Professionalization of occupational health and safety management in Danish companies and the effects on worker participation

The development of the internal OHS management is studied in sixty Danish companies, the results indicates an increase in professionalization, where employees - employed specifically with the purpose of managing OHS – are either supplementing or taking over from the mandatory OHS - committees. This 'new' group – referred to as OHS professional – have different approaches to the task, which constitutes new directions in OHS management. In this paper we introduce three archetypes of OHS professionals – 'the system builder’, ‘the process oriented’ and ‘the operations oriented’ OHS professional. The three archetypes have fundamentally different understandings of the institution of ‘the OHS organization’, which directly affects the role of the OHS reps. Both ‘the system building’ and ‘the operations oriented’ OHS professional has a tendency to function as a sponge absorbing all the OHS activities leaving the role of employee elected OHS rep as an empty formality without any powers or duties associated with the OHS management and removing initiative and commitment from the OHS reps.

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