

Abstracts

Health Assessment of the Individuals and Organizations, Private Information Protection and the Law

Takenori Mishiba (Kindai University)

This paper studies methods of balancing efficient health checks with the aim of promoting healthy companies and employee privacy. “Healthy Companies” is the concept for persuading company managers to promote health management for good productivity at work, and relates particularly to mental and cardiovascular disease, the associated risks and ill-health. Technical infrastructure has been developed to assess, manage the above risks, and Evidence-Based Policy Management (EBPM) for promoting occupational health is being planned by the government. In some cases, workers do not work sufficiently and disturb other workers. It is possible that companies will be interested in genetic information which indicates the likelihood of an employee getting cancer etc. As a result, assessments of private health and interventions into private life will be needed to a certain degree. This can be inconsistent with the laws for privacy and personal information protection. However, Japanese labor laws are by nature soft-laws and can be construed flexibly. In particular, (court) precedents have emphasized practical interpretation and have allowed sensible employers who are committed to health care and information management to handle workers’ health information to the greatest extent possible. The world’s only stress check system, which is required by law to be implemented by employers, can also be used. The system is designed to assess human resource management items including the suitability of each worker for his/her work, as well as protect their personal information in many ways. The questions recommended by the government can be revised, and survey items must be created and selected to suit the organization and the individual. Consequently, I suggest that health information can and should be used by employers who seek to conduct appropriate health and personal information management, depending on whether a) if it is inclined to invite prejudice, b) if its risk can be managed in the workplace, and c) if it affects work ability and/or disturbs other workers.

Optimal Strategies for Gathering Employee Health Data

Hisashi Eguchi (University of Occupational and Environmental Health, Japan)

Using the WHO definition of health as a measurement benchmark, this paper delineates a methodology for assessing the health status of workers, a pivotal component in health management promotion, and elucidates the stance of businesses towards gathering information on workers’ health, which is a prerequisite for comprehensive health data collection. Subsequently, the rationale behind the escalating interest in workers’ health management and the policy framework supporting strategic workers’ health management are discussed. The paper then describes specific measures for assessing workers’ health status, encompassing evaluations of individual wellbeing (regular health checkups, the stress check program, presenteeism, absenteeism, work engagement, etc.) and psychosocial factors at the workplace that influence both the mental and physical wellbeing of employees (utilizing models such as the Demand-Control-Support model and the Effort-Reward-Imbalance model). Additionally, it addresses the measurement of workers’ overall wellbeing, and also outlines the current landscape of health information collection, notably the rapid advancement in digital technology, which has made significant progress in recent years. This paper advocates for the integration of the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle in workers’ health management and health promotion initiatives, with the assessment of health status being an indispensable component of the “Check” phase. Additionally, it emphasizes the need for a forward-looking, strategic approach to workers’ health management, positioning it as a vital intangible asset.

Has Health and Productivity Management “Penetrated” Japanese Companies?

Yuta Morinaga (Sophia University)

This study examines whether health and productivity management (HPM) has “penetrated” Japanese companies and identifies issues that need to be considered in the future. First, this study reviews the trends in the number of companies participating in the Health and Productivity Management Survey and previous studies related to the survey. The results reveal that HPM is being introduced in many listed companies in Japan, but there is still room for penetration in small and medium-sized companies. Second, this study examines issues to be considered in the future from the perspective of the problem that there is room for HPM to “permeate” within organizations through effective practice within them. Specifically, we introduce employees’ perceptions of the how and why of human resource (HR) policies, which should be focused on to further penetrate HPM within the organizations. We rely on the findings of research groups that focus on the practical process of HR policies in the HR management theory of management science. Finally, the remaining issues that need to be considered with regard to HPM in the future based on the two “penetration” perspectives are summarized.

