Ergonomics of Activity and constructive ergonomics: a developmental perspective to improve workers participation

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Introduction:
Ergonomics of Activity (EA) has been developed in France after World War II by Alain Wisner and is characterized by a developmental and participatory approach involving the workers at every stage of the prevention intervention. Such collaborative approach allows actual activities of work to be integrated in job analyses and in the research of preventive solutions.

Methods:
This communication will consider the practice and models of EA in a philosophical perspective.

Results:
Philosophically, workers are conceptualized as active persons engaged with their own values in a complex social and technical environment, and able to (re)act on this environment. The concept of “operational leeway” emphasizes the dynamic and variable nature of workplaces, and the activity deployed by workers performing constant readjustments to cope with the task variability in order to achieve the production in quantity and quality. ‘Operational leeway’ is defined by the space of freedom available or constructed by workers to elaborate alternative strategies and ways of working according to their skills, knowledge and values in order to achieve production targets, while reducing psychological, mental and physical strains and avoiding negative health effects. This concept focuses “on what workers truly do” rather than “on what have to do”, and this has some similarities with the model of capabilities and effective freedom of choice proposed by Amartya Sen. Workers have constantly to arbitrate between the “work demand” and “what is the demand for him”. In this sense, work can be either a resource for personal development and well-being in case of enabling environment (Falzon) or a source of negative health effects and ethical conflicts in case of contradiction between work demand and capabilities or personal values.

Conclusions:
The implication of these concepts in the practice of Occupational Health, but also company’s and human resources management will be discussed.