

GOOD PRACTICES IDENTIFIED IN THE LITERATURE TO OPERATIONALIZE INTERVENTIONS AIMED AT PREVENTING AND MANAGING PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS DIAGNOSED BY COPSOQ III

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Abstract: Exposure to psychosocial risks at work, resulting from inadequate working conditions, negatively affects people's well-being in organizations, often extending to the family dimension of workers' lives. The Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ) has been widely used to identify organizational psychosocial risks. Its medium version aims to respond to new trends in the world of work, which makes it suitable for diagnosing psychosocial risks in organizations. Transposing diagnosis into intervention, however, can pose some difficulties for HR managers in terms of what kind of practices can be structured to reduce and/or eliminate these risks. This paper aims to present good practices identified in literature for preventing and managing the 31 risks divided into seven domains evaluated by COPSOQ III, medium version. It serves as a tool for effective interventions that promote employee well-being in the organizational context.

Keywords: Organizational interventions; Occupational Psychology; Risk management; Employee well-being.

Introduction

The work environment has evolved significantly, impacting the health and well-being of employees (Schulte *et al.*, 2019). Psychosocial risks arise from the organization of work and the social context (Leka *et al.*, 2017) and affect the work's well-being and the employee's physical and mental health (Fernandes & Pereira, 2016). Human Resources Management (HRM) should prioritize preventing these risks and communicating safe practices (Silva & Azevedo, 2023). Many organizations struggle to implement effective action plans beyond mere legal compliance in assessing psychosocial risks (Di Tecco *et al.*, 2023).

Various instruments assess psychosocial risks (e.g., JCQ; ERI), but the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ) stands out due to its systematic approach (Fernandes & Pereira, 2016; Cotrim *et al.*, 2022). This instrument will guide our recommendations for interventions addressing workplace psychosocial risks. We will discuss the seven conceptual domains and 31 dimensions of COPSOQ III, the medium version, and the key consequences of the identified risks for workers and organizations.

This research arises from the implementation of the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ) within a private organizational setting and the request of his HR manager to provide him guidelines on measures to deal with the identified risks. Thus, the primary aim is to present measures identified in the extant literature that seek to eliminate or mitigate those risks, thereby fostering employee safety and well-being. Consequently, this research constitutes a comprehensive literature review.

COPSOQ III Domains and Dimensions: Risks and Risk Management Measures

Demands at Work

Demands at work are related to job aspects and require cognitive, physical, or emotional effort (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2017). This domain includes the Quantitative Demands, Work Pace, Cognitive Demands, and Emotional Demands dimensions.

Quantitative Demands refer to the number of objectives that must be achieved, and they can be evaluated by assessing the discrepancy between the number of tasks and the time available to complete them (Burr *et al.*, 2019). These demands are closely linked to workplace stress (Mette *et al.*, 2018). To alleviate this, short breaks of about ten minutes can help boost energy and reduce fatigue (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Leaders can support

employee well-being by encouraging these breaks (Albulescu *et al.*, 2022). Identifying potential sources of time pressure within the work environment is also essential (Schilbach *et al.*, 2023).

Work pace refers to the speed at which tasks are performed, measuring the intensity of the work (Burr *et al.*, 2019). It can lead to psychological distress, irritability, anxiety, and frustration (Souza & Lisboa, 2005). Besides regular breaks during work and increasing the amount of time taken to perform a given task (DGS, 2021), granting employees greater control over their work and scheduling, particularly during periods of heightened intensity (Moen *et al.*, 2013), can effectively mitigate time-related stress. Production must be sustainable on a social level (Huo *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, organizations should foster a participatory climate (Paškván & Kubicek, 2017) where transparency prevails, and employees' insights are valued in decision-making processes. Another suggestion is to limit supervisor contact with employees after hours, as proposed by a recent EU directive (Mauno *et al.*, 2022).

Cognitive Demands assess an employee's cognitive skills but can exceed human capabilities, negatively impacting cognitive functioning (Couffe & Michael, 2017). To support employees, personalized strategies should be developed, considering the diverse needs of different groups (Meyer & Hünefeld, 2018). Cognitive ergonomics is essential as it aligns the human-machine relationship with cognitive capacities and limitations (Kalakoski, 2014). Additionally, job crafting practices may help mitigate the adverse effects of high work demands on well-being (Hakanen *et al.*, 2017).

