Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

Compliments of Canada Life

Workshop series



Participant handout

Putting psychological competencies and demands on the agenda: **creating change**



The results from employee input during the Creating awareness workshop on this topic should accompany this handout. If this piece is missing, please notify the workshop facilitator.

If you haven't already done so, please read through this handout before starting the workshop.

This session aligns with the recommendations of the National Standard of Canada on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (CSA z1003).



Process

- **Review** psychologically safe discussions
- **Recap** definition and statements
- **Align** employee input with evidence-based actions
- **Define** criteria for choosing actions
- **Complete** Creating change worksheets
- **Share** ideas
- **Vote | Refine | Commit**



Psychologically safe discussions

- **Focus** on moving forward and not on the past
- **Offer** constructive suggestions for improvement
- **Discuss** ideas, not individuals
- **Allow** everyone the chance to contribute

Guarding Minds at Work description of positive psychological competencies and demands:

"In a work environment where psychological competencies and demands are not a health risk, employees are continually supported to meet the psychological demands of their position."

People in this type of work environment would be able to say:

- Management appointments consider the "people skills" necessary for specific positions.
- I am able to do my job in a way that aligns with my values.

In an organization with positive psychological competencies and demands, employees might NOT say:

- My work threatens my psychological health.

Appendix

Evidence-based actions for creating change in psychological competencies and demands
Adapted from Guarding Minds at Work

For an up-to-date list of actions, visit Evidence-based actions for psychological competencies and demands.

Consider interpersonal and emotional competencies, technical skills and knowledge in hiring and promotion decisions.

- Interview for interpersonal competencies, including the ability to foster and maintain healthy working relationships, especially for leadership positions. Strong emotional intelligence can contribute to psychologically safe leadership strategies.
  - The ability to manage emotions and relationships, and to effectively solve interpersonal problems at work, is relevant for positions responsible for supervising or supporting others.
  - The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction provides an Interviewing template to help adapt for your hiring or promotion approach.
  - PositivePsychology.com has interview questions that focus on emotional intelligence.
- Ask team members to list the most relevant people skills for a team or leadership position and why. You should have this input before recruiting. This information may also help identify existing team dynamics that should be addressed.
- Give guidelines for evaluating the psychological competencies an applicant needs for the specific position.
  - Refer to these strategies and tips from human resources professionals. You can also use competency measures.
- Make sure the expectation that every employee must contribute to a psychologically safe workplace is part of your orientation process.
  - Employees' role in psychological health and safety is a free resource that can help you do this and track completion.
  - Provide ongoing feedback, training and support during the probationary period for new hires. There are resources to make onboarding more effective. For example, the Immigrant Employment Council of B.C. offers this toolkit for Onboarding newcomers. It offers strategies that can help all new employees.
- Let employees explore internal positions that may better match their interpersonal and emotional competencies, when possible. This can include job-shadowing or career-development discussions.
  - Use this 1:1 template to help open start a conversation.
  - Once created, allow potential candidates to review the detailed competencies requirements.

Ensure job descriptions include accurate psychological demands.

- Make required interpersonal and emotional competencies part of all job descriptions. Ask employees already in these jobs to review and confirm that these competencies are accurate and complete.
  - The Government of Nunavut uses a helpful template.

Help each employee develop and maintain the psychological competencies they need for the changing demands of their position.

- Review the psychological demands of the job regularly with each employee
- Prepare employees to handle both the usual and less familiar psychological demands of the job. For example, those who deal with the public such as librarians, bus drivers, baristas or store clerks may need to deal with someone who's violent. While this may only happen occasionally, it's a possibility. We can more confidently face unexpected events when we're prepared.
- Conduct regular and collaborative performance evaluations with constructive feedback about interpersonal and emotional behaviour.
  - Refer to Performance management for tips on how to do this.

Offer ongoing opportunities to develop social and emotional skills for leaders and employees.

- Social and emotional skills are part of lifelong learning and evolve with our circumstances, including our job demands.

While formal training programs may be effective, they can also be expensive and time consuming. Share information that's available for free online and in your community. Here are a few ideas:

- Team activities help build resilience and emotional intelligence.
  - → Building stronger teams gives strategies and information that can help employees:
    - → Respond more effectively to workplace stressors
    - → Help resolve issues
    - → Support each other
- Develop a culture in which emotional intelligence is understood and valued. And, make it a criterion for:
  - → Recruitment
  - → Selection
  - → Recognition or reward
  - → Promotion
  - → Emotional intelligence in organizations has resources to help.
- Provide ongoing training in interpersonal and emotional skills – particularly those needed for highly demanding positions.
  - → Building stronger teams has a section on Supporting effective team leaders.
- Talk about how values are aligned with each employee's role by taking the top 3 to 6 results from a Personal values assessment.

