

Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace

Psychological health comprises our ability to think, feel and behave in a manner that enables us to perform effectively in our work environments, our personal lives, and in society at large. **Psychological safety** is different - it deals with the risk of injury to psychological well-being that an employee might experience. **Improving the psychological safety of a work setting involves taking precautions to avert injury or danger to employee psychological health.**

It is important to note that psychological health problems occur on a *spectrum*, from mild psychological difficulties on one end to severe psychological disorders on the other. The most common psychological health problems in the workplace are anxiety and depression. These conditions account for a large proportion of the negative impacts on employees and employers.

HOW DOES EMPLOYEE PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH IMPACT AN ORGANIZATION?



NEGATIVE IMPACTS

- ❖ **Financial.** Mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety are rapidly becoming the main cause of disability in developed countries. Employers are facing increased disability premiums, rising health and benefits costs and expenses associated with replacing absent employees.
- ❖ **Productivity.** In addition to absenteeism, psychological ill-health is a significant contributor to 'presenteeism', decreases in performance due to illness or injury while an employee is still at work. A recent study found that, compared



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to a variety of common disorders (e.g. asthma, migraine, arthritis), depression caused the greatest decline in work productivity and focus.

◆ **Safety.** Reduced psychological health and safety contributes to accidents, incidents and injuries. Most jobs require employees to have good concentration, social skills and the ability to solve problems effectively. These skills are undermined by most mental health conditions. Thus, co-workers, customers and employees are at risk of serious, and sometimes dire, outcomes due to unrecognized or poorly managed mental health conditions.



◆ **Workplace morale.** Reduced psychological health and safety contributes to conflict and grievances. If one member of a team is struggling, the whole team is compromised. Unlike physical illnesses or injuries, which tend to be visible to fellow employees, mental health problems are often described as ‘invisible’, because these problems aren’t apparent or recognized by team members. Changes in a colleague’s usual behaviour or performance due to mental health problems may be perceived as intentional, resulting in misunderstanding, resentment and tense relationships. This, in turn, contributes to absenteeism and turnover.

POSITIVE IMPACTS

On the other hand, a psychologically healthy and safe workforce has meaningful benefits for organizations, including:

- ◆ **Improved recruitment and retention.** In today's complex and ever-changing job market, current and potential employees have higher expectations for their jobs. They expect to be treated fairly, recognized appropriately and provided with opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and develop new skills. Employers who create and sustain a 'great place to work' will attract and keep the best workers.
- ◆ **Improved employee engagement.** An engaged employee is someone fully involved in, and enthusiastic about, his or her work. When employees are engaged, they view their interests as aligned with those of the company. They are more willing to extend an extra or discretionary effort to assist clients, customers and their colleagues. The net result is improved performance, productivity and quality of goods and services.
- ◆ **Improved sustainability.** Organizations, like individuals, must be resilient to respond to external demands, be they

DID YOU KNOW...?

- ◆ On any given week, more than 500,000 Canadians will not go to work because of mental illness.
- ◆ More than 30% of disability claims and 70% of disability costs are attributed to mental illness.
- ◆ In 2011, lost productivity due to absenteeism due to mental health problems and illnesses was approximately \$6 billion dollars.

market challenges, mergers or opportunities for growth. Businesses or work groups with psychologically healthy employees are best equipped not only to survive, but to thrive, when facing challenges.

- ◆ **Improved health and safety.** Employers strive to create an atmosphere where there is a shared commitment to employee well-being and security. In such environments, staff recognize their responsibility to care for their own physical and psychological health, but also to support colleagues whose behaviour indicates that they are struggling or whose actions place others at risk. In such environments, staff are also more

accepting and collaborative when accommodating a colleague returning to work from a disability absence, whether physical or psychological. **Guarding minds @ work*

Industrial Safety Trainers, in partnership with Acede Consulting Group will be offering Information and Training Sessions in relation to Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace and Mental Health First Aid in Spring of 2017.

Learn and educate your staff on addressing Mental Health Matters in the Workplace to create a healthier, happier and more productive environment.

If you have questions or would like to learn more about these exciting new programs, please contact Industrial Safety Trainers at 800-219-8660 or email, info@industrialsafetytrainers.com



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