Finally, Emotional Demands encompass situations in which employees deal with the feelings and emotions of others, (e.g. colleagues, customers). They are linked to anxiety (Santa Maria *et al.*, 2017), psychological distress (Bültmann *et al.*, 2002), and depression (Madsen *et al.*, 2010), particularly when seen as extra-role (Duarte *et al.*, 2020). To mitigate these effects, workers should be encouraged to express their feelings, while preventive measures and social support from supervisors are essential (Suh & Punnett, 2022). Training programs that build coping skills can also promote a healthy work environment, promoting intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction (Mazzetti *et al.*, 2020).

Work Organization and Job Content

This domain covers Influence at Work, Possibilities for Development, Control Over Working Time, and Meaning of Work.

Influence at Work refers to the extent to which an employee can affect aspects such as work planning and the sequence of tasks (Burr *et al.*, 2019). When employees feel they have little to no influence, they may experience feelings of helplessness and inadequacy (Czuba *et al.*, 2019). The interpersonal influence of subjects can be promoted through communication: a manager open to employees' opinions promotes their sense of influence at work (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012) and commits them to the necessary changes. Managers should use downward communication (e.g., newsletters) to inform employees of organizational changes and upward communication (e.g., team meetings) to address their concerns (Gennard & Judge, 2005).

Possibilities for Development refer to viewing tasks as challenges or opportunities for learning, which can foster both personal and professional growth. When individuals lack development opportunities, they may experience apathy, indifference, and powerlessness (Burr *et al.*, 2019). Employees develop their skills through meaningful learning activities and training. Complex jobs create both pressure and opportunities for skill growth, positively affecting organizational productivity. Continuous training and collaborative relationships between colleagues and managers are essential for effective learning in organizations (Russo, 2016).

Control Over Working Time refers to workers' management of breaks and work hours. Empowering workers with flexible hours, autonomous vacation scheduling, and a culture of decision-making can reduce long sickness absences (Albrecht *et al.*, 2020). When employees choose their schedules and breaks, they feel more in control, and organizations should support this autonomy (Wöhrmann *et al.*, 2021).

Meaning of Work involves the purpose of tasks and their contribution to organizational goals (Burr *et al.*, 2019). It can be achieved by equipping workers with skills and varied tasks, and by discussing their aspirations and values (Albrecht *et al.*, 2021). Transformative leadership that prioritizes team dynamics, provides constructive

feedback, and sets clear goals, can help to build a sense of purpose (Steger, 2016). Training for managers on effective communication is also beneficial (Wikaningrum & Yuniawan, 2018). Additionally, supporting social responsibility activities, like volunteering, can enhance employees' sense of meaningfulness in their work (Cycyota *et al.*, 2016).

Work-Individual Interface

This domain covers the dimensions of Commitment to the Workplace, Job Insecurity, Insecurity over Working Conditions, Quality of Work, Work Life Conflict, and Job Satisfaction.

Commitment to the Workplace refers to how committed the employee feels to the organization (Burr *et al.*, 2019). When workers are loyal and committed to the organization, they are less likely to turnover (Aqilah *et al.*, 2023). Favorable working conditions, adequate facilities, and a supportive environment enable employee efficiency and commitment. Regular training initiatives signal organizational support for growth, promoting belonging and loyalty. Competitive salaries also encourage strong work commitment (Rajak & Pandey, 2017).

Job insecurity refers to an employee's fear of termination or uncertainty about reemployment if they lose their job (Burr *et al.*, 2019). This insecurity can lead to lower satisfaction, enthusiasm, focus, and engagement (Stankevičiūtė *et al.*, 2021). Implementing a clear reward and punishment system can create a more equal and harmonious organizational environment, reducing job insecurity (Wang *et al.*, 2020). Praising employees, promoting inclusivity (Yu *et al.*, 2020), and offering salary incentives are beneficial strategies. It's also essential for employees to be able to express concerns about job insecurity, which can be alleviated through psychological counseling and team-building activities (Yu *et al.*, 2021). Leaders should focus on building strong relationships and involving employees in decision-making, enhancing autonomy, and creating an empowering culture that reduces job insecurity (Wang *et al.*, 2020).

Insecurity over Working Conditions covers aspects of insecurity, such as the content of the work performed, changes in working hours, or deterioration in pay (Burr *et al.*, 2019). Training supervisors is crucial for fostering a partnership with employees, which creates a trusting work environment. Additionally, developing organizational resources, improving working relationships, and gaining leadership support can help organizations mitigate the impacts of job insecurity. This, in turn, facilitates employee engagement even amidst unpredictability or threats of job loss (Asfaw & Chang, 2019).

