

MANAGING WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE PERFORMANCE

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Abstract: *In the current context of organizational sustainability, working conditions represent a key factor not only for ensuring employee well-being but also for achieving long-term sustainable performance. This article aims to explore how the management of working conditions can contribute to the development of organizations that are both competitive and socially responsible. The research applies a multidisciplinary approach combining theoretical analysis of sustainability models, a review of relevant literature on occupational management, and comparative evaluation of organizational practices in European contexts. Key indicators of sustainable performance are examined in relation to workplace quality dimensions, including health and safety, work-life balance, and opportunities for professional development. The study highlights that sustainable performance cannot be achieved solely through economic efficiency. It requires integrated management of working conditions, where environmental, social, and governance (ESG) aspects are embedded into organizational strategy. Organizations that invest in modern workplace conditions such as ergonomic environments, flexible working arrangements, and continuous learning opportunities demonstrate higher resilience, innovation capacity, and long-term value creation. Furthermore, this article underlines the importance of aligning employee welfare strategies with digital transformation and sustainability goals to create a holistic model of sustainable organizational development.*

Key words: *working conditions, sustainable performance, workplace management, ESG, organizational resilience, employee well-being*

INTRODUCTION

Working conditions are the key to the performance, quality and safety of activities in a company. A healthy, balanced and well-organized workplace helps employees develop professionally. It also improves organizational processes and outcomes.

Studies show that the right staff size, psychological safety, open communication, teamwork and employee well-being are the most important elements that affect an organization's ability to provide quality goods and services [6].

Material resources and vocational education are not the only things that contribute to improving working conditions; Interpersonal relationships and teams are also important. At its core, work is an interactional process, and a company's ability to implement and sustain improvements depends on how these interactions promote an environment based on respect, safety, and cooperation.

Workers contribute to the creation of new goods and services for businesses, playing a key role in the process of value creation. High-quality jobs are good for the company, but they are also expensive. For this reason, public policies are aware of the importance of improving the quality of jobs.

Job quality is a multifaceted concept, which is recognized in both research frameworks and public policy approaches. Although the models used to analyze and track job quality may be different, they share many common points and, in particular, emphasize the importance of capturing the experience at work rather than a simple description of the activities carried out [1].

One of the main factors influencing workers' performance is their motivation. Motivation explains the intensity, direction, and persistence with which an individual strives to achieve their goals. It is closely linked to satisfaction, autonomy, and purpose at work.

Motivated employees demonstrate greater enthusiasm, creativity, and accountability. Conversely, lack of motivation results in inefficiency, absenteeism, and high turnover. Thus, employee motivation should be managed strategically, supported by recognition, fair pay, and opportunities for career growth [10]. Workplace discipline also affects performance and organizational excellence.

It represents the internalized form of self-regulation ensuring adherence to company procedures, rules, and ethics. A disciplined culture promotes stability, reliability, and trust in organizational behavior. Without discipline, the company's activities risk becoming inefficient and inconsistent.

Without discipline, the company's activities risk poor results and not achieving its objectives. The process of training and self-control that ensures compliance with internal rules and organizational standards is known as discipline. An ideal form of discipline is the constant application of the work system in accordance with the company's procedures and policy.

An attractive climate and supportive atmosphere describe the conditions that attract and retain workers, encouraging them to perform at their best. In a friendly and empowering work environment, employees are more willing to use their skills and competencies effectively [4, 15].

There are a number of reasons that will motivate them to achieve the ideal level of performance and productivity for their company. These reasons can come from external or internal sources. Endogenous motivations help to complete difficult tasks, while exogenous motivations offer rewards such as gratitude and a salary increase.

In modern organizations, justice is not always ensured by the equitable allocation of resources or by providing clear and acceptable explanations for decisions made, and employees are not always treated with dignity and respect in the application of policies and procedures.

This situation can create an unpleasant work environment, but many studies have shown that a positive and well-organized work environment is very important for achieving the results desired by a company [15]. Achievement orientation shows workers' willingness to achieve their goals. More people will be more productive and perform better if they focus on these goals. Consequently, ensuring a suitable work environment can help employees successfully achieve organizational goals.

Over the past three decades, sustainability and corporate social responsibility have gained increasing importance in research on business and organizations, highlighting the need for firms to take responsibility and find effective ways to manage and evaluate their social interactions.

