Fact sheet 1-F: "Work/life-balance activities or policy" 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 work/life balance?

At some point in their working life, all workers are faced with conflicts between their work and personal life, be it on account of personal, family or parental obligations, responsibilities or needs. Here are some examples of needs or demands that can emerge in a person's personal life and come into conflict with his or her work:

- Sebastien is the father of three children. He often has to take them to medical appointments during the day

- Margaly does triathlon and trains with her club at 5:00 p.m. three days a week. She has to be in good shape and needs lots of energy to be successful in her sport

- Sandra is a single parent. Her 12-year-old daughter has swimming competitions a few times a year. On those occasions, Sandra has to take Friday off in order to travel to the competitions

- Peter's father has Alzheimer's disease. Sometimes Peter has to take time off work in order to take care of his elderly father and accompany him to certain activities

Achieving work/life balance involves various activities that may or may not be part of a global policy to help workers balance the demands of their working and personal lives. The Bureau de normalisation du Québec has introduced a work-family balance standard (BNQ 9700-820). This standard is voluntary and involves a certification program.

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Why be concerned about this?

Work/life-balance is one aspect of an organization's psychosocial safety climate. Organizational practices designed to reduce conflict between workers' personal and working lives may have a positive impact on occupational health, in addition to helping attract and retain staff. In contrast, conditions that do not foster work/life balance are associated with health risks.

Some research has shown that workers with heavy family responsibilities are more likely than other workers to report poor health indicators. For one thing, this is because people with the heaviest family responsibilities tend more often to be in the lowest household income categories. In addition, these people are faced with more demands due to their dual role and often have fewer hours of recreation—a situation that is reported to have a harmful effect on their health (psychological distress, depressive symptoms perceived as being related to work, presenteeism).

What practices should be implemented?

Here are some examples of organizational and management practices that are likely to have a positive impact on the "work/life-balance activities or policy" indicator:

- Allow people to rearrange their work schedules for personal reasons by:
  - reducing their working time (part-time work, work sharing)
  - adjusting their work schedules (flexible hours, open-ended schedules)
  - ensuring predictability in their schedules and workplaces
  - compressing their workweek (35-hour week in 4 days)
  - banking their work hours and using them as needed (credit hours)
- Offer people the possibility of working part time.

- Give workers access to certain types of leave:
  - holidays and deferred-salary leave
  - sick leave for children and parents
  - parental leave
  - progressive return to work after maternity or paternity leave
  - progressive retirement
- Encourage people to work at home when working conditions permit
- Foster access to special conditions in the workplace:
  - workplace day-care centres
  - breastfeeding rooms
  - possibility of working on personal matters at work

References and useful links

1. Lippel, K., K. Messing, S. Vézina, P. Prud'homme (2011). "Conciliation travail et vie personnelle" in *Enquête québécoise sur des conditions de travail, d'emploi, de santé et de sécurité du travail (EQCOTESST)*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec and Institut de la statistique du Québec — Institut de recherche Robert-Sauvé en santé et en sécurité du travail, Chapter 3.

2. Melchior, M., L. Berkman, I. Niedhammer, M. Zins & M. Goldberg (2007). "The mental health effects of multiple work and family demands," Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 42, p. 573–582.

3. Dollard, M. F. & A. B. Bakker (2010). *Psychosocial safety climate as a precursor to conducive work environments, psychological health problems, and employee engagement*. Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, Vol. 83, p. 579–599.

4. Bureau de normalisation du Québec, Standard BNQ 9700-820, Work-Family Balance, https://www.bnq.qc.ca/en/standardization/health-at-work/work-family-balance.html

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