The Quality of Work evaluates an employee's perception of the tasks they perform or the products they produce (Burr *et al.*, 2019). This quality is determined by the specific work functions or activities carried out over a certain period (Raymond *et al.*, 2015). Reflecting on work-related issues can significantly impact positive outcomes and offers various benefits. This reflection can occur individually or collectively and does not necessarily require a lot of time. For instance, a supervisor might encourage team members to identify areas for improvement, allowing them to assess their strengths and weaknesses (Ellis & Davidi, 2005). Engaging in group reflection enhances performance through collaborative discussions on objectives and methods for accomplishing them (Schippers *et al.*, 2014). Transformational leadership may help this process, contributing to better performance and effectiveness (Lai *et al.*, 2020).

Work-Life Conflict (WLC) refers to the impact of work on family life and vice versa. It involves mental and physical energy, time issues, and can significantly affect workers' mental health (Chandler, 2021). Several strategies can help reduce work-life conflict (WLC). For instance, establishing childcare services, such as a nursery within the workplace for employees' children, can be beneficial. Additionally, providing support services for employees who care for elderly individuals and implementing more flexible work arrangements - such as reduced working hours and telecommuting options - can enable employees to spend more time at home without the need for commuting (Guerreiro *et al.*, 2006).

Finally, Job Satisfaction refers to the employee's satisfaction with multiple aspects of the job (Burr *et al.*, 2019). Dissatisfaction can cause stress, negatively affecting mental health (Qiu *et al.*, 2021). Organizations can enhance employees' job satisfaction through several factors, including the treatment of individuals, the nature of job tasks assigned, the quality of interpersonal relationships within the workplace, and the rewards provided for

performance (Spector, 2012). By prioritizing these elements, organizations not only foster a positive work environment but also contribute to their workforce's overall well-being and motivation.

Social Relations and Leadership

It includes the dimensions of Predictability, Recognition, Role Clarity, Role Conflicts, Quality of Leadership, Social Support from Colleagues, Social Support from Supervisor, and Sense of Community at Work.

Predictability reduces uncertainty or insecurity and is achieved when employees receive essential information at the right time (Burr *et al.*, 2019). Its absence can be a source of stress (Schoellbauer *et al.*, 2022). Predictability plays a significant role in fostering creativity within organizations. Positions characterized by moderate levels of predictability are often assessed by supervisors as exhibiting higher creative performance, in contrast to roles marked by either low or excessively high predictability. This occurs because creativity tends to flourish when certain job parameters are established in advance while remaining flexible enough to encourage innovative thinking. To promote a conducive environment for creativity, organizations can implement structured schedules that enable employees to anticipate specific challenges (Caniëls *et al.*, 2022).

Recognition refers to managers' understanding of the effort made by the employee (Burr *et al.*, 2019) and is one of the most important factors for job satisfaction (Thant & Chang, 2021). Companies should motivate their employees by rewarding their efforts, as this helps to value their contributions (Hussain *et al.*, 2019). Adequate salaries, opportunities for promotion, and training are essential for job satisfaction and recognition (Tadia & Singh, 2020). Also, one of the most effective ways to show recognition is through clear communication. Daily expressions of appreciation, personally thanking individuals, using their names, and specifically detailing the actions that merited recognition all reinforce desired behaviors by referring to particular instances. Additionally, sharing the emotions supervisors feel when goals are achieved, collectively thanking the team for their contributions (Harrison, 2020), and fostering trust-based relationships between supervisors and employees (Daniel & Metcalf, 2005) are valuable methods for promoting a culture of recognition.

Role Clarity reflects the employee's understanding of their role at work (e.g., task content, expectations to be met) (Burr *et al.*, 2019). When employees clearly understand their role, they show greater performance and satisfaction (Thangavelu & Sudhahar, 2017). Organizations should provide detailed role descriptions and align them with organizational objectives to improve processes. Recognizing team members' strengths and weaknesses is crucial for task assignment, fostering knowledge, and skill development, thereby optimizing the administrative culture (Samie *et al.*, 2015).

Role Conflicts can relate to the possible conflicting demands innate to a given task or in prioritizing different tasks (Burr *et al.*, 2019), and may lead to lower performance (Tubre & Collins, 2000). To mitigate role conflicts, organizations can redesign roles and adjust policies to give individuals greater control over their work activities (Vanishree, 2014). Job descriptions serve as effective tools for guiding employee performance, and periodic feedback helps employees understand their roles and responsibilities, enabling effective task performance (Swit-sarra, 2021).

The Quality of Leadership assesses the leadership of top management in different domains and contexts (Burr *et al.*, 2019). Toxic leadership decreases employee motivation, creativity, satisfaction, productivity, and commitment, leading to health issues and stress, which harm organizational performance (Rizani *et al.*, 2022). To enhance employee well-being, leadership should foster a supportive environment by promoting respect and equality, implementing anti-abuse policies, and training leaders in communication and conflict resolution. These measures help employees voice concerns and recognize contributions, reducing abusive behavior and encouraging creativity and innovation (Mehraein *et al.*, 2023).

