

# GUIDE TO THE PREVENTION OF PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS AT WORK



## FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE

For more information on the FPS Employment, its competences, its organisation, the topics it covers (labour regulations, employment contracts, remuneration, collective labour agreements, social dialogue, well-being at work, leave, posting, restructuring, etc.), please visit the website [www.employment.belgium.be](http://www.employment.belgium.be)

To contact the services of the FPS Employment, please visit the page «contact» on: [www.employment.belgium.be](http://www.employment.belgium.be)

**This brochure was completed in April 2016**

**Edition updated in March 2020**

**Editor:** University of Namur

Valérie Flohimont, Charlotte Lambert, Joëlle Berrewaerts, Sébastien Zaghdane, Martin Desseilles and Aurore Füzfa

**Production:** Directorate-General for Humanization of Labour

**Coordination:** Directorate for Communication

**Graphic design:** Kaat De Mangelaere

**Responsible publisher:** FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue

**Legal deposit:** D/2020/1205/07

### M/F/X

For the sake of readability, the terms used to designate persons are always expressed in the masculine form. The use of this form should be understood as referring to all genders.

### BESWIC

Find out all the topics and news on well-being at work on the website of the Belgian Knowledge Centre on occupational well-being:

[www.beswic.be](http://www.beswic.be)

This publication is freely accessible and downloadable from the website of the FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue: [www.employment.belgium.be](http://www.employment.belgium.be)

Cette publication peut être également obtenue en français.  
Deze publicatie is ook verkrijgbaar in het Nederlands

### WARNING

This publication refers to regulations that are sometimes very complex. No fee can be demanded on the basis of this document: to do so, reference must be made to the legal and regulatory texts.



@FODwerk  
@SPFemploi



[www.facebook.com/FODWerkgelegenheid](http://www.facebook.com/FODWerkgelegenheid)  
[www.facebook.com/SPFemploi](http://www.facebook.com/SPFemploi)



[linkedin.com/company/fod-werkgelegenheid-arbeid-en-sociaal-overleg](https://www.linkedin.com/company/fod-werkgelegenheid-arbeid-en-sociaal-overleg)  
[linkedin.com/company/spf-emploi-travail-et-concertation-sociale](https://www.linkedin.com/company/spf-emploi-travail-et-concertation-sociale)



spfemploi  
fodwerk

### © FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue

Reproduction of texts from this document is authorized provided that the source and, if applicable, the authors of the document are cited.

# FOREWORD

Whether you are a worker representative, an employer, a manager, an HR manager or a prevention officer, or if you are simply interested in this issue... This guide is for you!

We have seen an increase in psychosocial risks in recent years. This increase seems to have coincided with a major revolution in the organisation of working life. After all, the greater the demands in terms of the organisation of the work, the less favourably disposed workers will be towards their work.

However, psychosocial risks are not so easy to identify. Their sources are many and varied and the risks occur at every level of the organisation. For several years, the FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue has been developing a variety of tools and activities on this issue with the support of the European Social Fund (ESF). This guide forms part of an awareness campaign in collaboration with the social partners.

The purpose of this guide is to help organisations and companies - including SMEs and very small enterprises - to adopt and pursue a policy to prevent psychosocial risks that sits within a more general policy on the management of professional risks as well as within social dialogue. The possible solutions put forward recommend collective measures which take account of the organisation of the work. It is up to every company and every organisation to find out about the various possible solutions.

Preventing PSR is a matter of great importance for all prevention players, for anyone who champions the protection of workers' health and, in a more general sense, for anyone who is involved in efforts to develop the realm of work in a socially responsible manner.



# TABEL OF CONTENTS

Foreword	3
1. Psychosocial risks and misguided beliefs	7
2. Psychosocial risks: a few figures	8
3. What are psychosocial risks?	9
3.1 Explanation of the definition	9
3.2 Consequences and effects	9
3.2.1 <i>Consequences for the worker</i>	9
3.2.2 <i>Consequences for the company</i>	10
3.3 Main sources of risk	11
3.3.1 <i>The organisation of the work</i>	12
3.3.2 <i>The employment conditions</i>	12
3.3.3 <i>Occupational health and safety</i>	12
3.3.4 <i>The content of the work</i>	13
3.3.5 <i>Labour relations</i>	13
3.4 Interaction with the risk factors	14
4. Preventing PSR	15
4.1 General prevention principles	15
4.2 Factors that help prevent PSR	16
5. The steps to be followed in order to prevent PSR	18
5.1 Step 1: Explore	19
5.1.1 <i>The two big families of indicators</i>	19
5.1.2 <i>Detecting risks in practice</i>	19
5.1.3 <i>A few tips for detecting the presence of PSR</i>	20
5.1.4 <i>What should be done?</i>	21
5.2 Step 2: Conduct a risk analysis	21
5.2.1 <i>Gather more information</i>	22
5.2.2 <i>Discuss</i>	22
5.3 Step 3: Draw up an action plan	23
5.4 Step 4: Implement the action plan	24
5.4.1 <i>Ensure the visibility of the actions</i>	24
5.4.2 <i>Start with a pilot experiment</i>	24

5.5 Step 5: Evaluate the action plan	25
5.5.1. Compare consequences with objectives	25
5.5.2. Make a decision on follow-up	25
5.5.3. Introduce monitoring	25
5.6 What should be done for a worker who is experiencing difficulties?	26
6. The prevention actors, who should be mobilised?	27
6.1 Tip: Assemble an advisory group	27
6.2 And in small companies	28
6.3 And to support a worker who is experiencing difficulties?	28
7. Available tools?	31
7.1 Types of tool	31
7.2 Recommendations for launching a survey with a questionnaire	32
7.3 Method: participatory risk analysis	32
7.4 Toolkit	32
8. Legal obligations	33
9. PSR, other risks and corporate social responsibility	34
9.1 PSR and other risks	34
9.2 PSR and corporate social responsibility	34
10. PSR, my roadmap	35
11. To find out more...	39
11.1 The organisation of the work	39
11.2 The employment conditions	39
11.3 Occupational health and safety	40
11.4 The content of the work	40
11.5 Interpersonal relationships at work	42
11.6 Ranking proposed by Europe	43
Glossary of terms and abbreviations	45

# 1. PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS AND MISGUIDED BELIEFS

We hear so many inaccurate and preconceived ideas about psychosocial risks... Among these prejudices, you will undoubtedly have heard (or thought) the following:



**Be warned: These prejudices can be dangerous if they are used as an excuse not to combat PSR!**

## 2. PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS: A FEW FIGURES...

How would you react if we were to say to you that psychosocial risks are lurking everywhere and, today, pose one of the biggest risks to the physical and mental health of workers and the proper functioning of companies (in the public and private sector!)?

The Belgian national survey of 4,000 workers carried out in 2010 in partnership with the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions in Dublin found that:

- 3 in 10 workers (28%) usually or always suffer from stress at work. This ratio is the same for men and women, differs little by age group and occurs in all activity sectors and all professions.
- During the last month, 13% of workers have been the target of verbal abuse and 7% of threats or humiliation.
- During the last 12 months, 9% have been the victim of intimidation or harassment and 3% of physical violence.

And these are only the most striking results!

Let's talk a little about stress. Nowadays, stress seems to be increasingly prevalent across all professional environments. According to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), stress is the second most widespread health problem in the world of work. Stress affects 22% of all workers in the "Europe of 27".

Studies such as Belstress widely confirm the relationship between stress at work and absenteeism. Stress is thought to be the cause of 50 to 60% of absenteeism. This entails huge costs, in terms of human suffering as well as a decline in economic performance. The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions in Dublin estimates the economic cost of stress in the European Union at 20 billion euro. According to the ILO (International Labour Office), quality losses, absenteeism and turnover as a result of stress account for between 3 and 4% of the GDP of industrialised countries.

