

The Journey to a Psychologically Healthier and Safer Workplace

Shared experiences of organizations that are striving to support a
psychologically healthy and safe workplace

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Overview

The purpose of this document is to share experiences of organizations that are striving to support a psychologically healthy and safe workplace. The stories and case studies in this document provide recommended approaches and suggested resources to help:

- obtain senior leader and employee commitment
- establish a baseline and set goals
- communicate with employees
- evaluate results
- implement initiatives
- develop policy and processes
- establish plans for continual improvement

We share these with you to inspire action and to facilitate thoughtful consideration of the flexibility and adaptability of psychological health and safety strategies for your organization.

Introduction: Words from early adopters

The following two articles showcase early efforts of organizations that had adopted practices as outlined by the National Standard of Canada on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.

Article 1: Journey towards psychological health and safety in the workplace

BY MARY ANN BAYNTON, M.S.W., R.S.W. (Reprinted with permission of Moods Magazine www.moodsmag.com)

The National Standard of Canada on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (the Standard), introduced in January 2013, is being used by some organizations as a playbook to encourage business leaders to make mental health in the workplace a priority. Others have taken it as an opportunity to look inside their organizations to evaluate how they are doing in this important and emerging area.

We spoke to organizations with varying numbers of employees about their experiences since the Standard was released.

Creating champions for making the business case

Upon its release, Linda Brogden, Occupational Health Nurse, University of Waterloo (UW), immediately saw that the Standard provided a framework that could easily be applied to her organization. “I was already committed to this aspect of workplace wellness, so once the Standard came out I was excited to meet with senior management to express this was something we needed to do.” She was deflated when leaders were less enthusiastic due to competing priorities.

“In talking to colleagues, I realized that I had to help our leadership see the strategic business case for addressing psychological health and safety. In practice, if people have a predisposition to a mental health concern but work is going well, they often can still do their job. But if you bring in workplace stressors, such as conflict or an unmanageable work load, they may lose their ability to cope.”

Brogden brought together a group of ‘champions’ including representatives from UW’s Conflict Management and Human Rights, Human Resources and Organizational Human Development departments. “We were convinced that if the workplace was psychologically healthy and safe, employees were more likely to remain productive.”

Armed with this data, Brogden went back to management. She was also able to share that many of the 13 psychosocial factors that impact psychological health and safety in the workplace were already embedded in UW’s policies. By addressing the relevant interests and needs of senior management, she received the green light to go forward.

Brogden continues to draw on her team of champions to move ahead with a number of initiatives to engage managers and employees in the promotion of psychological health and address workplace mental health issues.

“The Standard itself and free tools like *Guarding Minds @ Work*TM (GM@W) are an incredible help. I also have realized that this will take time. You can’t do it all at once and if you accept that, it’s quite manageable and it will get done.”

Staying the course and building on strengths

David Brown, Medical Director, CIBC, shares Brogden’s view that the goal of psychological health and safety in the workplace is an ongoing process.

Back in the mid-1990s, CIBC was a pioneer in establishing an overall health and well-being strategy for its employees that included an understanding of the importance of psychological health. Brown said, “We looked at our disability plan and benefits usage and it became clear that we needed to take a preventative approach to employee well-being rather than just ‘fixing things’.”

“The next step was to outline a number of guiding principles, all of which we now see as relevant to psychological health and safety.” These included acknowledging the importance of employee well-being to organizational success, recognizing the employee’s shared responsibility for this, ensuring the strategy stay focused on solutions rather than problems, keeping measurement and evaluation as critical focal points, and sharing whatever was learned with employees and the broader community.

The organization conducted health risk appraisals that confirmed psychological well-being as a significant driver of employee health. Manager-employee relationships were also identified as key to overall health and well-being in the workplace.

“This helped us identify the importance of leadership training,” Brown said. “If you understand yourself as a leader, you’re in a better position to manage the well-being of your employees.”

Brown goes on to describe how, when an employee is returning to work, there may be a tendency for the workplace to look for medical advice on how to manage. “It’s unfair to expect a doctor to be aware of the workplace requirements.” He adds, “The best approach is for the employee and manager to formulate a return to work plan through face-to-face discussions that are focused on abilities in a way that isn’t judgmental or based on a diagnosis.” According to Brown, this approach has helped reduce the average length of absence by about 32 per cent.

Brown says there are times of great advancement when things move quickly, and other times when the organization needs to open itself to critical feedback, absorb new information and modify approaches.

“Our objective now is to stay the course and continue to build on strengths.”

Engaging employees in solutions

Perth District Health Unit (PDHU) has long been committed to employee wellness. Central to this was the establishment, in 2004, of an internal wellness committee, Lasting Improvements for Employees (LIFE).

Miriam Klassen, Medical Officer of Health, states, “To have a well-rounded view of employee wellness, you need to be looking at psychological health and safety.”

Various staff surveys have provided meaningful results. “The area where we scored the strongest in the most recent survey was employee engagement,” Klassen says. “Employees feel like we’re listening to them and this is supported by management regularly seeking staff input on many issues.” She adds, “It’s quite a dramatic difference from back in 2004 when staff were asking for more input into decisions.”

One area that had room for improvement was work-life balance. This was surprising due to the policies already in place to address this.

Kerry Price, LIFE committee lead and Health Promoter says, “We were able to ascertain that one cause for this is that, in spite of flexible policies, the norm was that employees were not taking regular breaks throughout the workday. We are now trying to support and encourage employees to take their breaks.”

The fact that employees identified performance management as an area in which they’d like to see improvement was less of a surprise. Klassen says, “We recognize that we’ve continued to increase the number of employees without increasing our complement of managers.” Reorganization is underway to address this concern and the organization is looking at changes to performance appraisals, taking into consideration research into current best practices, as well as union and employee feedback.

Price shares that there is now a focus on increasing opportunities for managers to provide meaningful, just-in-time recognition for good work. “Rather than giving a 30-year pin or announcing an employee of the month, we want managers to focus on giving ongoing and immediate verbal appreciation for work and efforts.”

Klassen says, “Investing in staff is inherent in our organizational culture and will always be part of our strategic plan.”

Responding to employee needs

Zoe Vulic, Manager, Health Management & Wellness, Brock University, has also embraced the Standard.

“The Standard has formalized what we’ve already been doing at Brock, but also provided some new considerations. The way the 13 psychosocial factors are laid out and the action plan around implementation was really positive to see.”

Vulic also appreciates the value placed on the perception of employees in determining what a psychologically healthy and safe workplace should look like. She adds, “This gives context to what we’re already doing but provides a new format that will create objectives that are measureable.”

Part of the University’s approach to workplace health and safety is an annual Wellness Day. Employees ‘step away from their desks’ to participate in workshops designed around the eight components of wellness – physical, emotional, occupational, environmental, social, intellectual, financial and spiritual. A survey is done beforehand to assess what employees are concerned about and workshops are tailored to respond to these needs.

The Standard has prompted Vulic to look more broadly at psychological health and safety. This past year, a graduate compiled information, based on available research, on the impact of mental health and mental illness in the University workplace. This included looking at drug claims, benefit plan utilization rates, and short- and long-term disability information.

The results paint a good picture. Vulic attributes this in part to the positive work environment at the University, but also to a clear understanding of the breadth of services available through their long-term disability carrier.

“When we introduced our new benefits provider back in 2012, there was a lot of focus on the services available, including a web-based mental healthcare program.”

Vulic shares that next steps will be to integrate implementation of the Standard in alignment with the University’s strategic plan, and to conduct surveys to further engage managers and employees.

Vulic reiterates that implementation of a psychologically healthy and safe workplace requires a continuous approach that will take time. “There are more layers to this than I initially thought, but I’m glad the right people are at the table to move forward with it.”

An ongoing journey

The Standard has helped all of these organizations validate their approaches to psychological health and safety. As many of those interviewed suggested, achieving psychological health and safety in the workplace is a journey. It’s not about checklists to achieve a specific goal or a number of steps to reach a particular destination. It’s an ongoing process to find solutions to protect and promote the psychological health and well-being, as well as the success of everyone in the workplace.

Article 2: Workplace psychological health and safety: Supporting organizational values

Ever since she became a leader, Carla *, a department head in a national service organization, has had a focus on what she now knows is psychological health and safety of her workplace -- but what she used to call a healthy work environment. “I wanted my staff to have work-life balance and opportunities for growth and learning. I would look for ways other than overtime to achieve our goals.”

She adds, “As I developed as a leader, I realized that for employees to volunteer their highest effort, they needed to be engaged and that they wouldn’t be engaged if their workplace wasn’t a healthy one.”

Still, Carla saw good people leave and felt there were challenges attracting new talent.

“The concept of a healthy workplace was one most everyone supported – but I felt there was still work to be done to build an understanding of all the dynamics that can contribute to a psychologically healthy and safe workplace.”

Carla’s division participated in *Guarding Minds @ Work* (GM@W), a free, self-service resource to help workplaces assess their psychological health and safety. This resource includes a framework for action planning and evaluation alongside 13 psychosocial factors that have been determined to have the greatest impact on employees’ psychological response to work and work conditions (see sidebar).

Carla was surprised when the results of the GM@W assessment revealed that her team was missing the boat on some of the psychosocial factors. However, even more concerning were reports of behaviours that went against her division’s well-documented core values of integrity, partnership, excellence and continuous improvement.

“I couldn’t believe this was happening on my watch,” Carla said. “Some of the findings made our values appear to be meaningless words on a piece of paper. It was quite demoralizing for me personally.”

Carla shares that once she was able to put her bruised ego back in check, she was ready to take responsibility for making positive changes. GM@W helped her team become aware of many of the elements of a psychologically healthy workplace. “While we’d been focused on work-life balance, recognition and engagement, we didn’t really have an appreciation for all of the other psychosocial factors.”

Especially challenging was that many of those exhibiting psychologically “unsafe” behaviours were high performers and long-time employees.

“Certain behaviours had been tolerated for a long time. So now, you might have someone who has been a supervisor for five years having to address a behaviour issue for the first time with an employee of 20 years.”

To begin the process, Carla and her management team took a direct approach, admitting that while mistakes had been made in the past, they were now taking steps for improvement.

Integrating psychological health and safety across the organization

Staff were engaged in various ways, including focus groups, one-on-one discussions and surveys, to solicit feedback and input for specific action plans. “We then implemented the action plans to address issues that had been raised.”

“Staff were helping us see that there was still a problem with civility in our workplace which went directly against our values. We created values training for both supervisors and staff to address this concern,” Carla said. “We took a number of steps to integrate the language and principles of our values into everything we were doing, from performance management and bonus discussions to questions asked throughout our recruiting process.”

