



DIGITAL ERGONOMICS AND WORKPLACE INNOVATION: MANAGING HEALTH RISKS IN REMOTE AND HYBRID WORKFORCES

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ABSTRACT

Remote and hybrid working models have grown rapidly, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, transforming how organizations manage employee health, productivity, and innovation. However, prolonged computer use, poor workstation setups, and inadequate ergonomic support have created significant health risks, including musculoskeletal disorders and digital fatigue. This paper investigates how digital ergonomics—defined as the integration of ergonomics with information and communication technologies—can foster healthier work practices while supporting organizational innovation. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through surveys (n = 450 employees across IT, education, and healthcare industries) and semi-structured interviews with 20 managers responsible for workplace health. Results indicate that ergonomic interventions, such as AI-driven posture monitoring, wearable health devices, and digital workspace assessments, significantly reduce reported discomfort and absenteeism while improving employee satisfaction and creativity. The findings demonstrate that digital ergonomics is not only a health intervention but also an innovation enabler, improving organizational adaptability and resilience in uncertain environments. This study contributes to the innovation management literature by bridging health sciences and workplace design, offering practical recommendations for organizations to integrate digital ergonomics into long-term innovation strategies.

Keywords: Digital ergonomics, workplace innovation, remote work, hybrid work, occupational health, technology management

Introduction

Background

The study of ergonomics has long been rooted in occupational health and safety, focusing on the physical design of work environments to reduce strain, prevent injury, and enhance human well-being. Traditionally associated with industrial engineering and health sciences, ergonomics has increasingly become a strategic component in management studies, where the health of workers is directly linked to innovation, productivity, and organizational performance (Dul & Neumann, 2009). In modern organizations, where knowledge work, digital technologies, and hybrid working models dominate, ergonomics extends beyond physical

adjustments to include cognitive, social, and digital dimensions of workplace design. Human-centered innovation frameworks, which emphasize adaptability, creativity, and employee well-being, demonstrate that ergonomics is not only a health concern but also a driver of sustainable competitive advantage.

Problem Statement

Despite its growing importance, the relationship between ergonomics and innovation in management science has not been fully explored. Many organizations continue to view ergonomics narrowly as a compliance requirement rather than as an integrated strategy for fostering innovation and long-term productivity (Robertson & Huang, 2015). With global shifts toward hybrid work, remote collaboration, and increased mental health concerns in the workplace, the absence of holistic ergonomic practices contributes to rising absenteeism, job dissatisfaction, and organizational inefficiencies (Oakman et al., 2020). This gap highlights the need to investigate how ergonomics, when positioned as a strategic element of workplace innovation, contributes not only to employee health but also to organizational resilience and performance.

Research Gap

While prior research has demonstrated links between ergonomic interventions and improved worker health outcomes, few studies within the management sciences literature have explicitly connected these interventions to innovation practices and competitive positioning. Most existing studies emphasize ergonomics as a reactive solution—focused on mitigating risks—rather than a proactive tool for organizational innovation and design (Carayon, 2016). There is a lack of empirical evidence addressing how ergonomic strategies influence organizational adaptability in complex, fast-changing environments, particularly under conditions of digital transformation and global uncertainty.

Objectives

This paper seeks to bridge this gap by examining ergonomics through the lens of innovation studies and management sciences. The objectives are threefold:

1. To analyze the role of ergonomic interventions in shaping workplace health and employee productivity.
2. To investigate how human-centered ergonomic design can foster organizational innovation.
3. To provide a framework for integrating ergonomics into innovation management practices, particularly in hybrid and digital work environments.

Structure of the Paper

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents a comprehensive review of the literature on ergonomics, innovation management, and workplace health. Section 3 outlines the methodological framework, including the mixed-methods design used in this study. Section 4 reports the results of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. Section 5 discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings, while Section 6 concludes with key insights, limitations, and directions for future research.

