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Vision Zero and well-being

Summary report

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Geneva

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Summary

The Vision Zero mindset is about the journey towards a higher prevention-level. It is based on the assumption that all accidents, harm and work-related ill-health are preventable. The Vision Zero concept of the International Social Security Association (ISSA) is flexible and can be adjusted to the specific safety, health or well-being priorities for prevention in any given context. Well-being at work is characterized by the active promotion and maintenance/sustainability of healthy psychosocial working conditions to sustain individuals' positive mental health and ability to work productively and creatively, and the active prevention of ill health and poor psychosocial working conditions.

Developing healthy psychosocial working conditions and healthy organizations should be a priority for any organization that is striving towards business excellence with the aim to create the best possible workplace and to attract and retain their managers and employees. Potential unhealthy psychosocial work environment dimensions need to be addressed, e.g., by considering how to create balance between work demands and resources; how the work-tasks match the employee's skills, abilities and competences; or how work-life balance can be promoted through flexible and adaptable working practices.

It is important to recognize that individual employees not only have their own needs, values, competencies and abilities but also that their work situation might differ depending on their experience and job position, which means that physical, cognitive, emotional and social aspects need to be taken into account to create a healthy psychosocial work environment. This summary report concludes with a presentation of the 7 Golden Rules for well-being that can be applied by organizations wishing to successfully create a healthy, productive, and reputable working environment.

1. Introduction

on Prevention has been developing a series of guides for occupational safety and health to support the idea that all occupational accidents and diseases are preventable. Based on the

7 Golden Rules (ISSA, 2017), these guides mainly address sectoral risks but did not look into the well-being of employees. The *ISSA Guidelines on workplace health promotion* (ISSA, 2019) provide a sound basis for promoting employee’s health as a social security organization, however, people’s values, needs and approaches to work have changed over the past years and especially since the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Vision Zero and the 7 Golden Rules

Accidents at work and occupational diseases are neither determined by fate nor unavoidable – they always have causes. By building a strong prevention culture, these causes can be eliminated, and work-related accidents, harm and occupational diseases be prevented. Vision Zero is a transformational approach to prevention that integrates the three dimensions of safety, health and well-being at all levels of work (Figure 1). The ISSA’s Vision Zero concept is flexible and can be adjusted to the specific safety, health or well-being priorities for prevention in any given context. Thanks to this flexibility, Vision Zero is beneficial to any workplace, enterprise or industry in all regions of the world.

The 7 Golden Rules provide the framework for a safe and healthy work environment. They equally can be applied to well-being aspects at the workplace.

Figure 1. *The three dimensions of Vision Zero*



7 Golden Rules for Vision Zero

1. Take leadership – demonstrate commitment
2. Identify hazards – control risks
3. Define targets – develop programmes
4. Ensure a safe and healthy system – be well-organized
5. Ensure safety and health in machines, equipment and workplaces
6. Improve qualifications – develop competence
7. Invest in people – motivate by participation

3. Introduction to well-being

It is important to differentiate between work-related stress and well-being at work. Work-related stress can be defined as the negative response individuals can have when their abilities and skills are poorly matched with the demands of their job and they receive no support. While well-being at work is about preventing poor psychosocial working conditions and poor psychological health (such as the experience of work-related stress), it is also about promoting and sustaining positive mental health and thriving at work.

The World Health Organization has inextricably linked well-being to mental health which has been defined as a state in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community (WHO, 1948). Therefore, well-being at work relates to several aspects of a worker's experience such as their ability to work productively and creatively, to engage in strong and positive relationships, to fulfil their personal and social goals, and to contribute to their community, and have a sense of purpose. Actions to improve safety, health and well-being (SHW) can be taken within the work context and outside of it. Actions taken in the workplace represent workplace interventions that are implemented in the work setting and consider the characteristics of work environments and workers.