In their reviews, managers now specify how employees are living up to the organization’s values. Carla says this is helping to ensure that psychologically unsafe behaviour is being addressed and not rewarded.

Initiatives have been introduced to recognize others for living the values and values discussions have become an integral part of team meetings.

Carla says now that her team understands the psychosocial factors described in the GM@W assessment, they will continue to make efforts to recognize and address them. Leadership development continues to be a focus.

Next steps include launching a divisional purpose statement, and working to ensure every employee understands how he or she contributes to the larger purpose. “We want every employee to know how his or her specific work tasks directly impacts and improves the lives of our clients,” Carla said. “This applies right across the board, from the employee who needs to handle the mail accurately and efficiently, to the employee who is on the front lines working with our clients.”

Building understanding: A guided approach

Sarah *, a human resources professional in the same company, shares that the announcement of the [National Standard of Canada on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#) escalated the need for the organization to offer some solid strategies for leaders and staff. Sarah was instrumental in helping leaders in the organization complete *Managing Mental Health Matters* (MMHM), a free, video-based training program designed to help managers, supervisors and other leaders learn how to effectively recognize and manage mental health-related issues in the workplace.

“We wanted to take a guided approach to help our leaders understand why all of this is important, and how it can make them more effective in their roles. We achieved this by walking

them through the main topics of MMHM.” The topics included *Managing Emotions, Managing Accommodation, Managing Performance, Managing Conflict and Managing Return to Work*.

“We were then able to look at our processes and provide a path for our leaders and staff to follow.”

Positive changes

While the total impact of the steps that have been taken to address workplace psychological health and safety is still being determined, Carla shares that there have been a number of positive changes.

“People are far more mindful of their own behaviour and how it can be perceived by others. I also see more recognition of people living our values.”

Another result is a clear reduction in the number of unresolved issues or conflict among staff or between staff and leaders.

“Leaders are far more equipped to address behaviour they might have overlooked or ignored before.”

Sarah adds, “It’s a great step forward that we are recognizing these things and providing information to help leaders and staff determine what their next steps should be.”

The right thing to do

Sounds like a lot of work, so one has to ask, *is it all worth it?* Sarah shares, “We all have a greater understanding and respect for different people in different stages of their health, work or lives. The training has taught us how to treat everybody with respect no matter what his or her circumstances.”

Carla adds, “It is absolutely the right thing to do. It requires some effort but few resources (other than time). A key component is a commitment from the entire leadership team of an organization. This can’t be a one-time focus. It should be an integral part of your job and needs to be embedded in the day-to-day interactions with all employees, in all decisions, and with all priorities.”

“All of this benefits succession planning, employee retention and organizational success. Without a psychologically healthy workplace, your organization has no chance of being great.”

Guarding Minds @ Work™ (GM@W) User Case Studies



The GM@W Analysis User Case Study project was commissioned by the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace and developed by Merv Gilbert, PhD and Dan Bilsker, PhD, from Simon Fraser University at the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction (CARMHA).

This project involved an analysis of the experiences of organizations accessing the GM@W resources for assessing and addressing organizational factors relevant to psychological health and safety in the workplace. This data was then used as the basis for generating case stories, each describing the journey of these organizations, although the stories have been altered to protect anonymity.

Following is a series of 12 case stories, representing different issues that may arise in the course of implementing GM@W. Review of the activities undertaken for each organization are done according to the framework for establishing a Psychological Health and Safety Management System indicated in the National Standard of Canada on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace.

More information and available resources can be found in the Psychological Health and Safety Management System section at: www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com.

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Story 1: Enhancing psychological safety in a rural clinic

Commitment and Leadership

A health service unit with 200 employees, operating in a rural area, participated in GM@W. Their reasons for implementing the GM@W Employee Survey were:

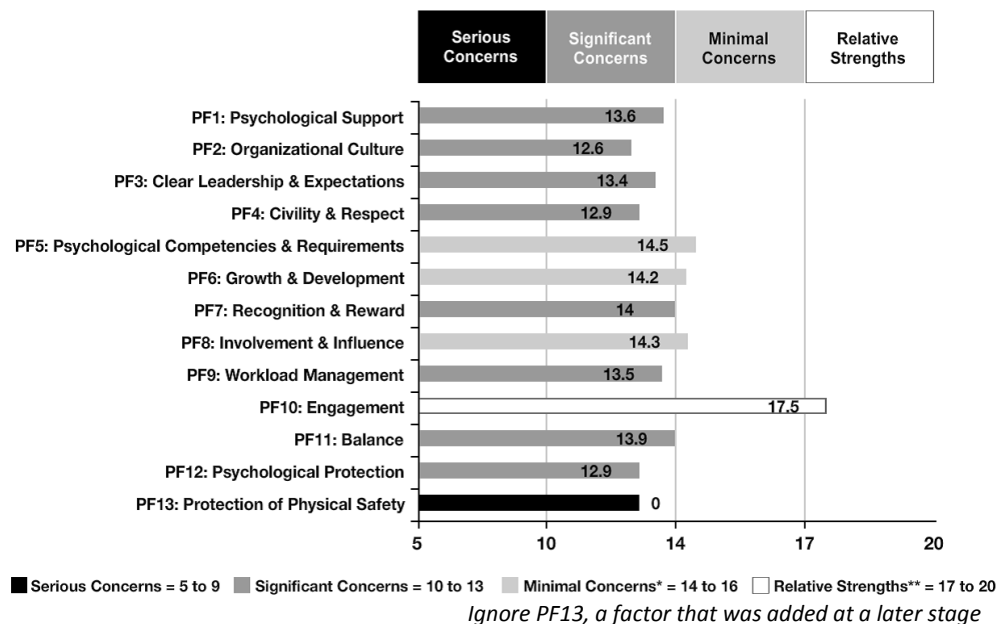
- Awareness of psychological health and safety was quite low
- Managers had expressed considerable uncertainty regarding management of psychological health and safety issues – they wanted to know whether their employees perceived adequate psychological safety and support.

Planning

A government agency supporting this initiative found it to be a slow process to prepare managers to talk about psychological health and safety issues: *"We had to say it again and again, not just the general concepts but how they are specifically relevant to everyday workplace function."*

Employees were given work time to complete the survey and also to participate in subsequent interventions. The message was sent from leadership – *"We encourage you to do this"* – and staff completing the survey received a chocolate bar. Action Teams were established and unions were informed. Notably, the survey was administered in a paper and pencil version rather than the standard online version, due to concern about several questions which were judged by an ethics review committee to be intrusive.

The GM@W Organizational Review was completed by a group including representation from leadership, human resources and engagement staff. It was agreed *"Going through the Organizational Review led to the identification of gaps and has supported efforts to address these."*



The survey profile shows that Engagement is high for this group – they are very committed to their jobs and the organization. There were Significant Concerns in the areas of Psychological Support, Organizational Culture, Clear Leadership & Expectations, Civility and Respect, Recognition & Reward, Workload Management and Psychological Protection.

Implementation

All employees were provided with the survey results and plans for addressing the issues that had been identified.. Action was taken to enhance the Organizational Culture and improve the level of civility and respect within this workplace. A workshop was given focused on enhanced civility and respect; a list of ways for managers or other staff to show appreciation for coworkers was developed and circulated; there was improved communication of leadership plans for the organization through a monthly summary distributed to all staff; there was a workshop about improving communication within the organization; a strategic planning day to discuss workload priorities with regard to enhancing manageability.

Evaluation and Corrective Action

The GM@W Employee Survey was re-administered one year later. There was a small but meaningful improvement overall, with four remaining areas of Significant Concern from the original eight. Change was most notable in the factor of Psychological Support – workers felt more supported by managers and by coworkers. There has also been notable improvement in Clear Leadership & Expectations, with workers having a better sense of the organization's direction and priorities, and in Workload Management.

Management Review and Continual Improvement

Although management was pleased with the evident improvement, it was clear that further efforts would be needed to address areas that remained of significant concern. Notably, Organizational Culture continued to be a significant concern, pointing to the importance of sustained action. The Action Teams remained in place with a sustained role in developing strategies for enhancing psychological health and safety.

Lessons Learned

This organization identified areas of concern, put in place affordable actions relevant to problematic areas, then evaluated the outcome and demonstrated improvement in key areas. It was clear that ongoing efforts would be needed to address other concerns, but this is a real success story.

Story 2: A Branch Manager steps forward

Commitment and Leadership

FairMoney is a credit union with offices throughout Eastern Canada. As an organization, FairMoney is considered a progressive employer in terms of salaries and benefits provided to employees. The Mission statement included a commitment to attending to employee health and well-being. Denise is a manager at one of their large Quebec branches with a staff of 45 employees. Denise has been with the organization for most of her professional career and shares her organization's dedication to her staff, many of which have been there as long as she has.

She subscribes to several management and human resources listserves and, on one of them, read about a new resource to assist employers in addressing the psychological health of their employees. She was pleased to see that this tool, GM@W, was available at no cost and that all materials were in French and English.

She contacted the Vice President to whom she reported and indicated that she would like to use GM@W in her branch. She believed that there were not any serious concerns amongst her staff but was aware that many of them were in two income families with young children and struggling with work-home balance. Her VP agreed and provided some financial resources to support the initiative, but indicated that he wanted to be kept informed and needed to approve any actions.