Social support from colleagues, defined as employees' perceptions of receiving assistance from coworkers, is crucial for job satisfaction and serves as a protective factor against workplace bullying and sexual harassment (Burr *et al.*, 2019; Sigursteinsdottir & Karlsdottir, 2022). This dimension is distinct from "horizontal trust," as employees may receive support without necessarily trusting their colleagues. Peer support programs enhance supportive skills and alleviate workplace stress (Agarwal *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, coaching and mentoring

initiatives for workers and supervisors foster supportive relationships within teams and between employees and supervisors (Ashford *et al.*, 2003).

Social support from supervisors, defined as employees' perception of receiving help from their superiors, is crucial for self-rated health (Burr *et al.*, 2019; Schmidt *et al.*, 2018). Leaders should enhance communication skills, adopt active listening, show empathy, and convey messages effectively. Promoting a culture of collaboration and mutual support through team-building activities fosters an inclusive work environment. Furthermore, developing strategies to mitigate conflicts is vital for effectively managing disagreements (Mahmoudian, 2023). Sense of Community at Work is related to employees' feelings of belonging (Burr *et al.*, 2019). When individuals feel excluded in the workplace, their self-efficacy decreases (Waller, 2020). Promoting belonging requires an inclusive culture where individuals excel and contribute to organizational goals (Pless & Maak, 2004). Leadership should be transformative, fostering motivation, intellectual encouragement, and consideration for team members. Leadership development initiatives, such as workshops or coaching sessions, are effective in occupational safety prevention and health issues (Kelloway & Barling, 2010).

Social Capital

This domain refers to characteristics of a social structure, namely networks, norms, and social trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation, generating mutual benefit (Putnam, 1995). It contains the Vertical Trust, Horizontal Trust, and Organizational Justice.

Vertical Trust relates to employees' trust in their superiors and vice versa (Burr *et al.*, 2019). It indirectly influences performance (Guinot & Chiva, 2019). Supervisors who demonstrate integrity and benevolence earn employees' trust, fostering support. A lack of trust leads to a culture of silence and low psychological safety (Joo *et al.*, 2023). To build trust, leaders should practice open communication, active listening, and constructive feedback. Transparency, rational decision-making, and appropriate emotional expression are crucial. Consistent behavior from supervisors creates a predictable work environment, reducing stress and anxiety (Ramdas & Sumitha, 2023).

Horizontal Trust relates to whether employees trust their colleagues in their daily work. It can be observed through communication (e.g., the possibility to express attitudes and feelings without fear of others' reactions (Burr *et al.*, 2019). Mistrust and lack of reciprocity are linked to health issues (Suzuki *et al.*, 2010). This dimension significantly impacts organizational climate and team learning more than vertical trust (Agbejule *et al.*, 2021). Trust among team members enhances performance and commitment (Barker & Camarata, 1998). Integrative conflict management strategies, which address all parties' concerns and seek commonalities, are most effective in developing trust (Wertheim, 2017).

Organizational Justice concerns how workers are treated, i.e., whether there is justice. It considers the distribution of tasks and recognition, the sharing process, how conflicts are managed, and how employees' suggestions are dealt (Burr *et al.*, 2019). Employees' perceptions of fairness influence job satisfaction, commitment, engagement, and turnover intentions (Bass & Avolio, 2000). Supervisors can address workplace injustice by explaining resource allocation respectfully, allowing employees to share opinions, and implementing fair provisions. Training initiatives to raise awareness of distributive justice can positively impact employee attitudes and behaviors (Abd Elsalam & Abdelmawgoud, 2023).

Personality

The domain highlights personality characteristics strongly related to coping mechanisms in the face of stress, including self-efficacy. Promoting psychological empowerment enhances employees' perceptions of self-efficacy and their affective commitment to the organization (Ruiz-Fernández *et al.*, 2022; Islam *et al.*, 2014). Encouraging employee participation and involvement in organizational decisions positively impacts self-efficacy and performance (Kim & Beehr, 2017).

Health and Well-Being

It includes Self-Rated Health, Sleep Problems, Stress, Burnout, and Depressive Symptoms.

