

## About PF12: Psychological Protection

### 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 PF12: Psychological Protection?

GM@W defines PF12: Psychological Protection as present in a work environment where employees' psychological safety is ensured. Workplace psychological safety is demonstrated when workers feel able to put themselves on the line, ask questions, seek feedback, report mistakes and problems, or propose a new idea without fearing negative consequences to themselves, their job or their career. A psychologically healthy and safe workplace is one that promotes employees' psychological well-being and actively works to prevent harm to employee psychological health due to negligent, reckless or intentional acts.

### Why is Psychological Protection important?

When employees are psychologically protected they demonstrate greater job satisfaction, enhanced team learning behaviour and improved performance. Employees are more likely to speak up and become involved. They show increased morale and engagement and are less likely to experience stress-related illness. Psychologically protected workplaces also experience fewer grievances, conflicts and liability risks.

### What happens when employees' psychological safety is not protected?

When employees are not psychologically safe they experience demoralization, a sense of threat, disengagement and strain. They perceive workplace conditions as ambiguous and unpredictable. The organization is at a much greater threat from costly, and potentially crippling, legal and regulatory risk. This can, in turn, undermine shareholder, consumer, and public confidence in the organization.

### How can Psychological Protection be improved?

Start by conducting the GM@W Organizational Review and/or the GM@W Survey and reviewing the results. If **Psychological Protection** 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 **Psychological Protection**. 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 **Psychological Protection** can be enhanced.

### Further information about Psychological Protection:

- American Psychiatric Foundation. (2012). *Partnership for workplace mental health*. Retrieved from <http://www.workplacementalhealth.org/>
- Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario. (2012). *Mental health works*. Retrieved from <http://mentalhealthworks.ca>
- 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](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Workforce/Workforce_Employers_Guide_ENG.pdf)
- Government of Canada (2012). *Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety*. Retrieved from <http://www.ccohs.ca/>
- May, D., Gilson, R., & Harter, L. (2004). The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work. *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology*, 77(1), 11-37. Retrieved from <http://zonecours.hec.ca/documents/H2007-1-1046395.Douglas.pdf>
- Roussin, C. (2008). Increasing trust, psychological safety, and team performance through dyadic leadership discovery. *Small Group Research*, 39(2), 224-248. doi: 10.1177/1046496408315988
- Schepers, J, de Jong, A., Wetzels, M., & de Ruyter, K. (2008). Psychological safety and social support in groupware adoption: A multi-level assessment in education. *Computers & Education*, 51(2), 757-775. Retrieved from [http://jijlsite.onward.nl/pdf/JeroenSchepers.nl%20-%20Schepers,%20De%20Jong,%20Wetzels,%20De%20Ruyter%20\(2008\).pdf](http://jijlsite.onward.nl/pdf/JeroenSchepers.nl%20-%20Schepers,%20De%20Jong,%20Wetzels,%20De%20Ruyter%20(2008).pdf)
- The Great-West Life Assurance Company. (2012). PF12: Psychological Protection. In *Centre Resources by GM@W Factor and On the Agenda*. Retrieved from <http://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com>

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