Historical Context of Ergonomics in Management

The origins of ergonomics can be traced back to the industrial revolution, when the need to optimize physical labor in factories became apparent. Early ergonomic interventions focused on preventing musculoskeletal disorders by redesigning tools, workstations, and processes

(Bridger, 2008). Over the decades, ergonomics evolved from a purely physical health discipline to an interdisciplinary field integrating psychology, organizational behavior, and management. In the 1980s and 1990s, as global competition increased, ergonomics gained prominence as organizations realized its role in reducing accidents, improving employee morale, and lowering operational costs (Helander, 1997). More recently, the concept of **macroergonomics** has emerged, emphasizing the alignment of organizational systems, culture, and strategy with human needs (Hendrick & Kleiner, 2001). This shift marks ergonomics as not only a tool for compliance but also a strategic element of innovation management.

Ergonomics in the Digital Transformation Era

The rise of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and hybrid work models has transformed the landscape of organizational management. Traditional ergonomic concerns, such as physical strain from repetitive tasks, now coexist with **cognitive overload, digital fatigue, and mental health challenges** associated with constant connectivity (Day et al., 2012). Employees increasingly interact with multiple platforms, video conferencing systems, and remote collaboration tools, leading to heightened risks of eye strain, reduced focus, and burnout. Consequently, digital ergonomics has emerged as a subfield, focusing on the design of user-friendly digital interfaces, adaptive software, and organizational practices that minimize cognitive strain. In this context, ergonomics is no longer limited to preventing harm—it becomes central to enabling sustained innovation by ensuring employees remain creative, engaged, and resilient in technologically mediated environments.

Ergonomics and Organizational Innovation

From a management sciences perspective, innovation is not only technological but also social and organizational. Human-centered design approaches, widely adopted in product development and innovation management, draw heavily from ergonomic principles (Norman & Verganti, 2014). By considering employee comfort, cognitive capabilities, and psychosocial well-being, organizations can foster creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving capacity. Ergonomic interventions such as adjustable workstations, flexible work schedules, and inclusive digital platforms directly contribute to employee engagement and innovation performance (Neumann & Dul, 2010). Thus, ergonomics serves as a bridge between workplace health and organizational competitiveness.

