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Bio

Martijn Burger is Academic Director at the Erasmus Happiness Economics Research Organisation (EHERO) and Associate Professor of Industrial and Regional Economics in the Department of Applied Economics at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. He obtained his Ph.D. in Economics (cum laude) from the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Most of his current research focuses on happiness economics and urban and regional economics, including geography of happiness, worker well-being, location decisions of multinational corporations, and institutional and social conditions for economic development. His research has been published or is forthcoming in several internationally refereed journals including Journal of Happiness Studies, World Bank Economic Review, Economic Geography, Journal of Economic Geography, Journal of International Business Studies, and Organizational Research Methods. In addition, he is associate director of the Globalization and World Cities Network (GaWC) Research Network, associate editor of the International Journal of Community Well-being, and member of the board of the Dutch Regional Science Association and the International Society for Quality of Life Studies.

Keynote address on:

The Workplace Wellbeing Paradox and the Human-Centric Organisation

Abstract

A growing body of evidence suggests that higher levels of employee well-being are associated with improved productivity, creativity, and service quality. In response, many organizations have substantially increased their investments in workplace well-being initiatives. Yet, paradoxically, levels of stress, burnout, and job dissatisfaction remain persistently high. This raises an important question: why do expanded well-being efforts so often fail to translate into meaningful improvements in employee outcomes?

In this lecture, we critically examine the limitations of prevalent well-being interventions. We argue that many initiatives fall short because they are insufficiently aligned with employees' core needs, are treated as peripheral rather than strategic priorities, or remain fragmented across isolated programs that lack systemic coherence. As a result, their aggregate impact is limited. We propose an alternative perspective that conceptualizes employee well-being as an outcome of organizational design rather than a set of add-on interventions. Drawing on a dataset covering nearly 30,000 employees across 14 organizations, we identify four foundational dimensions of what we term a "human-centric organization": purpose, psychological safety, equality, and competence. Empirical analyses indicate that organizations embedding these dimensions more structurally tend to exhibit higher levels of employee well-being alongside improved performance outcomes.

By situating employee well-being within a broader organizational and institutional framework, this session contributes to ongoing debates on the future of work and the role of firms in

fostering sustainable well-being. It offers both conceptual insights and empirically grounded implications for researchers and practitioners interested in moving beyond short-term interventions towards more systemic approaches.