According to the Belgian National Institute for Health and Disability Insurance (RIZIV/INAMI), in 2010

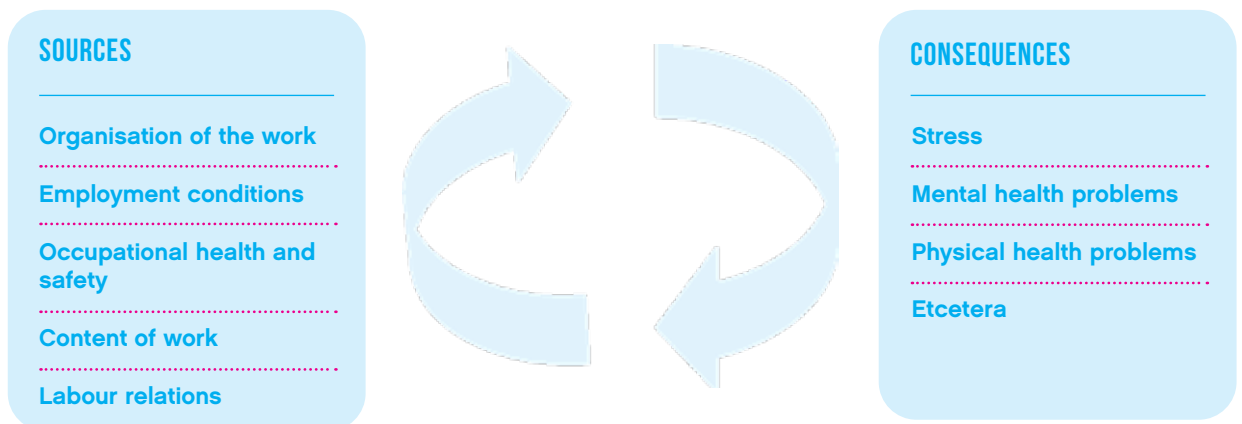
34% of people were in receipt of invalidity benefits due to mental health problems. In the course of 5 years, the amounts paid out in disability insurance have risen by 5%, which equates to 1 billion euro over 5 years.



# 3. WHAT ARE PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS?

## 3.1 EXPLANATION OF THE DEFINITION

Psychosocial risks (PSR) are defined as the likelihood that one or more workers will suffer psychological damage, which may or not be combined with physical damage, as a result of exposure to a work situation which entails a risk. This “hazardous” work situation may relate to the organisation of the work, the employment conditions, occupational health and safety, the content of the work or interpersonal relationships at work.



## 3.2 CONSEQUENCES AND EFFECTS

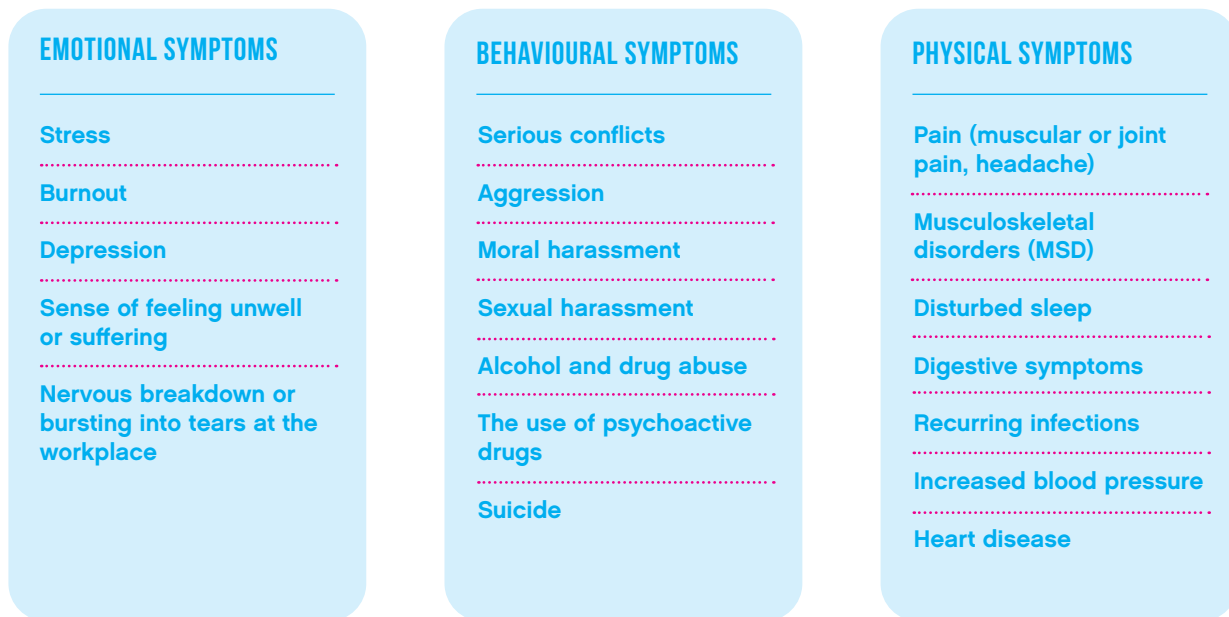
Psychosocial risks are harmful to workers (headaches, trouble sleeping, increased blood pressure, depression...) and the company (absenteeism, lower productivity, quality of work...). Ultimately, they lead to higher costs in terms of the health and safety of workers, for the company and for society in general.

### 3.2.1 Consequences for the worker

PSR can translate into emotional, behavioural and/or physical symptoms such as stress, sleep disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, back pain, migraine, depression, conflicts, burnout, aggression, harassment, suicide, etc. Studies have also pointed to the

existence of a proven link between certain physical pathologies such as increased blood pressure and exposure to PSR.

Here are a few examples...



These consequences can occur in differing ways in workers faced with identical situations or can be manifested in the same worker in different ways over time.

Exposure to a work environment which entails a risk can also have an impact:

- in the social sphere: poor family relationships, deterioration in contacts with others, etc.;
- in the professional sphere: incapacity for work, demoralisation, etc.

### 3.2.2 Consequences for the company

The consequences for the company can arise at the level of the workforce, in which case they translate into a deterioration in working atmosphere, conflicts, accidents, absenteeism, presenteeism, a high turnover rate, decrease in quality, etc.

These consequences incur high social costs for the companies.

At company level, the costs can be many and varied and arise directly or indirectly:

- managing absenteeism, turnover;
- replacing staff;
- occupational accidents;
- occupational diseases;
- declining productivity (lack of motivation among staff, superfluous staff, dysfunctions etc.);
- poor quality of products or services;
- deterioration in social climate;
- strikes;
- damage to the company's image;
- etc.

### 3.3 MAIN SOURCES OF RISK

The main sources of risk include:

