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EDITED AND REVIEWED BY
Rodrigo Lozano,
University of Gävle, Sweden

*CORRESPONDENCE
Ulf Johanson
ulf.johanson@ki.se

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Editorial: Managing occupational health and safety: Incorporating social sustainability into the organization

Ulf Johanson^{1*}, Emmanuel Aboagye¹ and Jun Yao²

¹Unit of Intervention and Implementation Research for Worker Health, Institute of Environmental Medicine, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden, ²School of Commerce, Meiji University, Tokyo, Japan

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Editorial on the Research Topic

Managing occupational health and safety: Incorporating social sustainability into the organization

Social sustainability is a dynamic concept that changes over time and place but is frequently defined as identifying and managing an organization's overall impact on society (McGuinn et al., 2020). In most cases, insightful and intelligent management recognizes that their efforts to promote social sustainability have the potential to produce long-term success. They must, however, be based on credible organizational practices and the prevention of activities such as human capital or social exploitation.

The present Research Topic of papers comprises some empirical work but also some basic theoretical aspects that are most relevant for future work on the management of OHS. We have aimed to stimulate discussion about some of the critical elements to consider when developing business models, strategies, and responsible management that incorporate OHS. In total, six papers addressing different aspects of the issue at hand were accepted. Some are empirical, while others are theoretical or conceptual.

The article authored by Guy Ahonen¹, Ove Näsman and Emmanuel Aboagye is an empirical paper on forming "Virtual Joint Companies as a Means of Incentivizing SMEs to Use Occupational Health Services." The trial study presents new and meaningful findings on how employees of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) can benefit

¹ Sadly, during the process of finalizing the text professor Guy Ahonen died in spring 2022. Guy started his academic career as an economist and devoted later his interest to OHS. He was a curious, open minded and very nice person. All of us who were colleagues and friends miss Guy very much.

from occupational health services through economic incentives in the same way that employees of large organizations do. The conclusions indicate that SMEs' ability to form legal entities in the form of virtual joint companies appears to address, at least partially, the issues associated with the conflict between their small size and investment in OHS to address work accidents and disease incidences. According to the study, implementing the proposed approach with differential fee systems for large and small businesses could provide a compelling economic incentive for small businesses to invest in OHS, thereby contributing to sustainable organizations (Ahoⁿon et al.).

A very different approach in relation to the subject is submitted by Bjurström. In this article "Doctrines for Occupational Health and Safety" the author suggests that the relationship between strategy, business models, management control and its impact on actual occupational health and safety practices is poorly explored in the literature. The author also asserts that everyday practice of OHS is messier than the abstractions that are expressed in strategies, business models, and management control systems. A practice notion of OHS, the author concludes, provides a more realistic starting point than the commonly assumed abstractions. The paper's contribution is that a practice notion shifts the focus to what is rather than what ought to be, which may lead to more sustainable organizations (Bjurström).

Johanson et al. developed a framework for integrating a business model for sustainability and performance management to promote OHS. A discussion of the value of OHS in the framework is highlighted, and the authors agree with Bjurström that the poor relationship between the business model and performance management is a major shortcoming in the OHS literature. Thus, the proposed interdisciplinary framework includes various aspects that must normally be addressed when bringing abstract formulations into practice to capture value. The concept of value has been extensively discussed in the text. The most important conclusion of the paper is the basic values upon which OHS actions are based or are supposed to be based should be addressed not only in the business model but also harmonize with the internal performance management system (Johanson et al.).

In their article, Yao and Johanson used empirical data to test the OSH model proposed by Johanson and Aboagye (2020), conceptualizing and operationalizing the components to form a theoretical framework including government policies, stakeholder culture and corporate management. The current and anticipated labor shortage has prompted the Japanese government to launch several projects aimed at improving employee health and productivity. The paper shows how health and productivity management practices in Japanese companies have embedded important elements to improve social sustainability in the workforce (Yao and Johanson).

The contribution by Holland also contains a conceptual framework named a "Behavioral theory of the financial firm."

The paper explores how Net Zero and social sustainability change is addressed in the business model of financial firms. It highlights stakeholders demands for managerial competence and responsibility for managing acceptable Net Zero and CSR change. This Net Zero and CSR-oriented framework is an embryonic theory based on a limited set of case and event-based data. Its interdisciplinary analysis is constrained by major problems in the literature concerning financial firms. It reflects the emerging "social finance" turn in the literature and the increased focus on social sustainability when facing climate change and new CSR change pressures. This places the research at the frontier of sustainability research, with all the problems associated with innovation and new ways of thinking. The paper contributes with new methods for academics, practitioners, and regulators to understand, communicate and act on rapid and complex changes such as climate change and new CSR change pressures in financial firms (Holland).

Finally, in the contribution "Decision-making in relation to health and environment: Toward sustainability economics," Söderbaum states that with respect to economics, the sustainability agenda calls for a shift of paradigm. If present development is unsustainable, then protecting the present neoclassical monopoly is hardly a defensible strategy. Research and education in economics need to be pluralist and if we believe in democracy, the latter should be addressed not only in working life but also within university departments of economics. This is to say that sustainability is a challenge not only in scientific but also in ideological terms. The emphasis on economic growth and profits removes the need to address sustainability issues. The main message of the paper is that politicians and citizens alike must incorporate environmental and health concerns into the ideological debate (Söderbaum).

The Research Topic includes new empirical work as well as theoretical organizational research that significantly adds to existing knowledge about the role of management social sustainability particularly OHS. One contribution is that the six accepted studies and their findings showed the complexity of the multi-faceted and context-related nature of the concept of social sustainability in relation to OHS. It also indicates that future research requires new interdisciplinary collaboration in defining the concept, designing theories and more advanced research designs that are sensitive to context and different stakeholder perspective. Some of the articles in this Research Topic call for new ways of thinking in the face of the possibilities and challenges that organizations have to deal with to improve OHS (Johanson and Aboagye, 2020). For example, the concepts of value and economics (i.e., what is valuable to employees, customers, citizens, and other stakeholders) needs thorough reflection as well as adjustment of theories and practice social sustainability in relation to OHS (Nicholson, 2022). We hope that this Research Topic of papers will facilitate in the development of new debates for

stronger OHS management as suggested by an ESNER report (EU-OSHA, 2022). This form of OHS management should consider of course better management of the psychosocial work environment with high employee participation, the economy's technological changes, and support for micro and small establishments in fulfilling their OSH management obligations, given their growing importance as key players in the employment market.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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