

GROUP
INSURANCE

Workplace Health Solutions

Transforming psychosocial risks into opportunities
to enhance team performance and commitment

MAUDE VILLENEUVE, Ph.D.

Relief Research Chair in Mental Health,
Self-Management and Work, Powered by Beneva

beneva

Overview

Workplace health solutions are all too often overlooked by managers and owners of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SME). And yet, a healthy workplace does more than prevent conflict and reduce stress, it boosts productivity and performance, while also improving retention.

This document allows SME managers to focus on effective, easy-to-implement actions adapted to their situation. Backed by evidence-based data, the recommendations and strategies presented here are designed to enhance workplace climate, promote a caring leadership approach and foster a culture of prevention. In the long term, these simple, cost-effective measures are meant to pay off without burdening managerial workload.

By identifying the psychosocial risks that weaken an organization's health, it is possible to transform these factors into opportunities to strengthen employee commitment and mental health.

Investing in workplace health will not only help build a resilient, dynamic and caring organization, it can offset the costs of absenteeism and turnover. The purpose of this guide is to outline some of the immediate actions that may be taken.



Is your company in good health?

This seems like a theoretical question. However, answering it will provide actual insight into your company's performance, reputation and job satisfaction.

By definition, a healthy workplace is one that attracts and retains talented individuals, fosters employee commitment and is productive.

Conversely, an unhealthy workplace is one where psychosocial risks, like employee stress, are high, and the turnover rate is concerning. But what are the warning signs? And what, if anything, can be done to turn things around?

The answers are found by examining the following:

- The definition and aspects of workplace health.
- The economic and relational impact of an unhealthy workplace.
- The factors that influence a healthy workplace.
- The actions designed to improve employee well-being and boost performance.
- The importance of a corporate culture rooted in wellness and prevention.

Workplace Health Overview

A healthy workplace refers to a work environment where employees are able to thrive, thereby directly influencing and ensuring the company's performance and sustainability.¹ Leveraging the concept of workplace health helps companies identify the actions to take.

What is the definition of a healthy workplace?

According to the World Health Organization, health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.²

When applied to organizations, this definition emphasizes that workplace health is more than just the absence of conflict or excessive stress. It is a holistic approach that includes well-being, job satisfaction, positive human relationships and a sense of purpose.³

A healthy workplace combines three key dimensions.

- **Employee health:** a workplace where mental and physical health is supported.
- **Corporate performance:** a structure that enables your company to achieve its strategic objectives while preserving team harmony.
- **Corporate culture:** a culture where interaction between the organization and its employees fosters commitment, recognition and a harmonious workplace or, more simply, the health of employees in a company that seeks to foster such health.⁴

Why care about workplace health?

In order to find answers to questions like these:

- How do I know if my workplace is healthy?
- What are the tell-tale signs of a healthy or unhealthy workplace?
- Does my company promote employee well-being?
- What can I do to create a healthier, more productive workplace?

Psychosocial Risks: A workplace health issue

In many cases, managers may not even realize that workplace health⁵ is being negatively affected by:

- A sustained high-volume workload.
- Reduced autonomy, support and recognition.
- Harassment or incivility in the workplace.

An overview of the issues is provided in section 1. Psychosocial risks are examined in section 2. In section 3, we explain how to turn them into opportunities, and ultimately, into a sustainable action plan.

Understanding the Issues

A look at the changing workplace

The pandemic changed how we work, what with the widespread deployment of remote work as well as the increased use of specialized communication tools. Despite the benefits of flexibility, this situation has created new pressures.⁶ For example, working from home can cause social isolation, and the lack of physical separation between the office and home makes it harder for employees to stop working.⁷ Professional and personal lives overlap more than ever.

The pandemic caused economic uncertainty. Many SMEs were forced to suspend or reduce their activities during confinement, leaving employees to worry about their job security.⁸ Months after all health measures were lifted, the looming fear of another pandemic and stock market volatility remained.

According to a recent survey, **35.2% of Canadian SME employees are dissatisfied with their current job**

and **37.3% would leave their company without regret for the right opportunity.**⁹

These numbers tell a story. When a job loses its purpose or becomes a source of stress and exhaustion, talented individuals will seek out a healthier workplace. This situation can be twice as hard on small businesses, since they are already struggling to recruit qualified employees.



Why invest in workplace health?

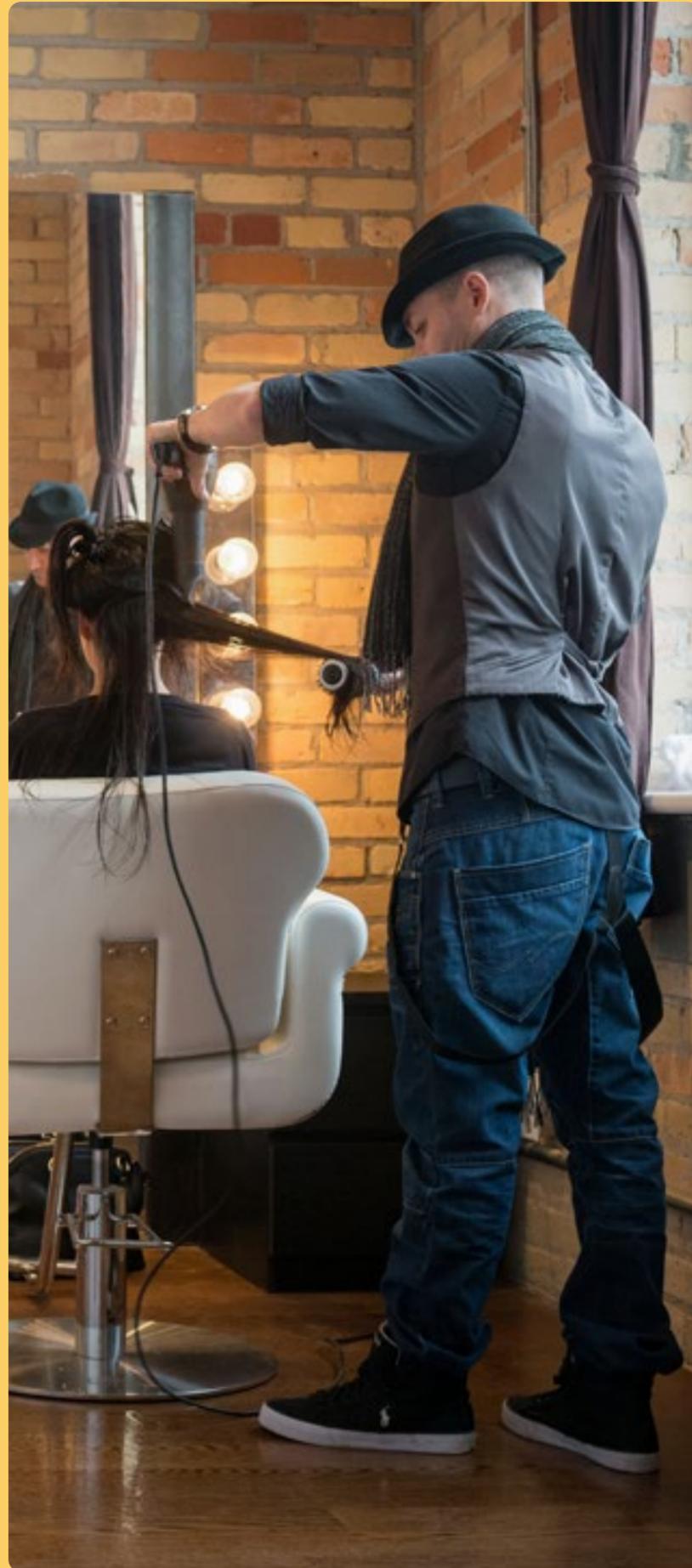
Firstly, the financial toll of mental health problems in the workplace is staggering, estimated at \$50 billion a year in Canada.¹⁰

