Measures for Promoting Mental Health in the Workplace

Introduction

Burnout, lack of worker engagement and poor organizational culture can all negatively affect workers' mental health. These issues can cause worker fatigue and irritability and also organization-wide effects like increased worker turnover and decreased productivity.

A psychologically safe and healthy workplace promotes workers' well-being and actively works to prevent harm to psychological health. Employers strive to provide a supportive environment for workers to thrive and feel a sense of purpose and fulfillment. A workplace environment that protects individuals' mental health has better engagement, morale, satisfaction, retention, recruitment, and productivity.

This document guides employers on practical measures they can take to prevent psychological harm to workers by addressing the psychosocial risk factors identified in CSA Z1003-13 (R2022) "Psychological health and safety in the workplace - Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation."

Balance

Work is an important part of life but should only take up a fraction of a day. A worker with a balanced life is less likely to suffer from job burnout and more likely to have higher job satisfaction and overall better mental health. Balance comes from managing work, family, and personal demands. Some ways in which an employer can promote work-life balance include:

- Set reasonable work goals, targets, and deadlines

- Fairly distribute workload (e.g., instead of allocating more work to workers who accomplish assignments faster, spread the workload evenly among workers and build the competence of the entire workforce)

- Provide reasonable paid time off and encourage workers to take their entitled vacation throughout the year. Make arrangements so that workers do not feel overwhelmed with work when they return (workers may be hesitant to take time off from work if they expect a backlog of work when they return)

- Allow multiple breaks during work and encourage workers to take these breaks

- Support remote or hybrid work that eliminates travel time to and from the workplace, giving more free time to the worker

- Provide flexible work arrangements (e.g., compressed work week, part-time work, flexible starting and ending hours for the workday)

- Consider offering personal and family supports for caregivers (e.g., daycare or after-school programs, adult day programs, elder care, comprehensive benefits, family responsibility leaves)

- Set an example by modelling positive work-life balance behaviour

- Provide workers opportunities to engage in healthy activities during breaks (e.g., on-site gyms, quiet rooms, kitchens)

- Develop and communicate a disconnecting from work policy

Civility and Respect

A workplace where everyone is respectful and considerate to others leads to better teamwork, enhanced relationships, improved morale, and greater job satisfaction. Some measures that employers can implement to promote civility and respect in the workplace include:

- Support activities that can help all workers feel included (e.g., having lunch together, asking about cultural experiences)

- Use unbiased and respectful language in all official communications and ensure they are easily accessible and understood by everyone

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- Maintain worker confidentiality in all communications

- Train workers on how to identify their biases

- Develop and communicate a [workplace violence and harassment policy](#), which focuses on the prevention of potentially harmful or offensive behaviours and the creation of psychologically safe interactions at work

- Develop and communicate a code of conduct that aligns with the organization's values and ethics, and which defines respectful and civil behaviour

- Develop and communicate a diversity and inclusion policy

- Promote inclusivity so all workers can thrive. Inclusivity allows for fresh perspectives and innovative ideas which can help the organization thrive as well

- Support workers through adversity (e.g., when dealing with a difficult customer)

Clear Leadership and Expectations

Strong, supportive leadership builds and maintains a positive health and safety culture by setting an example for the rest of the workforce. It is also important that employers set clear expectations, including abiding by company policies, and exhibiting behaviours that support the organization's efforts for a psychologically healthy and safe workplace. Some ways in which an organization can demonstrate clear leadership and expectations include:

- Set clear expectations for what workers are expected to accomplish within a given time period

- Help workers prioritize competing tasks and break down tasks into clear, achievable items

- Have job descriptions that workers are aware of and agree to

- Employers should hold leaders and workers accountable for fulfilling their roles and responsibilities and for any actions in breach of company policy (e.g., take action against a workplace leader breaking a company rule)

- Support direct communication between workers and leaders (e.g., frequent face-to-face meetings with workers, or meetings with direct reports). Avoid information overload

- Consider which communication methods work best for individual workers (e.g., email, phone call, video, or in person)

- Accept feedback and constructive criticism from workers and work toward improvement

- Train leaders in conflict resolution. Make sure workers know who they can speak with when dealing with a difficult situation

- Communicate to workers the mental health resources available to them

- Recognize that change can be difficult for everyone and can be even more challenging for any worker facing a mental health issue. Provide employees with tailored support

Engagement

Engagement helps workers feel connected to their work and professional network (e.g., coworkers and clients). Engaged workers are more motivated and interested in their work, which can mean greater customer satisfaction and worker morale, and better task performance. Engaged workers are also committed to the overall success of the organization. Some ways to keep workers engaged include:

- Design the workplace in ways that elevate workers' moods (e.g., good lighting, clean air at a comfortable temperature, break rooms, artwork, plants, etc.)

- Provide workers with volunteer opportunities at work

- Be clear about the organizational culture and its role in the hiring process. This perspective can help hire candidates that are fully engaged upon taking up their duties

- Train leaders to lead by example and recognize the efforts of workers

- Share the news of individual and team successes

Growth and Development

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Workers should be provided with the opportunity to advance their interpersonal, emotional, and job-related skills. Encouraging growth and development can increase organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Some ways in which the workplace can provide these opportunities to workers include:

- Leadership should meet with workers individually at least annually to discuss career goals and how the organization can assist in achieving professional milestones. An individual career plan can help keep track of goals and progress

- Arrange mentorship and job shadowing opportunities where workers are given firsthand experience from experienced colleagues

- Assess the organization's training needs and strategize learning outcomes based on each worker's career goals

- Provide opportunities for training and education during working hours at no cost to the worker

- Support self-directed learning methods such as attending webinars, conferences, etc.

- Share learning experiences during meetings or through staff communications and encourage conversations about how any learned skills can be applied to work activities

Involvement and Influence

Workers that are included in discussions on important matters and have input into their work are more likely to feel a sense of worth and be motivated to help the organization succeed. Their input can be related to improvements to their own jobs, teams, or the organization as a whole. Some ways to promote worker involvement and influence include:

- Have face-to-face discussions and also indirect ways of participation such as surveys or suggestion boxes

- Demonstrate to workers how their input was considered and used (e.g., present the results of surveys and explain how they are being used to make improvements)

- Allow workers to have some control over their work by setting priorities and making sure their time is managed appropriately. Avoid micromanagement

- Involve workers in discussions about changes to their work and support them in adapting to changes they may not have control over

- Engage employees in defining the type of work environment that best supports their productivity

- Ask for workers' input on matters of significance, where possible (e.g., a manager can ask for suggestions in optimizing a service during a team meeting)

Organizational Culture

An organization's culture is characterized by shared values of trust, honesty, and fairness. The culture impacts all workers and is influenced by the organization's leadership and their policies. In work environments with a positive organizational culture, workers trust each other and their leadership, and the entire organization is held accountable. A poor work culture can cause stress and burnout, leading to absenteeism and turnover. A good organizational culture can be developed in the following ways:

- Build a culture of trust in the workplace by making sure leaders are committed to the psychological health and safety of workers and by collaborating with workers to create a shared vision, mission, and values statement

- Train leaders on how to deal with conflicts and make sure workers know where to go for support, when required

- Communicate decisions that may affect workers with respect and encourage face-to-face conversations

- Make all workers feel included (e.g., introduce new workers to other teams, allow all workers to contribute to workplace matters, etc.)

Protection of Physical Safety

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Employers are responsible for taking every reasonable precaution to protect the health and safety of their workers. When workers feel their safety is protected, they are able to focus on their jobs and are more engaged in their work. Ultimately, when workers have confidence that their physical health and safety will be protected in the workplace, their mental health will be positively impacted. The most appropriate protective measures should be implemented according to the hierarchy of controls, starting with eliminating the hazard, if possible, and using personal protective equipment (PPE) as a last line of defense. The following measures can be taken to protect the physical safety of workers:

- Demonstrate the organization's commitment to health and safety by implementing a health and safety policy

- Assess the workplace hazards and implement the most appropriate control measures that would allow the worker to safely perform their duties

- Provide required training so that workers know how to work safely and how to respond when there is a danger to their safety or that of others

- Communicate to workers their duty to report hazards and their right to refuse unsafe work

- Promptly respond to work refusals and reports of hazards that present a risk to workers' physical safety

- Demonstrate that leadership also abides by the organization's safety requirements (e.g., managers touring the workplace must wear mandatory personal protective equipment (PPE))

- Investigate incidents (including near misses), find the root cause(s), and take steps to prevent recurrence

- Offer timely and effective supports to workers following an incident. These may include debriefs, defusing, resources to support workers experiencing mental distress (e.g., Employee Assistance Program, community resources), and psychological treatment, if required

- Provide workers with the necessary resources to be protected from physical harm (e.g., right equipment for the job, PPE, etc.)

- Make sure workers have sufficient rest in between work periods and that their schedules do not impose the risk of physical or psychological harm

Psychological Competencies and Demands

Successfully filling a role at work requires a combination of technical skills and knowledge, as well as psychological skills and emotional intelligence such as impulse control, persistence, and empathy. Some ways to support psychological competencies and demands include:

- Periodically review all roles to determine if responsibilities, required competencies, or demands have changed. If there is an increased psychological load for any particular role, work with the affected worker to enhance their skills to reduce the excessive burden

- Make sure job descriptions accurately reflect the required competencies and expected physical and psychological demands of the job. Human resources, organizational leadership, and workers already holding that role should be able to provide the necessary information to develop the job description

- Hire and promote individuals who meet the requirements of the job and also have the necessary psychological skills and emotional intelligence (e.g., a worker promoted to a leadership role should able to support their direct reports, have conflict resolution skills, understand their new responsibilities and accountabilities, etc.)