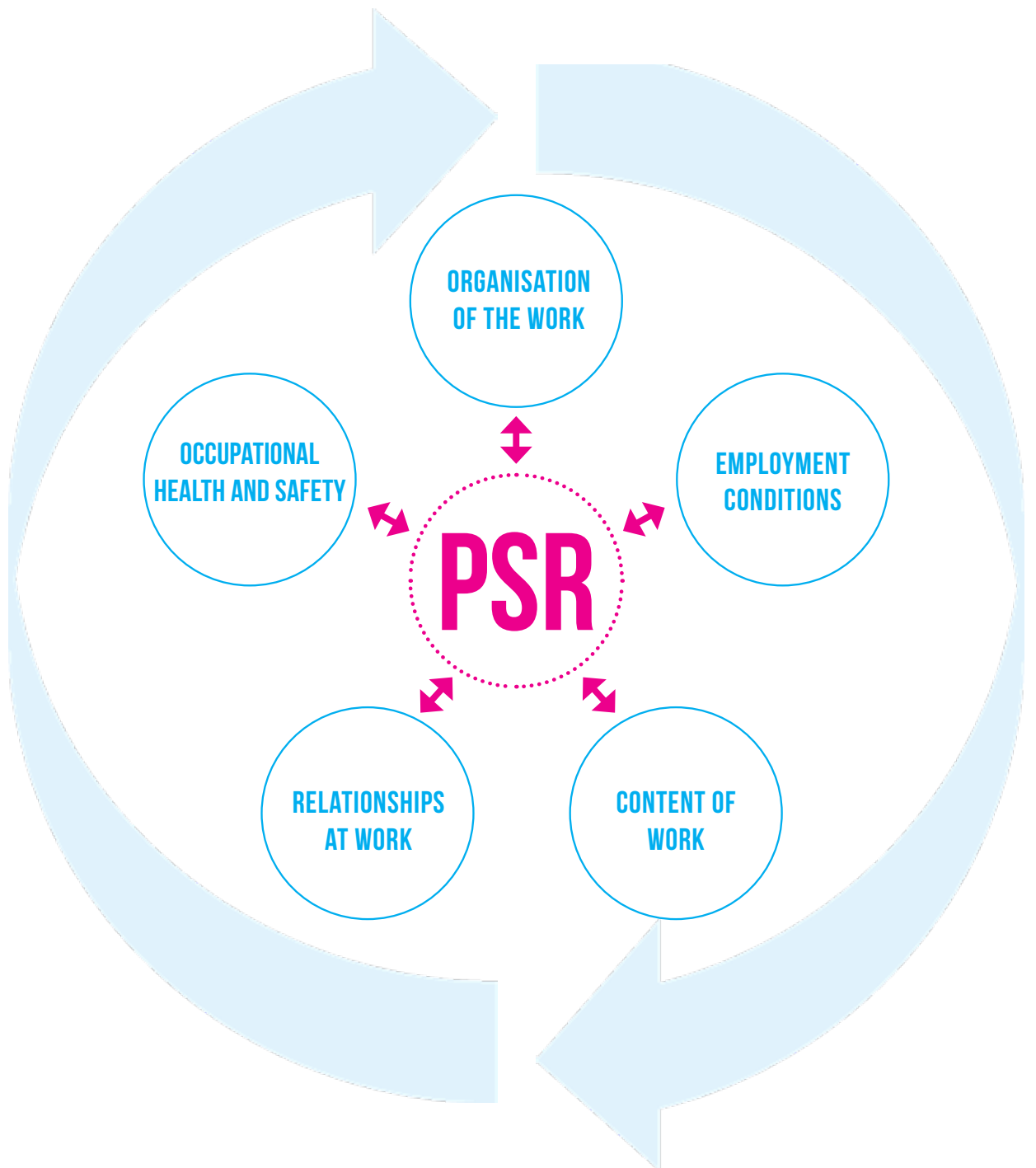
- the organisation of the work;
- the employment conditions;
- occupational health and safety;
- the content of work;
- relationships at work

By tackling the sources of risk that exist in the organisation of work, it is possible to reduce workers' exposure to PSR!



**Did you know?**

**All these risk sources are interconnected and have a mutual impact.**



### 3.3.1 *The organisation of the work*

The organisation of the work is the way in which tasks are structured and distributed within a company, as well as the relationships of authority designed to achieve the company's objectives. A company is managed according to global and general policy lines as well as specific policy relating to wellbeing or absenteeism, alongside the management resources and the autonomy of workers.

The risk factors may arise from and be connected with the socio-economic context of the company: crisis situation, restructuring, socio-economic uncertainty etc., which cause people to fear for their future! The organisation of the work has a major impact on other components of the source of PSR.

The atmosphere is deteriorating rapidly in a company's accounts department and the team is extremely stressed. And with good reason: they are all on their third boss since the start of the year. Different bosses mean different management ideas... And with all these different ideas, the workers don't know whether they're coming or going.

Peter is sleeping very badly these days. He is experiencing a great deal of stress at work, particularly now that the year-end review is approaching. He is all too aware that he has to achieve 120% of his performance compared with last year in order to get a positive rating.

For more information, see 12. To find out more...

### 3.3.2 *The employment conditions*

The employment conditions are the parameters which affect the performance of the work. These employment conditions include the type of work pattern, the type of contract, pay, etc. The employment conditions influence workers' mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Uncertainty about a job is a major stress factor, as it is a sword of Damocles which threatens a person's basic needs. Temporary contracts and the threat of staff cuts cause underlying apprehension and conflicts.

Jessica, Pamela and Barbara are on fixed-term contracts which end in the next three months. Just one of them will be given a permanent contract. They used to get along well but, now, they can't stand each other and are keenly aware of the competition between them... This has created a very awkward atmosphere affecting the whole team!

For more information, see 12. To find out more...

### 3.3.3 *Occupational health and safety*

Occupational health and safety includes the physical effort involved in the task, exposure to noise, safety etc.

Keith has a job in a laboratory, where he works with particularly hazardous substances. Lately, due to the acquisition of new machines, it has become very noisy at his workplace, leaving him unable to concentrate properly. He constantly works with the stress of knowing that he could cause an explosion and this stress is aggravated by the ambient noise of the machines.

For more information, see 12. To find out more...

### 3.3.4 The content of the work

The content of the work affects workers' mental and physical health and wellbeing.

When talking about the content of the work we need to take account of factors such as the complexity of the tasks, the intellectual or manual nature of the work, or the required skills. In terms of workload, some talk specifically about the emotional strain (contact with the public, encountering suffering, having to hide one's emotions, etc.).

Rozanne works on the till at a supermarket and, every evening, she is faced with the same problem: the till must add up! She is finding it increasingly difficult to deal with this, because each mistake is severely punished: the checkout operators have to make up the difference from their own purses. Moreover, for the last few months she has been suffering from sharp pain in her elbow. Her doctor says this pain is caused by her work: it is a musculoskeletal problem.

For more information, see 12. To find out more...

### 3.3.5 Labour relations

Labour relations, or interpersonal relationships at work, are the social relationships between workers and the social relationships between the worker and the organisation that employs him (relationships with the immediate boss, the HR department, and so on). They also include relationships with third parties (customers, patients, students, suppliers etc.).

Matteo has been made tutor of a difficult class this year. The students don't listen and are rude. Teaching the class is a real ordeal for Matteo and it is even harder for him to hear the comments of his colleagues, who are asking him to keep his students under control or are criticising him for his approach, citing his young age and the fact that he should never have been made a tutor so early on his career. Relationships with his students as well as his colleagues are becoming increasingly strained. When he decides to go and talk to the head teacher of the school, she tells him it isn't her problem and it is up to him to learn how to deal with it... Matteo has lost all motivation for his job. And to think that he always wanted to be a teacher!

For more information, see 12. To find out more...



#### Did you know?

Rather than each separate factor, it is primarily the paradoxical orders given to workers which increase PSR! For instance: asking the worker to work independently and solve problems alone while at the same time subjecting him to strict procedures and infantilising supervision, or asking the worker to work in a team while at the same time placing him in competition with his colleagues because of the performance rating system in place.

### 3.4 INTERACTION WITH THE RISK FACTORS

The risk factors are the “totality of elements of an organisational, collective or individual nature that have such an impact on the risk that they increase or reduce the likelihood of preventing adverse effects and the scope of those effects.”

Irrespective of the risks to which the worker is exposed, the consequences differ depending on the factors specific to the individual. An experienced worker, for instance, is at less risk of suffering stress when faced with a new situation than a young and inexperienced worker. A worker who maintains good relationships with his colleagues will be better able to cope with a difficult situation than a worker who is part of a group in which the working relationships are poor. There may also be a link between certain personal relationships and risk factors. A worker who is experiencing family problems, for instance, is less well equipped to cope with work stress at such times.

Conversely, problems with which a person is contending at work may affect his personal life. Variable or unpredictable working hours, for example, can make it particularly hard to organise your personal life. Harassment at work can also affect the social and family life of the person affected.

Because of this, it is important to always see the bigger picture and take account of the whole situation. Incidentally, this is the principle behind dynamic risk management, as referred to in the legislation on worker wellbeing.

In the organisational sphere, the resources placed at the worker's disposal can play a role. These resources may simplify the worker's duties and, by extension, reduce the psychosocial risks. This is the case when, for example, training is provided or recognition is given.

The resources may be individual (personality, worker's personal life) or collective (social support of colleagues, superiors).