Planning

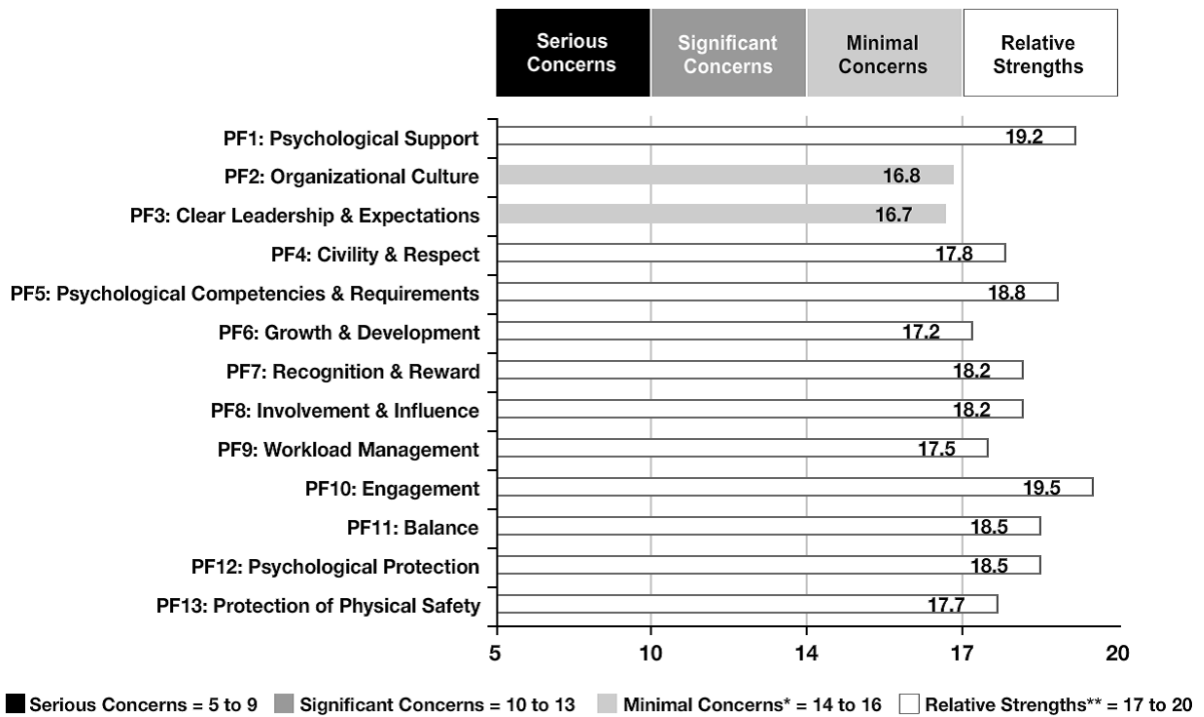
In 2012, Denise met with her staff to explain GM@W and encouraged them to review the materials on the website. She expressed her personal commitment to sharing the results of the assessment and taking action within the scope of her position. She registered for GM@W and sent a link to the Employee Survey to all of her staff, explaining that the survey was intended to gather their input as experts on the workplace and not to gather information on individuals.

Denise also told them that survey results would be aggregated and no individual employee could be identified. She encouraged staff to complete the survey at work or home and let them know that the survey would be open for two weeks. After the first week, she emailed a reminder to all staff. Denise completed the Organizational Review herself, consulting with HR personnel from head office when she needed more information.

She was very pleased that 90% of her staff completed the survey.

Implementation

When the survey was closed, Denise downloaded the GM@W report, which she found easy to access and interpret. The results for her branch were as follows:



Denise noted that the results were quite positive – staff-members were highly engaged in their work and felt that adequate supports were available to them if they were struggling with psychological issues. The results were actually somewhat better than her own ratings, particularly in workload management, as the branch had recently introduced a new computer system which was taking time to learn.

She met with her staff and shared the findings. They decided to focus on several factors, including some that were relative strengths, as these were seen as enablers of overall culture. Some of the actions they selected were:

- Review and update current job descriptions to ensure that they accurately reflected the skills, knowledge and competencies necessary to do the job.
- As advancement within the larger organization was dependent on bilingual competency, external consultants were hired to provide English classes. This was held onsite but after the employee’s shift.
- Concerns about the organizational culture were determined to reflect a greater need for communication, both within the branch and head office. Denise’s VP agreed to visit the branch to discuss FairMoney’s status and strategic plans. In addition, Denise added a standing communication item in her weekly staff meetings where anyone could provide or clarify information.
- In order to help staff manage personal health and maintain work-home balance, tips from a Quebec government website on health and wellness were regularly posted on the intranet. In addition, a nurse from the local public health unit came to the branch on several occasions to talk about childcare, nutrition, stress management and eldercare.

Evaluation and Corrective Action

The staff reported a very positive response to the actions at the Branch. Denise felt that these were successful but, in hindsight, thought that they took on an awful lot at once. She was pleased when head office reported that her absenteeism rate was the lowest of all FairMoney's branches.

Management Review and Continual Improvement

Denise recognized that the efforts to build and sustain a psychologically healthy environment in her branch would take ongoing commitment. She needed to provide the leadership but the ongoing involvement of all staff was also required. Of particular importance, in her opinion, was clear, consistent and ongoing communication.

Lessons Learned

Any workplace can make positive changes to improve psychological health and safety, even when there are no apparent issues. Waiting until problems emerge can make it that much more difficult to turn things around. It takes the commitment of a leader who is proactive rather than reactive and wants to build on existing strengths.

Story 3: An organization that bridges cultural differences

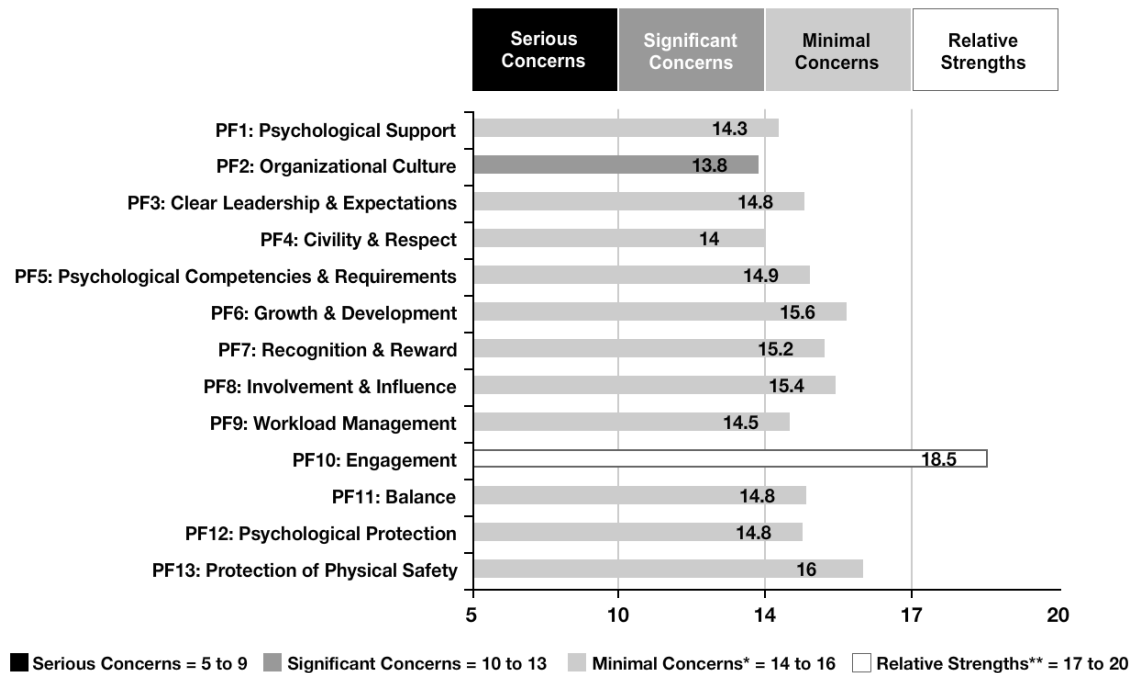
Commitment and Leadership

Northern Communities is a community services organization with 75 staff members that serves rural and remote areas. Reasons for participating in GM@W were that the head of this organization recognized *"Workers do not have much control over their job situation and environment, and they face the stress of isolation; we wanted to help people not feel so overwhelmed by their jobs"*. This leader had identified relatively high rates of sickness absence and stress leave, as well as low levels of staff retention. Several unions were represented in this organization and supported the initiative: *"They appreciated that there would be resources to support staff and the interest in employees' well-being"*.

Planning

Staff-members were informed about the GM@W Employee Survey in a letter adapted from the template provided on the GM@W website. This letter was sent out one month prior and again immediately before the survey was made available online. Two months were given to complete the survey, during which time reminders were sent out. Despite these efforts, the response rate was only 50%, likely attributable to that the high number of casual workers.

Survey results were as follows:



The profile is generally a positive one, with only one factor identified as a source of Significant Concern: Organizational Culture. The profile results were discussed "a lot" among staff and an emerging consensus identified that personality issues were affecting a lot of staff – peer conflict, and bumping of heads with regard to culture, partly related to Southern versus aboriginal styles of communication and time management. A relatively high rate of self-reported bullying or harassment was seen: 13.9% in this group versus 6.7% in the normative sample.

The organizational leader stated, "Although it didn't give us a black-and-white direction as to what to do, it did give us a clearer picture of how we fit with other organizations and where the issues are."

Implementation

The survey had been administered only a few months prior and no specific action had yet been taken. Training is being planned for existing and new staff in the areas of cultural awareness and identifying and dealing with bullying and harassment.

Evaluation and Corrective Action

The plan is to evaluate the impact of staff training and other initiatives to be carried out by conducting focus groups with employees and by repeating the GM@W Employee Survey one year later. The organizational leader was specifically hoping to show improvement in the domain of Organizational Culture.

Management Review and Continual Improvement

It is understood that ongoing action to address psychological health and safety issues, as well as repeated monitoring over extended intervals, will be required. The aim of this organization is to achieve sustainable improvements.

Lessons Learned

One of the most useful impacts of doing GM@W is raising staff awareness of critical issues, which affect psychological safety. In this case, the need for improved cross-cultural communication was highlighted by the survey and consequent conversations among staff members. Such increased awareness raises the likelihood that the organization will take effective action to improve this area of psychological health and safety.

Story 4: A Canadian manufacturer takes a stewardship role

Commitment and Leadership

ManInc is a large, publicly traded maker of auto parts with manufacturing, distribution and retail centres across Canada. It has over 1,800 employees, some of whom belong to one of three trade unions. It originated as a family company but went public ten years ago. ManInc's mission and values statement has an explicit focus on supporting employees and the communities in which they work. The company has provided financial and brand support for local fund-raising projects and events, even during the economic downturn, which has contributed to positive brand recognition by the public and a stable workforce.

In 2009 the Director of Human Resources and several of her staff attended a provincial conference on 'workplace mental health'. They heard presenters speak about the financial impact to organizations of employee mental health issues, which was consistent with their own data that indicated increasing benefits costs and EFAP utilization. Of particular interest were presentations on the impact of poor mental health on morale, productivity and safety. They also heard about a recently released tool, GM@W. This information was presented to the Senior Executive and a decision was made to make this a priority for the coming year.

The Vice President of Operations agreed to serve as corporate lead for this project. A project action team was created that included representation from Human Resources, Occupational Health & Safety committees and organized labour. A letter from the senior team was sent to all employees, explaining the project and committing to communicating and acting on the results of the assessment. The letter emphasized that the focus was on ensuring that the workplace was psychologically safe, and that financial or productivity gains were anticipated but not a priority. ManInc had a positive reputation for attending to OH&S issues in the manufacturing sector and they were eager to provide this leadership in the psychological domain.