Employee Wellbeing Management and Productivity

Yuji Kawata (Waseda University)

Ritsu Kitagawa (Waseda University)

Kohei Takahashi (Waseda University)

Hideo Owan (Waseda University)

Sachiko Kuroda (Waseda University)

Recently, an increasing number of companies have been proactive in managing the health of their employees, partly in response to the *Health and Productivity Management Initiatives* launched in 2015 by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), along with growing interest in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) investments. While it is socially desirable for more people to be healthy, this does not necessarily mean that there has been a large body of evidence to date on the extent to which companies’ efforts to promote employee health actually improve the health of their workers, and the extent to which company performance and productivity improve as a result of such health improvements. Recently, however, such research has been gradually accumulating. This paper reviews the latest academic research on employee wellbeing management and research designs that are useful for verifying its effectiveness, and introduces field experiments that the authors conducted with two companies to measure the effectiveness of health measures. Finally, the paper summarizes what needs to be done in the future to link health management to productivity improvement.

Employee Health Conditions and Their Work Incentives: The Importance of Managing Employee Health in Small-to-Medium-Sized Enterprises

Miki Kohara (Osaka University)

Tetsuya Matsubayashi (Osaka University)

Shinya Kajitani (Kyoto Sangyo University)

Do employees’ health conditions influence their work incentives and, consequently, labor outcomes? This paper examines the causal impact of health deterioration on work incentives and outcomes, focusing on the exogenous health shock resulting from the unexpected negative impact of the pandemic. Original surveys and experiments were conducted on employees in existing small-to-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The main findings are as follows: firstly, the pandemic-induced deterioration in employees’ health diminishes their work incentives and sense of work accomplishment. Secondly, health deterioration during the pandemic is exacerbated by an increase in work hours. Maintaining better employee health conditions in SMEs can enhance work incentives. Managing employee health is crucial not only for employees but also for SME employers.

Assessing Work Style Reform: Implications from Changes Over Time in the Japanese Panel Study of Employment Dynamics

Koichi Kume (Toyo University)

Makiko Hagihara (Recruit Works Institute)

Yawen Sun (Recruit Works Institute)

This paper attempts to summarize changes in working conditions in 2016 and 2022, before and after the implementation of the related work style reform legislation, from three perspectives: work environment, workers' welfare, and non-labor-force status. With regard to the work environment, we confirmed that while income growth is sluggish, working hours are decreasing in the direction of the legislation. On the other hand, there was an increase in workloads, a growing awareness of harassment, and an increase in mental illness among workers in their thirties. Regarding fair treatment of employment status, we found that the ratio of involuntary non-regular workers was slightly higher among middle-aged and older workers, indicating the necessity of redesigning the duties and treatment of these workers. We also confirmed an increase in workaholic scores due to overwork. The proportion of men and women in their twenties with work-life balance (WLB) stress decreased, job satisfaction increased, and career prospects were opening up, while WLB stress worsened for men aged fifty and older, and career prospects scores were lower for women aged forty and older. These results indicate that work styles are changing in the direction of the society that the Work Style Reform Act aims to create, but that issues remain to be addressed, such as coping with increased workloads, recovery from psychological fatigue, and realization of fair treatment.

Use of the "Kurzarbeitergeld" Short-Time Work Benefit in Germany during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Kenta Kawase (Embassy of Japan in Germany)

The purpose of this paper is to examine the consistency of take-up of the "Kurzarbeitergeld," a short-time work benefit in Germany, with the strengthening or relaxation of COVID-19 containment measures, and changes in this relationship during the transition of the measures. This paper reviews the trends of the measures and Kurzarbeitergeld take-up, and analyses the relationship between the stringency indexes of the measures and the development of short-time workers. The results are as follows. First, the number of short-time workers quickly increased as the stringency indexes increased. Second, the number of short-time workers soon decreased as the stringency indexes decreased, even when special regulations continued. Third, the impact of stringency on the number of short-time workers decreased after each wave of the strengthening and relaxation of containment measures. These results indicate that the Kurzarbeitergeld and its special regulations contributed to job retention at a sufficiently rapid pace along with the strengthening of containment measures, and did not maintain employment for an excessively long period after their relaxation. The decrease in the impact of stringency can be attributed to qualitative differences in the containment measures taken in each period, or to changes in business activities and work styles.