**Be warned: The fact that some workers are more vulnerable because of events connected with their personal lives does not relieve the company of its responsibility and its obligation to prevent occupational risks. It is not the intention for the company to disregard the worker's personal life.**

## 4. PREVENTING PSR

Prevention is better than cure... And PSR are no exception to this. Consequently, priority must be given to primary prevention actions, i.e. actions designed to permanently eradicate the sources of PSR.

Secondary and tertiary prevention actions serve to limit the impact of PSR at work. These actions may appear urgent and useful if a situation deteriorates, but they are never a substitute for the actions that target the imbalances that occur in the organisation of work.

The actions must relate chiefly to the work organisation and employment conditions, in other words the sources of the PSR..

### 4.1 GENERAL PREVENTION PRINCIPLES

It is generally advisable to choose a multidisciplinary and participatory approach. This means that all actors at the company are involved, including the worker.

The consequences of PSR for workers' wellbeing and the functioning of the companies clearly illustrate the importance of developing a high-quality prevention policy. Such a policy benefits both the companies (better climate, greater productivity, lower costs) and workers (work satisfaction, fewer health problems).

For a prevention policy to succeed, the following elements are required.

- A. A responsible strategy
  - a. The employer's role is extremely important. He must be really dedicated to preventing PSR;
  - b. The employer is legally obliged to undertake certain actions to prevent PSR;
  - c. The employer and worker representatives may, for instance, sign a declaration of intent on the prevention and handling of psychosocial risks.

- B. An overall strategy:
  - a. Having an overall picture of all the risks which also include PSR and therefore undertaking an overall analysis;
  - b. Having a holistic approach to all psychosocial aspects as part of a multidisciplinary approach (prevention advisors, HR department, company doctor, workers...) and working at various levels: at the level of the organisation, the team (and members of management) and, finally, at the level of the individual;
  - c. The active participation of the Committee for Prevention and Protection at Work (CPPW);
  - d. The cooperation of the Works Council (WC) and the CPPW.
  
- C. A participatory strategy:
  - a. Each phase of the prevention policy requires a participatory action in which the CPPW and the WC must occupy a central position. The workers are familiar with the real work and are able to come up with solutions!
  - b. It is important to involve all the actors at the company in the action: management board, CPPW, company doctor, worker representative, the Human Resources department, the worker himself, etc.
  
- D. A pragmatic strategy
  - a. It is appropriate to set about the task in phases;
  - b. Depending on the organisation, it may be useful to assemble ad hoc working groups in which various actors at the company are involved.
  - c. The business culture and available resources must be taken into account. So there are no ready-made solutions.



#### **Did you know?**

**Introducing changes to the employment conditions and the organisation of work are usually the responsibility of the works council. As, however, the changes can affect the health of workers, they must also be discussed by the CPPW. It may entail introducing a new performance evaluation system, a change to the work patterns, transferring workers to another branch, etc.**

## **4.2 FACTORS THAT HELP PREVENT PSR**

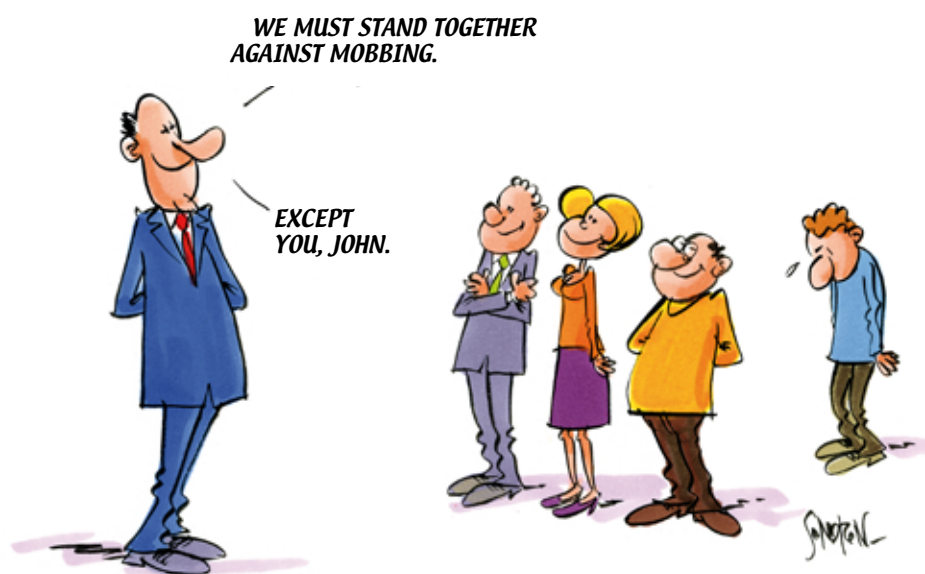
Each person at the company must become aware of the role he has to play in preventing PSR. All members of a company must actively participate: top management, the members of the hierarchical line, the HR Director, the worker representatives and the workers themselves must all be involved in the process. It is also important that everyone knows what he can do to combat PSR at the company. After all, everyone can do something at their own level.

Communication about matters relating to PSR and to health and safety at work is another element that is conducive to preventing PSR at the company. It is also important to provide information through the appropriate channels about the results of each step.



Overdoing things can be dangerous. And the same is true at a company. One of the factors that helps reduce PSR is the balance in regard to the organisation of the work that the company strikes between flexibility and workload on the one hand and autonomy and control on the other. This balance engenders a form of security for workers, enabling them to do their jobs with a sense of calm. So the company must make every effort not to ambush workers with reorganisations of their department, their work patterns or unexpected and unwarranted restructurings. Such upheaval causes a worker to worry about his future. Consequently, they must be as infrequent as possible.

Accompanying measures must also be planned, as well as a regular evaluation of the resources that are available to combat psychosocial risks at the company. Various studies on this issue have found that a lack of financial or material resources often constitutes an obstacle to introducing a prevention plan.



## 5. THE STEPS TO BE FOLLOWED IN ORDER TO PREVENT PSR



These steps ensure efficient prevention of psychosocial risks. By necessity, they must be adapted to each company. For instance: if step 1 has already been carried out, you can proceed directly to step 2.

### **!** Did you know?

**It is extremely important to communicate with all actors throughout the entire process. Communication is prevention in itself!**

**There are various ways to communicate efficiently. Some options are a company newspaper, newsletters, the use of social networks, a website etc.**

## 5.1 STEP 1: EXPLORE

Be warned: Prior to or during this phase, all actors must agree on what they understand by PSR at the company. After all, it is important that everyone is speaking the same language and that these terms are clearly defined.

The intention of this is to build a picture of the situation: which PSR are present at your company? What are their nature, frequency and severity? Has the company already undertaken certain actions with regard to PSR?

This involves collating and analysing the available information, including the quantitative and qualitative indicators. Ideally, this analysis of the information is carried out by a working group assembled to study these issues at the company.

At the end of this first step, firstly an initial picture should have been gained of the situation at the company with regard to PSR and secondly, a consensual decision must have been made on the strategy employed (purpose, method, resources etc.). It is then recommended that the decisions taken during this step are recorded in a written report and/or that workers are made aware of them.

### *5.1.1 The two big families of indicators*

The indicators that are often already present at the company allow to detect potentially risky situations from the outset. There are two big families of indicators: those connected with the functioning of the company (degree of absenteeism, turnover etc.) and those that are connected with the health and safety of workers (number and severity of occupational accidents, preventing RSI complaints etc.)

It is then important that these indicators are discussed with the various partners.

### *5.1.2 Detecting risks in practice*

The risk analysis - and therefore the workstation data sheets - required by the legislation on wellbeing at work forms an excellent basis (provided they are properly drawn up and take account of all kinds of risks) for detecting the risks.

Another interesting option is to define business areas in order to detect the presence of PSR there. A business area may correspond to a department, an activity, a profession or even the various work collectives (occupational collective, social collective and so on). High turnover or a high absenteeism figure may after all apply to a particular business area or a particular type of role and less so to another. The presence of difficulties may correspond to a staff category that is in the same occupational "genre".