Planning

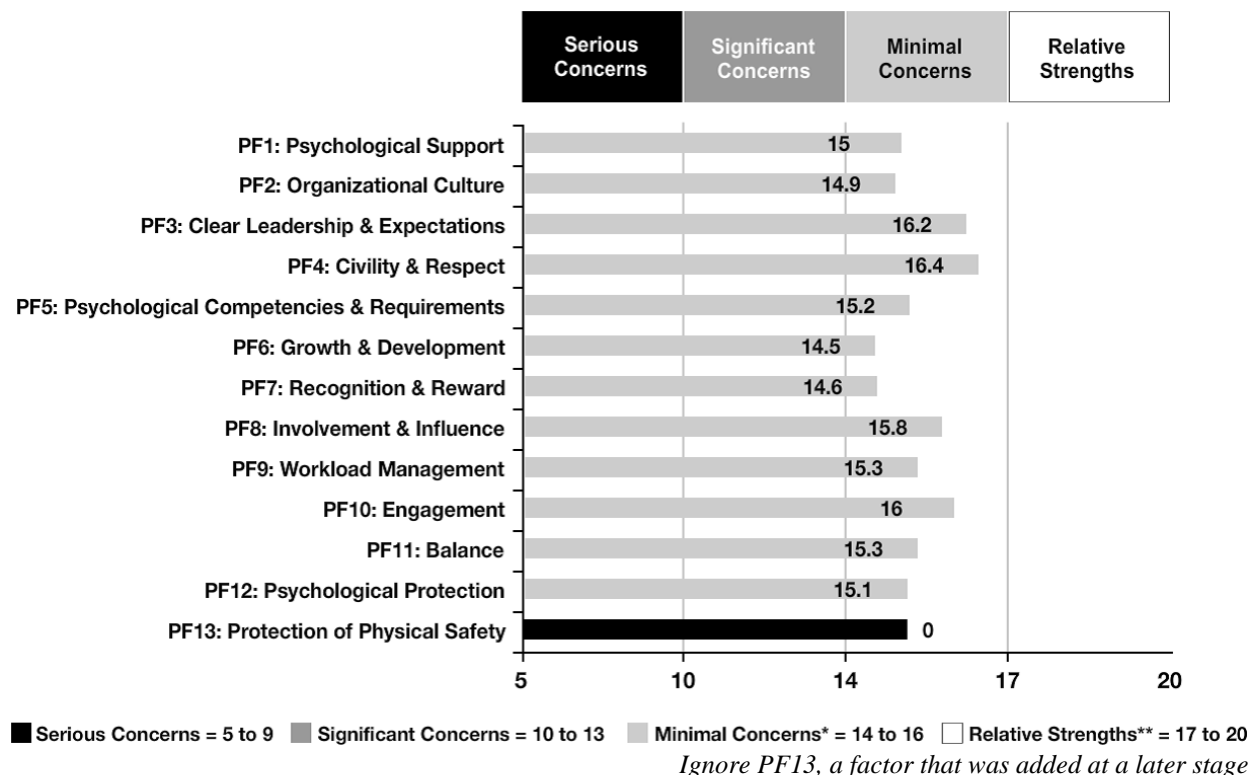
Given the size of the organization and the fact that workplace mental health was a new area for ManInc, it was decided to do an initial trial of GM@W with only one division (550 employees). The regional managers from this division participated in a training session conducted by a member of the GM@W development team. Participants were asked to review the GM@W website and materials in advance and during the training session went through a mock implementation of the GM@W Employee Survey

and completed the Organizational Review. Key issues were discussed with a particular emphasis on addressing concerns about privacy and confidentiality.

The draft letter from the [GM@W website](#), [Introducing GM@W](#), was placed on ManInc letterhead and sent to all employees with a link to provide access to the GM@W Employee Survey. In order to encourage participation, employees were allowed dedicated time during their workday to complete the survey with the option of completing the survey at home, if desired.

An incentive competition between regional locations was established with the team with the highest rate of participation receiving tickets to a sporting or cultural event of their choosing. These efforts were highly successful with an overall survey participation rate of 94% (with some offices at 100%!).

Once the GM@W Employee Survey was completed, the action team downloaded and reviewed the overall report. The team found the report easy to interpret but noted that it would have been useful to compare the results from different regions. (The 2012 upgrade of GM@W includes this option). Their survey results are represented below.



The action team was pleased that the overall survey results were positive, with no areas of serious or significant concern. When the Employee Survey results were compared with the findings from the Organizational Review, the team was surprised to find that managers actually had slightly lower ratings in some areas, particularly Psychological Protection.

Implementation

The communication department put the survey and review findings into a presentation that could be shared with staff from each region. Focus groups were conducted within each region in order to gain a better understanding of the results and to generate possible actions. 'Recognition & Reward' and 'Growth & Development' were determined to be priority areas. Some of the actions selected included:

- Opportunities to 'job shadow' colleagues in other areas in order to provide employees with better understanding of their work and opportunities for change or advancement.
- A peer recognition program whereby staff members could give public credit to a colleague for an accomplishment.
- Leadership training to ensure that existing management had the knowledge and skills necessary to attend to the psychological well-being and opportunities for growth of their direct report staff.

Evaluation and Corrective Action

The pilot implementation was considered very successful and GM@W was rolled out across the entire organization using a similar methodology. At this point, the 2012 version of GM@W was available which permitted segmentation across different divisions and regions of ManInc. Employees in the distribution division that had participated in the pilot received the survey again, thus providing feedback about the success of the interventions. There were notable improvements in 'Recognition & Reward' but little change in 'Growth & Development', thus the range and number of employee educational opportunities were increased. Proficiency in dealing effectively with distressed employees was included in the competency requirements of all managers.

Management Review and Continual Improvement

ManInc remains committed to the psychological health and safety of all employees. They publicly declared their intent to adopt the *National Standard of Canada on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace* when it was announced. The company's monthly newsletter has a standing column on psychological health and safety that includes employee suggestions for improvement. A GM@W committee has been created at head office that meets regularly to review survey findings and relevant HR and OH&S data, monitor the status of existing actions and set priorities for the coming year.

A large organization is hesitant to act

Rockhead Resources is a large mining company with offices across Western Canada and in the North. They were approached to participate in a provincial project intended to help organizations address workplace psychological health and safety. GM@W @ Work was offered as a no-cost 'Gold Standard' with respect to determining needs and areas for action. A facilitator from the project team explained the resource and steps for successful implementation. When the GM@W employee survey was reviewed, members of the senior team expressed concerns that the results of the survey might indicate to employees 'that the company had a problem'. As an alternative, they decided to run a survey to assess employee attitudes towards persons with mental illness. Lunch and learns were offered to employees to improve mental health literacy. However no further actions were taken at a corporate level.

Lessons Learned

Although large organizations are more likely to have human resource policies, programs and personnel, they also have greater complexity arising from multiple branches or 'microclimates', differing labour agreements and accountability to the public and shareholders. Therefore, a systematic and thoughtful approach to addressing workplace psychological health and safety is critical.

Story 5: A program undergoing too much change

Commitment and Leadership

This program with 350 employees delivers occupational health and safety services to government employees across a wide geographic region. Its catchment area includes dense urban as well as rural and remote communities.

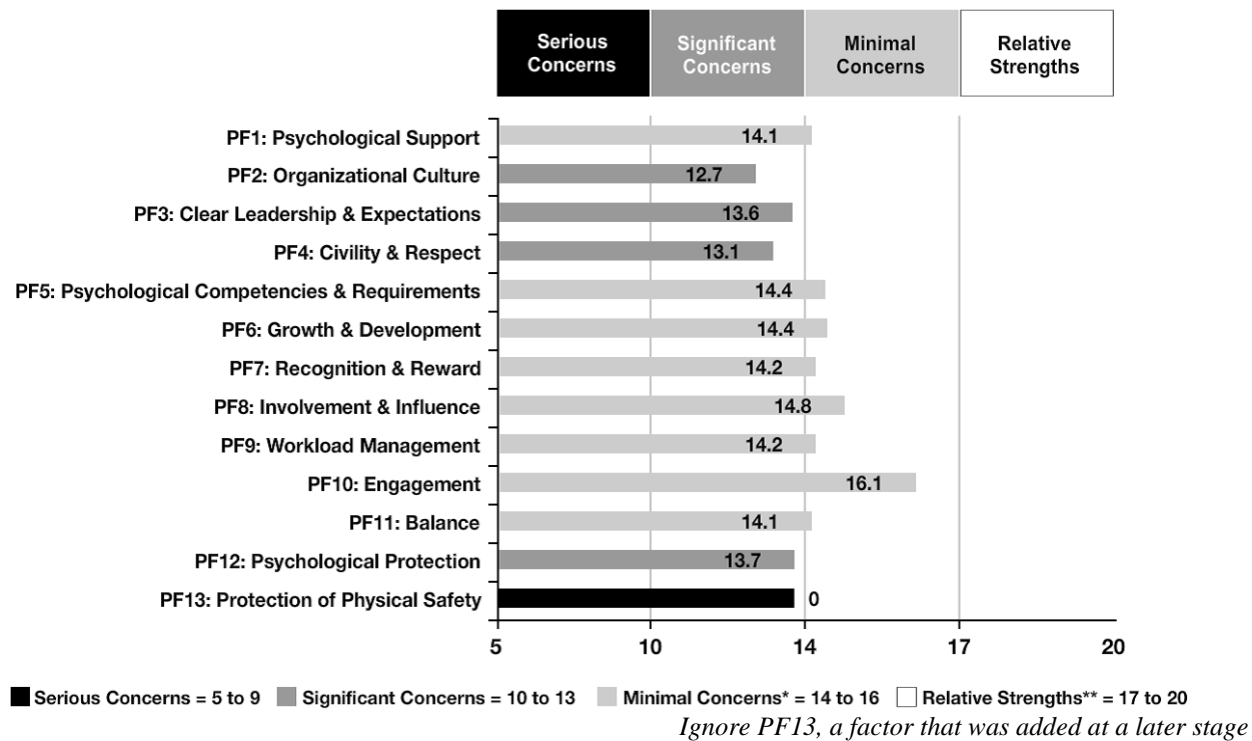
Reasons for implementing GM@W were:

- Mental health issues had been increasingly important in fitness to work determinations.
- Managers were stating that they didn't know how to deal with emergent mental health issues.
- It was a priority for this organization to raise awareness of mental health issues and reduce stigma.
- HR staff were unclear whether previous initiatives were focused in the right way and whether there had been substantial change ("we needed a baseline").
- Leadership had the impression of reduced staff engagement and organizational morale.
- There had been rapid change in this organization, with fundamental reorganization and new reporting structures, with continued change even as the survey was being run.

