE BOOK

Book reviews with star ratings can be more effective, compared to those which don't. Though this is entirely optional. I used a scale of 5 in the increments of 1; a) 1 Star – Complete waste of time, b) 2 Stars – Fine but not happy with it, c) 3 Stars – Satisfactory, not too bad, d) 4 Stars – Loved reading it and e) 5 Stars – Impactful (Writoscope, 2021).

The author thoroughly researched the topic before writing. This book is explaining the basic concept and practice of workplace innovation, an evidence-based approach to organizational transformation that leads to high performance and enhanced workforce engagement and wellbeing. Therefore, I rate this book 4 stars.

In my opinion, it needs to relate and give more practical example to safety and health impacts to the workplace and employees. There will be new emerging hazards and risks since the work process, facilities and surroundings change. Employers prefer the easiest and lowest cost control measures after measuring the effectiveness in short and long term periods to overcome the hazard at the workplace (M. E. Baruji et al., 2020).

**Author: Mohd Esa Baruji, P. Tech (ME)**

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The book review was written by Ts. Hj. Mohd. Esa bin Hj. Baruji, Technical Expert (Principle Consultant/ Researcher), NIOSH, Malaysia who is a registered professional technologist with the Malaysia Board of Technologist (MBOT), he possesses more than 20 years of OSH experience. The author declares that he has no conflict of interest with the book publication.