20 Questions for Leaders About Workplace Psychological Health and Safety

In his report *Tracking the Perfect Legal Storm* [PDF], Dr Martin Shain suggests that providing a psychologically safe workplace is no longer something that is simply nice to do, it is increasingly becoming a legal imperative. Changes in labour law, occupational health and safety, employment standards, the contract of employment, and human rights decisions are all pointing to the need for employers to provide a psychologically safe workplace. In addition, human rights require a duty to accommodate mental disabilities. These questions help review possible exposures to risk or potential for improvement.

1. Is employee psychological health and safety a stated priority in our organisational policy statement?

2. Do people in our organisation have a common understanding of a psychologically safe workplace?

3. Is our management team familiar with the legal and regulatory requirements and expectations related to workplace mental health and psychological safety?

4. What is the cost of stress-related illnesses - both physical and mental - to our organisation?

5. Is there a system in place to measure the rates of both absenteeism and presenteeism (being unproductive while present at work) in our organisation and what percentage of these may be related to psychological health and safety issues?

6. What percentage of our disability claims do we believe are related in whole or in part to mental health issues or workplace conflict issues?

7. Do our policies align with occupational health and safety, contract law and employment standards with respect to psychological health and safety?

8. Is there a process in place to encourage frontline managers to provide a psychologically safe workplace through such measures as performance indicators and evaluation methods?

9. Are those whose position includes managing, supervising, or supporting employees, adequately trained, skilled or competent to make sound decisions?

10. Do the leaders and management in our organisation recognise and respond to conflict in a timely and effective manner?

11. Are the leaders and management in our organisation trained to identify the difference between a mental health problem and a performance issue?

12. Does our organisation have a policy on work-life balance?

13. Does our organisation work to prevent physical, relational, or emotional harassment, bullying or aggression?

14. Does our organisation help prevent discrimination by providing all employees with a basic level of knowledge about mental health issues?

15. Do we have crisis response policies and processes in place for issues such as suicide, violence, threats of violence or emotional breakdowns at work?

16. Does our organisation have a process allowing for open communications between managers, supervisors and employees that assist us to address the needs of co-workers who are traumatised by personal or workplace issues?

17. Do we have a return to work policy that takes into account the emotional, psychological and interpersonal challenges and allows union/employee representatives a role to play in the return to work process including having the opportunity to provide input on the return to work process?

18. Do we know how to reasonably accommodate those with a mental health disability at work?

19. What resources in our organisation and/or community exist for employees struggling with mental health issues?

20. Is our organisation exposed to complaints concerning the duty to reasonably accommodate persons with mental disabilities, which may include depression or anxiety-related disorders?