**Study on the ergonomic design of industrial workplaces**

**Ergonomics in the workplace – more than the office chair and the work bench**

**Ergonomically optimised workplaces lead to better performance and fewer absences – and these aspects motivate many companies when it comes to equipping offices. As a** [**study**](https://welcome.item24.de/studie-ergonomie-am-industriearbeitsplatz) **commissioned by item shows, ergonomic considerations are also now frequently being taken into account in the design of industrial workplaces. However, this generally involves simply using height-adjustable work benches and chairs, rather than a holistic examination of the subject. For example, the majority of respondents in the study felt that the consequences and risks of lacking ergonomics in industrial workplaces are still underestimated.**

How ergonomically are companies working in manual production? This question was the focus of the latest study by item Industrietechnik GmbH, which was conducted in collaboration with market research institute Innofact AG. The results are based on an online survey of companies with manual production operations. The respondents are all either primary decision-makers or involved in the decision-making process when it comes to selecting and configuring work bench systems. item also conducted a survey of customers who have already provided their employees with ergonomically optimised industrial work benches. Findings from discussions with business and research experts also contributed to the study. Furthermore, input was also sought from decision-makers at small and medium-sized companies that have already optimised their manual production processes.

**The majority relies on ergonomically optimised work benches**

Many companies are now aware that both office workstations and industrial work benches need to be ergonomically optimised. In 83 percent of the companies surveyed, ergonomic work bench systems are already in place in their manual production facilities. Some 55 percent confirmed that investments based on ergonomic considerations are given a particularly high priority in their company. When companies decide against ergonomic industrial work benches, this is primarily due to the expected costs involved in procuring and redesigning the workstations and the time required for implementation.

**Combining lean production and ergonomics**

Generally, it is the companies’ occupational safety specialists, employees themselves or the works council that lobby for ergonomic work benches. According to the assessment of the experts, it is frequently an occupational accident or the threat of long-term employee absence that provides motivation for action in this regard. The item customer survey showed that lean experts in particular are asked for input. Prof. Ahrens, course leader for the Bachelor of Science in industrial engineering at Nordakademie Elmshorn, describes the benefits of combining lean production principles with ergonomically optimised industrial work benches: “Appropriate measures make it possible to optimise work efficiency and prevent ergonomic waste. However, this still receives too little consideration.”

**Benefits of ergonomically optimised work benches**

According to the study, there are two key factors in the decision-making process for implementing ergonomic work bench systems – reducing absences and boosting employee satisfaction. Increasing work efficiency is also mentioned as an important argument. Satisfied employees stay with the company, a high staff turnover can therefore be prevented and this has a positive effect on productivity and work efficiency. It is also worth highlighting the effect on job-seekers and young staff – companies that can demonstrate ideal working conditions boost their attractiveness as an employer.

**Involving employees at an early stage**

From the experts’ point of view, it is hugely important to see the use of ergonomic work bench systems as a strategic decision for the entire company. All levels of the hierarchy must acknowledge and understand the necessity and benefits of these systems. If ergonomics is to reach an appropriate level of recognition in the corporate culture, it is vital to inform staff at an early stage and involve them in the entire process. Individual employees can adopt the role of disseminators – their awareness of the subject is enhanced, and they receive training to enable them to explain the advantages and benefits of ergonomically optimised systems to their colleagues. These “ergoscouts” are then responsible in-house for providing instructions on using ergonomic work bench systems, are available to answer questions from staff in manual production and can communicate with their colleagues on a peer-to-peer basis.

**Much more than the office chair and the work bench**

Tailored ergonomic solutions involve much more than adjustable work chairs and height-adjustable work benches. Lifting aids, lighting that can be adjusted according to specific requirements, foot mats, foot and arm rests and systems for optimising the handling area can also help create the ideal workstation but are currently only used in a small number of manual production areas. However, the effect of these components must not be underestimated. For example, even with a height-adjustable chair and bench, employees can still be put under excessive strain if material provisioning and picking is not optimised to their handling area. Cheap, “off-the-shelf” ergonomics solutions are not appropriate. Instead, a holistic view must be taken, with numerous interconnected measures that take account of what individuals need from the production environment. For example, optimum noise protection, suitable working time models, regular breaks, the opportunity for job rotation and financial support for participation in back health courses are important aspects that must be considered to ensure employees can perform at their highest level long-term.

The study “How ergonomically are companies working in manual production?” is available for download at <https://welcome.item24.de/studie-ergonomie-am-industriearbeitsplatz> (German only).

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**Bildunterschrift:** In its latest study, item Industrietechnik GmbH looked at how ergonomically companies are working in manual production

**About item**

item Industrietechnik GmbH is the pioneer in building kit systems for industrial applications and a partner of the manufacturing industry across the entire globe. Today, the item product portfolio comprises more than 4,000 high-quality components designed for use in machine bases, work benches, automation solutions and lean production applications. The company has received a string of awards for products with ground-breaking industrial design and end-to-end ergonomics.

item is spearheading digital engineering by driving forward the digitalisation of processes with software tools developed in-house. The item Academy offers training at various levels with on-demand training and online courses available in multiple languages.

Headquartered in Solingen, Germany, item has subsidiaries in various countries. Some 900 employees worldwide harness their know-how and passion to develop innovative solutions and services. Eleven sites make sure the company is always close to customers in Germany, with a global logistics chain ensuring swift delivery times for all components.

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