As PSR cover a large area, finally it may be helpful to work in stages depending on the phenomena that are most obviously present or the most dangerous at the company. A transport company, for instance, could concentrate first on tackling the causes of alcohol abuse at the workplace.



### Did you know?

Rome wasn't built in a day and the same is true of the efficient prevention of PSR. Above all, it is important to create a "point of entry" in order to begin implementing a prevention policy. That point of entry is unique to each company and must be defined by the actors belonging to the organisation.

#### 5.1.3 A few tips for detecting the presence of PSR.

##### A. Draw up your own list of indicators

There is no fixed list of indicators. Each list must be adapted to the company concerned (size, economic sector, work situation, culture etc.). In any event, an ad hoc decision must be made on drawing up a list of indicators in consultation with all actors at the company: the manager, the CPPW, the trade union representatives, the ISPPW and/or ESPPW and the management board. These indicators must be understood and shared by everyone.

**Be warned: These lists of indicators can provide a clear, initial "snapshot" of the situation at a company, but there is no need to restrict yourself only to this list. After all, the fact that the indicators appear good does not always necessarily mean that there are no PSR at the company.**

##### B. Gather the data

In an initial phase, the focus is on gathering certain data which can be used to define detection indicators. Plenty of indicators are available at the company, more specifically in the social balance sheet, the instruments for monitoring productivity, the annual activity report by the internal and external services for prevention and protection at work. Other data must be sought or supplied by the company doctor, the human resources department, etc.

In 2014-2015, the FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue will be publishing a tool entitled "Warning indicators of the presence of PSR" which companies will be able to use to make this preliminary diagnosis and, in a subsequent phase, ensure that they are monitored.

During this phase, you don't need to survey the workers with questionnaires or during individual meetings. Should you still decide to do this, you need to be aware that this will inevitably foster expectations among staff and that you must meet those expectations!

##### C. Put the indicators in perspective in order to objectify the PSR

These indicators must be analysed

- depending on their differences in time  
Differences in time may refer to ongoing changes at the company. This is the case if, for instance, a rise in the number of spontaneous visits to the company doctor is observed, or an increase in the number of resignations;
- depending on the differences between departments, workplaces or branches of the company:  
Identifying differences makes it possible to establish whether certain departments or groups of workers are running more risks than others. For instance, a high degree of turnover may be observed at a particular workplace and a very low degree at another workshop, lots of requests to adapt a workstation in one department and none in another.

However, it is advisable to proceed with caution when making such comparisons and ask yourself whether the causes of such differences are indeed justified. Just because you've made a comparison doesn't automatically mean you are right!

- depending on the observed number of deteriorated indicators:  
The greater the number of deteriorated indicators, the greater the exposure to risks and the more urgent the need for action. If, for instance, you observe an increase in absenteeism, missed deadlines for the delivery of products and symptoms of chronic stress identified by the company doctor, there is a very urgent need for action


**Be warned: Make sure that you don't confuse situations. Where absenteeism is concerned, for instance, you must ensure that you are not working with figures which also took account of pregnant women and young mothers.**

#### 5.1.4 What should be done?

Therefore, working with the indicators and the other data enables agreement to be reached on the presence or absence of psychosocial risks at the company.

If the presence of PSR at a branch, in a department or within a team has been proven, action needs to be taken. The situation must be thoroughly evaluated (level of stress, factors concerned, risk groups, and so on) and a prevention plan drawn up and implemented.

If the presence of PSR has not been proved, all the better! However, establishing the absence of PSR in no way releases the company from its obligation to conduct a risk analysis and take preventive measures as well as measures to monitor the indicators. After all, it is important that the company ensures that the level of PSR remains as low as possible.

 **Did you know?**  
**A company cannot afford not to take preventive measures, regardless of whether or not PSR occur at the company. Prevention also means avoiding the risk arising!**

## 5.2 STEP 2: CONDUCT A RISK ANALYSIS

The aim of this second step is to establish where the problem actually lies within the working environment and how it is perceived by the workers.

Knowledge of the extent and features of the problem is essential in order to come up with suggestions for improvements. The existing information is analysed in detail and, if necessary, additional information is systematically gathered.

The aims of this step are as follows:

- to analyse the work actually done by talking to the workers;
- to catalogue the causes of PSR within the business areas;
- to analyse the work situations and objectify the risk factors;
- to analyse the conditions under which workers are exposed to these risk factors;

- to identify the traits of the most exposed population groups (age, gender, job role, department for which the person concerned works, length of service etc.) and the work situations that entail the risks;
- to identify the most relevant action levers in light of what is economically and socially feasible for the company and introduce prevention methods appropriate to the company.

When identifying the sources of PSR, it is important to take a more thorough approach and bring together the various levels of difficulties reported by workers. As mentioned in point 2, these difficulties might relate to:

- the organisation of the work;
- the employment conditions;
- occupational health and safety;
- the content of work;
- labour relations

#### *5.2.1. Gather more information*

Depending on the features of the company (size, number of branches, economic sector etc.) various methods may be used to make this diagnosis:

- analysis of warning indicators;
- investigation by means of questionnaires on employment conditions and/or the organisation of the work;
- perception of work situations and the interplay between workers and their environment;
- group and/or individual meetings with the workers;
- organising meetings with representative workers;
- etc.

There are various tools to assist you in this (see point 10, Available tools).

At the end of this step, it is essential to prepare a succinct report describing in detail the risk factors, the risk groups and the options for intervention and prevention.

#### *5.2.2 Discuss*

The results of the thorough diagnosis must by necessity be discussed on the WC, CPPW or in a working group with the staff representatives, the ESPPW, the ISPPW (the company doctor, prevention advisor on psychosocial aspects), the Human Resources department and the management board in order to compare the different views and jointly prepare a prevention plan for the PSR..

#### **Did you know?**

**A thorough diagnosis must be made in consultation with all actors at the company. The CPPW has a vital role to play. "Consultation" is the maxim that must guide all your actions!**

### 5.3 STEP 3: DRAW UP AN ACTION PLAN

As soon as the imbalances have been identified, the necessary actions can be determined.

As PSR are the result of several factors, it is sometimes sufficient to focus on one or two specific factors in order to change the situation and put an end to the vicious circles that are perpetuating the problem.

There are various stages involved in drawing up an action plan:

#### *Cataloguing the potential solutions*

This is highly recommended in order to start cataloguing the potential solutions. This phase opens the discussion about the measures that need to be taken in order to solve the identified problems.

#### *Determining priorities and objectives*

It is very important that everyone contributes to establishing priorities and objectives. It is also essential to make sure that everyone agrees with the criteria that are to be used to determine the priorities. Once the priorities have been set, they can be translated into concrete objectives.

#### *Establish the measures to be taken*

Once the priorities and objectives have been determined, the best solutions and measures for achieving those objectives must be sought, in a structured manner. It is important to distinguish between what can be done immediately and what can only be done in the medium or long term.

In the first place, the measures must be collective and designed to eliminate the risks at their source (primary prevention).

The final decision must be reached by mutual consensus, once the advantages and disadvantages of each proposed measure have been assessed.

#### *Define the overall action plan*

The concrete measures must be combined in an action plan (which is included in the overall prevention plan and in the annual action plan prepared by the company).

This plan proposes a scenario for each measure: methods to be applied, who is responsible, who does what, what are the obligations and resources (organisational, financial and material), timing.

These plans are discussed by the CPPW. The opinion of the WC is also required for all measures that may affect the organisation of work, the employment conditions and the company's returns. Because of this, it is important for the CPPW and WC to cooperate.



#### **Did you know?**

**In order for your action plan to be effective, you must specify who does what, by what date and by taking which specific actions. Make sure that your action plan is a genuine scenario, detailing the actions to be taken and ensuring that each player knows exactly what he has to do! This action plan must then be implemented. So make sure the roles have been clearly defined.**

For example:

Identified problem and objectives	Actions		Implementation deadline	Person entrusted with implementation
	Action(s) already taken	Action(s) to be taken		
Difficult communication between workers and managers  Strengthen communication between managers and workers	Set up contact unit	Train managers in team management and conflict resolution	December 2014	Mr Janssen, HR Manager

*Ensure that the implementation of the action plan is evaluated*

It is not enough to draw up an action plan. The means and basis for ensuring that the plan is being implemented properly must be determined.

