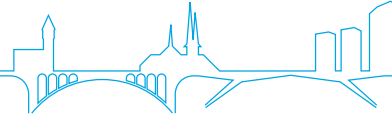




Psychosocial risk factors



Psychic factors in the first place

It is certainly no longer a secret that workloads and stresses in the world of work have changed over the past decades. While the physical strain has meanwhile decreased significantly, the demands on the "mental performance capacity of employees" have increased considerably. In the area of mental stress, this not only leads to a health risk for the employees, but also to a reduction in performance on the company's side. This leads to a decrease in productivity, a negative influence on the business and a decrease in creativity and innovation in the performance of the company.

It is necessary to react adequately to these new requirements and constraints.

Currently, there are still few statistics and evaluations on days of absence and extended work stoppages of employees due to mental illness, so we take a look at our neighboring country, Germany (health report of the health insurance company Techniker Krankenkasse 2015), which is certainly not an exception with regard to this current situation and can therefore be used as a comparison for Luxembourg.

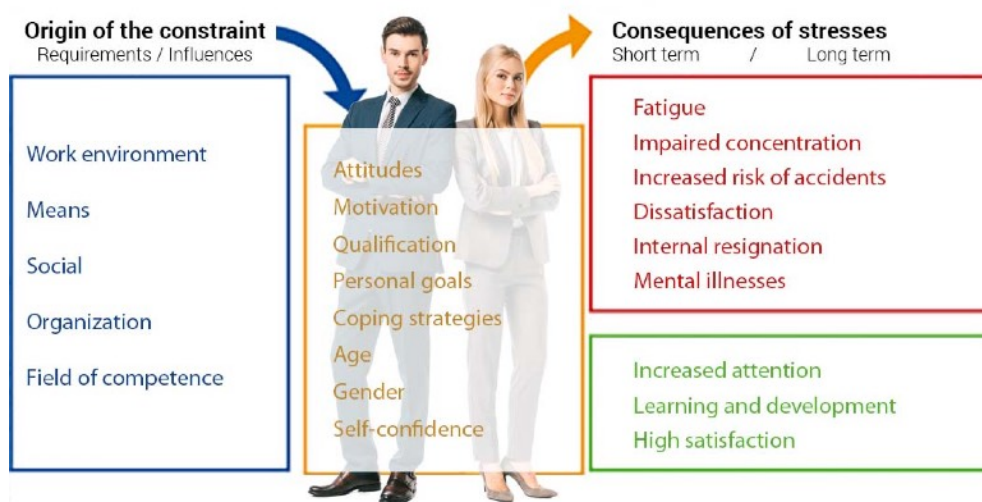
What might be the risk factors for such an increase in work stoppages and how do we manage them here in Luxembourg?

How do our employees feel at risk?

Mental load vs. poor solicitation

Let's start by taking a closer look at the potential risks. The causes of increased mental workload in the workplace are, at present, the following:

- the intensification of work;
- the acceleration of production, service and communication processes;
- increased use of new technologies;
- more "knowledge work" (information processing and communication, e.g. in the service sector);
- decompartmentalization of work with permanent availability;
- increased personal responsibility of employees;
- increasing complexity of work requirements;
- discontinuous working relationships;
- reduced social security/feeling of loss of control.



However, these constraints are not dangerous in themselves and can be considered a possible challenge if social, organizational or personal resources are sufficiently supported. But if the individual is ill, i.e. if his or her coping skills are limited, the result is quickly overwork (stress, exhaustion, etc.), which translates into a bad psychological burden for each individual.

Thus, a job without psychological load is no more possible than a job without any physical load. Only the quantity and the environment determine the harmful effect on health.

To define and assess the degree of risk factors, there are different modelled approaches.

One of them is the Job-Demand-Control model of the American sociologist Robert Karasek. It is used to assess the load and stress factors in the work environment.