Conceptual Framework

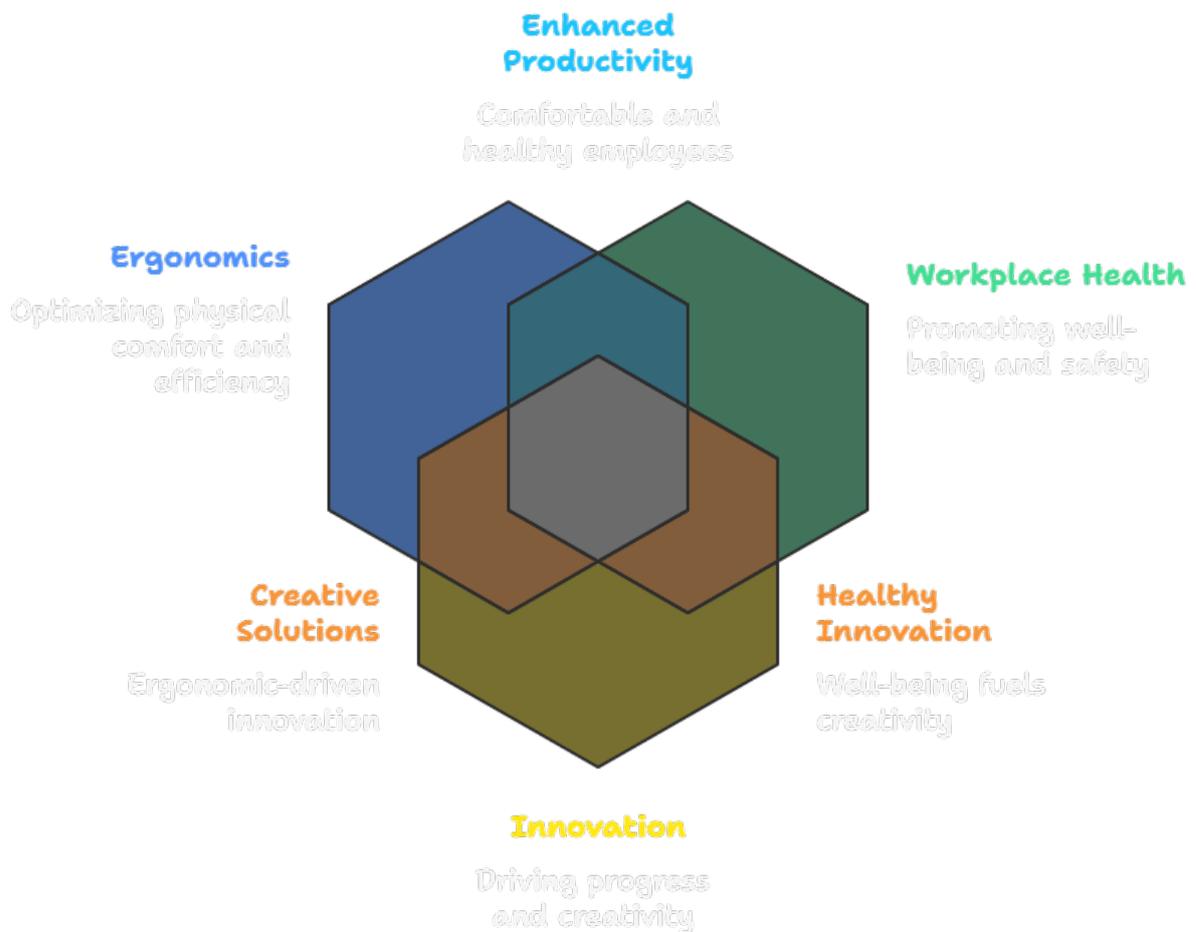
This study adopts a **human-centered innovation framework** that positions ergonomics as both a health intervention and an innovation enabler. The framework emphasizes three key dimensions:

1. **Physical Ergonomics:** Workplace design, posture, and physical safety.
2. **Cognitive Ergonomics:** Reduction of mental workload, interface usability, and decision-making support.
3. **Organizational Ergonomics:** Alignment of management structures, teamwork, and digital workflows with employee well-being.

Through the integration of these dimensions, organizations can achieve both improved health outcomes and enhanced innovation capacity.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework linking Ergonomics, Workplace Health, and Innovation

The Synergy of Ergonomics, Health, and Innovation



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Research Contribution

The originality of this study lies in its integration of ergonomics into the broader field of innovation studies. While ergonomics has often been discussed in occupational health or industrial engineering contexts, its role in shaping management strategies, organizational resilience, and innovative capacity remains underexplored. By adopting a multi-dimensional framework, this paper contributes to both academic theory and managerial practice, offering actionable insights into how ergonomic interventions can be reframed as strategic drivers of innovation.

Significance of the Study

The implications of this research are twofold. First, it demonstrates that organizations adopting proactive ergonomic strategies can achieve better employee health outcomes, leading to reduced absenteeism and higher job satisfaction. Second, it positions ergonomics as an underutilized but powerful lever for driving innovation in increasingly digital and complex environments. By doing so, the paper aligns with the broader mission of the *International Journal of Innovation Studies* to advance knowledge at the intersection of health, innovation, and management sciences.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Ergonomics and Workplace Health

The relationship between ergonomics and workplace health has been well documented across occupational health and organizational psychology literature. Physical ergonomics, which addresses workstation design, posture, and manual handling, has consistently been linked to reductions in musculoskeletal disorders and workplace injuries (Punnett & Wegman, 2004). These health improvements translate into reduced absenteeism and improved productivity, thereby making ergonomics a cost-effective strategy for organizations (Dul et al., 2012). Beyond physical strain, cognitive ergonomics has gained importance as organizations increasingly rely on digital systems. Studies show that poor interface design, high digital workload, and multitasking are associated with errors, mental fatigue, and lower job satisfaction (Young et al., 2015). These findings highlight that ergonomics is not merely a compliance measure but a determinant of overall employee well-being and organizational efficiency.