Corporate social responsibility is considered a strategic investment, bringing benefits to both the company and the community. It contributes to strengthening relationships with the community (customers, suppliers, authorities), influencing the target audience, raising the company's social status, maintaining a good reputation, building customer loyalty, motivating employees and developing business excellence, thus providing a real competitive advantage [9].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To examine the relationship between sustainable performance and working conditions, the research used a blended approach combining quantitative and qualitative

analyses. The theoretical background was built through an exhaustive review of the literature. It was based on a variety of scientific studies on sustainability, motivation and quality of work.

The empirical part used data from the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) and focused on analyzing exposure to specific occupational elements by age and gender. The selected indicators included:

- work carried out at a rapid pace;
- lack of autonomy in professional activity;
- lack of prospects for professional growth;
- difficulty balancing work and family life

Descriptive statistics were employed to interpret the data, identifying patterns of inequality and demographic differences in exposure to demanding work environments. This methodological approach enabled a nuanced understanding of how age, gender, and occupation influence job sustainability and organizational performance.

Additionally, the study triangulated quantitative findings with qualitative insights from literature and case studies to strengthen the conclusions.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Companies are increasingly attaching importance to their image and relationship with the social environment, as well as the advantages of adopting socially responsible behavior, according to the current economic reality.

Contemporary companies emphasize fundamental human values and ethical commitment to society, considering them essential elements of competitiveness in an environment of increasing competition [8].

In today's digital economy, employees must possess both technical and soft skills. Technically, employees must have advanced skills in areas such as programming, artificial intelligence, data analytics, and complex digital skills. These skills are essential for operating smart, automated, and robotic systems today.

They are also necessary for optimizing processes, quickly identifying errors, and making informed decisions based on the data collected from these technologies. In addition, being familiar with advanced digital tools allows employees to actively participate in innovation, contribute to the creation of technological solutions that fit the organization's needs, and maintain the company's competitiveness in an increasingly automated and digitized work environment [14].

To remain competitive in a rapidly evolving digital economy, employees must develop a well-balanced mix of technical expertise and soft skills that foster innovation, collaboration, and adaptability in the workplace (figure 1).

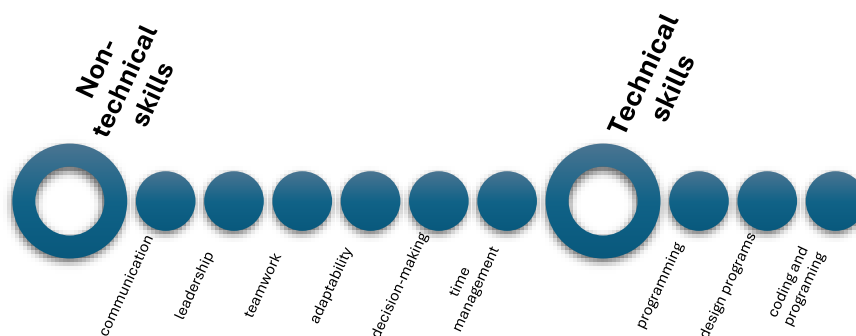


Figure 1. Core technical and soft skills necessary for today's workforce

Source: elaborated by author based on [14]

For the business environment, international standards are essential strategic tools, which support companies in addressing the specific challenges of the modern economy. By applying them, organizations can achieve increased process efficiency, increase productivity levels, and facilitate their expansion into new and competitive markets [12].

In the context of continuous digital transformation and globalization, the modern labor market demands a workforce equipped with a balanced mix of technical and non-technical (soft) skills.[11]

While digital literacy and programming abilities remain critical for operational efficiency and innovation, interpersonal competencies such as communication, adaptability, and teamwork are equally indispensable for fostering collaboration and organizational resilience.

The following figure illustrates the essential combination of core skills required to ensure competitiveness and sustainable performance in today's dynamic business environment.

The dual emphasis on technical and non-technical skills reflects a shift in how organizations define employee competence and long-term employability. Technical skills, such as programming, design, and data processing, are vital for managing automation, digital platforms, and advanced analytics that characterize Industry 4.0.

These abilities enable workers to interact effectively with intelligent systems, optimize workflows, and contribute to innovation-driven growth. At the same time, soft skills are becoming decisive for career success and organizational sustainability. Communication, leadership, adaptability, and time management facilitate teamwork, conflict resolution, and the effective implementation of change processes.