Any given week, an estimated 500,000 Canadians are absent from work for mental health reasons.¹¹

Stress, exhaustion and a lack of motivation translate into absenteeism, presenteeism (employees who are at work but not productive) and high turnover.¹²

A recent study in Quebec revealed that workplaces that fail to value the mental health of their managers increase the likelihood of them burning out.¹³ And when managers are on the verge of a burnout, it undermines the quality of their work, and the whole company suffers. An exhausted manager is unable to effectively supervise employees, which can lead to a slew of problems (more mistakes, less motivation, etc.).

Taking care of workplace health also means taking care of yourself, so that you can support your team.



Beyond employee well-being, investing in workplace health is a sound business decision. Employers that take care of their employees' mental health reap the benefits.

\$1.62 is the median return on investment (ROI), after one year, for each dollar invested in mental health programs. This amount climbs to \$2.18 after just a few years.¹⁶

Some companies even reap higher returns. For example, Bell Canada generated an ROI of \$4.10 for every dollar invested in its mental health program after 10 years.¹⁷ Although Bell is not an SME, the message is clear: workplace health is good for employees and good for business.

A healthy workplace will have fewer absences and accidents, improve productivity and retain talent, all of which are crucial for the long-term sustainability of a small- and medium-sized business.

The challenges for SMEs

Small- and medium-sized businesses are no exception to the rule. If anything, the fact that they are fewer in number means that any absence or conflict has an even greater immediate impact on operations.¹⁴

- When a key member of a 10-employee start-up is on leave for two months due to depression, that's a 10% loss in workforce.
- When conflict breaks out in a team of five people, it really shows. In this case, the cost of psychosocial risks can be very heavy for an SME.

Despite constraints and limited resources, SMEs do have a number of advantages over larger corporations. Their structures are more flexible, offer greater proximity to employees and are able to intervene more quickly. Their small size can facilitate the adoption of simple, appropriate and creative measures without the bureaucratic red tape of larger ones.¹⁵

For example, many SMEs have introduced flexible work hours, team activities or unlimited vacation policies to attract and retain employees. These initiatives show how psychosocial risks can be turned into opportunities—even with limited resources—when workplace health is a priority.

Workplace Health: A shared responsibility

One basic observation is that preventing psychosocial risks and promoting mental health in the workplace is a responsibility shared by managers and employees. Obviously, the employer is responsible for creating a safe environment for everyone, but employees and managers have important roles to play.

In practical terms, shared responsibility means:

- Management leads by making workplace health a priority, both in practice and in its policies and programs.
- Every employee has a duty to contribute to a healthy workplace (i.e. by respecting each other and reporting issues as they arise).¹⁸

Let's look at it this way. Workplace health is a shared investment. The company invests in resources and preventive measures, while managers invest in attentive listening and support. Employees, for their part, invest in commitment and trust.¹⁹ Together, they make mental health an integral part of the corporate culture.

Exploring the Risk Factors

Six key risk factors

Every workplace is different. And yet, when it comes to sources of stress, it's always the usual suspects.

Without providing an exhaustive list of risk factors, here are the six that are likely to affect SMEs:

- **Work overload**
- **Lack of decision-making power**
- **Insufficient support and recognition at work**
- **Organizational injustice**
- **Job insecurity**
- **Harassment and violence in the workplace**

Each factor along with their warning signs will be explored as well as the categories of employees that are likely to be more sensitive to them.

1. Work overload

Work overload is the most consistent and potent risk factor.

It is characterized by tight deadlines, a list of tasks beyond what a person can reasonably accomplish in a day and, in many cases, an obligation to work overtime.²⁰

In SMEs, work overload is rampant given the limited number of employees. A person often has to wear several hats. What's more, peak periods cannot simply be absorbed by prompt recruitment.²¹

According to Portrait 2023 des PME, **48% of Canadian employees** complain that their workload is too heavy.

More than 50% of them cite the presence of contradictory or unclear tasks that add to the pressure.²²

The warning signs of work overload can be summed up as follows:

- Working late or weekends
- Feeling exhausted (yawning, inability to focus)
- Making mistakes and omissions
- Being irritable and causing conflict (caused by nervous tension)²³

One thing to keep an eye on is the rate of absences due to work overload or stress. When an employee regularly takes sick days in the wake of peak periods or goes on short-term disability for exhaustion, it's a sign that their workload capacity has been exceeded.²⁴

2. Lack of decision-making power

The second risk factor concerns the low control or decision latitude that employees have on how to do their work.

Low control means having little:

- Ability to organize tasks.
- Freedom over the means they use.
- Influence on the decisions that affect them.²⁵

For example, employees who must follow strict procedures without being able to suggest improvements may experience frustration and stress.

In SMEs, the organizational structure is often just a highly committed owner-manager and a few or no management levels. In some cases, all decisions—no matter how inconsequential—are made by the owner.²⁶ As a result, despite the best of intentions, this concentration of power can create an environment where employees feel left out of the decision-making process, which negatively affects their motivation and well-being.

The warning signs of the impact that a lack of decision-making power may have are subtle. However, once a lack of motivation sets in, employees cease to take any initiative. They wait for instructions and become detached from their job. Unfortunately, this can increase the rate of mistakes or accidents in the workplace, simply because employees unwillingly apply methods or processes they find sub-par or problematic.²⁷

3. Insufficient support and recognition at work

Insufficient social support at work refers to the lack of help, encouragement and consideration offered by coworkers and supervisors. It is a detrimental factor to mental health and its presence constitutes a major psychosocial risk. Insufficient support manifests itself when employees:

- Feel abandoned in the face of difficulty.
- Have no one to turn to in the event of work overload or problems.
- Feel that their manager does not support them.²⁸

This factor often goes hand in hand with high effort and low reward. A lack of recognition is characterized by a job well done that goes unnoticed, efforts that go unacknowledged and the sense of never working well enough.²⁹

Signs of poor support can take many forms, such as overworked employees reluctant to ask for help for fear of being perceived badly. It can also be a tendency to keep their concerns to themselves at work.

A climate of 'every man for himself', where team successes are never celebrated, also indicates a high risk. In extreme cases, an employee who chronically lacks support may go on leave or quit without ever talking about it because they don't feel that they can.³⁰

4. Organizational injustice

This is the perception employees (or managers) have when results, processes or interactions within the company are deemed unfair.³¹

Organizational injustice is perceived as...

- **Distributive** when it concerns the allocation of rewards and resources.

For example, two employees with equivalent job descriptions and experience are paid different salaries for no valid reason.