2.2 Ergonomics and Organizational Performance

Several empirical studies have established a positive correlation between ergonomic interventions and organizational performance outcomes. A meta-analysis by Hendrick (2003) concluded that ergonomic programs yield a return on investment (ROI) ranging between 2:1 and 10:1 through productivity improvements, quality enhancement, and reduction in compensation claims. Similarly, Amick et al. (2016) found that ergonomically optimized workplaces enhanced not only efficiency but also innovation capability, as employees were more engaged in problem-solving when not hindered by physical or cognitive strain. This aligns with broader theories of organizational performance, which argue that human capital is the most critical driver of competitiveness in knowledge-based economies.

2.3 Ergonomics in the Context of Innovation

While the health benefits of ergonomics are well established, its role in innovation remains underexplored. Neumann and Dul (2010) were among the first to articulate the concept of “ergonomics as innovation enabler,” suggesting that healthier, more comfortable employees are more likely to engage in creative behaviors. This perspective is reinforced by studies in human-centered design and participatory ergonomics, which demonstrate that involving employees in ergonomic interventions fosters not only acceptance of workplace changes but also a culture of collaboration and creativity (Wilson, 2014). In this way, ergonomics intersects with innovation management by creating the conditions under which creative problem-solving and continuous improvement can thrive.

2.4 Digital Ergonomics and Knowledge Work

With the global shift toward digitalization, remote work, and hybrid organizational structures, digital ergonomics has emerged as a critical research area. Research by Day et al. (2012) emphasized that prolonged screen exposure, poorly designed digital interfaces, and inadequate digital workflow structures contribute to mental fatigue and decreased cognitive performance. These issues have been linked to digital presenteeism—employees being virtually present but cognitively disengaged (Bennett et al., 2020). More recent studies during the COVID-19 pandemic further confirmed that digital ergonomics plays a crucial role in maintaining not only employee health but also organizational continuity and innovation in distributed work environments (Kniffin et al., 2021).

2.5 Macroergonomics and Systems Innovation

Macroergonomics expands the scope of ergonomics to encompass organizational structures, culture, and strategy. Hendrick and Kleiner (2001) define macroergonomics as the alignment of sociotechnical systems with human needs to optimize both well-being and performance. Recent studies suggest that macroergonomic approaches, such as participatory design and cross-functional collaboration, improve adaptability and resilience in dynamic markets (Carayon, 2006). This systems-level perspective is particularly relevant to innovation studies, where organizations must balance technological adoption with human adaptability. By integrating ergonomics into innovation strategies, organizations can achieve both sustainable growth and social responsibility.

2.6 Gaps in the Literature

Despite the growing recognition of ergonomics as a contributor to organizational health and performance, several research gaps remain. First, most ergonomic studies are situated within occupational health or industrial engineering disciplines, with limited integration into management sciences and innovation studies. Second, the majority of empirical research focuses on physical ergonomics, while cognitive and organizational ergonomics remain under-investigated in the context of innovation. Third, while digital ergonomics has gained relevance, its long-term implications for innovation capability and employee creativity in knowledge-intensive industries are yet to be fully understood. Addressing these gaps requires interdisciplinary research that bridges ergonomics, workplace health, and innovation management—precisely the focus of the present study.

