

Preventative solutions from a systems perspective: Outcomes of a co-creating process among executives and researchers

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THE WORK IN CONTEXT

Stress is still one of the biggest challenges when it comes to people's mental health and workplace opportunities to create growth and wellbeing puts new demands on managers to solve the problem. There is also a stronger focus on top executives and managers, who play a key role in preventing and managing stress, but without a clear picture of what that role implies. There are plenty of international tools and methods available to support interventions to prevent stress, but managers still search for ways to deal with the increasing and costly problem. This search also includes two Danish companies, the Danish Association of Managers and Executives (DAME) and the Danish Pension and Insurance Company, (PFA) which experience an increase in the request for concrete knowledge and tools from their members and customers to solve this problem. Besides applying their vast in-house consultants' experience to serve their members, the two companies also wish to provide their customers and members with current, relevant and research-based knowledge on how to prevent stress in practice. Acknowledging the experience and knowledge among executives, managers and researchers, the aim of this project was to allow these actors inspired by Mode 2 knowledge production to co-create new knowledge on preventative strategies. The idea is that the joint knowledge production in combination with a systems perspective on prevention and stress management can qualify the ongoing stress and management debate and provide ideas for new solutions, enhancing the implementability of stress preventive changes that can ensure both business relevance and improved mental health.

KEYWORDS

Knowledge co-creation, stress prevention, systems thinking

A brief outline of the work carried out

In the pursuit for new knowledge, DAME and PFA formed their first advisory table in 2015 focusing on stress and wellbeing, where the IGLO (individual, group, leadership and organisation) model formed the foundation for the idea generation. After four years of work targeting the individual, group and leadership levels, the advisory table was now to focus on organisational level interventions and how to implement these from an executive perspective.

In two four-hour meetings approximately twenty executives, managers, human resources experts and intervention researchers discussed different challenges, problems and co-created solutions regarding prevention of work-related stress from an organisational design point of view.

By combining the executive level focus with Jay Galbraith's organisational design model – the Star Model (1975) – the participants described and systematised organisational conditions they found influenced wellbeing, and the prevention and management of stress. Their work included the concern for the strategy, structure, processes, rewards and people. The joint work also included discussion about the impact on strategies and the organisational design if prevention and stress management would be integrated in the organisational design.

In the first meeting, the aim of the co-production knowledge production process was to uncover, explore and describe central topics with regard to stress from an executive and organisational perspective. In the second meeting, the aim was to enable the participants to decide on implementable solutions that included the concern for the organisational design and discuss potential positive and negative effects. The identified topics from the first meeting formed the basis of the design of the solutions.

Findings/solutions (the outcome)

The outcome of the joint knowledge production were several topics that were categorised according to the relevant component of the Star Model: strategy, structure, processes, rewards or people. Then democratic prioritisation process solutions were developed for each of the selected/prioritised topics.

Impact

DAME and PFA have joined the topics and solutions and aim to share the new knowledge with customers and members via advice and counselling or articles. Both DAME and PFA anticipate a change in competence level and knowledge about the organisational interdependencies, managerial implications and prevention of work-related stress.