

About PF9: Workload Management

What are Psychosocial Factors?

Psychosocial factors are elements that impact employees' psychological responses to work and work conditions, potentially causing psychological health problems. Psychosocial factors include the way work is carried out (deadlines, workload, work methods) and the context in which work occurs (including relationships and interactions with managers and supervisors, colleagues and coworkers, and clients or customers).

What is PF9: Workload Management?

GM@W defines PF9: Workload Management as present in a work environment where tasks and responsibilities can be accomplished successfully within the time available. This is the psychosocial factor that many working Canadians describe as being the biggest workplace stressor (i.e., having too much to do and not enough time to do it). Research has demonstrated that it is not just the amount of work that makes a difference, but also the extent to which employees have the resources (time, equipment, support) to do the work well.

Why is Workload Management important?

Most employees are not only willing to work hard, but experience a 'good day's work' as fulfilling and rewarding. Workload management is important because there is a unique relationship between job demands, intellectual demands and job satisfaction. Job demands reduce job satisfaction, whereas intellectual demands, or decision-making latitude, increase job satisfaction. Even when there are high demands, if employees also have high decision-making ability, they will be able to thrive. Having high decision-making latitude also allows for positive coping behaviours to be learned and experienced.

What happens when employees can't manage their workload?

If any system is subject to excess load without respite it will break. This is as true for people as it is for equipment. Increased demands, without opportunities for control, result in physical, psychological and emotional fatigue, and increase stress and strain. This has a negative influence on performance. Emotionally fatigued individuals also have a diminished sense of personal accomplishment and an increased sense of inadequacy. One of the main reasons employees feel negatively about their jobs and their employers is excessive workload.

How can Workload Management be improved?

Start by conducting the GM@W Organizational Review and/or the GM@W Survey and reviewing the results. If **Workload Management** is identified as an area of concern or relative strength, refer to the GM@W Action Resources for a practical strategy and evidence-based and effective suggested actions that can improve **Workload Management**. It is also important to discuss the findings with employees to gain a further understanding of the results and to obtain input into possible interventions. Furthermore, it is important to evaluate the undertaken interventions over time to ensure they are effective and to take corrective action where needed. Consider reviewing the resources below. Finally, refer back to the GM@W website on occasion for new ideas about how **Workload Management** can be enhanced.

Further information about Workload Management:

- Barnes, C., & Van Dyne, L. (2009). 'I'm tired': Differential effects of physical and emotional fatigue on workload management strategies. *Human Relations*, 62(1), 59-92. doi: 10.1177/0018726708099518
- Gilbert, M. & Bilsker, D. (2012). *Psychological Health and Safety: An Action Guide for Employers*. Retrieved from http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Workforce/Workforce_Employers_Guide_ENG.pdf
- Health and Safety Executive. (2012). Work related stress – together we can tackle it. In *Guidance*. Retrieved from <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm>
- Karasek, R. (1979). Job demands, job decision latitude, and mental strain: Implications for job redesign. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24(2), 285-308. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2392498>
- Lardner, R., Amati, C., & Briner, R. (2002). *Stress management standards for workload*. Retrieved from <http://www.keilcentre.co.uk/Data/Sites/1/Workload%20-%20Stress%20Management%20StandardsFinal.pdf>
- The Great-West Life Assurance Company. (2012). PF9: Workload Management. In *Centre Resources by GM@W Factor and On the Agenda*. Retrieved from <http://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com>

www.guardingmindsatwork.ca