

FOR OUR ENGLISH-SPEAKING READERS

OVERLOOKED

Overstaffing: Cost to be reduced, or slack to be encouraged?

Stéphane Deschaintre & Salomon Bernier-Khedache.

Overstaffing is commonly seen as a cost that should be reduced. However, our research, based on two industrial cases, presents company managers who advocate it. To analyze this counterintuitive result, we use the concept of organizational slack. The arguments of the managers are then structured around functions of organizational slack: Overstaffing allows them to prepare for the future and to preserve their employees. Showing overstaffing as a slack to be favored is unusual in the present context, and questions more broadly the widespread representations of a workforce that must necessarily be reduced. Our research also sheds light on the concept of organizational slack by showing that it can be consciously rationalized by managers, and therefore be part of a reasoned managerial logic.

TRIAL BY FACT

Story of a gradual decline of maintenance skills in a high-risk organization (1980-2020)

Léna Masson & Anne Dietrich.

In industry, maintenance work, which is deemed non-strategic, is widely subcontracted. While these activities are essential to maintaining the reliability of high-risk organizations, the fact that they are subcontracted is frequently blamed for industrial disasters. In the short term, this leads to financial gains, but also to adverse effects, especially in terms of skills. An in-depth, longitudinal, and multi-level case study within the high-risk business line of a major government-owned company enables us to map out the skills-loss process, to identify the factors behind it, and to inform the analysis of the relationship between inter-organizational control mechanisms and the skills that are required to perform the outsourced activities.

Of chips and men: When working in Industry 4.0 is more human than expected

Véronique Blanc-Brude & Christian Defélix.

In order to address the challenges of efficiency and manufacturing quality, the high levels of automation and data integration that characterize Industry 4.0 make it possible to produce customized runs at a similar cost to mass production, which leads to the creation of vibrant and complex work situations. In “flow” industries, such as microelectronics, very real human work becomes

less visible as it only occurs in the event of a flow or process interruption. But what exactly are the consequences of this automation, pushed to its maximum, on the work and the skills required for production operators? This paper is based on an industrial case study, where the search for high performance levels and the increase in automation lead to increased monitoring of anomalies. The theoretical framework chosen is that of invisible work and its threefold experience (Gomez, 2013), which allows us to discover a change in work that is not really considered by the official organization. Thanks to a qualitative approach combining direct observation and semi-structured interviews, this research reveals that the work experience is marked by a ballooning objective dimension, a far cry from the most frequent, flattering presentations of Industry 4.0. A collective, non-official component is still necessary, with many interactions. Lastly, the subjective experience reveals many areas of tension. Thus, “4.0” work, even if it is more automated, turns out to be much more human than expected.

OTHER TIMES, OTHER PLACES

Is Kodak’s collapse a closed case?

Albéric Tellier.

Kodak’s bankruptcy is generally considered to be an exemplary case of disruption. Our objective is to revisit this assertion, which has circulated widely among researchers and the general public.

A systematic analysis of company data published between September 2003 and January 2008 demonstrates that disruption theory does not fully explain Kodak’s decline. In particular, our analysis highlights the role played by shareholders in rejecting the company’s initial digital strategy.

Our findings demonstrate the impact of shareholder activism on disruptive innovation strategies. They also allow us to discuss the risk of circularity bias in using case studies to illustrate theoretical approaches.

MOSAICS

Antoine Masingue

“On Luc Ferry’s *La frénésie du bonheur*” (FR: Éditions de l’Observatoire) 2023.

Guy Maugis

“On Walter Isaacson’s *Elon Musk*” (US: Simon & Schuster) 2023.

Hervé Dumez

“On Alain Prochiantz’ *Accident. Regard sur la république des sciences*” (FR: Odile Jacob) 2024.