



Title : Changing perspectives: Why the singular understanding of ergonomics in IDCs is hurting its development

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Industrially advanced countries are characterized by an aging workforce as both the mortality and natality rates are on the decline. Furthermore, the primary health care concerns in many of these countries are non-communicable diseases such as coronary heart disease, stemming from the obesity issues so prevalent in the developed world. Ergonomists in these countries are therefore faced with the challenge of incorporating an understanding of the older worker and obesity into their workplace design considerations. This however is in stark contrast with the situation within industrially developing countries such as South Africa and India. Firstly, due partly to the impact of HIV/AIDS (particularly within the South African context), the life expectancy is substantially lower in the developing world, with little prospect of an aging workforce. Secondly the disease profile is far more complex, not only does the developing world have to deal with chronic diseases of lifestyle but also HIV/AIDS, infectious diseases and violence. This creates a quadruple burden of disease compared to the singular burden associated with the more developed countries. Furthermore, there is growing evidence to suggest that the genetic differences due to historical geographical location are important in determining work capacity. These factors are imperative for the ergonomist as they are ultimately going to have a profound impact on the capacity of the worker. Consequently the application of ergonomics guidelines developed in advanced countries, with very different population characteristics and socioeconomic backgrounds is highly questionable. The purpose of this presentation will be to discuss the role of the ergonomist in trying to understand the complex interaction of factors determining the work capacity in industrially developing countries. It will further contend that failure to acknowledge this interaction will have a deleterious effect on the ability of the ergonomist to perform his or her role, and ultimately negatively influence the development of these countries. The presentation will further highlight the importance of ensuring that ergonomics guidelines are developed to suit the characteristics of the target group, and need to be highly contextualized.