Planning

Staff were informed of the survey through a memo introducing it and responding to FAQs, including how anonymity would be protected and how the data would be used. There was some resistance, with a few staff arguing that a regular survey was already being conducted and that they did not perceive action occurring as a result of the regular survey. The response was to commit to sharing the results and planning action in a collaborative way. Differences between GM@W and the previous surveys were highlighted, such as the low rate of participation in the regular survey. Participation in the GM@W Employee Survey was impressive, at 70%.

Significant concerns emerged in the areas of Organizational Culture, Clear Leadership & Expectations, Civility & Respect and Psychological Protection. Self-reported rates of bullying and harassment were notably higher than the national norm: 15.7 % versus 6.7 % for the normative sample.



Implementation

Actions based on these results were limited by the shrinking budget for this organization. Meetings were held with staff to present the results – but it was difficult to obtain input regarding possible actions to improve the situation: *"They needed time to digest it and a mechanism for creating a plan"*. Staff found it difficult to come up with workable ideas, partly because the ongoing reorganization and budget cuts reduced group cohesion: *"It was like we had no identity at that point"*. Despite these difficult conditions for taking positive action, staff-members were provided with a series of workshops to enhance awareness of psychological health issues and give staff more options/skills for responding to these issues.

Evaluation and Corrective Action

Clearly, much work remains to be done once the organization achieves a greater degree of cohesiveness and stability. Until that time, it would not be meaningful to re-administer the survey or assess impacts of these early efforts.

Management Review and Continual Improvement

The intent of this organization is to continue this program of action for improving psychological health and safety, within the constraints of shrinking budgets and ongoing systemic change.

Lessons Learned

Organizations subject to a high degree of change in structure, leadership and resources suffer in two ways: first, intense change is highly stressful and is likely to increase psychological risk factors; second, intense change makes it more difficult to engage staff in collaborative action to improve psychological health and safety. Sometimes, one can only ensure access to lifejackets until a crisis has passed – then one might consider changing the direction of the vessel.

Story 6: Policing Psychological Health and Safety

Commitment and Leadership

In 2010 a community college in the Maritimes hosted a presentation on ‘Workplace Mental Health’ in partnership with the local public health unit. An invitation to participate also was extended via local media to organizations in the community.

A human resources professional from one of the community police forces attended the session. He was encouraged to learn that organizations of varying size, type and structures had used GM@W but wasn’t sure if it would be relevant to his organization’s needs. He connected with the college faculty member who organized the event, Dr. Thompson, and they jointly applied for, and received, funding from the provincial compensation board to do a pilot implementation trial. They also approached another police force in their region that agreed to join the project.

There was discussion of the complexity and unique nature of police organizations. There were two unions representing, respectively, the uniform staff and the support staff. The work was quite stressful and there was a need to balance accountability to staff and the public.

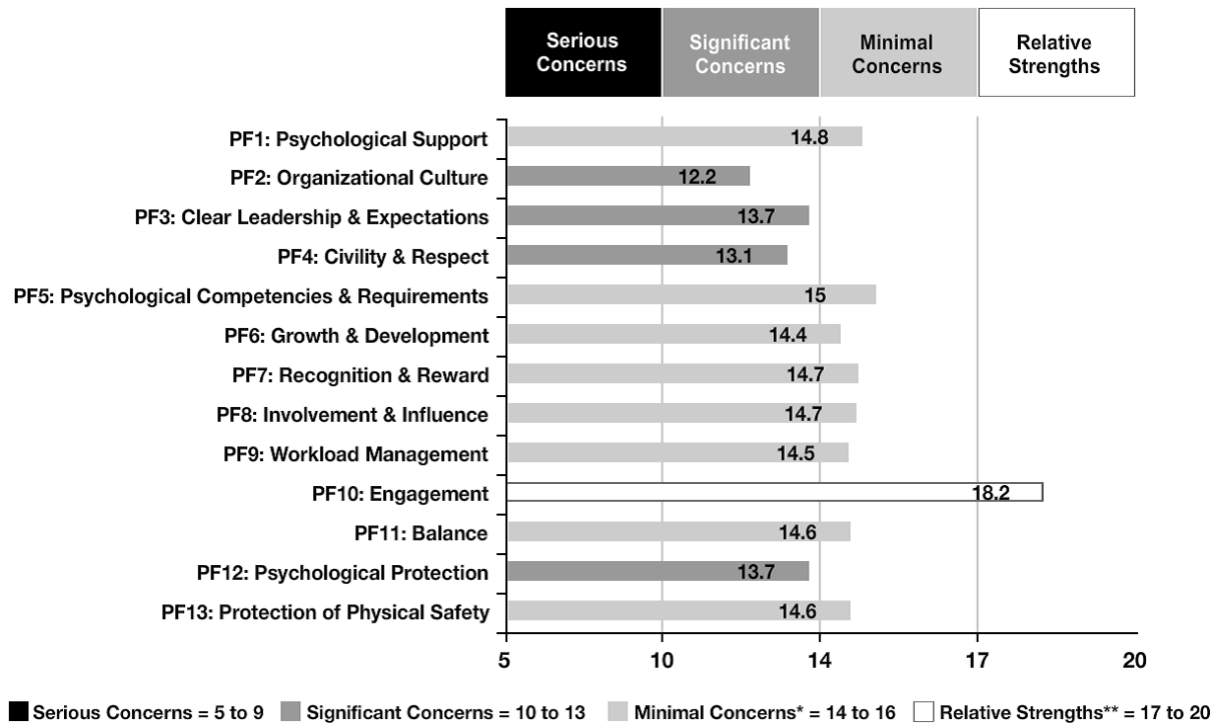
Dr. Thompson served as the GM@W facilitator and, along with representation from HR and unions, briefed the boards of each police force, who gave approval to proceed. This decision was motivated in part by a recent report stressing the need to pay greater attention to occupational stress injuries amongst police and corrections officers.

Planning

The decision was made to focus on utilization of the GM@W Employee Survey with both administrative and uniform staff. The unions were pleased that the survey had been developed by a research team and had gone through university ethics approval. The fact that a third person coordinator was administering the project also increased their trust in the process. Nevertheless, there were still concerns about respondent privacy and confidentiality, so the decision was made to remove descriptive questions regarding gender, role, and years of employment. Dr. Thompson made copies of GM@W materials describing the resource and the 13 factors available to all employees. Although the Organizational Review was not conducted because of concerns about sharing sensitive information with an external consultant, Dr. Thompson worked with HR from the two forces to gather relevant data including EFAP utilization rates and sick time. It was noted that absenteeism was high, with significant impact on morale and budget.

Implementation

The response rate was 30% for one of the organizations and 50% for the other (its survey had remained open for twice as long). The two organizations had similar profiles. One of the profiles is shown below:



Although reports of discrimination or unfair treatment were below the comparison sample norms, there was a relatively high rate of reported bullying or harassment. The results were shared with the union and management leaders with the intent to share these findings with all staff as part of implementation. It was decided that the main actions would involve training, with a focus on Organizational Culture, Clear Leadership & Expectations, and Civility & Respect. A review of research literature on psychological health amongst police forces was carried out. Several websites, such as Workplace Strategies for Mental Health (www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com) were searched for tips and recommendations for training. The following actions were selected:

- Training of all management and supervisory personnel (administrative and uniform) to improve awareness of mental health issues amongst staff. The intent was to customize training to fit the particular needs and characteristics of a police environment.
- Staff training to increase mental health literacy and encourage peer support.
- Training for all staff, particularly those involved in HR and supervision, on the nature and impact of bullying and harassment as well as relevant OH&S policy and legislation.

Evaluation and Corrective Action

Staff have been informed of the rationale and nature of the actions, however, these are ongoing and it is not yet possible to determine impact. Both staff and management have anecdotally commented on greater awareness of the importance of psychological health and safety and expressed cautious optimism that the results will make a difference.

Management Review and Continual Improvement

This is a work in progress. However, management, oversight boards and union representatives have publically stated their commitment to continue to address this issue. The facilitator noted that *“It was very important for us to do an assessment before intervening: it is more cost efficient and effective and you don’t run the risk of poor outcomes or alienation of staff with use of irrelevant interventions”*.

Lessons Learned

Organizations such as police forces have unique characteristics, which place particular stresses on the workplace and workforce. As such, utilization of a standard approach to psychological health and safety, as represented by GM@W, could seem inappropriate. In fact, with external support, some customization and clear communication this approach is very useful, yielding findings and strategies of value to similar organizations in other regions.

Failure to understand available tools can delay action

A GM@W facilitator approached a British Columbia police service about using GM@W to help them address the rising number of ‘stress leaves’, injuries and grievances that they were experiencing. Management and union representatives expressed concern that this would be interpreted as measuring psychological fitness to work, with the union indicating that this could negatively impact recruitment and advancement of officers and management worrying that this would increase their liability for ‘causing’ mental illness. They decided to forego any further action.

Unfortunately, they misunderstood the nature of GM@W: 1. It does not measure individual fitness; 2. Failing to measure a workplace risk does not absolve an organization of its responsibility to mitigate that risk.