In terms of preventing PSR, the actions taken must focus more specifically on the PSR sources.

When reviewing our action plan, for instance, we must make sure that Mr Janssen really has scheduled the training on team management and conflict resolution to take place before December 2014.

**5.4 STEP 4: IMPLEMENT THE ACTION PLAN**

The fourth step involves carrying out the actions and managing their implementation.

If a number of measures have to be taken, it is often not possible to do everything at once. It is therefore important to follow the action plan drawn up in step 3 and ensure that the implementation of the plan is managed as closely as possible.

Again, consultation is essential and follow-up by the CPPW is of fundamental importance. The committee must ensure that the action plan is adhered to and, if necessary, adjust it during implementation. However, it must also monitor the impact of the actions taken and changes made. The time factor is an indisputable advantage for the success of this approach.

*5.4.1 Ensure the visibility of the actions*

The involvement of staff and managers is a good guarantee of success. To ensure this, it makes sense to announce the actions and their objectives and ensure that they are visible. It is advisable to turn the project into an event, no matter how small. It is also important to strictly adhere to the timetable when implementing the measures.

*5.4.2 Start with a pilot experiment*

It is advisable to start with a few, simple measures the results of which are apparent to everyone, in order to demonstrate the benefit of the risk analysis and the whole approach.





#### Did you know?

The participation of all actors is extremely important during the implementation phase. However, it is the employer's responsibility to take preventive measures.

## 5.5 STEP 5: EVALUATE THE ACTION PLAN

Last but not least! Both the plan and its results must be evaluated. This evaluation allows attention to be focused on the results achieved (or not achieved), establish any differences between the hoped-for results and the results achieved, both positive and negative, and if appropriate set the new objectives and determine new actions.

The evaluation is conducted on the basis of the monitoring indicators set out in the action plan. The intention is to obtain the views of the actors on the evolutions observed at the various levels, the persistent difficulties and the points for improvement. This balance allows the courses of action to be altered and adapted.

This fifth step involves:

- checking the monitoring indicators;
- re-evaluating the risk factors and the exposure of workers;
- re-investigating the previous action plan and making any necessary adjustments.

### *5.5.1 Compare consequences with objectives*

During the evaluation process, you must first check on the basis of the monitoring indicators whether the objectives set have been achieved. If so, the measures that are necessary to consolidate the results achieved will be determined. If, however, the objectives set have not been achieved, the causes of this failure must be identified and the action plan adjusted. Were the objectives set appropriate? Were they realistic? Was the problem analysed correctly? Was the timing allotted realistic? Were the necessary resources available?

### *5.5.2 Make a decision on follow-up*

The evaluation is also used to update and, if necessary, adjust the analysis and evaluation of the risks and the overall prevention plan. After all, a company is continually evolving: people are assigned to different roles, the techniques and needs evolve, the business climate changes, new prospects emerge.

The results of the evaluation and, where applicable, decisions on updating and adjusting are discussed by the CPPW or even by the WC and are notified to workers.

### *5.5.3 Introduce monitoring*

This is about regularly obtaining information so that the emergence of PSR can be anticipated.

The introduction of monitoring allows to measure evolutions and to observe the emergence of new phenomena. This monitoring can be based on the warning indicators used for step 1 "explore".

The monitoring of the measures carried out over time involves keeping track of the various warning indicators and their evolution. The CPPW fulfils an important role in this monitoring.



**Did you know?**

**To ensure the efficiency of the actions, it is important to regularly evaluate and adjust the action plan and to schedule long-term monitoring.**

## **5.6 WHAT SHOULD BE DONE FOR A WORKER WHO IS EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTIES?**

When situations associated with PSR deteriorate, it is wise to introduce accompanying measures for workers who have fallen victim to such risks.

These measures are important because it ensures that those workers have access to support within or outside the company, in order to limit the impact of PSR and find solutions that are appropriate to their situation.

Recognition by the company itself of the existence of PSR is, in itself, an initial accompanying measure, as it avoids the mechanisms of attributing “individual guilt” to the workers with respect to their own situation (sense of having failed, loss of confidence in their own skills, etc.).

# 6. THE PREVENTION ACTORS, WHO SHOULD BE MOBILISED?

One very important factor in the success of a prevention policy for PSR at work is the involvement of all actors at the company: the managerial staff and the workers as well as the ISPPW and/or ESPPW:

- the responsible person at the company (management board, employer, hierarchical line);
- the head of the HR department;
- the CPPW: the worker and employer representatives;
- the ISPPW: the internal prevention advisor for safety, the counsellor;
- the ESPPW: the specialist prevention advisor on psychosocial aspects;
- the company doctor;
- the trade union representatives and delegates;
- the workers.

The involvement and enthusiasm of the management board and all members of the management are very important factors in the success of a prevention policy, partly because these categories of workers can be exposed to PSR!

The management board must therefore fulfil a primary role in preventing psychosocial risks.

In situations in which labour relations have badly deteriorated and social relations are very tense, it is sometimes necessary to involve an external intermediary.

## 6.1 TIP: ASSEMBLE AN ADVISORY GROUP

The holistic approach to preventing PSR must be suitably maintained at the company, for example by assembling an advisory group in consultation with the CPPW. As well as the employer or its representative and people from the various departments of the company, the specific expertise of the appropriate prevention advisor can also be used. The advisory group could also include external experts.

The advisory group's remit is to steer, supervise and evaluate the PSR prevention plan and to ensure good communication and continuity throughout the successive steps. Within the boundaries of their respective competencies, the CPPW and WC remain

responsible for evaluating the proposed measures and for supervising their proper implementation.

## 6.2 AND IN SMALL COMPANIES?

In small companies that have no CPPW, no WC or even any trade union delegates, the actors at the company can designate a person who enjoys the trust of the parties involved. According to the law, the workers must be directly involved in the risk analysis and the adoption of measures. In this case, the employer must guarantee the direct participation of its workers by providing them with a register in which they can note their comments (with full discretion!). The employer must also communicate about these issues with its workers.

The prevention policy can be managed by the company manager, the staff representative, the company doctor or an external prevention advisor.

## 6.3 AND TO SUPPORT A WORKER WHO IS EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTIES?

If a worker is genuinely suffering from PSR, some players are in a position to help the worker in this difficult situation:

- **The colleagues and managers** are the people in the worker's immediate circle. As such, they are able to understand and help solve the problem. Moreover, they are also best placed to simply lend a listening ear.
- **The counsellor** is a person (non-mandatory) designated by the organisation. This person is available in a "first line" capacity in the event of relational difficulties at work (conflicts, harassment etc.)  
The counsellor listens in confidence, informs, gives advice and, together with the worker, seeks a solution. At the worker's request, this person may organise conciliation between the various parties or introduce the procedures provided for by law.
- **The prevention advisor** specialised in the psychosocial aspects of work is an expert (mandatory) who advises the employer and workers in order to prevent work-related psychosocial risks. He may be part of an internal or external service for prevention and protection at work.
  - o The prevention advisor listens in full confidence, informs and gives advice in order to find a solution. At the worker's request, this person may organise conciliation/mediation between the various parties or introduce the procedures provided for by law.
- **The company doctor's** task is to oversee the health of workers at the workplace. In the event of a health problem at the workplace, the company doctor can help and provide the worker with information about the possible solutions. The worker always has the right to independently request a meeting with the company doctor. The company doctor may refer the worker to various external actors: psychiatrist, occupational psychologist, social worker, associations etc.