- Discuss your organization's professional values with employees. Then, they can better understand how their values contribute to their work and how they differ from others.
  - → Fill out the work values test.
  - → Once values are established, discuss how you can improve alignment in the workplace.

Additional actions and resources

- Review Policy recommendations to see where you can improve psychological health and safety. Include best practices for protecting employee psychological safety in your policies and procedures.

Adapted from Guarding Minds at Work



Creating change criteria:

- Honours the input of our employees
- Improves psychological competencies and demands
- Is within our budget
- Is easy to implement now
- Minimizes risk to psychological safety

Up to 3 evidence-based actions chosen by our group

Why we feel this will create the change we want:

1

2

3



Creating change process

It can seem daunting to prioritize and choose those evidence-based actions most likely to improve psychological health and safety in the workplace. Use this Creating change process to help you think through the options and guide your decision making.

Psychological health and safety is a process of continual improvement. Trying to do too much all at once can create stress and put pressure on employees. Instead, consider implementing smaller changes over time. Focusing on one initiative at a time may be ideal. After you incorporate these initiatives, or when they're no longer necessary, you can add more.

Choose your evidence-based action. Then, use the Creating change worksheet to refine your plan.

Step 1: Assess potential actions

Weigh risks and benefits to help identify potential challenges and opportunities before you commit. Review each of the following points against your proposed action. Then write your response on the Creating change worksheet you've already started:

1. **Appropriateness** is the degree to which the action's relevant to our work situation and good for our organization.

   This would be an action compatible with our work demands and setting. Record on the Creating change worksheet why you feel the action's appropriate.

2. **Acceptability** is the degree to which the employer, union if applicable, and employees would agree to implement the action. Actions should be:

   - → Beneficial for all
   - → Easy to explain to decision makers
   - → Easy to communicate to employees
   - → Straightforward to implement

   Decision makers and employees may reject actions that are overly complicated or interfere with the ability to meet objectives. In unionized environments, the action should align with the collective agreement. Record on the Creating change worksheet why this action will be acceptable to all workplace stakeholders.

3. **Accessibility** is the degree to which everyone can participate regardless of ability or location.

   There are many considerations in terms of who can access the action. They include location, method of delivery and timing. Language, literacy level and format also can slow or hinder access.

   It's important to include and support employees with differing abilities. Record on the Creating change worksheet how this action will be accessible to everyone.

4. **Efficiency** is the degree to which we have the resources to implement and sustain the action.

   Do a cost-benefit analysis on the action. Estimate these costs:

   - → Material
   - → Delivery expenses such as transportation, venue or refreshments
   - → Time and expenses for developers, facilitators, participants and evaluators to participate

   Weigh the expenses against the value this action may achieve for each participant. Here's an example:

   - → The total cost is $5,000.
   - → 50 or more employees will become more aware of protecting their own mental health.
   - → The potential cost-benefit is decreased absenteeism and improved productivity for $100 per employee.

   Record on the Creating change worksheet why this is an efficient action.

5. **Effectiveness** is the degree to which the action will have a positive measurable impact and lead to the intended outcomes.

   Ensure anyone can see a link between the selected action and the intended outcomes. This is critical. This evidence can come from established workplace practices, evidence-based resources or academic literature. Record on the Creating change worksheet the evidence for why the action will be effective as well as how you'll measure success.

   Measurements of success could include the following approaches and metrics:

   - **Participation** – measure how many people take part in your action.
   - **Behaviour changes** – track the number of times participants do things differently. Give specific direction in advance. What behaviour change are you looking for? How do participants or their leaders report this action?
   - **Absenteeism** – track the number of days off in the months before and after implementing the action. Look for changes in trends. Look for ways to maintain confidentiality while tracking absence.
   - **Complaints, conflicts or grievances** – track the number reported in the months before and after the action.
   - **Awareness** – survey employees to determine the level of awareness about your action or the intended outcomes.
   - **Participant perception** – ask specific questions about the experience with the action.
   - **Supervisor perception** – survey supervisors about changes resulting from this action.
   - **Focus groups** – bring together participants to discuss how the action impacted them and suggestions for improvement.
   - **Stress satisfaction scan** – administer this 6-question survey before and after the action to measure changes in how employees feel about work.

6. **Safety** is the degree to which all potential risks to both physical and psychological safety are eliminated or managed.

   Unintended consequences can happen at an individual or organizational level. For example, we may trigger or stigmatize employees when we discuss mental illness. Come up with potential risks to physical and psychological safety. This will reduce the likelihood of them happening. In the Creating change worksheet, record the risks you identified and how to prevent or mitigate them.