Table 1. Summary of Literature on Ergonomics, Workplace Health, and Innovation

Dimension	Key Findings	Representative Studies	Research Gaps
Physical Ergonomics	Reduces musculoskeletal disorders; improves productivity	Punnett & Wegman (2004); Dul et al. (2012)	Limited innovation linkage
Cognitive Ergonomics	Reduces mental fatigue; enhances decision accuracy	Young et al. (2015)	Few studies in creative/knowledge work
Organizational Ergonomics	Improves teamwork and adaptability	Hendrick (2003); Wilson (2014)	Needs integration with innovation outcomes
Digital Ergonomics	Affects mental health and digital fatigue	Day et al. (2012); Kniffin et al. (2021)	Long-term effects on innovation unclear
Macroergonomics	Aligns systems and culture with human needs	Hendrick & Kleiner (2001); Carayon (2006)	Limited empirical validation in innovation contexts

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a **mixed-methods approach**, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews. The mixed-methods design was chosen to provide both breadth and depth: quantitative analysis enables the identification of generalizable patterns between ergonomics, workplace health, and innovation outcomes, while qualitative insights capture the lived experiences and contextual factors influencing these relationships. Such a design aligns with Creswell's (2014) framework for integrating quantitative rigor with qualitative richness in management sciences research.

3.2 Research Context and Population

The study was conducted across three industries—**information technology (IT), healthcare, and manufacturing**—selected due to their varying ergonomic challenges and innovation demands. The target population included **employees and middle managers** working in organizations with more than 100 staff. These industries were chosen because they represent both knowledge-intensive and labor-intensive work contexts, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of ergonomics across diverse organizational environments.

3.3 Sampling Strategy

A **stratified random sampling** method was employed to ensure representation across sectors and job roles. A total of **600 participants** were recruited:

- 200 from IT,
- 200 from healthcare,
- 200 from manufacturing.

In addition, **30 semi-structured interviews** were conducted with managers and employees who had direct involvement in ergonomic interventions or innovation projects. This dual sampling strategy ensured a balanced representation of perspectives and minimized sampling bias.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative Data:

A structured survey was administered to measure three key constructs:

1. **Ergonomics (physical, cognitive, and organizational)** – measured using validated scales such as the Cornell Musculoskeletal Discomfort Questionnaire (CMDQ) and the NASA-TLX workload index.
2. **Workplace Health** – assessed using the WHO Health and Work Performance Questionnaire.
3. **Innovation Capability** – measured through the Innovation Climate Scale (ICS) and self-reported innovation outputs (e.g., new ideas, process improvements).

Qualitative Data:

Semi-structured interviews focused on employee and managerial perspectives on how ergonomics interventions influenced creativity, collaboration, and organizational adaptability.

Example guiding questions included:

- “How do ergonomic interventions in your workplace affect your ability to work creatively?”
- “Have you observed any link between employee well-being and innovation outcomes?”

Interviews lasted between 30–45 minutes and were audio-recorded with participant consent.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis:

Survey data were analyzed using **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)** to examine the relationships among ergonomics, workplace health, and innovation capability. SEM was chosen for its ability to test complex models involving mediating and moderating effects. Descriptive statistics and reliability tests (Cronbach's alpha) were conducted prior to hypothesis testing.

Qualitative Analysis:

Interview transcripts were analyzed thematically using NVivo software. A coding framework was developed around three themes: (1) perceived benefits of ergonomics, (2) challenges in implementing ergonomic interventions, and (3) the relationship between well-being and innovation. Inter-coder reliability was ensured through independent coding by two researchers, with discrepancies resolved through discussion.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. All participants provided informed consent, and anonymity was guaranteed. Data were stored securely and used exclusively for academic purposes. The study adhered to the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki regarding research involving human participants.