- **Procedural** when it concerns the decision-making process and procedures.

For example, an employee is given a promotion that seems arbitrary or based on unclear criteria.

- **Interpersonal** when it concerns the treatment and communication that employees receive from the organization, including perceptions of respect, dignity and honesty.

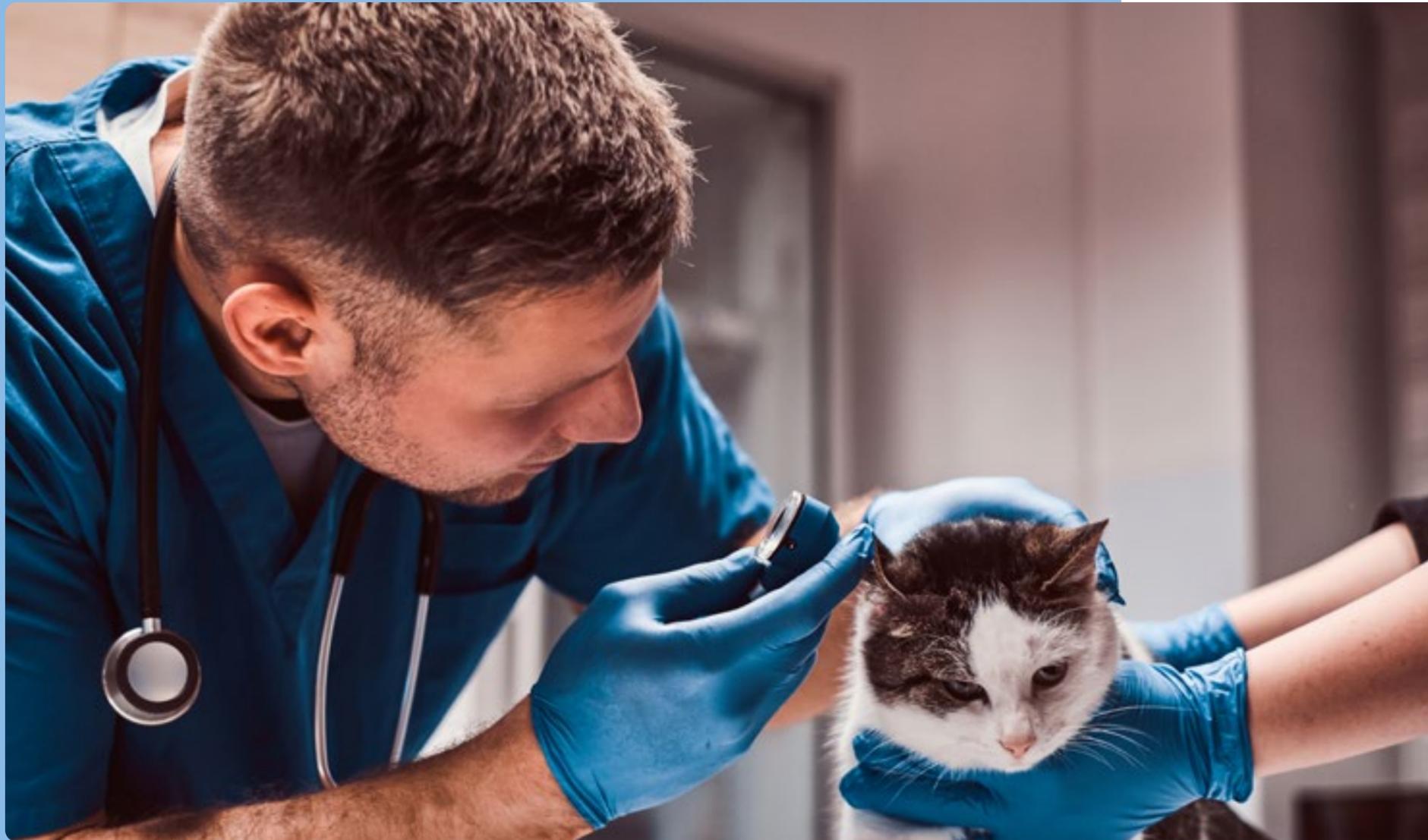
For example, a manager withholds important information from certain employees when assigning tasks in a project.³²

These are just a few examples. Organizational injustice manifests itself in countless different ways.

A lack of transparency will undermine an organization's decisions (promotions, raises, assignments) and processes.³³

Preferential treatment, where certain employees enjoy privileges due to favouritism, will breed resentment.³⁴

Finally, discrepancies between official company policy and reality trigger negative psychological and emotional consequences that harm employee well-being and engagement.³⁵ For example, a company claims to value work-life balance, but some employees are denied flexible work arrangements that are granted to others.



5. Job insecurity

Job insecurity refers to the fear of losing one's job or of deteriorating job conditions (reduced hours, lower pay).³⁶ For SMEs, the source of this insecurity stems from the economic vulnerability of being dependent on a handful of clients, having limited cash flow and having to absorb market volatility.³⁷

In the last few years, we have seen companies close overnight due to lock-downs, cancelled agreements, etc.³⁸ Even without a pandemic, SMEs are often subject to unpredictable seasonal or project disruptions. For employees, this can mean the threat of temporary layoffs and uncertainty about the future. They also develop a fear of uncontrolled change like a corporate restructuring, a hostile takeover, a business relocation.³⁹ All this invariably leads to stress.

The signs of perceived job insecurity are clear. Anxiety will cause employees to talk negatively or spread rumours about the company and its future. Sometimes, when employees think the company has no future, some no longer see the point of getting involved and job insecurity turns into disengagement.⁴⁰

Ironically, job insecurity can also lead to self-preservation. In the hope of appearing indispensable, employees will work overtime, never take time off and exhaust themselves to show their dedication.⁴¹

6. Harassment and violence in the workplace

The final psychosocial risk is workplace harassment and violence, which ranges from incivility (derogatory remarks, disrespect, conflict) to actual psychological harassment, which is repeated vexatious conduct aimed at a coworker that creates a tense environment.⁴²

In a small team, one person's toxic behaviour can wreak havoc. For example, a vindictive boss who humiliates employees in front of others, a senior employee who bullies a junior, or even persistent gossiping about a colleague. All these situations will foster an environment that is detrimental to mental health.⁴³

Can friendliness conquer these abuses? Not really.

Nearly 18% of SME employees in Canada experienced psychological harassment at work in the past year.⁴⁴

That's almost 1 in 5 people. SMEs are therefore not immune.

The warning signs of a toxic workplace climate include:

- An increase in interpersonal conflicts (frequent arguing, tension).
- Employees who avoid colleagues or who are afraid to speak at meetings (for fear of reprisal or being mocked).
- The presence of sarcasm, insults or inappropriate jokes on a daily basis.⁴⁵

A high turnover rate can also be an indicator,⁴⁶ especially when several employees in the same department decide to leave. Furthermore, they may not be forthcoming about the harassment or incivility they endured or observed at the exit interview.

Which workers are most vulnerable?

Psychosocial risks in the workplace tend to affect certain profiles more than others.