- **The worker representatives:** some problems can be dealt with by the trade union delegate or by the worker representative on the CPPW, in order to consider organisational measures.
- **Checks on wellbeing at work (the labour inspectorate):** if the problems cannot be dealt with internally and the employer is not fulfilling its obligations in regard to health and safety at work, the worker can contact the Algemene Directie Toezicht op het Welzijn op het Werk (General Directorate for the Supervision of Wellbeing at Work). Its role is to assist companies with advice in the sphere of wellbeing and to ensure that the regulations are applied. It can impose measures on the employer.
- **External specialists:** several specialists can guide workers and help them with the problems they are facing at work. Addresses can be found in the “Contact” section on the website: [www.respectatwork.be](http://www.respectatwork.be).

## MAKE A DIAGNOSIS



# 7. AVAILABLE TOOLS?

There are various identification and analysis tools for psychosocial risks that can be used at companies.

The choice of a tool depends on the intended purpose, the context in which the company operates, the size, the available expertise and, above all, the results of step 1.

## 7.1 TYPES OF TOOL

There are two groups of tool: questionnaires and participatory methods (meetings with representative workers, observation of work situations, meetings).

Each category has its advantages and drawbacks. A combination of both is possible. The two approaches can be complementary: as well as the tool and the results it delivers, a quantitative approach can be used to mobilise all the actors at the company specifically around a project.

An advisory group can be created, for instance, to agree what is understood by PSR at the company and social dialogue can be initiated about the issue. The use of a quantitative method depends on the context, the level of awareness and the knowledge of PSR at the company.

For example, at very small companies the problems are widely known, so a quantitative approach is less appropriate and qualitative solutions can be immediately sought.

- Quantitative (questionnaire) vs qualitative (participatory)

Quantitative approach (obtain figures by asking good questions)	Qualitative approach (to determine concrete solutions)
Figures for each company	Knowledge of the terrain (participatory)
All workers are surveyed	Participation of some of the workers
Comparison with other structures	High-quality, concrete results
Definition of risk groups	Greater likelihood of a result
Easy to reproduce over time	Raising awareness among participants

## 7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LAUNCHING A SURVEY WITH A QUESTIONNAIRE

- The questionnaire must be adapted to your company in order to encourage a large number of workers to participate;
- The approach must target employment conditions and/or the organisation of work in order to determine the main action levers for tacking action in the sphere of primary prevention;
- The anonymity and confidentiality of the data must be guaranteed. In some situations, therefore, it is advisable to have the survey carried out by an external expert;
- A questionnaire is an analysis tool which enables the key risk factors to be objectified. To make a full diagnosis and draw up a prevention plan, the questionnaire must by necessity be supplemented with a qualitative approach based on observation of work situations, individual and/or group meetings.

## 7.3 METHOD: PARTICIPATORY RISK ANALYSIS

- The SOBANE strategy for managing occupational risks was developed for the purposes of dynamic and effective risk management. It comprises four intermediate levels: Screening, OBServation, ANalysis and Expertise.  
[www.sobane.be](http://www.sobane.be)
- Screening: Screening for each sector using the Déparis method adapted to different economic sectors. This methods provides an overview of all the problems.
- Observation: Specific method for identifying and investigating psychosocial aspects in detail and determining actions.

## 7.4 TOOLKIT

The website [www.respectatwork.be](http://www.respectatwork.be) has a “toolkit” section where you will find various tools. This section is not exhaustive. The tools were developed during the course of scientific research supported by the FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue and the European Social Fund. In addition, each ESPPW uses its own tools.

The diagnosis in itself is not enough; rather it is one phase in an overall prevention strategy. The risk analysis is a process; measuring and screening are merely preliminary steps.



## 8. LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

The employer is obliged to evaluate the psychosocial risks and take preventive measures.

In Belgium, the Act of 4 August 1996 on the wellbeing of workers in the performance of their work is the basic law in the field of health and safety at work. The Act explicitly refers to psychosocial aspects of work as one of the 7 domains of wellbeing at work (Article 4, Section 1, paragraph 2, 3°).

Accordingly, the employer must incorporate the prevention of psychosocial risks at work in its prevention policy and take measures to prevent and manage those aspects.

This law is implemented by the codex on well-being at work, which sets out the obligations to be met by the various actors. Psychosocial risks can be found in the codex in book I, title 3.

For more information about the Act of 4 August 1996 on well-being of workers in the performance of their work: <http://www.employment.belgium.be/defaultTab.aspx?id=556> (psychosocial risks at work: art.32/1-art.32/visies).

We should also add that, on 30 March 1999, in line with the Act of 4 August 1996, the social partners concluded collective labour agreement no. 72 which relates to policy on preventing work-related stress. This CLA applies only to the private sector. It was made compulsory for this sector in a royal decree of 21 June 1999.

CLA no. 72 states: "In application of the Act on wellbeing and its implementing decrees, the employer is obliged to pursue a policy designed to collectively prevent and/or ease stress caused by work".

Further information about the regulations, PSR, stress etc. can be found on the website of the FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue.

- [www.werk.belgie.be](http://www.werk.belgie.be)
- [www.employment.belgium.be](http://www.employment.belgium.be)

# 9. PSR, OTHER RISKS AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

## 9.1 PSR AND OTHER RISKS

Psychosocial risks are the result not only of subjective, human or relationship factors (work relationships, the aggressiveness of customers or suppliers and so on) but also of factors connected with the work environment, safety, etc. Thus workers who do not have the right materials to enable them to do their jobs safely are exposed to a greater degree than others to the risk of stress. Workers who work in a noisy environment or an environment with aggressive colours contend more frequently with conflicts or violence.

In other words, an analysis of PSR is inextricably bound up with an analysis of the other risks. It is fundamentally important for the company to tackle exposure to risks in their totality.

## 9.2 PSR AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

As stipulated in a number of official documents, including opinion no. 1.544 of the NLC, “by assuming their social responsibility, companies do more than what is expected of them by law: they invest in human capital, the environment and their relations with other parties involved”.

A growing number of companies are drawing up charters or Declarations of Principle relating to corporate social responsibility. These declarations concern not only the company's relationships with third parties (customers, subcontractors, suppliers, shareholders etc.) or its environmental policy. Corporate social responsibility also relates to the policy pursued with respect to the company's personnel. Therefore, particularly when it comes to efficiently preventing PSR, it is very important that such declarations take account not only of this aspect, but also that the messages disseminated outside the company align with the experiences of workers at the company. Discrepancies between what the company proclaims about its personnel policy outside its walls and what actually happens within those walls are a source of suffering for the workers who are then exposed for one or more psychosocial risks. So coherence must be the watchword for companies when it comes to corporate social responsibility!

# 10. PSR, MY ROADMAP

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing, consisting of 20 lines in total.





.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



**THINK OF THE FIRM, JOHN  
AND STEP BACK**

SARAH

# 11. TO FIND OUT MORE...

Below is some additional information on risk sources.

## 11.1 THE ORGANISATION OF THE WORK

The organisation of the work is the way in which tasks are structured and distributed within a company, as well as the relationships of authority designed to achieve the company's objectives. A company is managed according to global and general policy lines as well as specific policy relating to wellbeing or absenteeism, alongside the management resources, work procedures, communication between the various departments and workers or the autonomy of workers.

The risk factors may arise from and be connected with the socio-economic context of the company: crisis situation, restructuring, socio-economic uncertainty etc.

The organisation of the work has a major impact on other components of the source of PSR.

## 11.2 THE EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS

The employment conditions are the parameters which affect the performance of the work.

Those employment conditions include, in particular:

- the type of work pattern: flexible working hours, shift work, night work, part-time work, overtime, split shifts;
- the type of contract: short-term contracts, consecutive contracts, part-time contracts;
- the wage and social benefits;
- the way in which the work is assessed;
- the training opportunities;
- the career opportunities;
- the options for planning working hours;
- the work/life balance;
- etc.

The employment conditions influence workers' mental and physical health and wellbeing.