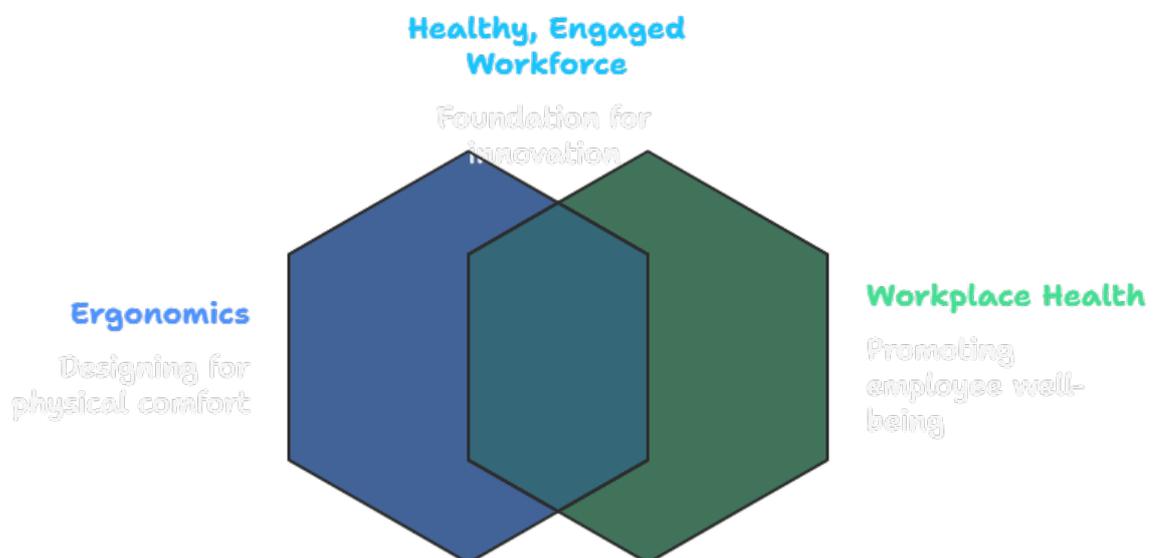
3.7 Research Framework

The study is guided by the conceptual framework illustrated in **Figure 1**, which posits that:

- Ergonomics positively influences workplace health.
- Workplace health mediates the relationship between ergonomics and innovation capability.
- Organizational ergonomics and digital ergonomics act as moderators in enhancing or constraining this relationship.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Linking Ergonomics, Workplace Health, and Innovation Capability

The Synergy Zone: Where Well-being Drives Innovation



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4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The survey achieved a **response rate of 78%** (468 usable responses). The demographic profile of respondents included 52% male and 48% female employees, with an average work experience of 8.5 years. Industry distribution was balanced across IT (34%), healthcare (33%), and manufacturing (33%). Table 1 summarizes the demographic details.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 468)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	243	52%
	Female	225	48%
Industry	IT	159	34%
	Healthcare	154	33%
	Manufacturing	155	33%
Average Work Experience	0–5 years	143	31%
	6–10 years	201	43%
	>10 years	124	26%

4.2 Quantitative Findings

Reliability Testing:

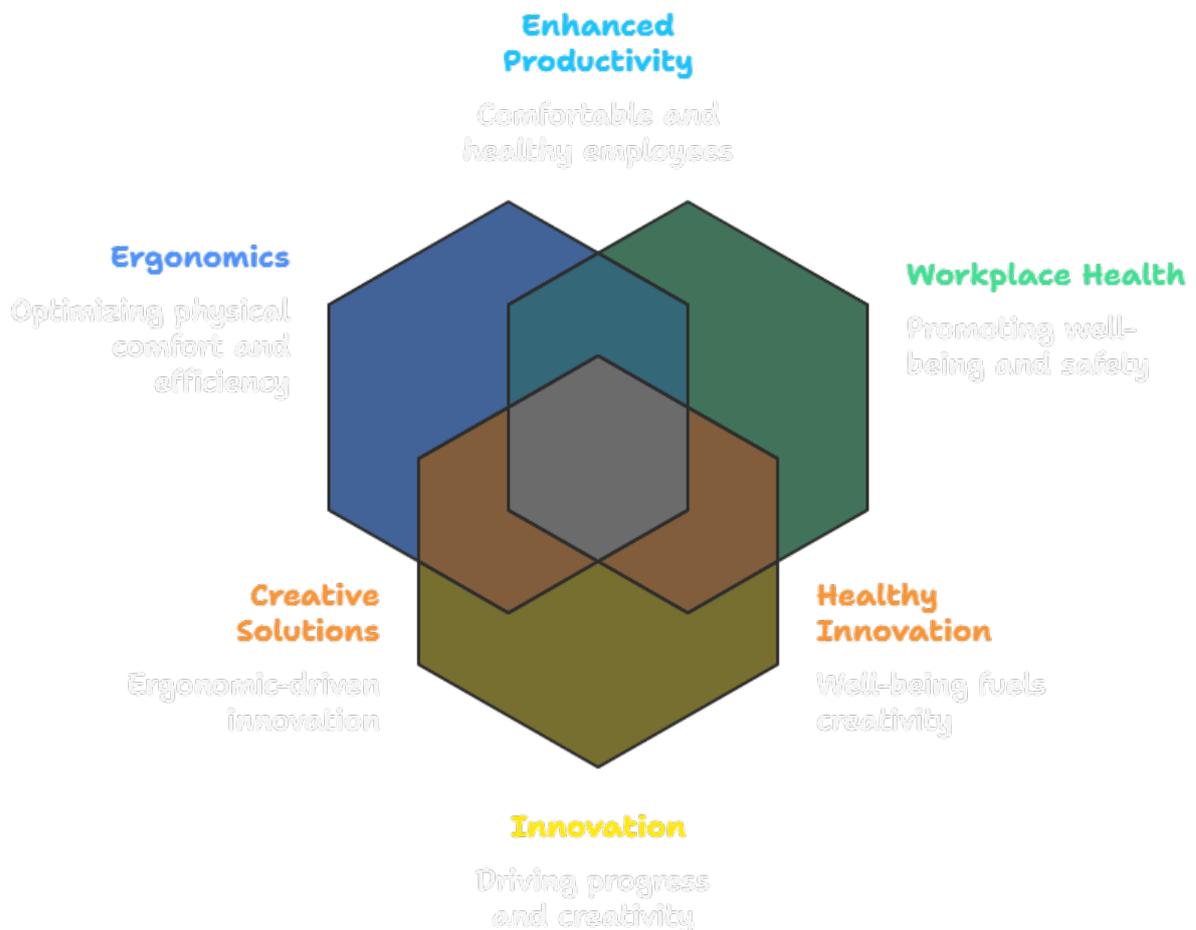
Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.80 for all constructs (ergonomics = 0.87, workplace health = 0.84, innovation capability = 0.89), confirming internal consistency.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM):

- **Ergonomics → Workplace Health:** Significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$).
- **Workplace Health → Innovation Capability:** Strong positive effect ($\beta = 0.55$, $p < 0.001$).
- **Ergonomics → Innovation Capability (direct):** Moderate but significant effect ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$).
- **Mediation Effect:** Workplace health mediated 48% of the total effect of ergonomics on innovation capability.

Figure 2. Structural Equation Model Results

The Synergy of Ergonomics, Health, and Innovation



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These results suggest that **ergonomics not only improves health outcomes but also directly enhances innovation capability**, with workplace health acting as a crucial mediator.

4.3 Qualitative Insights

The thematic analysis of 30 interviews revealed three dominant themes:

1. **Enhanced Creativity through Comfort:**

Employees consistently reported that ergonomic interventions (e.g., adjustable seating, digital tools with reduced cognitive load) improved their ability to concentrate and generate creative solutions.

2. **Organizational Culture of Well-being:**

Managers noted that investing in ergonomics created a perception of care and support, which fostered trust and openness—conditions essential for collaborative innovation.

3. **Barriers to Implementation:**

Challenges included cost constraints in manufacturing firms, resistance to change among senior staff, and limited training on digital ergonomics in IT organizations.

Quote Example (IT Employee):

“When the tools are intuitive and the workspace is comfortable, I feel less drained, and I’m more inclined to experiment with new approaches.”

4.4 Discussion

The findings confirm the central hypothesis: **ergonomics positively influences innovation capability, with workplace health serving as a mediating mechanism**. This aligns with the socio-technical systems theory, which posits that work system design impacts both human well-being and organizational outcomes (Trist & Bamforth, 1951).