A healthy psychosocial work environment includes an appropriate social support from leaders and peers, an appropriate degree of autonomy and opportunities for learning and development, and can positively contribute to health and well-being, as well as to safety. It is important to

remember that both physical and psychological health at work are affected by psychosocial factors in terms of work organization and interpersonal relationships at work. At the same time, the physical work environment can also directly affect our health and well-being.

“Well-being: Psychological health at work is characterized by the active promotion and maintenance/sustainability of healthy psychosocial working conditions to sustain individuals’ positive mental health and ability to work productively and creatively, and the active prevention of ill health and poor psychosocial working conditions.”

Source: Adapted from ISSA (2020).

4. Key considerations on the psychosocial work environment

It has been found that organizational culture, work-life balance and a good social environment play a big role in individuals’ decision-making when it comes to choosing employment and staying in their jobs. This is especially true for younger generations who are prepared to change jobs much more frequently to find suitable working conditions (OECD, 2018). Employers are therefore placing more focus on recruitment and attracting talent as well as developing healthier working environments that promote SHW at work.

When organizations develop healthy psychosocial work environments, they reap significant benefits and generate value and returns on their investment. However, when they fail to do so, they face significant challenges and even threats to their sustainability. How well an organization manages the risks associated with the various psychosocial work environment dimensions, is related to whether they are faced with positive or negative outcomes (Table 1).

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4.1. The organizational well-being perspective

Organizations need to consider how to create balance between work demands and resources, for example workload and work pace according to staffing levels; how to create clear roles and responsibilities and interpersonal trustful relationships, including avoiding conflicts or bullying; how to balance the effort workers put into their work versus the different types of rewards and recognition they receive; how the tasks workers have to deal with match their skills, abilities and competences; and how work-life balance can be promoted through flexible and adaptable working practices.

At the organizational level, it is important that well-being is embedded in organizational goals and that there is a shared understanding of these goals and associated responsibilities. Important dimensions of well-being at the organizational level include trust and a strong sense of psychological safety that allows both managers and staff to openly discuss challenges in relation to well-being and celebrate good practices. This presupposes the existence of a collaborative and supportive culture, underpinned by fairness and justice. Often managers and employees may feel uneasy to share psychological health issues. This implies that the focus is on the individual and not on the organization (Figure 2).

Table 1. *Potential healthy and unhealthy psychosocial work environment dimensions*

Dimensions	Unhealthy psychosocial working conditions	Healthy psychosocial working conditions
Organizational culture & function	Poor psychosocial safety climate, poor communication, low levels of support for problem solving and personal development, lack of definition of, or agreement on, organizational objectives	Good psychosocial safety climate, clear organizational objectives, appropriate support for problem solving and personal development, good communication processes
Job content	Lack of variety or short work cycles, fragmented or meaningless work, under use of skills, high uncertainty, continuous exposure to people through work	Meaningful work, appropriate use of skills, work retaining employee interest and engagement, appropriate support
Workload & work pace	Work overload or under load, machine and algorithm pacing, high levels of time pressure, continually subject to deadlines	Appropriate level of workload, appropriate work pace, human in control work pacing, sensible and achievable deadlines
Work schedule	Shift working (especially irregular), night shifts, inflexible work schedules, unpredictable hours, long or unsociable hours	Sensible shifts and reasonable working hours to maintain work-life balance, flexible working practices
Control	Low participation in decision making, lack of control over workload, pacing, shift working	Participation in decision making, control at work
Environment & equipment	Inadequate equipment availability, suitability or maintenance; poor environmental conditions such as lack of space, poor lighting, excessive noise	Good physical working conditions according to good practice guidance
Interpersonal relationships at work	Social or physical isolation, poor relationships with superiors, interpersonal conflict, lack of social support, harassment, violence	Good relationships at work, teamwork, social support, appropriate policies and procedures to deal with conflicts
Role in organization	Role ambiguity, role conflict, responsibility for people	Clear roles and responsibilities, appropriate support to meet objectives
Career development	Career stagnation and uncertainty, under promotion or over promotion, poor pay, job insecurity, low social value to work	Appropriate career prospects & development matching skills & performance, effort reward balance, valuable/meaningful work, job security
Home-work interface	Conflicting demands of work and home, issues arising from telework from home, low support at home, dual career problems	Work-life balance, supportive organizational policies and practices to achieve 'life balance'

Source: Adapted from Jain, Leka and Zwetsloot (2018).