Story 7: An organization not quite ready for change

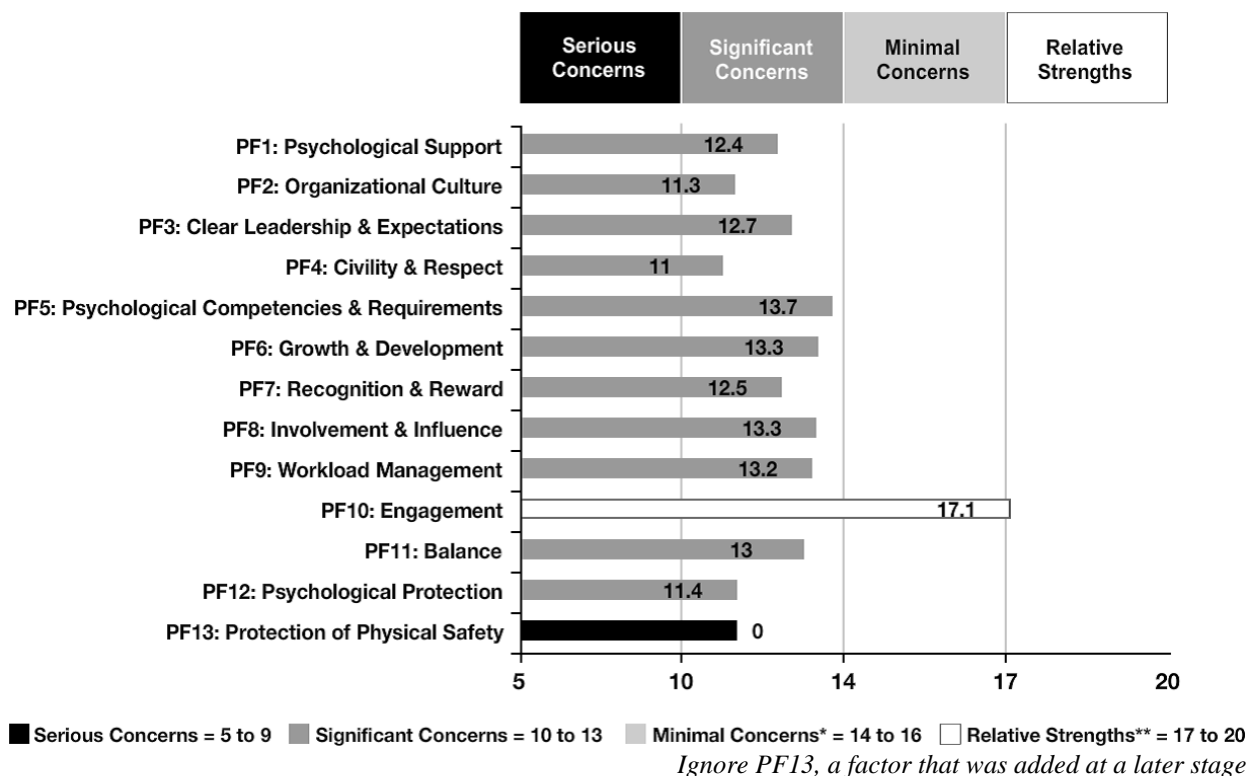
Commitment and Leadership

Stormy Waters Recovery Centre (SWRC) is an extended care facility in a major urban setting. It has 300 employees across a range of health related professions. The SWRC human resources department learned that a government agency was piloting GM@W and realized this would be an opportunity to address a simmering problem. Several clinical units had serious psychological safety issues, resulting in increased absenteeism and mental health-related disability. SWRC hoped that GM@W would be a way to tackle these issues.

The government agency agreed to include SWRC in the initiative – but they now state, *"We didn't know what we were getting into"*. The agency's concern is that SWRC *"Wanted a quick fix for problems that just weren't quick fixers"*.

Planning

The Action Team administered the survey to all employees and had a 50% response rate (a respectable rate of participation). The GM@W profile of this organization looked like this:



The profile showed real strength in Engagement – employees felt committed to their work and to the organization itself. But the profile indicated Significant Concerns in all other areas, notably Civility & Respect, Psychological Protection and Organizational Culture.

The workforce was indicating a high level of psychological risk in this work setting, including many disrespectful interactions between staff and supervisors and among staff. They did not feel protected from psychological harm. Somehow, over the years, a culture of disrespect and lack of support had emerged, with negative impacts on the psychological health and safety of employees. The operation of these units had been compromised by a troubled organizational culture.

Not only did the profile portray a negative Organizational Culture, but key questions also indicated high psychological safety risk: relatively high proportions of employees reported bullying or harassment.

Implementation

Several webinars were presented to share results of the survey; participation was high, with 60 -70% attendance. Employees were given the opportunity to voice their concern through the webinar or through a private phone conversation.

Based on survey results, a Respectful Workplace workshop was provided to employees.

Evaluation and Corrective Action

Results of this intervention have not yet been assessed – but the agency facilitating the initiative expressed doubt over efficacy in this case. The agency facilitator perceived that the leaders of the troubled units came into the project with unrealistic expectations about what could be accomplished through a survey. These leaders underestimated the difficulties of repairing dysfunctional units as well as the need for significant changes in the identification and management of psychological issues in the work setting.

Management Review and Continual Improvement

While the degree of change needed was somewhat daunting, management had gained increased awareness of the need for change and the conversation with staff was ongoing. It is likely that further psychological health and safety initiatives will be undertaken.

Lessons Learned

This might be seen as an issue of *readiness* for the bold action and fundamental change needed to fix a dysfunctional workplace. As the GM@W facilitator stated: *"you can't continue doing what you've been doing and think it will immediately get better – they don't yet see the link between their policies and the problems they're facing."* GM@W is one component of a plan to address psychological health and safety in the workplace – it is not an effective intervention by itself. It will help to identify significant problem areas and suggest ways to make things better, but will not specify actions specific to a work setting, induce organizations to be ready for change nor achieve implementation of effective interventions. GM@W sets the stage for action, but is not in itself a solution to entrenched difficulties in a workplace.

Story 8: Changing Leadership

Commitment and Leadership

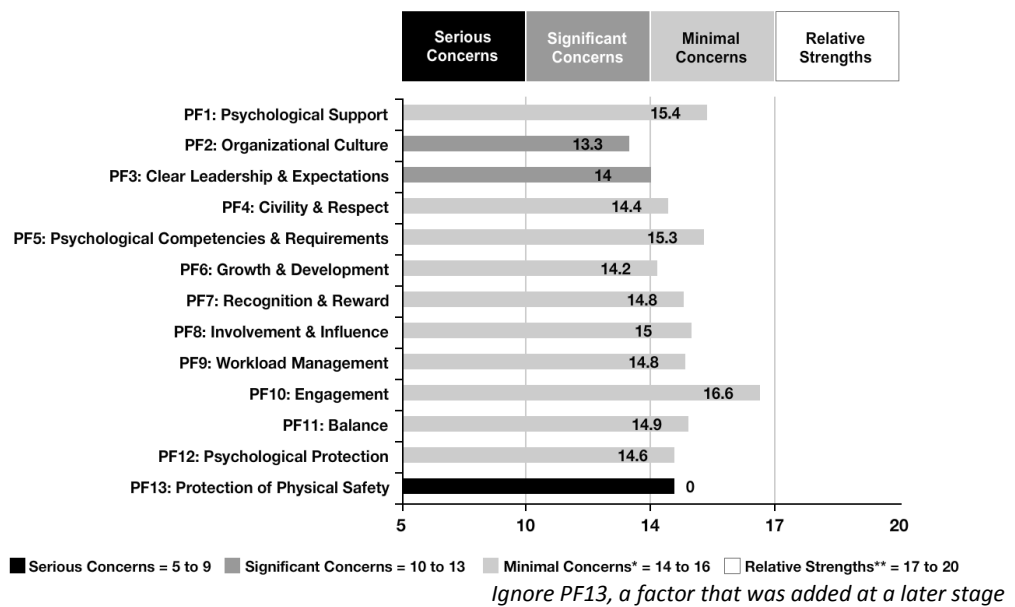
FabKare is an independent, third-party benefits provider and adjudicator offering services to a range of small to medium-sized organizations, including a number of unions. They are not unionized and have 85 staff members working out of a central location. Given the business they are in and the data they process, FabKare is very aware of the increasing impact of employee mental health on benefits utilization and costs. This is not only true for their client companies but also for their own organization. The CEO recognized that taking a leadership role in the area of psychological health and safety would send an important message to customers and employees.

Planning

On the basis of discussion with some of their clients and access to relevant industry publications, members of the executive team were aware of the *National Standard of Canada on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace* and some of the suggested resources, including GM@W. Although the company had conducted annual engagement surveys, the decision was made to run the GM@W Employee Survey instead, given its specific focus on psychological health and safety. Rather than use the Organizational Review tool, they decided to run the Employee Survey with the senior team as well as all staff and compare the results. Although they possessed data on absenteeism, retention and costs and expected that these would improve, the primary focus was on employee engagement and productivity. FabKare's CEO served as champion for the project, managing all communications from her office and posting links to websites with relevant background information such as the Canadian Mental Health Association, Workplace Strategies for Mental Health and GM@W.

Implementation

There was a 69% level of employee participation resulting in the following profile:



These survey results were compared with those of the executive team. While both datasets showed concern about 'Leadership and Expectations', the employee group were concerned about 'Organizational Culture' while the executive group expressed concerns about 'Growth and Development' as well as 'Involvement and Influence'. As both of these latter factors pertain to employee input and learning, this suggests that management was concerned about issues that staff did not see as a problem.

These findings were rolled out to all members of the organization in a 'town hall' meeting. The concern about leadership was determined to reflect the fact that FabKare's CEO had recently announced her decision to retire, leading to feelings of uncertainty about future direction. On the basis of these findings, several actions were initiated including:

- Creation of an annual 'Healthy Workplace Month' as an organization-wide campaign including informational bulletins, staff quizzes on mental health and resiliency and guest speakers on topics selected by staff.
- Rollout of an enhanced recognition program whereby peers and managers distributed gift cards to employees, not only for a specific accomplishment but also in acknowledgement of personal events or challenges.
- Formation of a staff-driven GM@W committee to serve as a forum for employees to confidentially express concerns or offer suggestions for improving Organizational Culture.

Evaluation and Corrective Action

Both staff and management have reported that the efforts have reaped benefits. *"The most positive action was the GM@W committee. It was non-supervised and acted as a 'union type committee'. For example, one of the supervisors was experienced as too pushy with his staff. The younger and newer staff didn't feel comfortable and this issue was brought forward to the committee and then to senior management who took appropriate action".*

Management Review and Continual Improvement

The intent is to run the GM@W Employee Survey on a biannual basis. The next assessment round will be particularly important given the pending change in leadership. FabKare reported that utilizing the GM@W resource gave them a useful snapshot of their current status and where to focus their efforts. They found it to be very user-friendly and would recommend it to other organizations.

Lessons Learned

Input from both line staff and senior management is critical in determining and addressing the psychological health and safety of an organization. Discrepancies in perspectives do not mean that one group is wrong, but rather may reflect access to information or awareness of issues that the other group may not have. Shared understanding and clarity of communication is critical. This is particularly important when an organization is going through change in leadership.

