Industry Recognizes the Importance of Taking Action

STAKEHOLDER RESPONSE

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ABSTRACT

Any gap between the demands of the environment and the individual's expectations and resources places his or her health at risk. The individual's perception and evaluation determine the extent of the risk and the degree of negative or positive impact. Companies now recognize the importance of taking action to deal with workplace organization (i.e., primary prevention), in addition to offering more conventional methods of secondary and tertiary prevention. Variables associated with the intervention context, which were identified in Vézina's text, are conditions for the successful implementation of any occupational health and safety project. As representatives of a joint occupational health and safety association, we feel that we should be focusing mainly on primary prevention in the workplace. Research should be conducted to offer companies the procedures, methods, tools and means they need in order to implement effective and sustainable prevention strategies that will maintain a healthy workplace.

THE PAPER THAT DISCUSSED promotion and prevention strategies in the workplace presents a review of two work analysis models to help define the issue of psychological health on the job.

In light of our experience in the field, Selye's stress model appears to be a good complement to the two other models described in the document. One reason is that this model brings out the subjective and systemic dimensions inherent in the definition of risk factors. In this model, the problem is the interaction between the individual and his or her environment. Any gap between the demands of the environment and the individual's expectations and resources places his or her health at risk. The individual's perception and evaluation determine the extent of the risk and the degree of negative or positive impact. This model recognizes the need to deal with psychosocial risk factors based on multifactorial combinations.

In an ASSTSAS survey of the Quebec health sector, nearly 49% of the respondents who had experienced a major health problem believed the problem to be directly related to their job.

Companies and organizations dealing with prevention are now more interested than ever in identifying potential solutions to this emerging problem. Companies now recognize the importance of taking action to deal with workplace organization (i.e., primary prevention) in addition to offering more conventional methods of secondary and tertiary prevention. In Québec, research conducted by Université Laval's chair of occupational health and safety management in organizations is attempting to put forward primary prevention intervention tools for workplaces. In our view, it is obvious that psychological health concerns must be integrated into the culture of the organization and reflected in management philosophy.

Our experience confirms that the variables associated with the intervention context, which were identified in Vézina's paper, are conditions for the successful implementation of any occupational health and safety project. The factors that facilitate this intervention include support from senior management, commitment by all leaders of an organization, the type of leadership, worker participation, shared vision (through group projects), communication that encourages participation, and structured and consistent follow-up to increase or simply maintain any improvements.

The research approaches to be developed should make it possible to identify effective primary prevention strategies for companies – in other words, strategies that address work-related causes – in order to eliminate or reduce sources of stress: avoiding work overload, reviewing levels of supervision, improving communication, increasing worker participation in the organization's decision making, holding team meetings, and ensuring the development of skills required by employees – in other words, improving work organization.

Companies traditionally tend to invest in secondary prevention by acting on personal characteristics and individuals' coping mechanisms. These strategies, which are taught through stress management training, aim to reduce the consequences of stress, but they cannot change the working conditions and usually have just a short-term effect. Similarly, tertiary prevention strategies, which come into play when the individual is experiencing problems, aim to reduce suffering and improve well-being. The strategies consist of EAP, treatment, rehabilitation, return to

work and individual follow-up. Like secondary prevention, these strategies are directed at the individual rather than the work situation.

As representatives of an occupational health and safety joint association, we feel that we should be focusing mainly on primary prevention in the workplace. Research should be conducted to offer companies the procedures, methods, tools and means they need to implement effective and sustainable prevention strategies. As a complement to the priorities identified in the Vézina report, we believe that the research agenda should more specifically take the following actions:

• Design tools and procedures for companies and measure their effectiveness.
• Document the characteristics of a work situation that place workers' psychological health at risk, and also document the characteristics of a healthy environment that fosters psychological well-being.
• Specify the links that exist between factors of satisfaction, dissatisfaction and psychological health at work.
• Analyse the relationship between the quality of the organizational environment and psychological well-being, between the quality of the environment and performance, and between performance and psychological well-being at work.
• Identify psychological health indicators in the workplace.
• Create tools to measure the effectiveness of a preventive approach to psychological health in the workplace: impact indicators, measurements of results and follow-up over time.

• Identify the components of an effective program for managing the return to work after psychological problems, and measure the impact of such a program in terms of organizational health indicators (absenteeism, quality of the work environment, etc.).