Figure 2. *Dimensions of well-being at organizational level*



Source: Human House (2022).

6 4.2. The employee's well-being perspective

It is important to recognize that individual employees not only have their own needs, values, competencies and abilities but also that their work situation might differ depending on their experience and job position. Various issues need to be taken into account such as physical, cognitive, emotional and social demands, access to information and sense of predictability, available support from managers and colleagues, autonomy and influence over their work life, recognition and sense of purpose. These and other aspects of the psychosocial work environment are not static and should be systematically evaluated over a period of 1–2 years, especially recognizing that organizational change is a common feature of most organizations (Figure 3).

Furthermore, to truly achieve well-being, employers need to promote a good balance between work and private life. It is well known that SHW are impacted by various social determinants and work is one of them. Socioeconomic background, cultural background, access to support services are other examples. While employers are responsible for providing healthy working conditions, it is important that they are aware of the wider environment their workers are living in and associated challenges.

Figure 3. *Dimensions of well-being at employee level*

Source: Human House (2022).

4.3. The international well-being perspective

To address challenges posed by psychosocial risks, several policy responses have been implemented at the international, regional, and national levels (ILO, 2016). Many countries now have specific legislation that applies to SHW. Recently an international standard was also introduced in this area: ISO 45003:2021 (ISO, 2021).

Workplace health, safety and well-being are also being increasingly seen as an essential component of responsible business practices, recognizing that organizations cannot be responsible and good externally, while having a poor social performance internally (Jain, Leka and Zwetsloot, 2018). An active healthy workforce is considered a key determinant of sustainable economic and human development which is explicitly recognized in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015).

5. Prevention levels to achieve optimum well-being in workplaces with Vision Zero

The Vision Zero mindset is about the journey towards a higher prevention-level. It is based on the assumption that all accidents, harm and work-related ill-health are preventable. Vision Zero is therefore the ambition and commitment to create and ensure safe and healthy work by preventing all accidents, harm and work-related diseases through its 7 Golden Rules and continually promoting excellence in occupational safety and health. This is also true for well-being at work.

Risks arising from unhealthy psychosocial working conditions can be systematically managed like any other type of risk. A healthy psychosocial work environment in terms of, for example appropriate social support from leaders and peers, appropriate degree of autonomy and

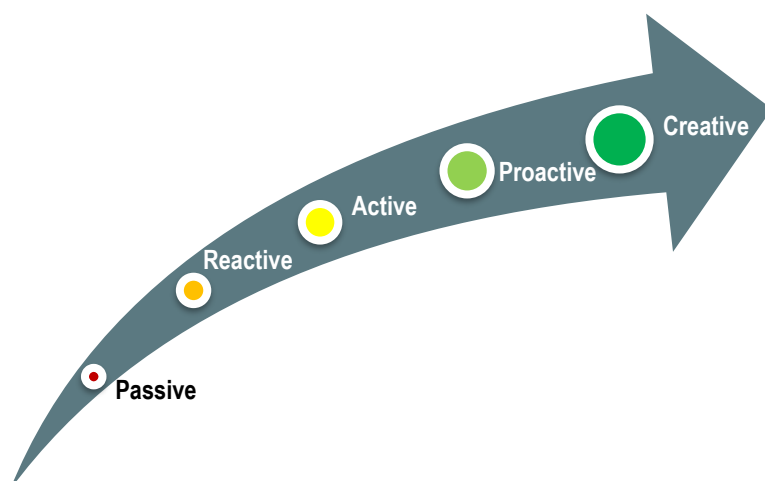
opportunities for learning and development, can positively contribute to health and well-being, as well as to safety.