Story 9: A facility that is remote – and committed to change

Commitment and Leadership

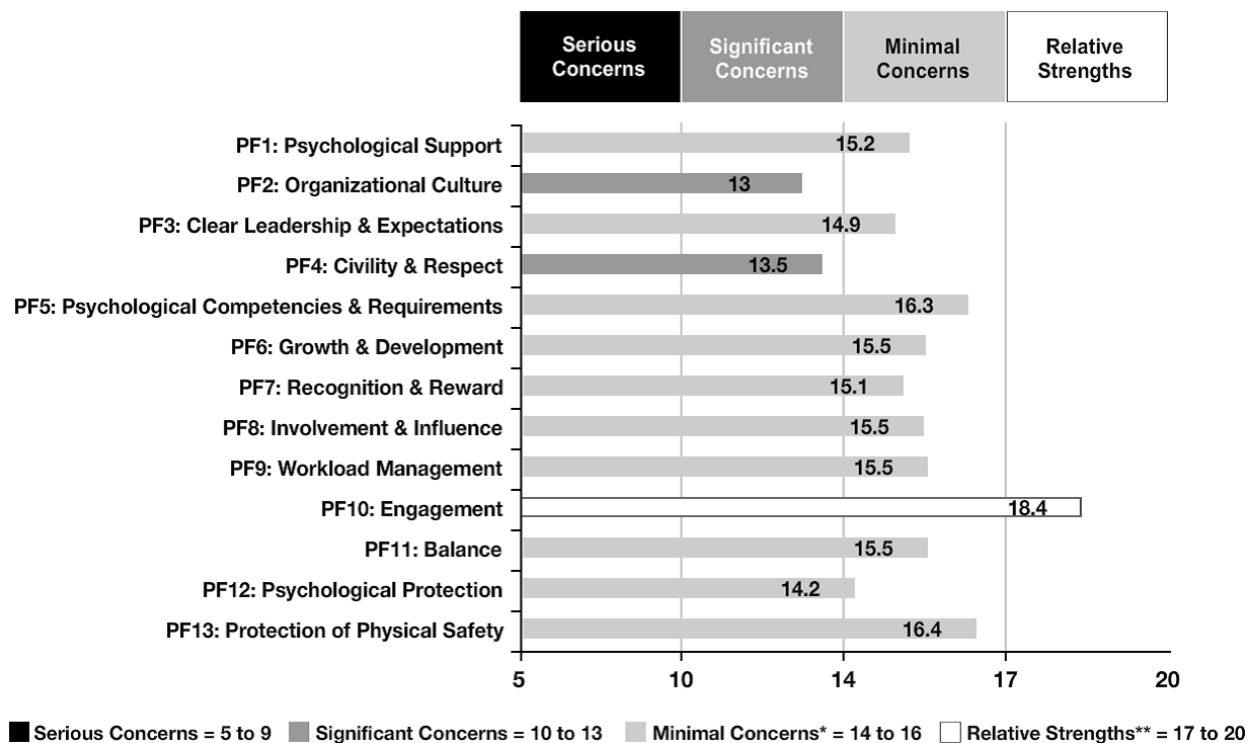
This relatively small health facility, with 70 employees, serves a remote area and a population with a high proportion of First Nations individuals. It is divided into clinical teams, each serving different regions or providing a different type of healthcare.

Planning

There were several reasons for implementing the GM@W Employee Survey: first, the health facility was undergoing an accreditation process to which this was directly relevant; second, previous surveys raised *"red flags related to incivility among staff"* but failed to clarify the nature of the problem and how to approach it; third, as a health facility it seemed important to protect the health of its own employees.

The survey was introduced using a template derived from the GM@W website and was administered to all 70 employees (a 76% response rate was achieved, indicating a high level of staff engagement). Staff-members were encouraged to be open and reassured about confidentiality.

Results were as follows:



The profile indicated notable concerns in the areas of Organizational Culture, Civility & Respect and Psychological Protection. Also, a relatively high proportion of employees reported being bullied or harassed. Organizational leaders said:

"We had expected that there would be difficulties reflecting a lot of organizational change over the past couple of years – but we were surprised at the extent to which psychological safety emerged as an issue. Using the segmentation option we learned that there was one clinical team in particular where psychological safety was a serious issue: we called this a hotspot and it was a focus of our efforts."

Implementation

Results of the survey were provided to staff by having the report posted on the Intranet and by holding a meeting of all staff to discuss the findings:

"We have begun to initiate actions to address these problems, especially on the hotspot team. This has included a change in management, a shift to more open meetings, and new emphasis on monitoring and ensuring professional conduct among staff and improve communications within the team. The aim is to get our house in order so that we can provide the best possible service."

Evaluation and Corrective Action

Use of Guarding Minds is perceived in this organization as having been a useful and positive experience: *"the tool is much better than what we have used before – it is more meaningful, it provides resources and it is user-friendly."* This facility plans to run the survey again and anticipates a better result.

Management Review and Continual Improvement

Organizational change continues, at the staff and leadership levels, imposing ongoing stress but also enhancing the opportunity for change in organizational culture. Efforts continue to manage the change while improving psychological health & safety.

Lessons Learned

This organization's experience gives a fine example of the benefits of using GM@W. Although it had been clear to organizational leadership that there was a general problem with the organizational culture, they simply did not have the degree of precision and response options that were provided by GM@W. As a result, they have been able to initiate substantive change and anticipate a better outcome next time they run the survey.

Story 10: An organization with a diverse workforce

Commitment and Leadership

DrillThings is a manufacturer of heavy equipment for the oil industry based in Britain, with a major manufacturing plant in Canada. The number of staff varies depending on the economy and current contracts, but averages 400 including a number of temporary staff. Many of these are foreign workers from China, India and Russia.

The impetus to address workplace psychological health and safety arose primarily because of the commitment of the Canadian director, whose daughter had committed suicide. The director had spoken openly about this tragic loss and had committed to increasing action on mental health in his community and workplace. He met with his management team and shop stewards from the union and gained commitment to proceed.

Planning

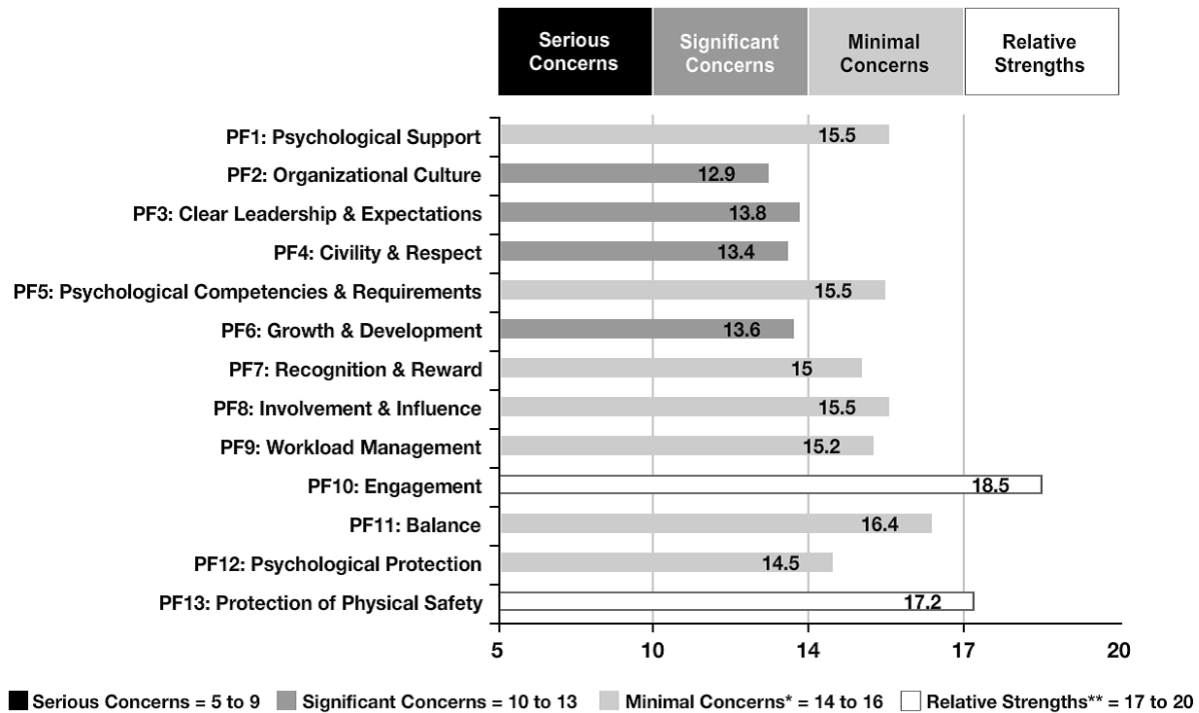
DrillThings charged the existing Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S) committee with extending their mandate to address psychological, as well as physical, safety. They used their limited budget to bring in local educators to speak at 'brown bag events' on topics such as diet, exercise and mindfulness. Attendance was sparse and typically limited to office personnel with little participation by plant staff. Furthermore, it was noted that the focus on activities intended to help workers manage stress did little to address workplace factors. A member of the OH&S committee had participated in a webinar on GM@W and suggested that the company utilize this resource.

It was recognized that the diverse nature of the workforce represented a barrier, so the OH&S committee chair approached the developers of GM@W and funded the translation of the GM@W Employee Survey and the letter introducing the survey to employees into simplified Chinese, Punjabi and Russian. This was sent out and the committee completed the Organizational Review. Some of the foreign workers expressed anxiety about the potential impact of the survey on their employment status. With help from HR, permanent staff from the same ethnic background reassured these employees about the confidentiality of the survey.

Implementation

There was a 65% response to the employee survey, which was seen as quite positive. One of the members of the committee noted, *"I thought that the survey questions were very clear. Other surveys that I have seen leave room for interpretation and are subjective."*

The results were as follows:



In addition, the employee survey indicated that an above-average number of employees reported discrimination or being bullied or harassed. The results of the Organizational Review by the OH&S committee similarly pointed to concerns about Civility & Respect and Organizational Culture. However, the elevated rates of reported harassment and discrimination were a surprise as DrillThings had incorporated a bullying and harassment policy established by their head office in the UK.

The committee reviewed several consulting organizations and informational websites including the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety and the Workplace Strategies for Mental Health. The following actions were selected:

- Training was provided to all managers and supervisors on 'Civility and Respect' in the workplace.
- The existing Bullying and Harassment policy was reviewed and updated. It was recognized that many staff were unaware of the policy or how it was implemented. It was made part of orientation for all new staff and HR personnel gave presentations at staff and OH&S meetings.
- General communication to staff was translated into relevant languages and a monthly update meeting was opened up to all staff instead of just managers.

Evaluation and Corrective Action

DrillThings intends to run the GM@W Employee Survey in two years to assess change. In the interim, there has been an increase in participation in meetings by all staff, including temporary workers. Company social events have begun to feature a focus on the particular food and music of each of the home countries of some of the staff.

Management Review and Continual Improvement

DrillThings remains committed to attending to psychological health and safety in the workplace. The OH&S committee has redrafted their mandate so that this is a standing item at all meetings.

Lessons Learned

The importance of workplace psychological health and safety extends across diverse organizations and workforces. Attending to and addressing this diversity allows for positive and sustainable action.