   Once you've added your ideas to the Creating change worksheet, you may need to get approval.

Step 2: Choose actions that meet criteria

Prioritize the actions that meet your criteria, identifying what will be done first. This can include one or more actions.

Step 3: Choose the action planning team

Assign people to the various responsibilities found in the Committing to our success form.

Step 4: Implement the action(s)

Be sure to use the methods of measurement to assess the effectiveness of your action.

Step 5: Evaluate the outcomes

Analyze your measures of success to report on the extent to which the action(s) were able to reach the intended outcomes.

Step 6: Use a continual improvement approach

Your evaluation can support a process of continual improvement. Take what you learn from the action and consider how you can do it better or if the best course of action is to continue as is.



Creating change worksheet

Relevant psychosocial factor: psychological competencies and demands

Group members: _____

Date: _____

Description of action proposed:

Appropriateness is the degree to which the action is relevant to our particular work situation and good for our organization.

Relevance to our organizational or team objectives:

Acceptability is the degree to which the employer, union if applicable, and employees would agree to implement the action.

The chosen action will be acceptable to our employees (and union if applicable) because:

The chosen action will be acceptable to our employer because:

Approval may be needed for:

Accessibility is the degree to which everyone can participate regardless of ability or location.
(Indicate how those with any of the disabilities below would be supported to participate.)

- Language
- Sight
- Mobility
- Hearing
- Mental illness

Description of method:	Location and timing of the action to allow everyone to participate:

Efficiency is the degree to which we have the resources to implement and sustain the action. Create a cost-benefit analysis – be as detailed as you can.

Estimate costs including any:

- Staff time for planning, development, delivery and participation
- Materials including copies
- Equipment or technology
- Refreshments or meals
- Venue
- Other

Describe resources available without cost, such as:

- Volunteers
- Repurposing or recycling existing materials

Describe potential benefits, such as:

- Reduced absenteeism
- Fewer grievances
- Less injury or illness
- Improved employee energy
- Improved well-being
- Increased engagement
- Boosted morale
- Increased productivity

Effectiveness is the degree to which the action will have a positive measurable impact and lead to the intended outcomes.

State your intended outcomes:	Evidence that this action will lead to each of the intended outcomes:

How we'll measure success: see the Creating change process for examples of ways to measure success. Choose one from there or describe your own.

Safety is the degree to which all potential risks to both physical and psychological safety are eliminated or managed.

Identify all potential risks and list strategies to address them:

Notes about potential actions

Use this space to record any questions or comments about the actions presented.

Refining our top action(s)

This space is for notes about potential challenges, solutions to those challenges and ways to improve the effectiveness of the actions chosen.

Committing to our success

Improving psychological competencies and demands in our workplace – potential implementation team

Recommend names and emails, including your own, of who should be involved in:

	Name	Email
Leading the project		
Finalizing the action plan		
Developing measurement tools like surveys or interviews		
Researching, securing or creating resources to use for the action		
Communicating about and promoting the action		
Managing registration if necessary		
Facilitation of the action		
Participation in the action		
Facilitating the completion or analysis of measurement tools		
Presenting on the outcomes of the action to senior leaders		
Evaluating the outcomes against the objectives		
Authorizing continual improvement		

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health resources are:

- For all employers, people leaders, employees and facilitators of workplace psychological health and safety
- Available in English and French
- Evidence- or practice-based
- Available to anyone at no cost



Examples of the resources available at clwsmh.com include:

Discrimination prevention and inclusivity
Address discrimination and promote inclusivity through your policies and processes. This creates a positive environment and supports all employees to thrive and succeed.

Employees' role in psychological health and safety
Free online learning modules for employees to learn how to contribute to a mentally healthy workplace. This orientation to psychological health and safety in the workplace is for individuals.

Guarding Minds at Work
Provides a comprehensive set of free resources to help assess and address the psychological health and safety of workplaces. It was used as a reference for the National Standard of Canada on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.

Mental health policies and programs
Helps inform policies and programs related to Accommodation, return to work, EAP, stigma, suicide prevention and peer support strategies for organizations.

Psychologically Safe Leader Assessment
This free resource helps leaders become aware of the impact they can have on the psychological health and safety of employees at work. It helps leaders improve communication, social intelligence, fairness and problem-solving.

Strengthening leadership skills
This booklet of activities can help you build leadership skills, including emotional intelligence, resilience and communication strategies.

All Workplace Strategies resources are available to anyone at no cost, compliments of Canada Life. To learn more, visit clwsmh.com.

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