Psychological Safety in the Workplace

Psychological safety is a vital condition of a workplace that prioritizes employee well-being, engagement and safety.

Definition of Psychological Safety in the Workplace

The absence of harm and/or threat of harm to mental well-being that a worker might experience.[1]

Consideration of psychological injury is an important part of building a robust psychological health and safety program. Psychological injury "involves harm to a person that results from someone else's negligent, reckless, or intentional conduct."[2] Improving psychological safety in the workplace involves taking precautions to prevent injury or danger to employee psychological health that is within the influence and responsibility of an employer.

Psychological safety is good for business: it is "one of the strongest predictors of team performance, productivity, quality, safety, creativity, and innovation."[3] A positive workplace culture is rooted in psychological safety. Specific legal, business and wellness reasons for mining companies to recognize and address psychological safety include:[4]

- Positive impact on productivity and growth.
- Ability to attract talent or investment.
- Role in meeting organizational, legal or regulatory obligations.
- Positive influence on employee well-being.

In promoting and protecting psychological safety, employers support a positive workplace culture that embodies:[5]

1. Dignity and respect, addressing employee need for a sense of self-worth, self-esteem, inclusion and belonging.
2. Security, addressing employee need to feel safe, both physically and psychologically.
3. Equity, addressing employee need to feel a sense of belonging in a community that prioritizes fairness.

1   Mental Health Commission of Canada, *The National Standard*, 7.
2   Guarding Minds, *What is Psychological Health and Safety?*
3   McKinsey, "What is Psychological Safety?"
4   Guarding Minds, *What is Psychological Health and Safety?*
5   Adapted from Guarding Minds, *What is Psychological Health and Safety?*

MiHR RHIM

MINING INDUSTRY HUMAN RESOURCES COUNCIL

Tips for Employers

Employers establish psychological safety in the workplace when they create the conditions in which individuals feel included, safe to learn, safe to contribute and safe to challenge the status quo.[6] In other words, employees are ready to take on new challenges, ask questions to ensure they understand their tasks and provide constructive input. A positive workplace culture that promotes psychological safety takes psychosocial risk factors into account, such as civility and respect, growth and development, involvement and influence, recognition and reward and workload management.[7]

In Canada, a voluntary National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace offers a framework to help employers identify and eliminate hazards, assess and control risks, implement supporting structures and practices and foster a positive workplace culture.[8] The guiding principles underpinning the National Standard are that:[9]

- Legal requirements identified and complied with.
- Workplace stakeholders participate and share responsibility for psychological health and safety, including their own health and behaviour.
- The workplace is based on mutually respectful relationships.

- Senior management will demonstrate commitment to developing and maintaining a psychologically healthy and safe workplace.
- Organizational decisions are considered through a psychological health and safety lens.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada created a *Guide to Implementation*[10] to help organizations adopt the Standard. The Guide describes four stages of implementing the Standard:[11]

1. **Build a Foundation** – Demonstrate leadership, communicate commitment.
2. **Identify Opportunities** – Analyze data to identify strengths and areas for improvement.
3. **Build an Action Plan** – Identify vision, objectives, targets and training requirements.
4. **Implement** – Put processes in place for action, performance monitoring and management review.

---

6   Clark, *The Four Stages*; and McKinsey, "What is Psychological Safety?"
7   See the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety's Mental Health resources for a more detailed discussion of psychosocial risk factors in the workplace.
8   CSA Group, *Psychological Health*, 2.
9   CSA Group, *Psychological Health*, 3.
10   Mental Health Commission of Canada, *The National Standard*.
11   Mental Health Commission of Canada, *The National Standard*, 4.

MINING INDUSTRY
HUMAN RESOURCES COUNCIL

Building a Positive Reporting Culture

Build a positive culture of reporting[12] by:

- Creating and sharing a policy to address concerns and complaints.
- Communicating and implementing a clear and transparent process of handling concerns and complaints.
- Managing the collection, storage and handling of sensitive information.
- Controlling access to sensitive information.

Evaluation and Reporting

Evidence-based qualitative and quantitative measures are useful in capturing the status of a facility's psychological safety journey. Short-term measurements could include the number of complaints or grievances received, absenteeism rates or worker awareness of policy and procedure levels. Longer-term measurements could examine these trends as well as those regarding sense of belonging over time to support any needed changes.

Reporting on the performance of psychological safety objectives should be more than just a checklist of activities. Monitoring and progress reporting can include, for instance:[13]

- Leadership engagement.
- Baseline assessment of psychosocial risk factors.
- Baseline assessment of other workplace determinants of psychological health (e.g., environmental, physical, job requirement, staffing levels).
- Psychological injury and illness statistics.
- Return-to-work programs.
- Aggregated data from health risk assessments.
- Aggregated analysis of the results of investigations or events.

The outcome of the audit can include reporting on:

- Identification of gaps and opportunities for improvement.
- Corrective actions to be taken.
- A review and update of relevant organizational policies and procedures.
- A review and update of objectives, targets and action plans.
- A communication plan to share the audit results.

12   See MiHR's Sexual Harassment and Gender Based Violence in the Workplace: Sample Policy and Procedure for ideas on creating a reporting process.
13   CSA Group, *Psychological Health*, 14.

MIHR RHIM
MINING INDUSTRY HUMAN RESOURCES COUNCIL

References

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. (2024). *Mental Health: Psychosocial Risk Factors in the Workplace.* https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/mh/mentalhealth_risk.html

Clark, Timothy R. (2020). *The Four Stages of Psychological Safety*. Porchlight Books. https://www.porchlightbooks.com/blog/changethis/2020/the-four-stages-of-psychological-safety#:~:text=Psychological%20safety%20is%20a%20condition,or%20punished%20in%20some%20way.

CSA Group, Bureau de normalisation du Québec, and Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2022). *Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace: Prevention, Promotion, and Guidance to Staged Implementation*. CSA Group. https://www.csagroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2421865-Z1003-13EN.pdf

Government of Canada. (2018). Trauma and Violence Informed Approaches to Policy and Practice. https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/health-risks-safety/trauma-violence-informed-approaches-policy-practice.html

Guarding Minds @ Work. (2022). *What is Psychological Health and Safety?* https://www.guardingmindsatwork.ca/about/about-safety

McKinsey & Company. (July 17, 2023). "What is Psychological Safety?" https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-psychological-safety

Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2014). *The National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace: Assembling the Piece*s. CSA Group. https://www.csagroup.org/store/product/SPE%20Z1003%20IMPLEMENTATION-HB/

MIHR
RHIM

MINING INDUSTRY
HUMAN RESOURCES COUNCIL