SME owners and managers

- These leaders often work 50 to 60 hours a week, exposing them to burnout.⁴⁷
- The pandemic amplified their stress—for some time at least—by having to respect health and safety measures in addition to their daily responsibilities.⁴⁸
- With reduced resources, they often have to compensate for employee absences, which increases their workload.⁴⁹

Young workers and junior employees

- Their lack of experience and non-permanent job status (e.g. during internships) tend to be a source of stress.⁵⁰
- Their precarious financial situation (student debt, no savings) makes them more vulnerable to job insecurity.⁵¹

Disadvantaged or minority employees

- Their non-permanent status (contract workers, trainees) often means that they are reluctant to report issues, for fear of losing their jobs.⁵²
- The following are typically the target of harassment and exclusion⁵³:
 - Women in a male-dominated environment
 - Members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community
 - Members of under-represented ethnic groups
 - Disabled people

34. Adamovic, 2023. | 35. Sainz et al., 2023. | 36. Costa and Neves, 2017. | 37. Rangrez et al., 2022. | 38. Coulombe et al., 2020. | 39. McKee et al., 2017. | 40. Yam et al., 2023. | 41. Nath et al., 2024. | 42. CNESST, 2025. | 43. Rasool et al., 2021. | 44. Villeneuve et al., 2023. | 45. Rasool et al., 2021. | 46. Islam et al., 2023. | 47. Sardeshmukh et al., 2021. | 48. Giusino et al., 2022. | 49. Dvorsky et al., 2021. | 50. Rigó et al., 2021. | 51. Kim and Chatterjee, 2021. | 52. Bhattacharya and Ray, 2021. | 53. Diamond and Alley, 2022; Wolbring and Lillywhite, 2023.

Taking Action

Transforming psychosocial risks into opportunities

Identifying risks is step one. The challenge lies in transforming them into opportunities. For SMEs, taking action means implementing changes that are both effective and realistic, given their limited resources. The good news is that a large HR team or massive budget is not the only to improve the health of an organization. Many measures are within reach and inexpensive, if not free—It's all a question of willingness, creativity and consistency.

Now let's look at some concrete strategies that apply to each of the six risk factors. SME managers can create a practical action plan simply by choosing the recommendations that best correspond to their issues and situation.

The 80/20 rule applies here in that 80% of the benefits result from 20% of the effort. The idea is not to do everything all at once. Identify one or two key changes that will solve the greatest number of problems, and focus on them.

Strategies for each factor

Work overload

Objective: Avoid chronic overload and enable employees to carry out their work under sustainable conditions.

Concrete actions

1. **The realistic prioritization and organization of tasks.** Learn to identify what is urgent/important and say 'no' to tasks or projects when capacity doesn't allow.
2. **Process optimization.** Often, the sense of being overwhelmed at work is caused by time mismanagement. It's important to take a critical look at key processes. Are any of the processes redundant? Do multiple validation steps add less value? It's all about efficiency.
3. **Time management and delegation training.** Organizational skills aren't innate, they're acquired! A little training and adequate tools can go a long way—for you and your employees.
4. **Job description update.** Especially in SMEs, it's important to know who does what. Without being set in stone, job descriptions serve as guidelines for a position's main tasks, key performance indicators and hierarchy (who the person reports to, who reports to them).
5. **Priority and objective clarification.** Every year, set three to five company objectives. Then, break them down into projects and assign them to teams or employees. This way, everyone will know what's important and what's not.

Seizing opportunities

Preventing work overload means:

- Less overtime, so less stress on payroll.
- Fewer mistakes and accidents.
- Less waste, omissions and leaves (lower disability insurance costs).
- Fewer absences due to work overload⁵⁴

It's usually more cost-effective to optimize the current workload than to recruit someone to replace a burnout or a departure.

Proactive wellness management (workload is part of this) pays off in the sense that it prevents having to incur the costs associated with work overload and work stoppages.⁵⁵ In the long run, a team that is not overworked will be more productive and not have to hire more resources.

What's more, clear roles and priorities prevent the duplication of efforts and tasks falling through the cracks, which is good for efficiency.⁵⁶ Finally, an employee who knows exactly what is expected of them can be evaluated and rewarded accordingly, motivating them to perform better at work.⁵⁷



Lack of decision-making power

Objective: Increase an employee's control or decision latitude so they feel more competent and committed.

Concrete actions

- 1. Employee involvement in day-to-day decisions.** Rather than applying decisions from the top down, consult your team on issues that concern them. Doing so can be as simple as asking for their opinion on tasks, new tools and the preparation of work schedules.
- 2. Flexible execution.** For each task or project, distinguish between the goal (the what) and the approach (the how). As much as possible, leave the approach up to the employees, which will empower them.
- 3. Training and coaching on taking initiatives.** Some employees never take the initiative, especially in a strict hierarchical structure. To encourage them, reward innovation by allowing them to make mistakes.
- 4. Flexible working hours.** Whenever possible, allow flexible work arrangements, such as variable schedules or allowing employees to work four days a week (if this suits the organization).
- 5. Logging off.** Lead by example. All managers or employees who are in a position of authority should avoid working late at night or on weekends. It may also be worthwhile to impose a rule that things can go to the next business day.

Seizing opportunities

Studies show that autonomy at work increases job satisfaction and commitment, which in turn reduces turnover. The benefits are real.

Replacing an employee costs 50 to 200% of their salary in lost production, recruitment efforts and training.⁵⁸

Micromanagement requires effort! Self-reliant employees will save managers time by allowing them to focus on strategy rather than day-to-day operations.

In terms of performance, autonomy stimulates creativity and innovation. The good news is that employees are in the best position to find solutions that reduce costs or open up new opportunities.⁵⁹ Autonomy also has a buffering effect on stress. Employees who are more self-reliant are better able to deal with pressure, and are less likely to suffer burnout⁶⁰, thereby reducing the cost of healthcare benefits, and fewer prolonged absences.



Insufficient support and recognition at work

Objective: Foster a workplace where employees feel supported and valued for their contributions, and are free to talk about their mental health.

Concrete actions

1. Caring management practices.

This can be as simple as:

- Regularly checking in with your team.
- Being understanding when someone is going through a difficult situation.
- Offering help or a break to employees who are overloaded.

2. Recognition system.

Recognition doesn't have to be expensive or complicated.

It can be as simple as:

- A thank you at a weekly meeting.
- Celebrating years-of-service anniversaries or jobs-well-done in an email or with a surprise (cake, paid coffee).
- Encouraging coworkers to thank each other.

3. Peer support.

Support doesn't just have to come from managers, it can also come from peers and through team-building activities.

They can be as simple as:

- Going out for lunch.
- Celebrating a success.
- Organizing an activity outside of work.

4. DEI awareness.

Embrace diversity, equity and inclusion with sensitivity training for employees. It's important to acknowledge employees who come from different backgrounds and cultures. The idea is for everyone to feel welcome.

This can be as simple as:

- Celebrating their holidays and traditions.
- Learning about their culture.

5. Connecting through technology.

When employees work in different offices or cities, use internal communication tools like Slack or Teams so they can talk to each other.

This can be as simple as:

- Sharing jokes, photos (e.g. pets).
- Sharing personal stories.

