

## Fact sheet 2-C: “Social support of immediate supervisors” 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 social support of immediate supervisors?

Social support of immediate supervisors consists of management practices that promote effective listening, openness to the opinions of others and being available for employees. This indicator refers to an immediate supervisor’s ability to support employees, as well as the dignity, politeness and respect with which he or she treats them.

Social support of immediate supervisors can be of several different types:

**1) Operational**, or task-oriented. This includes providing employees with the tools, resources and time they need to perform tasks more easily. When immediate supervisors get their employees to work together and resolve operational problems, they are offering a form of operational support.

**2) Informational**, or focused on information and advice. The goal is to provide employees with the support they require to do their work and find solutions to difficult situations. When immediate supervisors clarify roles, responsibilities and expectations, they are offering a form of informational support.

**3) Emotional**, or person-oriented. When immediate supervisors listen to their employees, treat them with respect and make them feel confident, they can help them to overcome professional difficulties more easily.

## Why be concerned about this?

In a context where work is intensifying and change is more and more frequent, social support of immediate supervisors is an essential protection factor in the prevention of occupational health problems. Making oneself available, listening to employees' needs, respecting their abilities and providing them with the tools, resources and training required to do their work are all management practices that make employees feel they are respected and supported.

In many organizations, managers have a heavy workload, sit on several committees, spend a great deal of time in meetings and are sometimes required to use remote management, with the result that they are not very available to provide their employees with sufficient support. When social support of immediate supervisors is lacking, it is not just the quality of human relations that suffers but also the efficiency of an organization. This situation can lead to the development of conflicts and harassment, as well as contribute to absenteeism and high staff turnover.

## What practices should be implemented?

Here are some examples of organizational and management practices likely to have a positive impact on the "social support of supervisors" indicator.

- Train or coach managers on management practices that foster health and attentive listening
- Help managers by offering them the resources and time they need to support their team. For example:
  - limit the number of committees they have to sit on
  - limit the number of meetings they have to attend
  - allow them the autonomy they need to make decisions affecting the support that they can give their employees
  - recognize managers who put social support practices in place, and listen to their problems
- Help managers to fulfil their role more effectively by encouraging them to:
  - Recognize their own limits and problems and seek support from their supervisors
  - Hold regular team meetings with employees to exchange information and give them an opportunity to talk about the problems they face
  - make time for one-on-one meetings on a regular basis and not only during annual evaluations. Give employees clear policy directions, explain their roles, responsibilities and mandates regularly and ensure they are clearly understood
  - Share the successes and failures of team members. If necessary, defend employees in front of the administration and clients
  - Adopt respectful language and behaviour and verify how it affects other people
  - Follow up on employees' requests and suggestions within a reasonable timeframe
  - Facilitate the work of employees by supplying them with necessary resources and limiting additional requests that, although they are related to the employees' main mandate, are not part of it
  - Do not allow conflicts to deteriorate. Act as a mediator or enlist the necessary help

## References and useful links

1. Brisson C., M. Gilbert-Ojime, C. Duchaine, X. Trudel, M. Vézina (2016). *Workplace Interventions Aiming to Improve Psychosocial Work Factors and Reduce Related Health Problems*. Chapter 16 in *Work Stress and Health in a Globalized Economy*, edited by Johannes Siegrist and Morten Wahrendorf. Springer International Publishing.
2. Brun, J.-P. (2007). *Les sept pièces manquantes du management*. Les Éditions Transcontinental.