Organizations can be at different steps in their journey towards well-being and prevention. Some might be passive or only reactive as issues emerge while others might be active having implemented several actions to promote well-being at work. Fewer organizations are recognized as proactive or even creative according to the Vision Zero Company Maturity Scale Model (Figure 4). These organizations prioritize well-being in a preventive manner. There is a focus on creating the best workplace to attract and retain managers and employees.

- **Passive level:** Well-being is not a priority in the organization.
- **Reactive level:** The organization only focuses on well-being in case of for example many stress incidents or conflicts.
- **Active level:** Well-being is said to be a priority, but there is not always consistency between words and actions in the organization.
- **Proactive level:** The organization prioritizes well-being and focuses on preventing psychological ill health before it occurs.
- **Creative level:** Well-being is an integrated part of business leadership with an ongoing daily focus. There is a focus on creating the best workplace to attract and retain managers and employees.

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Figure 4. *Organizational prevention levels: Vision Zero Company Maturity Scale Model*



Source: Human House (2022).

6. Developing a healthy psychosocial work environment and promoting well-being at work within the Vision Zero prevention strategy

Reaching the proactive and creative levels on the Vision Zero Company Maturity Scale Model will require organizations to develop a healthy psychosocial work environment. Creating a healthy workplace will ensure, and also clearly signal, that the organization prioritizes well-being and that it is an integrated part of business leadership with an ongoing daily focus. According to the WHO, a healthy workplace is one in which workers and managers collaborate to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety and well-being of all workers and the sustainability of the workplace (WHO, 2010).

6.1. How to create a healthy psychosocial work environment

Addressing well-being in a proactive way requires that well-being is embedded into the strategies, activities and practices of organizations, i.e. into their business processes, systems, and culture as well as into the mind-set of managers and workers and into their HR processes. A healthy workplace is not a state but a continuous process of improvement, which means to continuously assessing risks to safety, health and well-being. This process broadly follows the following steps:

1. **Establish the team** - The first critical step is to mobilize and gain commitment from the leaders and key stakeholders in the organization. At least half of the team should be non-management employees and attention should be paid to gender representation and other characteristics of a diverse workforce.
2. **Assess** - The second step is to assess both the present employee and organization situation, along with the future outcomes that are desired. Data should be gathered on the demographics of employees, disability, work-related illnesses and injuries, well-being, employee engagement, productivity of the organization, turnover and issues that have arisen from risk assessment processes.
3. **Prioritize and develop an action plan** - Once all the information has been gathered, the healthy workplace team will prioritize the identified issues and deal with them in the appropriate order. This decision-making process should consider: the preferences and opinions of managers, employees and their representatives, as well as the risk to employees; whether there is a potential solution to the problem and how easy it is to implement; and also the cost of the problem if it continues to be ignored. Based on this prioritization, an action plan should be developed which outlines the actions to be taken over the short, medium and long term.
4. **Implement** - The fourth step is to implement the action plans, with responsibilities having already been assigned in the previous stage. Employee involvement is crucial at this stage, as is the demonstration of support and commitment from management for the specific policies or programmes.
5. **Evaluate and improve** - The final step is to determine what is, and what is not, working and identify what is important for success. The process of implementation should be evaluated, as well as the short-term and long-term outcomes.

6.2. How to develop and promote meaningful work and a healthy organizational culture

In order to achieve success and continuous improvement in promoting SHW and developing a healthy organizational culture, it is important to embed these activities in organizational practice. Both, managers and workers must have “ownership” of the process. All key stakeholders that can contribute to and shape a healthy workplace should be identified and actively engaged, which not only ensures sustainability of the activities but also helps to develop and promote meaningful work.