Seizing opportunities

Adequate support and recognition will reduce absenteeism and turnover.⁶¹ A workplace where employees feel valued and supported builds loyalty, while also reducing recruitment and replacement costs.⁶²

Supported employees are more inclined to speak positively about the company, show more engagement and be more productive.⁶³

An inclusive workplace will also attract a more diverse talent pool and skillsets.⁶⁴

Organizational justice

Objective: Restore trust through fair and transparent practices.

Concrete actions

- 1. Transparency and communication.** Openly discuss decisions and organizational changes like assigning a new client to a particular employee, the criteria for an exceptional bonus, etc. For SMEs, this can be done at team meetings. This transparency shows that the company has nothing to hide, which will defuse a lot of resentment.
- 2. Fair management practices.** Hiring, promotions, raises, workload allocation are examples of practices that require policies. Set objective criteria for promotions and share them with everyone. Implement formal HR processes to reduce favouritism (i.e. giving preference in spite of better judgement).
- 3. Attentive listening and accountability.** When an employee feels compelled to report an injustice, actively listening to them and acknowledging their feelings is essential for building trust. It's important to indicate when a decision is well-founded, because this will alleviate the sense of unfairness. However, in the event of a mistake or oversight, it's important for managers to have the courage to admit to it and rectify the situation.

Seizing opportunities

Acknowledging mistakes and correcting them shows integrity. It's a powerful signal that can turn a negative situation into a confidence-building opportunity.⁶⁵ After dealing with an incident, it's important to implement a communication strategy on the changes made and reaffirm the company's stance on fairness.

When a company learns from its mistakes and is willing to improve its practices, employee motivation benefits.⁶⁶ This renewed engagement translates into improved teamwork and productivity.⁶⁷ For example, employees who believe that corporate decisions are fair will be more likely to put in extra effort, innovate and get involved in new projects—all of which contribute to performance.

Job insecurity

Objective: Reduce anxiety linked to uncertainty by communicating openly and involving employees in the company's future.

Concrete actions

- 1. Financial transparency.** Without delving into the details of the company's finances, managers must keep their teams up to date on the company's health. When things are not going well, they should be honest about the situation and indicate what is being done to rectify it. Employees generally prefer to know the truth. When things are going well, remind them that they're here to stay.
- 2. Involvement of employees in difficult decisions.** It's important to involve employees on corporate decisions concerning reduced work hours, team restructuring, etc. Organize meetings to discuss the issue and possible solutions. Involving employees often results in the best options being found, or, at worst, in employees being supported in their search for a new job.
- 3. Honesty about the future.** Insecurity also comes from not knowing what the future holds. In a one-on-one meeting, discuss each employee's career development plans. SMEs who don't necessarily offer many career opportunities can nevertheless help an employee map out their progression (new responsibilities, new skills, future opportunities, if any).

Seizing opportunities

Alleviating the stress related to insecurity about the future of their company will make employees more committed and productive. Employees will help find solutions to challenges that can lead to innovative cost-saving measures or new ideas. And, above all, SMEs avoid presenteeism, where people stay, but no longer make an effort.⁶⁸





Harassment and violence in the workplace

Objective: Create a safe and respectful workplace where incivility is not tolerated, and intervention is swift and decisive.

Concrete actions

1. **Clear policies.** Even SMEs, regardless of size, benefit from having a workplace harassment policy that:
 - Defines harassment and incivility.
 - Asserts that the company has zero tolerance for such behaviour.
 - Describes the reporting process.
 - Is distributed to everyone.

Teams should discuss the subject on a regular basis to make sure it's understood and respected.

2. **Training and awareness-raising.** A workplace DEI training session, like a half-day workshop or online modules, will serve to explain best practices and make sure employees apply them.

3. **Respectful workplace climate**

It's not just about preventing harassment, it's about good behaviour. Encourage employees to say thank you, be polite and calmly resolve their disagreements. Formerly ban all forms of aggression and aggressive behaviour. For example, an outburst in a meeting must be followed up with an apology.

Seizing opportunities

By preventing harassment, SMEs not only avoid conflicts, they avoid legal fees, complaints to labour boards, compensation, etc. Reputation has a cost, too, in that a bad reputation is hard to rebuild. A single case of harassment can cost tens of thousands of dollars in fees and penalties.⁶⁹ A culture of respect improves performance and a good workplace climate promotes psychosocial safety (i.e. free from harassment). Both tend to increase employee commitment and decrease health issues, resulting in better overall productivity.⁷⁰ In short, it pays to be nice!

The Wendat Nation Council: A case study in best practices

Here is a real-life example that should drive home the importance of addressing psychosocial risks in the workplace. It involves the employees of the Wendat Nation Council and the practices they implemented in their organization.

How would you like to inspire Canadian companies to take an interest in the psychosocial risks in the workplace?

Marc-Olivier: I'd like us to become a model of best practices among First Nations and Indigenous organizations.

Our mission as an organization is to educate and inspire.

Constance: Our goal is not merely to comply with regulations, but to go beyond them, as we believe this approach has a significant positive impact on our organization.

Johanne: By identifying psychosocial risks, we can improve employee well-being in the workplace, which makes for a safe working environment as well as better exchanges and collaboration between colleagues and managers.

Réal: It's by leading by example that we want to show that Wendat Nation Council employees are happy here. We take care of our employees.

You regularly consult your staff for information on the psychosocial risks present in their workplace. Why do you want employees' opinions on this process?

Constance: In our opinion, employees are keenly aware of the psychosocial risks associated with their work, which is why we want to consult them. We want to better understand these risks and avoid overlooking important elements.

Johanne: We consult our staff because they are our agents of change. So, if we want to improve, take action and apply best practices, we must consider what employees tell us.

Constance: We want people to be ambassadors for workplace health and wellness.

For managers, this means being a caring leader and a good listener.

– Marc-Olivier



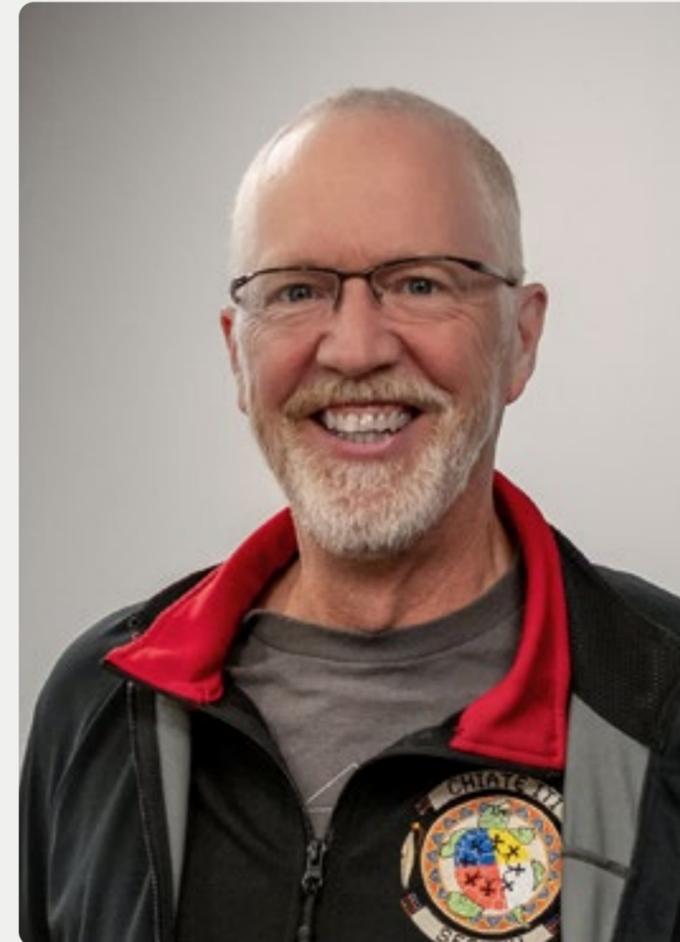
Around the table:

Marc-Olivier Allard
CIRA, Acting Executive Director

Johanne Duchesneau
CHRP, Human Resources Advisor

Constance Bédard-Daigle M.Sc., CHRP,
Organizational Development Advisor

Réal Lesage Vice-President of the
Wendat Nation Council Employees Union (CSN)



FROM RIGHT TO LEFT: JOHANNE DUCHESNEAU, MARC-OLIVIER ALLARD, RÉAL LESAGE AND CONSTANCE BÉDARD-DAIGLE

The Wendat Nation values community well-being and pride. In your organization, how do these principles influence your approach to workplace health and psychosocial risk prevention?

Johanne: Our corporate culture is based on guidelines and prevention. In line with the Nation's values, we stay close to the people, and implementing a workplace health and wellness program enables us to be even closer to them. This is why we meet with employees in every sector.

The aim is to improve conditions regarding presenteeism, absenteeism and short- and long-term disability. So, our health and wellness approach will also foster a sounder workplace.

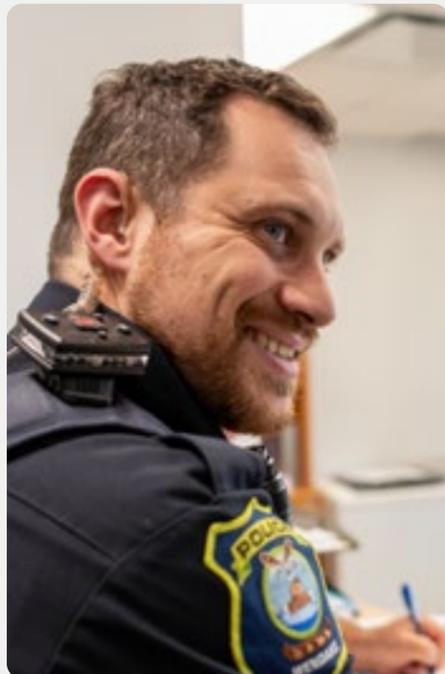
Constance: We believe that identifying psychosocial risks is a shared responsibility. The reason we want to gather information from the people in the field is to identify protection factors and apply prevention methods. Our aim is to create a healthy and viable workplace for employees.

How do you make sure that workplace health and the prevention of psychosocial risks remain a priority at the Wendat Nation Council, while also respecting the cultural and social realities of your organization?

Constance: We want to get regular feedback from employees and involve the various stakeholders, like the union. Senior management is very supportive.

Johanne: We also have a Workplace Health and Safety Committee that provides us with information from the field on the various risks from the various sectors.

Réal: A steering committee comprising unionized and non-unionized personnel was also created, allowing them to work together to ensure that mechanisms are in place to achieve results that are both quantifiable and verifiable.



MATHIEU TESSIER GROS-LOUIS, POLICE PATROLMAN

I don't necessarily see the leaders as being solely managers. In fact, anyone can be a leader, and we all have a role to play in promoting health and wellness.

– Constance



ALAIN DUCHESNEAU, PUBLIC WORKS TEAM LEADER AND DAVE RINGUET, REALTY MANAGEMENT AGENT

How do you expect leaders to promote health and wellness?

Constance: I don't necessarily see the leaders as being solely managers. In fact, anyone can be a leader, and we all have a role to play in promoting health and wellness.

Réal: Yes, everyone can be a leader. They're just like any other employee. They don't necessarily see themselves as leaders, but they are 'doers' of wellness.

Marc-Olivier: For managers, this means being a caring leader and a good listener. It's having the ability to pick up on things and take action to create a healthier workplace. It also means being understanding in order to mobilize our teams, and foster a climate of trust.

Committing to sustainable change

Taking action is an excellent start, but actual change takes time. Much like physical health, workplace health requires effort. Let's conclude with a question: how can SMEs adopt these changes?

The goal is for a change to become second nature and bear fruit for years to come. This is achieved by fostering a culture where wellness and commitment are not just words, but principles lived and shared by all employees.

Applying appropriate practices

The size, sector, situation and culture of each SME are unique. This is why it's crucial to prioritize and personalize initiatives. There's no point in trying to do everything all at once. It's better to implement a few value-added actions and do them well.

But, how to decide?

1. Rely on what employees say. After talking with them, some problems will invariably come up more often than others (e.g. a lack of recognition). It's important to address these issues.
2. Understand your situation. It may not be realistic for small family businesses to implement extensive processes, but working on open communication is.
3. Start small... but start now. Identify one or two simple initiatives that are easy to implement to show your desire and commitment. For example, implementing a summer schedule where the office closes at 1 p.m. on Fridays (if possible) to encourage work-life balance.
4. Encourage experimentation. When an initiative fails to produce the expected results or garners little support, it can be changed. The key is to stay focused on the objective (e.g. recognition) until the right approach is found.

Fostering a culture of workplace health

To make mental health in the workplace a pillar of the culture, it must be integrated into the company's values and behaviours.

How are good behaviours integrated into the culture?

1. Lead by example. Owners and managers need to embrace these behaviours. Bosses who advocate for work-life balance should not be working themselves to exhaustion. And if kindness is valued, managers must set an example by being attentive and caring. This consistency is essential to credibility.
2. Integrate mental health into day-to-day HR processes. For example, add criteria related to support, collaboration, etc., to annual performance reviews.
3. Include workplace health in the company's strategic objectives. When workplace health is made into a key performance indicator, like sales or quality assurance, it becomes a management priority in its own right.
4. Encourage feedback loops. Create opportunities for feedback (meetings, suggestion boxes, climate polls). This way, it becomes easier to spot when something is going off course or when a new source of stress is emerging. Use this information to promptly correct the situation, as this will increase trust in the company and contribute to a culture of transparency.

Supporting managers and teams

All managers—team leaders, supervisors, foremen or owners—are the promoters of workplace health. Since they apply policies, observe and encourage healthy behaviours, it's essential to provide them with the right training and tools.

1. Training and awareness. Affording managers opportunities to develop their caring leadership, stress management, communication and conflict resolution skills means giving them tools adapted to SMEs, such as personnel interview grids, to keep mental health in mind, and resources for when employees confide in them (EAP, helpline, etc.). These tools—some of which are free—will make managers more confident and competent.
2. Peer review. It can be lonely being a manager in an SME, so it's important for them to be able to share their experiences. For example, organizing a monthly meeting for all supervisors to discuss team issues and help each other out. For lack of colleagues, encouraging them to network with managers from other SMEs (chamber of commerce events, etc.) is a good idea.