For example:

- Uncertainty about a job is a major stress factor, as it is a sword of Damocles which threatens a person's basic needs. Temporary contracts and the threat of staff cuts cause uncertainty and insecurity which can be a source of conflicts;
- The wage is a major factor of dissatisfaction if a person feels it is inadequate. Pay inequality is another source of dissatisfaction. A higher wage fosters satisfaction and is a sign of recognition. If a person becomes aware that colleagues are receiving more recognition than himself, he will feel he is being treated unfairly;
- If a person's work does not offer the opportunity to learn new things and if that person's knowledge is stagnating, his wellbeing will be adversely affected. The opportunity to achieve fulfilment and grow is an important source of motivation;
- The opportunity for a person to evolve and fulfil his personal expectations is a factor in that person's satisfaction.

### 11.3 OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Occupational health and safety influence workers' mental and physical health and well-being.

Occupational health and safety includes:

- the physical effort involved in the task;
- exposure to vibrations;
- exposure to difficult climatic conditions;
- safety;
- exposure to noise;
- lighting and ventilation;
- the presence of hazardous (chemical) substances;
- the position in which the worker has to carry out his work;
- the fact of having proper equipment (a good chair, good tools);
- etcetera.

Long-term exposure to noise, for instance, can cause tiredness, stress, anxiety and attention disorders. It can also disrupt communication, hinder concentration, distract attention... and cause occupational accidents.

### 11.4 THE CONTENT OF THE WORK

The content of the work affects workers' mental and physical health and wellbeing.

When talking about the content of the work, we primarily mean:

- the complexity of the tasks;
- the intellectual or manual nature of the work;
- the required skills;
- the variability of the work (monotony or diversity);
- the flexibility of the work (predictability of the work, ability to anticipate, requested changes);
- the autonomy of the work;



- participation in decision-making;
- the exact definition of the work to be carried out (ambiguity of the role);
- the information that is provided about the task to be carried out (poorly defined tasks, vague objectives);
- the working patterns;
- the workload (mental, physical and emotional strain);
- the arrangements for inspecting work;
- the ethical conflicts: having to undertake a task that is inconsistent with personal values
- etc.

In terms of workload, some talk specifically about the emotional strain (relationship with the public, encountering suffering, having to hide one's emotions, etc.).

Emotional strain is inherent in many professions, more particularly where the perception of other people's emotions and control over your own emotions are of material importance to doing the job well. This is true, for instance, of nurses and carers who have to deal with patients' suffering. The same applies to call centre staff, who have to deal with unhappy customers.

This strain can disrupt the individual's emotional balance and have ramifications in his personal life. This is often the case in social or caring professions.

For example:

- Monotony at work is a source of stress because it is associated with a lack of appreciation for the worker. On the other hand, having too many different tasks can create the impression with the individual that he is juggling too many tasks simultaneously and is not doing a meaningful job;
- Having to work too fast or dealing with an unmanageable workload are the precursors of stress. Equally, working too slowly or not having enough work is a stress factor or, at the very least, is demoralising;
- Poorly defined tasks or vague objectives are stress factors, because they put the individual in a situation in which he is never sure whether he is doing the work that is expected of him;
- A vague definition of the roles is another major stress factor. Poorly described responsibilities are open to all kinds of interpretation. Some tasks are not carried out, others are carried out twice. Such blurred lines, which leave a person confused about what he is responsible for, are a breeding ground for power clashes and conflicts;
- A lack of autonomy can cause a feeling of alienation with regard to the work, such as a lack of self-confidence. However, too much autonomy is also a cause of stress;
- Allowing workers to participate in the decision-making process ensures that they support the decisions taken. They embrace those decisions and do not see them as a fate over which they have no influence at all.
- Psychological strain is a source of stress when the quantity of information a person has to process for a particular task exceeds that person's information processing capacities.

## 11.5 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK

Interpersonal relationships influence workers' mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Labour relations, or interpersonal relationships at work, are the social relationships between workers and the social relationships between the worker and the company that employs him (relationships with the immediate boss, the HR department, and so on). They also include relationships with third parties.

Account is taken of:

- the quality of the relationships (cooperation, integration etc.);
- the management style, etc.;
- how fair the company is (justice, arbitrariness, recognition);
- any violence in the relationships (physical and psychological aggression);
- the paradoxes (conflicting orders making it impossible for the person to do what is asked of him);
- how cooperation is organised and how conflicts are resolved;
- the working atmosphere;
- moral and sexual harassment;
- contact opportunities (social isolation at the workplace, communication).

For example:

- Knowing that you are being listened to, that you are understood and that you are respected is a source of satisfaction. Conversely, feeling misunderstood and at the mercy of other people's decisions is a stress factor. This is particularly so if the people who are not listening are hierarchical superiors or other people with influence or decision-making authority over workers;
- As regards access to information, confidential information and opaque decisions are conducive to rumours, mistrust and scepticism among workers;
- The consequences of harassment for the victim can include: the occurrence of anxiety disorders, aggression, stress, symptoms of depression and even post-traumatic stress. Often, the victim will disengage and, sometimes, can withdraw completely from the world of work and end his career. The negative impact of harassment also has ramifications for the professional environment, creates a negative working atmosphere and reduces the quality of the work;
- If the task to be undertaken is emotionally challenging, solidarity and the sharing of experiences are a great help in distancing from the emotional impact and avoiding becoming "engulfed" by the job;
- The working atmosphere can be markedly improved by encouraging informal relationships (e.g. opening a cafeteria).



**Did you know?**

Rather than each separate factor, it is primarily the paradoxical orders given to workers which increase PSR! For instance: asking the worker to work independently and solve problems alone while at the same time subjecting him to strict procedures and infantilising supervision, or asking the worker to work in a team while at the same time placing him in competition with his colleagues because of the performance rating system in place.

**11.6 RANKING PROPOSED BY EUROPE**

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work assigns the causes of the risks to 2 major categories, namely the context of the work and the content of the work.

The table proposed by the Agency comprises 10 categories which can constitute a risk, and the circumstances in which these factors appear to cause stress and be detrimental to health.

<b>CONTEXT OF THE WORK</b>	
Organisational culture and function	Poor communication, insufficient support with solving problems and developing personal skills, failure to set organisational objectives
Role within the organisation	Ambiguous and conflicting roles, vague definition of workers' responsibility
Career plan	Stagnation and uncertainty in career, insufficient or excessive promotion, low pay, job insecurity, insufficient social value attached to the work
Freedom to make decisions / control	Insufficient participation in decision-making, lack of control at work
Interpersonal relationships at work	Social or physical isolation, poor relationships with hierarchical superiors, interpersonal conflicts, lack of social support
Relationship between personal life and work	Conflicting demands between work and personal life, insufficient support at home, difficulty reconciling personal life with professional life

## CONTENT OF THE WORK

Working environment and work equipment	Problems with regard to reliability, availability, adaptation, maintenance or repair of the equipment and resources
Conception of the task	Lack of variety in tasks or short work cycle, fragmented or pointless work, underuse of skills, high degree of uncertainty
Workload/work rate	Excessive workload or insufficient work, lack of control over work rate, severe pressure in terms of time allowed to do the work
Planning	Shift work, night work, inflexible planning, unpredictable working hours, long working hours or work that is done outside normal working hours

**ONE WORKER OUT OF THREE IS SUFFERING FROM STRESS!**



# GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

## Risk analysis:

The group of activities intended to systematically and consistently identify hazards and risk factors and establish and evaluate the risk, with a view to determining the preventive measures.

## Risk source:

The words “source” and “cause” are used interchangeably and refer to all elements which may give rise to a psychosocial risk at the company.

## Risk factors:

Factors of a collective or individual nature which have such an impact on the risk that they increase or reduce the likelihood of the occurrence of adverse consequences and the scope of those consequences.

## Prevention:

The totality of measures taken at the level of the organisation as a whole, at the level of a group of workstations or functions or at the level of the individual, with a view to preventing risks and avoiding or limiting damage.

## Risk:

The likelihood that damage of a certain severity will occur in certain conditions of use or if a worker is exposed to certain risk factors.

CNT/NAR	National Labour Council
WC	Works Council
CPPW	Committee for Prevention and Protection at Work
ESPPW	External service for prevention and protection at work
ISPPW	Internal service for prevention and protection at work
PSR	Psychosocial risk
CLA	Collective Labour Agreement
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises