General Introduction
Framework for a Psychologically Healthy and Safe Workplace

Improving Organizational Results and Individual Psychological Well-being

A psychologically healthy and safe workplace is defined as a workplace that promotes workers' psychological well-being and actively works to prevent harm to worker psychological health, including in negligent, reckless, or intentional ways.[1] The concept of psychologically healthy and safe workplaces was formally introduced to Canadian workplaces on a national scale in early 2013 with the release of the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace. Though the concept was not entirely new to some employers, it was an enhancement on concepts such as high performing workplaces and employee engagement. What differentiates the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) standard is its focus on psychological health and well-being in the workplace. The Standard is comprised of 13 factors that affect psychological health and safety. Psychosocial factors are elements that impact an individual's psychological responses to work and work conditions, potentially causing psychological health problems.

1. Psychological Support

Why is psychological support important? The more individuals feel they have psychological support, the greater their workplace attachment, commitment, satisfaction, involvement, enthusiasm about their work, desire to remain with the organization, organizational citizenship behaviours, and performance. The most important aspect of psychological support is its helpfulness in protecting against harmful stressors at work.

- Psychological support is present in a work environment in which colleagues and supervisors are supportive of individuals' psychological and mental health concerns, and respond appropriately as needed.
- Equally important are the individuals' perceptions and awareness of organizational support.
- When individuals perceive that they are supported, they may feel that the organization values their contributions, the organization is committed to ensuring their psychological well-being, and they are provided with meaningful support if their well-being is compromised.

When adequate psychological support is present, individuals experiencing psychological distress will be more likely to seek and receive appropriate health care, will feel safe and productive at work while they recover, and if an absence is required, will be more likely to return to work in a sustainable way.

When psychological support is lacking, individuals may experience increased absenteeism, withdrawal behaviours, strain, conflict and turnover. Strain can then lead to greater issues such as fatigue, headaches, burnout and anxiety.

A workplace with good psychological support would be able to state that:

1. Our institution offers services and/or benefits that adequately sustain individual psychological health.
2. Our supervisors and managers respond appropriately and compassionately to an individual who may be distressed while at work.
3. Individuals feel supported in our workplace when they are dealing with personal or family issues.
4. Our workplace supports individuals who are returning to work after time off, regardless of whether the absence was due to a mental health condition or physical illness.
5. People in our workplace have a good understanding of the importance of individual and collective mental health.

2. Organizational Culture

Organizational culture defines the philosophy, values, norms, beliefs, attitudes and ultimately, the actions of the organization itself. The culture defines how we behave, and affects how people experience the organization. For example:

- The degree to which the work culture is characterized by trust, honesty and fairness.
- Organizational culture has been described in general as a group of assumptions developed by a group.
- These assumptions are a mix of values, beliefs, meaning and expectations that group members hold in common and that they use as behavioural problem-solving cues.

A workplace with a positive organizational culture would be able to state:

1. All people in our workplace are held accountable for their actions.
2. People at work show sincere respect for others' ideas, values and beliefs.
3. Difficult situations at work are addressed effectively.
4. Individuals feel that they are part of a community at work.
5. Individuals and management trust one another.

3. Clear Leadership and Expectations

Leadership is the foundation for the success of any organization. Effective leadership increases morale, resiliency and trust while decreasing discontent and conflict. A leader who demonstrates a commitment to maintaining their own physical and psychological health can influence the health of individuals as well as the health of the organization as a whole. Middle managers are often at greater risk due to the fact that they must be leaders and be led simultaneously. If not managed appropriately, this role conflict can lead to feelings of powerlessness and stress.

- Effective leadership is evident when there is support that helps individuals understand their role and what is expected from them, how their work contributes to the organization, and whether there are impending changes.
- Leadership styles impact psychosocial safety and health in different ways.
  - Instrumental leadership focuses primarily on producing outcomes, with little attention paid to the "big picture", the psychosocial dynamics within the organization, and individual needs.