In an era where technology evolves rapidly, such interpersonal and cognitive abilities allow employees to remain flexible and creative while maintaining ethical and socially responsible behavior at work.

The balance between technical and soft skills represents a cornerstone of sustainable performance. Organizations that cultivate digital expertise alongside emotional intelligence are better positioned to navigate uncertainty, embrace innovation, and maintain a competitive advantage in the rapidly changing global economy.

Quality of work is now seen not only as an optional benefit, but as a strategic indicator for the long-term success of the company and the health of employees.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) highlights seven fundamental dimensions of job quality: work environment, work intensity, quality of working time, social environment, skills development, career opportunities and income. People around the world use these global standards as a basis for comparison.

There are numerous problems happening worldwide, including excessive overtime, high stress levels, lack of job stability, and gender pay gaps. However, it is emphasized that when companies decide to invest in employees, this has an obvious effect on both employee health and the company's productivity and competitiveness.

A company's ability to survive and grow without sacrificing natural resources for the future is known as sustainability. Three pillars form the concept of sustainability: environmental, economic and social [9]. Reconciling economic development with the protection of social and ecological balance is the main goal of sustainability.

The idea of a 'green economy' comes from the idea of an economy that focuses on improving people's quality of life and promoting social equity, with the aim of reducing harmful effects on the environment and remedying ecological imbalances [13].

Therefore, we will make a comparison of the working conditions reported by transport and warehousing workers against the average of all economic sectors in 2021.



Figure 2. The seven fundamental dimensions of quality

Source: elaborated by the author based on [1]

The graph highlights the percentage of employees who experience a variety of issues related to their work environment, such as exposure to noise, night work, tiring work positions, and effects on their health (figure 3).

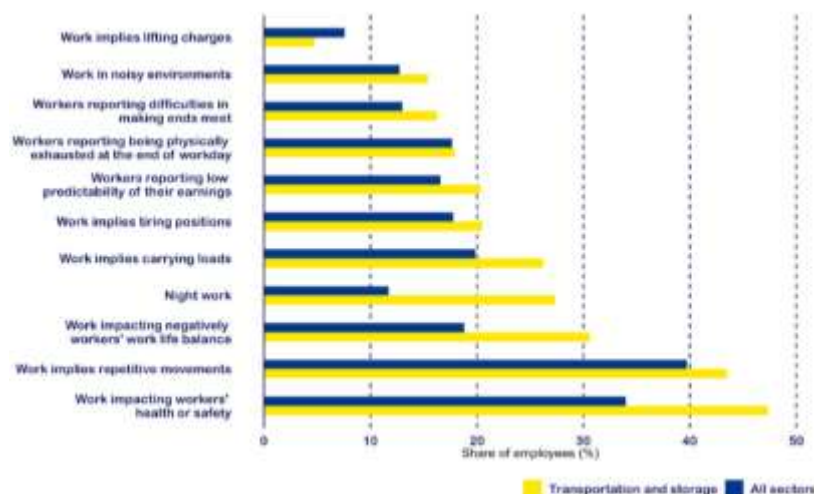


Figure 3. Working conditions reported by employees in the transport and storage sector compared to the economy as a whole, 2021

Source: excerpt from [3]

The results show that the transport and warehousing sector is characterized by more demanding conditions than the average in other areas, in particular in terms of repetitive movements, weight transport, health and safety risks, as well as physical fatigue at the end of the working day.

Thus, the figure clearly illustrates the specificity of a sector dominated by intense physical loads and higher risk factors, highlighting the need for more effective policies to protect and improve working conditions for transport and warehousing workers.

The well-being of workers and the development of society depend on a balanced allocation of time for work, care, recreation, volunteering and personal development. Interactions between households and the labour market are determined by social policies, working time regimes and gender norms on domestic work.

At the same time, the social organization of households is changing. With the increase in the number of people who are employed in the labour market, especially women, it is necessary for an increasing number of people to combine their professional and care tasks. Working time is "gender-marked" because men's and women's circumstances and preferences regarding working time are perceived and influenced in different ways [2].

A particularly valuable direction for future research would be to conduct a practical study aimed at developing a mathematical model that establishes a correlation between working conditions, employee competencies, and organizational performance outcomes [7]. Such a model could quantify the extent to which improvements in workplace environment and professional skills directly influence productivity, innovation capacity, and sustainable growth [14].