3. Senior management support. When senior management embraces a healthy psychosocial workplace climate, it can prevent burnouts and improve management quality.⁷¹ Listening to managers and their concerns, while giving them leeway and recognition will make them realize that their role is valued.
4. Workplace health as part of the manager's role. Too often, managers are only seen as those who plan, direct and oversee. Discussing their efforts with them on a regular basis, and encouraging and rewarding them when they deliver will turn them into caring leaders.



CONCLUSION

Mental Health is a Shared Responsibility

Investing in workplace health is no longer a nice-to-have or a trend for Canadian SMEs—it's a valid strategy based on human needs.

In this document, we covered the importance of raising awareness as well as understanding that managers should be able to:

- Identify psychosocial risks.
- See them as opportunities for improvement through concrete actions.
- Integrate these best practices into the culture.

In short, what have we learned?

Firstly, the benefits are many and real. For the company, better workplace health means more loyal, productive and creative employees. Fewer unplanned absences, fewer costly mistakes, less desire to quit—all of which represent direct and indirect financial gain.

In Canada, studies show that every dollar invested in mental health in the workplace can yield a return of anywhere between \$1.50 and \$4.00²². It's a win-win situation. Employees with good mental health contribute to the company's prosperity, which the company can then use to reward them.

Secondly, it is possible to put theory into practice without it costing a fortune. To suit their own needs, SMEs can choose from a wide range of solutions like introducing flexible working hours, organizing training, clarifying roles and simply expressing recognition. No solution is insignificant. These changes don't have to be costly or complicated, but they will require effort and consistency.

In conclusion, a call to action is necessary.

Reading this far proves that you're committed to mental health in the workplace and the well-being of your employees. Now it's time to translate this commitment into concrete action.

Do this by:

1. Getting your employees together and discussing how you could do better together.
2. Setting one or two goals for your employees to be implemented by the end of the next quarter.
3. Applying your practices as soon as possible to adopt new habits.
4. Being sensitive to and adapting to your employees' reactions.

You play a role in workplace health and wellness!