To do this, Karasek puts forward two important parameters to determine these factors:

Job Demands and Job Decision Latitude (the amount of leeway or autonomy at work). Both factors can be low or high.

Job stress occurs when job demands are high, but the worker has little leeway due to a lack of autonomy.

Karasek assumes that high work demands lead to a state of high action energy (push motivation). The extent to which the worker can make decisions modulates or transforms the release of the energy produced (motivation).

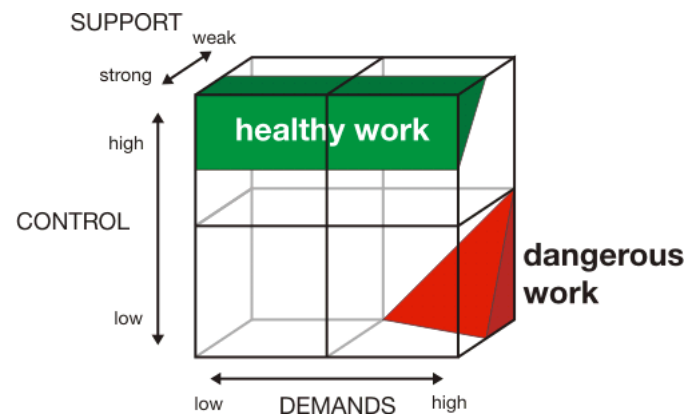
If no action is taken, the action energy is transformed into stress symptoms in the form of "mental stress".

In addition to the 3 risk factors of Karasek's model:

- Control/autonomy,
- Support and
- Intensity of workl.

However, there are other factors to consider:

- Esteem;
- Respect/justice;
- Recognition;
- Workplace design.



Health management challenges:

What are our risks and what can we do about them? In order to be able to answer this question in part, it would be sensible to carry out a consistent psychosocial risk assessment of all employees. The European framework directive RL 89/391/EEC is the basis for this assessment.

This measure allows for the early identification of personal and occupational exposure risks. Then an interdisciplinary team, consisting of the company, the occupational medicine and the staff delegation, should work together on these risks and reduce or eliminate them.

Comprehensive occupational health management, preventive examination by occupational medicine, and educational sessions to strengthen an individual's resources should be the goal.

Workers' knowledge of potential risk factors is therefore more important than before.

With this in perspective, occupational medicine offers a series of information sessions in the form of conferences and workshops.

These include:

- Stress management;
 - Exercise;
 - Balanced diet;
 - Time management;
 - Relaxation techniques such as sophrology, muscle relaxation according to Jacobsen.
- Burnout ;
 - How to recognize it?
 - What to do if?
 - Safety net.

But topics such as mobbing, communication, etc. are also important elements of this information work.



Building resilience - what can employers do?

The aim is to strengthen the resources of an individual in his or her environment, i.e. also in the working world.

In addition to the optimization of work processes, good conflict management within the team and higher structures as well as regular employee evaluations with corresponding feedback interviews (praise, remuneration, improvement aids), the following offers by employers can be added to the practical level of the mastery strategy:

Sport:

- Fitness program;
- Outdoor activities;
- « Jogging appointment ».

Nutrition:

- Eat sustainably;
- « Healthy Weeks ».

Meditation:

- Yoga classes;
- Rest room.

Those are just few examples. Provided that the necessary infrastructure is available. (Changing rooms, shower facilities, etc.)

If there are signs of instability in the area of personal resilience, regular preventive medical examinations are of great importance to ensure early identification of triggering factors.

But it also depends on the individual's willingness to strengthen his or her own resources.

The interaction between private and professional life will become more and more visible and indispensable in the future due to the decompartmentalization and flexible organization of work.

Providing a broad prevention network while focusing on "real" work is a challenge for any employer - but one that, if successful, offers good prospects.

Overall, this will allow for more efficient work and better service delivery. The result is a reduction in sick leave and absences. A "win-win" situation between employer and employee is created.