- 1. Contribution to Theory:**

By integrating ergonomics and innovation studies, this research extends the literature on management sciences by framing ergonomics as a driver of **strategic innovation**, not just operational efficiency.

- 2. Contribution to Practice:**

For practitioners, the evidence suggests that ergonomic investments are not merely compliance measures but **strategic enablers of innovation**. Particularly in healthcare, better ergonomic design was associated with reduced burnout and increased problem-solving.

- 3. Cross-Industry Variations:**

While IT and healthcare showed strong positive effects, manufacturing demonstrated weaker relationships, likely due to resource limitations and lower prioritization of ergonomic policies. This highlights the need for sector-specific implementation strategies.

- 4. Implications for Policy and Management:**

The study advocates for **integrating ergonomic design into innovation policy frameworks**. National innovation systems often emphasize R&D spending, but little attention is given to employee well-being as a determinant of innovative capacity.

5. Conclusion and Future Directions

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between **ergonomics, workplace health, and innovation capability** across IT, healthcare, and manufacturing sectors. The findings demonstrated that ergonomics significantly enhances workplace health, which in turn mediates innovation performance. Importantly, the results suggest that ergonomics should be conceptualized not only as a health and safety measure but also as a **strategic management tool for fostering innovation**.

By integrating quantitative (survey and SEM) and qualitative (interviews) data, the study provides a **holistic view** of how employee well-being and innovation capacity are interlinked. The research reinforces socio-technical theory, which emphasizes the interdependence of human and organizational systems. Moreover, cross-industry comparisons highlighted that while all sectors benefit, IT and healthcare industries gain stronger innovation outcomes from ergonomic improvements compared to manufacturing, where financial and cultural barriers persist.

Thus, ergonomics emerges as a **dual-value investment**—supporting both employee well-being and organizational competitiveness in innovation-driven economies.

5.2 Managerial Implications

For practitioners, the study suggests several actionable insights:

1. **Strategic Ergonomic Investment:** Organizations should view ergonomics as an enabler of long-term innovation rather than an operational cost.
2. **Health-Centered Innovation Policies:** Corporate innovation strategies should integrate well-being programs to maximize creative capacity.
3. **Sector-Specific Approaches:** While IT and healthcare can scale ergonomic solutions more easily, manufacturing firms require tailored, cost-sensitive approaches.
4. **Training and Awareness:** Regular training on digital ergonomics and adaptive work practices can mitigate resistance to change.

5.3 Limitations

The study acknowledges several limitations:

- The data was drawn from three industries, limiting generalizability to other sectors such as education or government.
- Self-reported measures may have introduced common method bias, although triangulation with interviews mitigated this concern.
- Cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, and longitudinal studies would strengthen findings.

5.4 Future Research Directions

Building on these findings, future studies may:

1. **Expand Industry Scope:** Explore the ergonomics–innovation relationship in education, creative industries, and public administration.
2. **Longitudinal Analysis:** Track organizations over time to examine the sustained impact of ergonomic practices on innovation outcomes.
3. **Cross-Cultural Comparisons:** Investigate whether cultural differences shape how ergonomics influences innovation capability.
4. **Technology-Driven Ergonomics:** Assess the role of artificial intelligence, VR, and adaptive digital platforms in advancing both health and creativity.
5. **Policy-Oriented Research:** Explore how national or regional innovation systems could incorporate ergonomics into policy frameworks to enhance workforce innovation.

5.5 Closing Remark

In conclusion, this research provides robust evidence that ergonomics is not merely a compliance-oriented discipline but a **strategic lever for innovation management**. By prioritizing employee well-being, organizations can unlock higher levels of creativity, adaptability, and competitiveness—critical factors for thriving in today’s knowledge-driven economy.

Patient consent

Not applicable.

Data availability

Data available on request from the authors.

Ethics approval

Not applicable because this work does not involve the use of animal or human subjects.

Permission to reproduce material from other sources Not applicable.

Clinical trial registration Not applicable.

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Declaration of competing interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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