References

- ALCOVER, C.-M., R. RICO et al. Understanding the changing nature of psychological contracts in 21st century organizations: A multiple-foci exchange relationships approach and proposed framework. *Organizational Psychology Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2017, p. 4-35. doi: 10.1177/2041386616628333
- ADAMOVIĆ, Mladen. Organizational justice research: A review, synthesis, and research agenda. *European Management Review*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2023, p. 762-782. doi: 10.1111/emre.12564
- BAKKER, A. B., and E. DEMEROUTI. Job demands-resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2016, p. 4-273. doi: 10.1037/ocp0000056
- BHATTACHARYA, A., and T. RAY. Precarious work, job stress, and health-related quality of life. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, vol. 64, no. 4, 2021, p. 310-319. doi: 10.1002/ajim.23223
- BLIESE, P. D., and C. A. CASTRO. Role clarity, work overload and organizational support: Multilevel evidence of the importance of support. *Work & Stress*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2000, p. 65-73. doi: 10.1080/026783700417230
- BOWLING, N. A., G. ALARCON et al. A meta-analytic examination of the potential correlates and consequences of workload. *Work & Stress*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2015, p. 95-113. doi: 10.1080/02678373.2015.1033037
- BRIEN ROBIDOUX, E., C. LABRÈCHE et al. La justice organisationnelle et l'épuisement professionnel : une nouvelle mesure selon les opportunités en milieu de travail. *Humain et Organisation*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2017, p. 21-28. doi: 10.7202/1095894ar
- CNESST. *Harcèlement au travail, 2025* [https://www.cnesst.gouv.qc.ca/fr/prevention-securite/milieu-travail-sain/harcèlement-au-travail].
- COSTA, S., and P. NEVES. Job insecurity and work outcomes: The role of psychological contract breach and positive psychological capital. *Work & Stress*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2017, p. 375-394. doi: 10.1080/02678373.2017.1330781
- COULOMBE, S., T. PACHECO et al. Risk and Resilience Factors During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Snapshot of the Experiences of Canadian Workers Early on in the Crisis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 11/2020 [https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.580702]
- CUNNINGHAM, T. R., R. J. GUERIN and coll. Work-related fatigue: A hazard for workers experiencing disproportionate occupational risks. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, vol. 65, no. 11, 2022, p. 913-925. doi: 10.1002/ajim.23325
- DAGENAIS-DESMARAIS, V., M.-È. DUFOUR et al. Santé organisationnelle : où en sommes-nous et vers où allons-nous au Québec? *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations*, vol. 68, no. 4, 2013, p. 661-681. doi: 10.7202/1023010ar
- DE VINCENZI, C., M. PANSINI et al. Consequences of COVID-19 on Employees in Remote Working: Challenges, Risks and Opportunities – An Evidence-Based Literature Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 19, no. 3, 18, p. 4-2022. doi: 10.3390/ijerph191811672
- DEADY, M., A. ARENA et al. Psychological workplace injury and incapacity: A call for action. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2024. doi: 10.1177/00221856241258561
- DELOITTE CANADA. Mental health and employer return on investment: A Canadian perspective. *Deloitte Insights*, 2022 [https://www2.deloitte.com].
- DEXTRAS-GAUTHIER, J., and A. MARCHAND. Does Organizational Culture Play a Role in the Development of Well-being at Work? vol. 2, no. 3, 2, p. 4-2017. doi: 10.1037/e508572017-001
- DHONDT, S., F. DELANO et al. The importance of organizational level decision latitude for well-being and organizational commitment. *Team Performance Management*, vol. 20, no. 8, 2014, p. 307-327. doi: 10.1108/TPM-03-2014-0021
- DIAMOND, L. M., and J. ALLEY. Rethinking minority stress: A social safety perspective on the health effects of stigma in sexually-diverse and gender-diverse populations. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, vol. 19, no. 3, 138, p. 4-2022. doi: 10.1016/j.neubiorev.2022.104720
- DOLLARD, M. F., and A. B. BAKKER. Psychosocial safety climate as a precursor to conducive work environments, psychological health problems, and employee engagement. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, vol. 83, no. 3, 2010, p. 579-599. doi: 10.1348/096317909X470690
- DVORSKY, J., J. BELAS et al. Business risk management in the context of small and medium-sized enterprises. 34, no. 1, 2012, p. 1690-1708. doi: 10.1080/1331677X.2020.1844588
- FERNET, C., O. TORRÈS et al. The psychological costs of owning and managing an SME: Linking job stressors, occupational loneliness, entrepreneurial orientation, and burnout. *Burnout Research*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2016, p. 45-53. doi: 10.1016/j.burn.2016.03.002
- FERRARA, B., M. PANSINI et al. Investigating the Role of Remote Working on Employees' Performance and Well-Being: An Evidence-Based Systematic Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 19, no. 3, 19, p. 4-2022. doi: 10.3390/ijerph191912373
- FRANCIS, L., and J. BARLING. Organizational injustice and psychological strain. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue canadienne des sciences du comportement*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2005, p. 250-261. doi: 10.1037/h0087260
- GILBOA, S., A. SHIROM et al. A Meta-Analysis of Work Demand Stressors and Job Performance: Examining Main and Moderating Effects. *Personnel Psychology*, vol. 61, no. 2, 2008, p. 227-271. doi: 10.1111/j.1744-6570.2008.00113.x
- GILLET, N., J. FOREST et al. Justice organisationnelle et intentions de quitter : Le rôle médiateur du bien-être eudémonique. *Revue québécoise de psychologie*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2015, p. 127-144.
- GIUSINO, D., M. DE ANGELIS et al. We All Held Our Own: Job Demands and Resources at Individual, Leader, Group, and Organizational Levels During COVID-19 Outbreak in Health Care. A Multi-Source Qualitative Study. *Workplace Health & Safety*, vol. 70, no. 1, 2022, p. 6-16. doi: 10.1177/21650799211038499
- GORGENYI-HEGYES, E., R. J. NATHAN and M. FEKETE-FARKAS. Workplace Health Promotion, Employee Wellbeing and Loyalty during Covid-19 Pandemic – Large Scale Empirical Evidence from Hungary. *Economies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2021, p. 4-55. doi: 10.3390/economies9020055
- HARRIS, Lloyd C. Commitment and Quiet Quitting: A Qualitative Longitudinal Study. *Human Resource Management*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2025, p. 565-582. doi: 10.1002/hrm.22274
- MOSHER HENKE, Rachel. Knowing Well, Being Well: Well-being born of understanding: Supporting Workforce Mental Health During the Pandemic. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, vol. 36, no. 7, 2022, p. 1213-1244.
- ISLAM, M. S., A. K. ASO et al. Workplace Bullying Causes Employee Turnover: A Responsible Human Resource Management Approach. *The International Journal of Organizational Diversity*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2023, p. 17-36. doi: 10.18848/2328-6261/CGPV23102/17-36
- JALALI, M., R. ESMAEILI et al. Mental workload profile and its relationship with presenteeism, absenteeism and job performance among surgeons: The mediating role of occupational fatigue. *Heliyon*, vol. 9, no. 3, 9, p. 4-2023. doi: 10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e19258
- KIM, J., and S. CHATTERJEE. Financial Debt and Mental Health of Young Adults. *Journal of Financial Counseling and Planning*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2021, p. 187-201. doi: 10.1891/JFCP-18-00048
- LAMONTAGNE, A. D., A. MARTIN et al. Workplace mental health: Developing an integrated intervention approach. *BMC Psychiatry*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1, p. 4-2014. doi: 10.1186/1471-244X-14-131
- LIU, Y., J. CHERIAN et al. Internal Corporate Social Responsibility and Employee Burnout: An Employee Management Perspective from the Healthcare Sector. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, vol. 23, no. 16, 2023, p. 283-302. doi: 10.2147/PRBM.S388207
- MCKEE, M., A. REEVES et al. Living on the edge: Precariousness and why it matters for health. *Archives of Public Health*, vol. 75, no. 3, 13, p. 4-2017. doi: 10.1186/s13690-017-0183-y
- NATH, A., S. RAI et al. Coping strategies mediating the effects of job insecurity on subjective well-being, leading to presenteeism: An empirical study. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2024, p. 209-235. doi: 10.1108/IJOA-10-2022-3476
- PARENT-LAMARCHE, A., and C. BIRON. When bosses are burned out: Psychosocial safety climate and its effect on managerial quality. Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières et Université Laval, 2022.
- PETERS, S. E., J. T. DENNERLEIN, J. et al. Work and worker health in the post-pandemic world: A public health perspective. *The Lancet Public Health*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2022, p. 4-194. doi: 10.1016/S2468-2667(21)00259-0
- PLUTA, A., and A. RUDAWSKA. The role of the employees' individual resources in the perception of the work overload. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2021, p. 590-612. doi: 10.1108/JOCM-08-2020-0241
- PROCTER, S., D. HARRISON et al. New Ways of Working in UK mental health services: Developing distributed responsibility in community mental health teams? *Journal of Mental Health*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2016, p. 126-130. doi: 10.3109/09638237.2015.1078880
- RANGREZ, S. N., F. AMIN, and S. DIXIT. Influence of Role Stressors and Job Insecurity on Turnover Intentions in Start-ups: Mediating Role of Job Stress. *Management and Labour Studies*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2022, p. 199-215. doi: 10.1177/0258042X221074757
- RASOOL, S. F., M. WANG et al. How Toxic Workplace Environment Effects the Employee Engagement: The Mediating Role of Organizational Support and Employee Wellbeing. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 18, no. 3, 5, p. 4-2021. doi: 10.3390/ijerph18052294
- RIGÓ, M., N. DRAGANO et al. Work stress on rise? Comparative analysis of trends in work stressors using the European working conditions survey. *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*, vol. 94, no. 459, 474, p. 4-2021. doi: 10.1007/s00420-020-01593-8
- ROSTAMI, F., A. BABAEI-POUYA et al. Mental Workload and Job Satisfaction in Healthcare Workers: The Moderating Role of Job Control. *Frontiers in Public Health*, vol. 19, no. 3, 9, p. 4-2021. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2021.683388
- SAINZ, M., E. MORENO-BELLA and L. C. TORRES-VEGA. Perceived unequal and unfair workplaces trigger lower job satisfaction and lower workers' dignity via organizational dehumanization and workers' self-objectification. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 53, no. 5, 2023, p. 921-938. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.2944
- SARDESHMUKH, S. R., M. GOLDSBY and R. M. SMITH. Are work stressors and emotional exhaustion driving exit intentions among business owners? *Journal of Small Business Management*, vol. 59, no. 4, 2021, p. 544-574. doi: 10.1111/jsbm.12477
- SHAH, M. K., N. GANDRAKOTA et al. Prevalence of and Factors Associated With Nurse Burnout in the US. *JAMA Network Open*, February 2021, doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.36469
- SIEGRIST, Johannes. The Effort-Reward Imbalance Model. *The Handbook of Stress and Health*. John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2017, p. 24-35. doi: 10.1002/9781118993811.ch2
- SUN, S., N. WANG et al. Crafting job demands and employee creativity: A Qualitative Longitudinal Study. *Human Resource Management*, vol. 59, no. 6, 2020, p. 569-583. doi: 10.1002/hrm.22013
- THURIK, R., A. BENZARI et al. Techno-overload and well-being of French small business owners: Identifying the flipside of digital technologies. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2024, p. 136-161. doi: 10.1080/08985626.2023.2165713
- VILLENEUVE, M., S. COULOMBE and A. MISSUD. Portrait de la santé mentale au sein des PME canadiennes édition 2023 – Pérennisation du télétravail et autogestion de la santé mentale : Impacts sur la santé et la performance organisationnelle. *Chaire de recherche Relief en santé mentale, autogestion et travail*, 2023.
- WOLBRING, G., and A. LILLYWHITE. Burnout through the Lenses of Equity/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Disabled People: A Scoping Review. *Societies*, vol. 13, no. 5, 2023, p. 4-131. doi: 10.3390/soc13050131
- YAM, K. C., P. M. TANG et al. The rise of robots increases job insecurity and maladaptive workplace behaviors: Multimethod evidence. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 108, no. 5, 2023, p. 850-870. doi: 10.1037/apl0001045

For more information, talk to
your account executive.
If you don't have one, simply
get in touch with our team.

You can also read our health report
for the latest trends and insights in
the field of health care.

beneva

People
Protecting
People