By integrating statistical analysis, regression modeling, or machine learning techniques, this research would provide evidence-based insights for optimizing human resource strategies and promoting long-term organizational resilience.

To deepen the comparative analysis between European regions, the research examined the relationship between occupational categories and the quality of working time across different country groups.

This comparative perspective provides valuable insight into how labor market structures, social policies, and organizational cultures influence employees' ability to balance professional and personal life.

The results are summarized in Table 1, which highlights, through significant coefficients, the differences in working time quality by occupation and region.

Table 1.

Associations between occupational categories and quality of working time by country group

	Managers	Professionals	Technicians	Service and sales workers	Elementary occupations	Plant and machine operators	Agricultural workers
Anglophone	Reference						
Baltic	Blue	Blue					
Central-Eastern			Red	Red			Red
Continental		Blue		Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
Northern		Blue			Blue	Blue	
Southern		Blue	Red	Red		Blue	Red

Note: The bars represent the relative associations between each occupational category and country group, showing only the significant coefficients ($p < 0.01$). The blue bars indicate positive associations for workers compared to the reference group, known as the English speaker, while the red bars indicate negative associations. For example, workers in the fields of service and sales score much worse in the Southern European and Central-Eastern Europe groups of countries than those in the English-speaking group. On the other hand, workers in the continental group score much better than those in the reference group.

Source: except from [2]

The interpretation of the data presented in the table reveals several key trends concerning the sustainability of working conditions across Europe. First, it is evident that Baltic countries stand out with a positive association between managers and technicians and higher working time quality [5].

This suggests a more balanced organizational structure and better utilization of human capital. Such results may be attributed to modern corporate governance strategies and the rapid digitalization of workplaces, both of which facilitate more efficient task management and reduced occupational stress.

In Central and Eastern Europe, the picture is more complex: workers in agriculture, services, and sales encounter significant challenges in maintaining a satisfactory work–life balance.

This reality reflects, on the one hand, the labor-intensive nature of these sectors and, on the other hand, the limited implementation of flexible work arrangements and social protection policies. Consequently, the less favorable conditions in these regions underline the urgent need for modernization of human resource management practices.

In contrast, the Continental group displays positive associations for several occupational categories such as machine operators, professionals, and unskilled workers. This indicates that these countries maintain a culture of work that values equilibrium between personal and professional life, while also adhering to high standards of occupational safety and health.

The Nordic countries continue to represent a benchmark in terms of working time quality, especially for machine operators and technical occupations. These results reaffirm the region's reputation for implementing flexible labor policies, promoting gender equality, and encouraging autonomy and participation in the workplace.

Conversely, the Southern European countries show a visible polarization: professionals benefit from better conditions, while service workers, agricultural employees, and elementary occupations face disadvantages.

This structural inequality highlights a persistent gap between highly qualified sectors and traditional labor-intensive jobs, emphasizing the need for inclusive labor market policies and the reduction of physical strain in demanding professions.

Overall, the analysis confirms that the quality of working time is a crucial indicator of social sustainability, reflecting the balance between economic efficiency and employee well-being.

Countries that manage to sustain this equilibrium not only enhance organizational performance but also contribute to the development of a resilient, innovative, and motivated workforce.

CONCLUSIONS

The study shows that working conditions are an essential factor for a company's sustainable performance. Companies that prioritize employee well-being, fair treatment, and workplace safety are more efficient, innovative, and adaptable.

The analysis of the self-employed shows that age and experience do not necessarily guarantee poor working conditions. Exposure to demanding work environments, intense pace and lack of professional development opportunities continue to be a major problem after the age of 50. This fact shows how important it is to create labor policies that accept all categories of employees, regardless of gender or age.

The results also show that economic success is not the only way to achieve performance sustainability. It requires a comprehensive approach that integrates fair working conditions, social responsibility and continuous professional development. Organizations that implement workplace management methods that are sustainable improve the health of their employees and accelerate long-term economic and social progress.

In conclusion, economic success and sustainability must evolve together. Organizations that integrate ESG principles into their management of working conditions strengthen resilience, enhance employee satisfaction, and foster social progress.

Future research should focus on developing quantitative sustainability indices linking workplace quality to organizational performance, thereby providing policymakers and managers with evidence-based tools for continuous improvement.

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