

## Fact sheet 2-A: “Workload” indicator



### Supplement to the Tool for Identifying Psychosocial Risk Factors in the Workplace

#### Indicators included in the tool

##### 1- Work context and prevention measures in place

- A. Job and work context
- B. Illness absenteeism and presenteeism
- C. Occupational health activities or policy
- D. Activities or policy against violence and harassment
- E. Return-to-work activities or policy
- F. Work/life-balance activities or policy

##### 2- Key components of work organization

###### A. Workload

- B. Recognition at work
- C. Social support of immediate supervisors
- D. Social support of colleagues
- E. Decision-making autonomy
- F. Information and communication

#### What is workload?

Workload is a concept that is difficult to define and involves more than simply the amount of work prescribed by an employer. It has a subjective dimension in that the perceived workload is just as important as the workload actually required. The concept of workload must be discussed globally, taking into account the complexity of a person’s actual work, the formal and informal demands that are made of him or her, the resources and tools placed at the person’s disposal for doing his or her work, the amount of time available, and unforeseeable events that have an impact on workload.

In the area of psychosocial risk factors, workload refers to the amount of work that has to be done, the intellectual effort that is required, and the time constraints that must be met in doing the work. These aspects can be assessed by asking workers how they perceive their actual workload.

#### Examples of questions that can be asked to assess a person’s workload

- Do you feel that your workload is too heavy?
- Do you have the impression that you have to work very hard?
- Is your job very hectic?
- Does your work require long periods of intense concentration?
- Do you often receive contradictory requests?
- Are you often interrupted while you work?
- Do you have enough time to finish your work?

## Why be concerned about this?

Work intensification is an increasingly present phenomenon that results from major changes in forms of work organization. It is reflected by a steady rise in workload and increased mobilization of workers' intellectual, psychological and physical abilities.

Workload is a major health risk factor. Several studies have shown a link between heavy workload combined with limited decision-making autonomy and mental illness, musculoskeletal disorders and cardiovascular disease.

In addition to increasing absenteeism and presenteeism, heavy workload can have a negative impact on organizations. For example, increased workload can curb workers' initiative and creativity. Moreover, assigning managers a heavy workload appears to interfere with the implementation of management practices fostering the support and availability of immediate supervisors.

## What practices should be implemented?

Here are some examples of organizational and management practices likely to have a positive impact on the "workload" indicator:

- Define the roles and responsibilities of each party, by encouraging the workers concerned to take part in this process and by reviewing their roles and responsibilities regularly. Ensure that assigned tasks can be completed within regular working hours
- Introduce means to accurately assess a worker's workload on a regular basis and adjust it according to new requests, the worker's abilities and unforeseen events. For example:
  - hold team meetings once a week
  - enable colleagues to discuss problems encountered in order to find new ways to resolve them
- organize regular meetings between employees and their immediate supervisors in order to set realistic objectives and determine if the means for achieving them are appropriate
- Replace people who leave their jobs because they are ill or wish to retire
- Add resources or call on backup resources during peak periods
- Redefine priorities by eliminating certain tasks after consulting the workers concerned
- Implement changes gradually, that is, in phases separated by periods of stability, to enable workers to adapt to and assimilate the changes
- Encourage workers to participate in changes and provide them with adequate training so that they can adjust their work to the new procedures
- Ensure that the type and amount of work is in line with each worker's abilities and skills
- Implement a skills development plan involving coaching, mentoring, co-development and appropriate training activities
- Take learning time into account when dividing up the workload
- Define action plans using workforce planning based on realistic needs projections

## References and useful links

1. Fournier, P.-S., S. Montreuil, J. Villa (2013). *Contribution à un modèle explicatif de la charge de travail : le cas du service à la clientèle*. Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations, Vol. 68(1), p. 46-70.
2. Vézina, M., R. Bourbonnais, C. Brisson, L. Trudel (2006). *Définir les risques : sur la prévention des problèmes de santé mentale*. Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales, Vol. 3(163), p. 32-38.
3. Brun, J.-P. (2007). *Les sept pièces manquantes du management*, Les Éditions Transcontinental.