- ○ Transformational leaders are seen as change agents who motivate individuals to strive for more than what is expected. They are cognizant that over time, while organizations change, people transition. Transformational leaders are concerned with long-term objectives, imparting vision, mission and purpose. They have charisma, give distinctive consideration to individuals, stimulate intellectual capabilities in others, and inspire people.

A workplace with good leadership and clear expectations would be able to state that:

1. People know what is expected of them and have role clarity.
2. Leadership is effective.
3. Staff members are informed about important changes at work in a timely manner.
4. Supervisors provide regular supportive and proactive feedback to staff members on their performance.
5. The organization provides clear, effective and timely communication.

4. Civility and Respect

Civility and respect are essential behaviours for all members of any organization.

- Civility and respect is present in a work environment where staff and faculty are respectful and considerate in their thoughts and interactions with one another, students, clients and the public.
- Civility and respect are based on showing esteem, care and consideration for others, and acknowledging dignity.

When a workplace lacks civility and respect, an accumulation of that stress can lead to emotional exhaustion. An uncivil and disrespectful workplace is associated with greater conflict and job withdrawal, and can also lead to increased numbers of grievances and complaints. It is important to recognize that the negative impacts of disrespectful behaviour could be considered bullying and harassment. Exposure to workplace bullying and harassment are associated with psychological complaints/concerns, depression, burnout, anxiety, aggression, and psychosomatic[1] and musculoskeletal health complaints.

A workplace with good civility and respect would be able to say that:

1. People treat each other with dignity, respect and consideration in our workplace.
2. Our workplace effectively manages interpersonal problems that may arise.
3. People from all backgrounds and of all genders are treated fairly in our workplace.
4. Unnecessary conflict is kept to a minimum.

5. Psychological Competencies and Requirements

Emotional intelligence is a set of skills that allow us to understand, manage and regulate emotion in any human relationship.

- A work environment where psychological competencies exist is one in which there is a good match between individuals' interpersonal and emotional competencies, their skills and the

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[1] Psychosomatic = caused or aggravated by a mental factor such as internal conflict or stress.

position they hold. This means the individuals not only hold the technical expertise and knowledge for a particular position, but they also have the psychosocial skills and emotional intelligence to perform their role.
- Emotional intelligence includes self-awareness, regulation, persistence, motivation, empathy, interpersonal skills and social astuteness.

It is important that individuals are recruited for more than solely their ability to meet technical requirements of the job, but also that their working style and interpersonal skills are congruent with the kind of work environment that we seek.

A workplace with good psychological competencies and requirements would be able to state that:

1. Social skills are considerations in hiring/promotion decisions to ensure appropriateness for the position.
2. The organization hires people who have the appropriate technical skills and professional acumen, and who bring a diversity of thought and perspectives within the organization.
3. Individuals have the social and emotional skills needed to do their jobs well.
4. Supervisors believe that social skills are as valuable as other skills.
5. Positions make good use of individuals' personal strengths.

6. Growth and Development

Ongoing growth and development allows individuals to remain competent and relevant in their careers.

- Growth and development is present in organizations where staff members receive encouragement and support in the development of their interpersonal, emotional and job skills.
- Such workplaces provide a range of internal and external opportunities for individuals to build their repertoire of competencies, which will not only help with their current jobs, but will also prepare them for possible future positions.

A workplace with growth and development would be able to state that:

1. Staff received ongoing feedback at work that helps them grow and develop.
2. Supervisors are open to staff ideas for taking on new opportunities and challenges.
3. Staff have opportunities to advance within their organization.
4. The organization values individuals' ongoing growth and development.
5. Staff have the opportunity to develop their skills at work.

7. Recognition and Reward

Recognition and reward is a critical component of basic needs in the workplace environment.