- Allow workers to be open about the demands of their job and receive support from their leaders

- Clearly communicate to workers their responsibility to contribute to a psychologically safe work environment and set an example to follow

- Encourage knowledge sharing to build team competencies

- In addition to regular duties, also prepare workers for uncommon and potentially stressful events such as emergencies or difficult clients

Psychological Protection

Workers should feel safe to come forward with their ideas, perspectives, and feedback, and to report issues, hazards, and mistakes. A psychologically safe workplace is open to worker participation without fear of reprisals. In addition, a workplace that offers psychological protection to workers helps prevent bullying, harassment, stigma, and discrimination. Workplaces can provide psychological protection to their workers by implementing the following:

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- Establish safe methods for workers to report issues that could affect their mental health and consider how this process would work if a complaint is made about someone in a leadership position (e.g., anonymous feedback cards, designated recipients for complaints)

- Implement organizational policies around psychological health and safety, such as those related to harassment and bullying, discrimination, trauma, violence at work, etc

- Perform risk assessments regularly (at least annually) to assess threats to psychological protection among workers

- Assess the psychological health and safety of leadership in the workplace

- Train leaders and workers on tolerance and being open to what others have to say regarding work

Psychological and Social Support

Workplaces with psychological and social support foster a sense of belonging and contribution for all workers. When a joint effort is made to protect everyone's psychological well-being, there is a cultural shift to a more curious, compassionate, and understanding workplace. Some ways in which psychological and social support can be promoted at work include:

- Have team building activities to build social support among team members (e.g., volunteering days, problem-solving games, brainstorming sessions, sharing positive experiences)

- Accommodate workers with personal or health issues where possible and manage coworker reactions to accommodations by discussing fears, concerns, or resentments with those affected

- Train workers and leaders on mental health and psychological safety that can affect the workplace

- Maintain communication with workers who are working remotely, or are off work due to injury or illness, and look for ways to reduce feelings of isolation

- Make sure workers are familiar with the mental health resources that are available to them (e.g., Employee Assistance Program, community resources). Invite benefit providers to give a presentation to workers

- Empower and encourage all workers to respond accordingly to psychosocial hazards in the workplace (e.g., report bullying in the workplace by following the official process)

Recognition and Reward

Recognition refers to thanks, appreciation, and praise (e.g., acknowledging a team's contribution to the organization's quarterly target during a company-wide meeting, posting the accomplishment on the notice board or the intranet). Rewards refer to tangible gifts for accomplishments (e.g., financial bonuses, team parties, tickets to an event of the worker's choice). Acknowledge the work done by workers and show appreciation for their efforts in a fair and timely manner (i.e., shortly after successes such as the completion of a project). Recognizing and rewarding good performance reinforces positive behaviors and helps workers feel effective. Consider applying the following in the workplace:

- Design a recognition and reward system that best suits the organization, and provide options where possible (e.g., a company with many small teams may choose to cater to the preferences of each team, while a small organization can tailor recognition and rewards to specific workers)

- Incorporate recognition and rewards into annual performance reviews

- Review and fairly adjust salaries at least annually, where possible

- Allocate a budget for financial rewards, if possible (e.g., year-end bonuses)

- Acknowledge that some performance cannot easily be measured and workers fulfilling their normal duties deserve recognition and rewards, not just when they go beyond expectations

- Make sure workers are made aware of positive feedback they receive from others

- Keep track of recognition and rewards and make sure that the frequency is enough to show workers they are valued

- Find out workers' preferred ways to be recognized and rewarded (e.g., directly asking them during individual meetings with their manager or with a form that the worker can complete)

Workload Management

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Workers should be supported to complete their job tasks successfully and within a reasonable time. Clear expectations can help workers understand what they need to accomplish, and the time it should take. Workload can be managed in different ways, including:

- Look for ways to eliminate or reduce redundant activities (e.g., have shorter, less frequent group meetings)

- Have flexible deadlines especially when there are competing, regularly changing priorities

- Foster a work culture that values more than just the quantity of work completed (e.g., reward quality of work, good time management, teamwork, customer and worker satisfaction, etc.)

- Leaders should set clear and reasonable expectations and communicate with workers about difficulties with their workload

- Periodically review all roles to determine if the workload is appropriate

- Have a plan for completing work during times of worker shortages or vacations (e.g., reallocating workers to teams with higher demands, onboarding temporary workers, pushing back deadlines)

- Ask workers about stress associated with their workload so that leaders can work with them to identify the issue and create solutions

- Give some control of the work to workers, if possible

- Provide workers with the resources they need to complete their tasks (e.g., adequate time, technology)

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