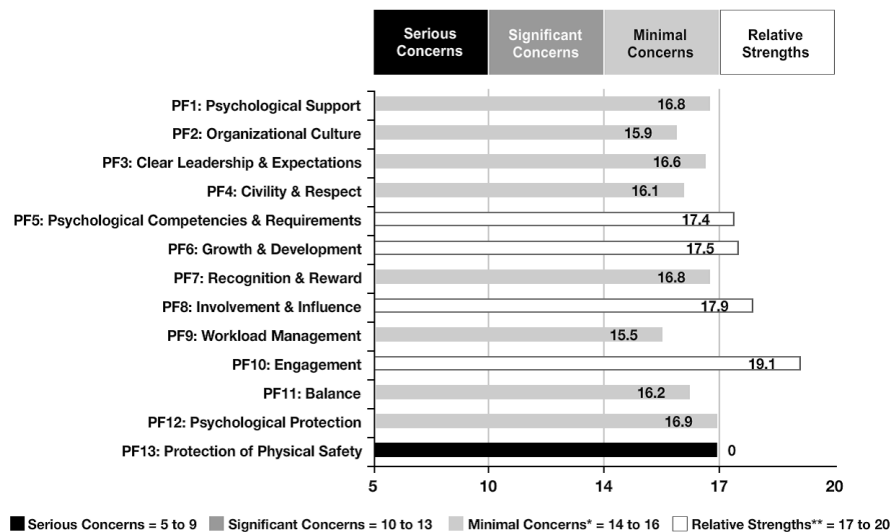
Story 11: A morale problem

Commitment and Leadership

Leaders of a primary healthcare service were concerned about morale among their workforce because the organization had undergone significant change, including rapid growth, change in leadership and a change in union representation. They had done engagement surveys before but stated, *"We wanted to try something new."*

Planning

They distributed the GM@W Employee Survey, introducing it to staff through e-mail, and got 43% participation. Although this level of participation is not out of line for workforce surveys, leaders were disappointed and identified it as an example of poor morale among the workforce. The profile obtained from this survey is below:



It is evident from this profile that this group of employees shows a high level of Engagement, feels a strong sense of involvement in key decisions, perceives good opportunities for growth and development and judges there to be a good match between the skills and demands of their occupational role. Overall the profile is a notably positive one, without appearing to be exaggerated or otherwise invalid. A low degree of concern is evident in the areas of Organizational Culture (perhaps reflecting reduced morale, but at a fairly mild level) and Workload Management, suggesting that there is it would be worthwhile to follow-up regarding workload concerns. The critical items show levels of reported discrimination that are comparable to national norms (7.1% versus 5.5%), along with notably low levels of reported bullying or harassment (3.6% versus 6.7%). Overall, this is a positive and reassuring result.

Implementation

Several actions were taken as a result of these findings: 1. An Engagement Committee was formed to address perceived recognition and appreciation, for example by providing access to gym memberships. 2. The Engagement committee was also used to provide a safe place for staff to identify small problems before they become substantial. 3. Positions were added in particular areas where workload issues had been identified in the survey.

Evaluation and Corrective Action

The survey has not yet been repeated, but feedback from staff has been very positive. This organization started at a pretty good level and it looks like things have gotten even better.

Management Review and Continual Improvement

There is a management commitment to sustaining change in this domain, building on the positive outcome.

Lessons Learned

It is sometimes difficult to integrate positive findings, when systems are oriented towards spotting problems. There may have been indications of morale problems in this workplace, but the GM@W profile itself does not point to a significant morale difficulties. The prompt response of the organization to the identified concern with workload (a mild concern) was impressive, responding promptly by increasing staff in particular areas. Overall, findings of the GM@W Employee Survey are best seen as providing reassuring feedback about the psychological health and safety of this workplace.

Story 12: PH&S in a merged organization

Commitment and Leadership

GoodHome is a residential construction company with a staff of 120 working in sales, administration and on-site construction. Many of the latter are contract workers and belong to trades associations. GoodHome had just merged with another construction company and integrated the site supervisors from both organizations. Recently, there was a fatal accident when a crane collapsed, killing the operator. Investigation into the accident revealed that the worker, who had been a valued employee,

had missed a lot of work over the last few months and, on one occasion, showed up at work apparently intoxicated. His site supervisor commented that the worker had recently gone through a very difficult divorce. The President of GoodHome recognized the importance of supporting and keeping a skilled workforce. He did an online search and came across several articles describing the impact of stress and poor worker mental health on accidents, injuries and incidents. Further searches took him to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) website, where he learned about the new National Standard and the suggested assessment tool, GM@W.

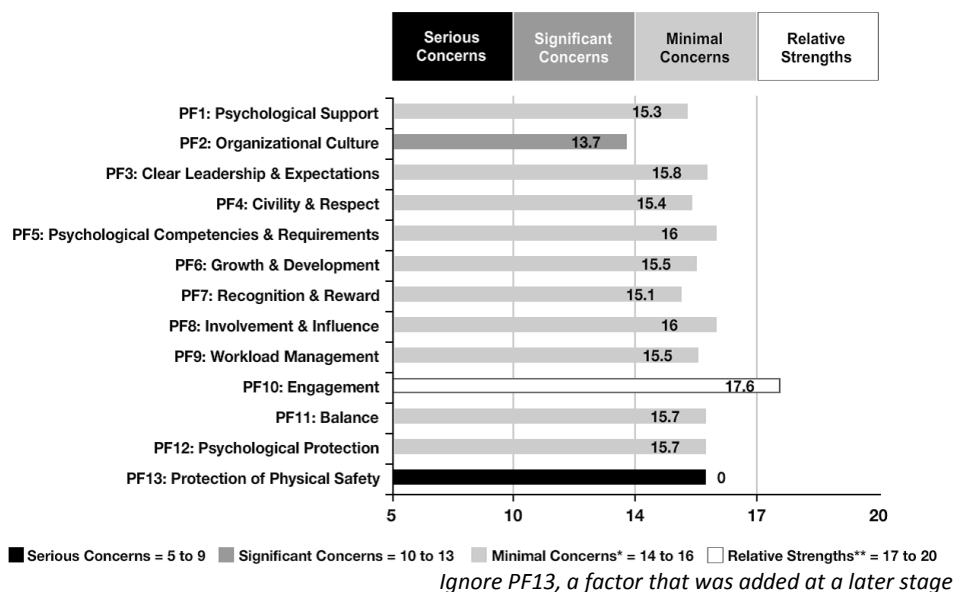
Planning

The President knew how important it was to have a clear work plan before starting to build, so he decided to conduct the GM@W Employee Survey with his workforce. He met with his office staff and site supervisors and went to current worksites to explain the nature and purpose of the survey. He asked any employee with concerns to contact him directly and encouraged those unionized workers to inform their trade association. He registered on the GM@W site and sent the Employee Survey link to all staff in the office.

As a number of staff worked at various sites and/or did not have access to computers at work, notices were posted at all sites. He set up a dedicated terminal in the main office for completion of the survey. As several staff members were not comfortable with computers, he made hard copies of the survey available and had his secretary enter the data (anonymously). He completed select sections of the Organizational Review, particularly those pertaining to Recognition and Reward, Organizational Culture and Balance. When he reviewed some of the company payroll data, he was surprised to find that absenteeism had increased significantly since the merger.

Implementation

Sixty-five per cent of GoodHome’s workforce completed the survey. This revealed the following profile:



While it was very encouraging that the majority of individuals were very engaged with their work, there was clearly a concern about Organizational Culture. He arranged to meet with all staff in order to understand this finding. Although it was evident that participants had concerns, there was reluctance to discuss these in an open forum. The president encouraged all employees to contact him directly by letter or email, assuring them that all information would be strictly confidential. He also set up individual meetings with specific staff in the office and on-site. He learned that some office managers and site supervisors from the merging company had a very authoritarian style, expecting employees to explain any absence, often publicly, and a reluctance to permit staff to attend personal or family appointments during work hours. The following actions were implemented:

- A policy was created permitting employees to flex their time, providing there were no operational barriers, with the expectation that the time would be made up within the next pay period.
- Office managers and site supervisors participated in a training session on effective performance management practices with an emphasis on provision of timely recognition and support for staff.
- The OH&S committee added 'psychological safety' to their standing agenda and any accident, injury or incident was reviewed with a psychological lens to determine if there were possible contributing psychological factors such as fatigue, stress or substance misuse.

Evaluation and Corrective Action

Staff responded positively to these changes. The president received several private communications indicating that morale had improved, including one note from a longstanding employee, with a reputation for being critical, saying that he was impressed with the changes and had recommended GoodHome as a great place to work. Absenteeism dropped by 20% in the last quarter and the provincial compensation board reported that GoodHome's claim rate for accidents and injuries was well below the average for their industry.

Management Review and Continual Improvement

The President was pleased with the outcomes and continued the opportunity for any employee to confidentially contact him with concerns or suggestions stating, *"The staff knows that if we start to go back to some of our former practices, they can speak up."* He recognized that many of the contract tradespeople worked with other construction companies and that it was of mutual advantage to work together for psychological safety. He proposed that this become a standing item on the agenda for future labour-management meetings and conferences.

Lessons Learned

This case study illustrates two important points. Firstly, assessing and addressing workplace psychosocial factors not only benefits the psychological health of employees, it also helps protect their physical health and safety. Secondly, organizations have unique ways of doing things and, when they merge, a 'culture clash' can occur that may result in confusion or conflict.

Conclusion

The stories and case studies provided highlight different approaches that can be taken towards achieving a psychologically healthy and safe workplace.

Some key points to consider are:

- ensuring key stakeholders are involved and committed at the outset.
- using the free resources that are available.
- developing a plan of action to address your organization's specific concerns.

The task may seem onerous but the results as shown here strengthen the business case for striving towards a psychologically healthy and safe workplace.

Free Tools and Resources

Guarding Minds @ Work provides organizations with proactive, comprehensive ways to assess the psychological health and safety of their specific workplaces, combined with information on appropriate solutions and a method of measuring the effectiveness of those solutions.

[*Workplace Strategies for Mental Health*](#) is an initiative of the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace and provides free information, tools and resources available to employers and organizations that recognize that a healthier workplace can improve their bottom line through:

- Improving psychological health and safety in the workplace
- Supporting employee success when mental health is a factor

The website includes links to specific tools and resources related to promoting and integrating psychological health and safety in your organization:

Psychological Health and Safety Management System provides resources and information that can help you integrate psychological health and safety into your organization.

Managing Mental Health Matters is a free, online video-based program that helps address the need to improve the competence of managers and avoid risk to the psychological health or safety of employees. It includes modules on accommodation, return to work, performance management and conflict resolution.

On the Agenda is a series of interactive sessions to engage work teams in discussions about solutions to workplace concerns that may impact psychological health and safety. It includes slide presentations and facilitator guides that human resources professionals, managers or other leaders can use to help facilitate discussion on psychological health and safety in the workplace.

Working Through It[™] is a series of video interviews of real people sharing their experiences working through tough times of mental health pressures. This resource can be used as a support for employees who are experiencing mental health difficulties, as well as an approach to awareness and education for all staff.

[Mental Health Works](#) is a nationally available program of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) that builds capacity within Canadian workplaces to effectively address the many issues related to mental health in the workplace.