- Recognition and reward are present in a work environment where there is appropriate acknowledgement and appreciation of individuals' efforts in a genuine, equitable and timely manner.
- This includes appropriate and regular financial compensation as well as individual or team celebrations, retirement, recognition of years served, and/or milestones reached.

- An imbalance between effort and reward is a significant contributor to burnout and emotional distress.

A workplace with good recognition and reward would be able to state that:

1. Immediate supervisors demonstrate genuine appreciation of individuals' work.
2. Individuals are compensated equitably for the work they do.
3. The organization appreciates extra effort made by individuals.
4. The organization celebrates our shared accomplishments.
5. The workplace values individuals' commitment and passion for their work.

8. Involvement and Influence

When a workplace involves individuals in workplace decisions, those individuals become invested not only in the outcome but the overall success of the organization.

- Involvement and influence is present when staff members are included in discussions about how their work is done and how important decisions are made.
- Opportunities for involvement can relate to an individuals' specific job, the activities of a team or department, or issues involving the organization as a whole.

If individuals do not believe they have a voice in the work of the organization, they are likely to feel a sense of disengagement and resentment. Job alienation, or non-involvement, is associated with cynicism and distress, greater turnover, and burnout.

A workplace with good involvement and influence would be able to state that:

1. Staff and faculty members feel that their immediate supervisors are accessible and approachable.
2. Staff and faculty have decision-making influence over how they organize and accomplish their work.
3. Individual opinions and suggestions are considered.
4. Staff members are informed of important changes that may impact how their work is done.
5. The workplace encourages input from all staff members on important decisions related to their work.

9. Workload

Workload management is important because there is a unique relationship between job demands, intellectual demands and job satisfaction.

- A manageable workload is present if tasks and responsibilities can be accomplished successfully within the time available.
- Research has demonstrated that it is not just the amount of work that makes a difference but also the extent to which individuals have the resources (time, equipment, support) to do the work well.

High-intensity workloads can only be sustained for limited periods of time before they negatively impact people's health, well-being and engagement. Some kinds and levels of stress can enhance work

performance, and some lead to decreased performance, depending on an individual's level of resilience. Unrelenting and unmanageable job demands can reduce job satisfaction, whereas intellectual stimulation and decision-making influence can increase job satisfaction. Even when there are high demands, individuals with opportunities to make decisions about their work and work priorities will be better supported to thrive by encouraging the development and demonstration of positive coping behaviours.

Without opportunities for individuals to evaluate and influence priorities when facing unmanageable workloads, they may experience physical, psychological and emotional fatigue, and increased stress and strain. This has a negative influence on performance. Emotionally fatigued individuals also have a diminished sense of personal accomplishment and an increased sense of inadequacy.

A workplace with good workload management would be able to state that:

1. The amount of work individuals are expected to do is reasonable for their positions.
2. Staff members feel safe discussing their workload with their supervisor and feel that they can work together to make necessary adjustments.
3. Individuals have access to the equipment and resources needed to do their jobs well.
4. An individuals' work is free from unnecessary interruptions and disruptions.
5. Staff members have control over prioritizing tasks and responsibilities when facing multiple demands.

10. Engagement

The importance of employee engagement is well-documented. From the organizational perspective, high employee engagement can result in reduced absenteeism and turnover. From the perspective of individuals, high employee engagement, such as increased job satisfaction, a sense of connection and pride, and willingness to put in discretionary effort, derives from feeling valued and supported in the workplace.

- Staff members enjoy and feel connected to their work, and feel motivated to do their job well.
- Individual engagement can be physical, emotional and/or cognitive.
- Cognitively engaged individuals devote more attention to their work and are truly invested in their work.
- Whatever the source, engaged individuals feel connected to their work because they can relate to, and are committed to, the overall success and mission of the organization.

A workplace with good engagement would be able to state that:

1. Individuals enjoy their work.
2. Individuals are willing to devote discretionary effort at work if needed.
3. Individuals describe their work as an integral part of who they are.
4. Individuals are committed to the success of the organization.
5. Individuals are proud of the work they do and where they work.

11. Balance

It is important for the organization and individuals to identify ways to balance between the demands of work, family and personal life.

This factor reflects the fact that everyone has multiple life roles: as professor, colleague, parent, partner, etc. This complexity is enriching and allows fulfillment of individual strengths and responsibilities, but competing responsibilities can lead to role conflict or overload.

One source of imbalance is conflict between work and family roles. When the workplace recognizes that harmony across work and other areas of life is important, leaders acknowledge imbalances and offer greater flexibility. This helps to minimize conflict by allowing staff to accomplish the tasks necessary in their daily lives. Balance reduces stress and the possibility that home issues will spill over into work and vice versa. Harmony allows individuals to maintain and/or increase concentration, confidence, responsibility, and sense of control at work.

A workplace with good balance would be able to state that:

1. The workplace encourages individuals to take breaks (e.g. lunch, sick time, vacation time, days off, parental leave, etc.).
2. Individuals are able to reasonably balance the demands of work and personal life.
3. The workplace promotes work/life harmony.
4. Individuals feel safe initiating a discussion with their supervisors when they are having trouble maintaining work/life balance.
5. Individuals have energy left at the end of most work days for their personal commitments.

12. Psychological Protection

Psychological protection is present in a work environment where individuals' psychological safety is ensured.

- Workplace psychological safety is demonstrated when workers feel able to ask questions, seek feedback, solve problems, or propose a new idea without fearing negative reprisal to themselves, their job or their career.
- A psychologically safe and healthy workplace actively promotes emotional well-being among individuals while taking all reasonable steps to minimize threats to individual mental health.

A workplace with good psychological protection would be able to state that:

1. Immediate supervisors genuinely care about individuals' emotional well-being.
2. The organization makes efforts to prevent harm to individuals from harassment, discrimination or violence.
3. Individuals would describe the workplace as being psychologically healthy with a positive sense of community.
4. The workplace deals effectively with situations that may threaten or harm individuals (e.g., harassment, discrimination, violence).
5. There is a sense of trust both felt and demonstrated between staff and leadership.

13. Protection of Physical Safety

Individuals who feel a sense of physical safety at work have increased satisfaction, and more opportunity to flourish in their roles.

- Staff have the equipment needed to reduce the impact of physical risks on health (e.g., proper lighting, noise reduction, panic alarms, ventilation) at work.
- Management recognizes the impact of incidents and work-related illness on an individual's psychological and physical well-being.
- Safety programs and policies are reviewed regularly.

Those who perceive the workplace as protective of physical safety will feel more secure and engaged at work. Research has shown that when employees have higher levels of confidence in safety protection at work, they experience lower rates of psychological distress and mental health problems. The sense of physical safety protection is enhanced by: adequate training with regard to physical safety, trust that the employer minimizes physical hazards, confidence that the employer responds quickly and effectively to safety incidents, and the opportunity to have meaningful input into workplace policies and practices.

A workplace with good protocols, processes and plans for the protection of physical safety would be able to state that:

1. Management takes appropriate action to protect employees' physical safety at work.
2. Our workplace offers sufficient training to help protect employees' physical safety at work (e.g., emergency preparedness, safe lifting, and violence prevention).
3. When accidents occur or risks are identified, our workplace responds efficiently and effectively.
4. Staff have the equipment and tools they need to do their job in a physically safe way (e.g., protective clothing, adequate lighting, and ergonomic seating).
5. The workplace responds appropriately when workers raise concerns about physical safety.

All Information directly modified from:
Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace www.csagroup.org, Workplace Strategies for Mental Health www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/
Guarding Minds @ Work www.guardingmindsatwork.ca/
Guarding Minds @ Work, What is Psychological Health and Safety?
www.guardingmindsatwork.ca/assets/pdfs/What_is_Psychological_Health_and_Safety.pdf