It is important to recognize the expertise of people on their job and take into account their collective perception of their work environment. Workers and their representatives must not simply be consulted or informed but must be actively involved in every step of the risk assessment and management process from planning to evaluation considering their opinions and ideas. It is critical that workers have some collective means of expression. Finally, commitment and engagement of senior leaders is important to integrate healthy workplaces into the enterprise's business goals and values and mainstream key activities in core business operations.

Mainstreaming involves embedding and integrating safety, health and well-being into the strategies, activities and practices of organizations, i.e. into their business processes, systems, and culture as well as into the mind-set of managers and workers (Jain, Leka and Zwetsloot, 2018). This is important for successful healthy workplace programmes, policies and management, especially over time, and foster the development of a healthy organizational culture. A company's mission and vision should form the basis for strategically embedding organizational policies to enhance SHW and develop healthy workplaces. Every organization, even a very small enterprise, has some sort of planning and control cycle.

A healthy workplace policy can be integrated into the normal planning and control cycle, but still can be based on a specific plan that will be developed with internal stakeholders. It is important to define a set of SHW performance indicators that can be used to monitor and communicate progress in the realization of the plan. Table 2 summarizes the key strategies that can be implemented for mainstreaming SHW in organizations.

Table 2. Strategies for mainstreaming safety, health and well-being

<p><i>Integrated approaches for SHW management</i></p> <p>The development and integration of occupational safety, health and well-being management systems into quality and environmental management systems, so as to build on structures, procedures and ways of thinking and acting that are already accepted in the organization.</p>
<p><i>Implementation and evaluation of interventions</i></p> <p>SHW policies need concrete programmes, intervention and actions in order to be able to achieve SHW improvements. Programmes, interventions and actions need to be implemented and evaluated to enable a better understanding of mainstreaming SHW.</p>
<p><i>Embedding SHW in strategic management</i></p> <p>A company's mission and vision form the basis for strategically embedding organizational policies to enhance SHW. The strategic added-value of SHW depends therefore on the company's vision of how the organization will be able to flourish in a sustainable manner in the longer run.</p>
<p><i>Integrating SHW into the planning and control cycle and in performance measurement</i></p> <p>SHW policy should be integrated into the normal planning and control cycle, by defining a set of SHW performance indicators (leading and lagging indicators) that can be used to monitor progress and to communicate progress in the realization of the plans.</p>
<p><i>Integrating SHW into workplace innovations</i></p> <p>Workplace innovation aims to create synergies between the parallel interests of SHW on the one hand, and good business and productivity at the other. Integrating SHW into workplace innovations involves the deployment of people in order to improve performance while creating better quality of work. It is also related to the development and implementation of interventions in the areas of work organization, control structure and employability of personnel.</p>
<p><i>Integrating SHW into human resource management (including training and education)</i></p> <p>While safety engineers form the dominant profession for dealing with safety risks, and occupational health experts are dominant for dealing with health and well-being at work, the role of human resource management for SHW management is becoming increasingly important. It is also increasingly recognized that training and education on SHW is not only relevant for those on the shop floor, but also for the development of SHW management competencies.</p>
<p><i>Integrating SHW into human rights and business responsibility policies</i></p> <p>With growing recognition of 'health and safety' as a fundamental human right, it is important to integrate SHW aspects into organizational human rights policies. Human rights policies, like SHW policies require a mixture of formal procedures to address issues, but also require the underlying values and principles, are shared as part of the organizational culture and internalized into the 'mind-sets' managers and employees. Procedures require values and the 'right' mind-sets to comply with them, while values and mind-sets require procedures to tackle issues in practical situations.</p>
<p><i>Creating healthy and safe core processes and good work</i></p> <p>The most challenging option for mainstreaming SHW, especially for SHW professionals, is to create 'good work', i.e. to create work that has a positive impact on SHW, thereby reducing the need to manage SHW risks as an afterthought. Good work requires that in the design stage of the production process, attention is paid to the most important factors that can have a positive or negative impact on SHW at work.</p>
<p><i>Integrating SHW into values, culture and leadership within organizations</i></p> <p>Organizations increasingly define core values, to give meaning to their existence and their value for society, and as a compass for strategic decisions. Safety, health and well-being at work represent important values. Values provide guidance for people on what is good or desirable and what is not. They exert major influence on the behaviour of individuals and teams and serve as broad guidelines in all situations. Values are also an important component in organizational culture and SHW culture.</p>

Source: Adapted from Jain, Leka and Zwetsloot (2018).

6.3. Assessing skills, competences and abilities based on organizational expectations

It is important for an organization to ensure that necessary skills and resources are available for the creation as well as sustainability of a healthy psychosocial work environment. Raising awareness and educating managers and employees on the causes and consequences of work-related stress, including developing an understanding on how psychosocial risks can interact with one another and other risks, and the nature and scope of their potential outcomes, is essential.

Knowledge, competencies and skills on continuous psychosocial risk prevention and management at the workplace should therefore be developed through, assessment of training needs (which take into account the needs, experience, language skills, literacy and diversity of individual workers), and provision appropriate training for managers and workers. Such training should also help develop competence to implement the measures and processes necessary for the prevention of psychosocial risks and promotion of well-being at work. Mechanisms should also be putting in place for reporting or raising concerns, and external advice sought when such knowledge is not available in the organization.

7. The 7 Golden Rules for well-being

To successfully create a healthy workplace and reach a higher prevention level on well-being, the following 7 Golden Rules and leading indicators on well-being may be followed by organizations:

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- 1. Take leadership** – demonstrate commitment to the well-being of both managers and employees

Examples:

- Employee evaluations of managers as role models on well-being (surveys).
- Frequency of well-being as part of department meetings or 1-1 dialogues.

- 2. Identify hazards** – perform well-being risk assessments, for example when planning organizational and work changes. Risks arising from psychosocial hazards can be systematically managed just like any other type of risk

Examples:

- Number of risk assessments of organizational changes (e.g., how will a change in organizational structure affect the workload of the managers and employees affected by the restructuring of the organization?).
- Frequency of management follow up on reported well-being incidents (analysis, learning, improvement, feedback to those involved) – for example in teams with many conflicts or constant high workload.

- 3. Define targets** – develop proactive leading indicators on well-being

Examples:

- Evaluation of objectives set on selected Workplace Assessment results (surveys).

- Frequency of onboarding instructions including well-being, for example principles for prioritization of tasks or company Code of Conduct.

4. **Ensure a safe and healthy system** – create an ethical framework on well-being

Examples:

- Managers and employees know where to go, if they experience stress symptoms, bullying or conflicts.
- Frequency of start-up meetings with well-being on the agenda (for example workload and collaboration in the group).

5. **Ensure safety and health in machines, equipment, and workplaces** - prevention through design

Examples:

- Frequency of well-being considerations included when investing in new IT solutions (for example, requirements for complexity and learning of new processes).
- Well-being considerations in relation to the physical work environment (e.g., noise, lighting, physical isolation).

6. **Improve qualifications** – develop manager, employee and support staff competences in relation to well-being

Examples:

- Number of education programmes including well-being (for example, stress prevention, guidelines for good behavioural conduct, harassment policies - or current topics such as well-being in relation to COVID-19).
- Access to suitably qualified professionals on well-being at work.

7. **Invest in People** – involve employees systematically and regularly in well-being dialogues

Examples:

- Number of knowledge-sharing on good well-being initiatives and best practices.
- Evaluation of employee feedback systems on well-being at work.

8. Further reading

This summary report is based on the findings of a study on well-being, produced by the same author and supported by the well-being working group of the ISSA Special Commission on Prevention. In addition to the summary presented here, it also includes a well-being maturity model tool that will help organizations of all sizes to understand their prevention level in relation to well-being. It will also help to reorientate their practices towards reaching the proactive or creative levels of well-being in their organizational settings.

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