Self-Rated Health assesses employees' perceptions of their overall health, encompassing physical and emotional aspects (Pavão *et al.*, 2013). To address this, preventive and intervention measures are necessary. Implementing programs to raise awareness about the importance of physical activity is recommended. Occupational gymnastics, which involves workplace exercises, can prevent musculoskeletal injuries and enhance productivity and quality of life (Mendes & Leite, 2008). Ergonomic posture training is also beneficial. Teaching employees proper posture avoids musculoskeletal injuries (Brisson *et al.*, 1999). Additionally, mental health measures are crucial. Creating a safe environment for discussing mental health issues, supporting employees' return after absences, encouraging open communication, and facilitating social activities can improve overall well-being (Public Health Agency, 2014).

Sleep problems, related to sleep quality and interruptions, are linked to increased mortality, morbidity, and workplace accidents (Burr *et al.*, 2019; Watson *et al.*, 2015). Implementing assessment tools like the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Scale (PSQI) is crucial for identifying sleep issues (Buysse *et al.*, 1989). Departments with significant sleep quality problems should refer employees to sleep medicine specialists. Establishing reasonable work schedules to minimize sleep disruptions benefits health (Takahashi, 2012).

Burnout assesses the employee's levels of physical and mental exhaustion and fatigue (Burr *et al.*, 2019). Burnout evaluates employees' physical and mental exhaustion. It is linked to poor health, reduced productivity, and dissatisfaction in work and personal life (Burr *et al.*, 2019). It can lead to increased work-related conflicts, substance abuse, and, in extreme cases, suicide (Wall *et al.*, 2014). Primary prevention requires awareness of burnout's impact, while addressing high-burnout departments to identify stress triggers is essential (Lima & Dolabela, 2021). Tools like the Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT) can screen for burnout (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2020). Tertiary prevention involves providing psychological support and occupational health consultations for affected employees.

Stress, resulting from prolonged exposure to high-demand levels, can be managed through organizational measures that foster supportive relationships among employees (Burr *et al.*, 2019). Providing workers with control over their tasks enhances job satisfaction and work quality. Effective communication strategies and positive supervision, where information and guidance support the team, can mitigate stress. Adopting flexible working hours, decentralizing decision-making, and encouraging regular medical check-ups are other beneficial strategies (Prasad *et al.*, 2015).

Depressive symptoms, as indicators of depression, include feelings of guilt, worthlessness, diminished self-confidence, impaired reasoning, decision-making, concentration, suicidal thoughts, and changes in sleep and appetite (Burr *et al.*, 2019; WHO, 2023; Khan & Sultan, 2020). These symptoms negatively impact employee and organizational performance (Khan & Sultan, 2020). Workplace interventions are essential for raising awareness and equipping managers to identify signs of depression, such as poor posture, reduced interaction, fatigue, and missed deadlines (Khan & Sultan, 2020). Effective programs can restore workers' health, leading to a more efficient workforce (Adrian & Aseel, 2014). Initiatives like flexible working hours and promoting work-life balance are also beneficial (James & Lea, 2006).

Discussion

Given the consequences of psychosocial risks, it is essential not only to assess but also to manage these risks to promote the well-being, productivity, and health of employees (Di Tecco *et al.*, 2023).

Various scientifically validated strategies can be adapted to each organization's specific context. Following the implementation of these practices, a phase of monitoring and evaluation is necessary to ensure their effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, verify the achievement of initial objectives, assess the gains and benefits, consolidate the changes, and, where possible, calculate the profitability resulting from these improvements (Antunes, 2023).

Conclusions

Effective psychosocial risk management practices can significantly reduce costs with absenteeism, errors, and accidents. These practices enhance the organization's attractiveness by positioning it as a good employer, fostering innovation, responsibility, and a future-oriented approach, which benefits the organization's health and well-being, and the broader community (BSI, 2011).

It is important to recognize that managing psychosocial risks is a dynamic and context-dependent process that is constantly evolving (Fernandes & Cotrim, 2023). Reflecting on the insights gained from this research, it becomes evident that the integration of psychosocial risk management into organizational practices is not merely a strategic advantage but a moral imperative. Organizations must recognize the profound impact that prioritizing the psychosocial well-being of their members has on fostering a resilient and thriving future. This commitment to psychosocial health not only enhances the overall organizational culture but also contributes to long-term sustainability and success in an ever-evolving landscape. As organizations navigate the complexities of modern work environments, the prioritization of psychosocial risk management becomes a crucial component in ensuring the well-being of employees and the overall effectiveness of the organization. By embedding these practices into the organizational framework, leaders can create an environment that supports innovation, responsibility, and a proactive approach to health and safety. This holistic perspective underscores the essential role of psychosocial risk management in achieving sustainable organizational growth and community well-being. In addition, and based on our experience, it is evident that while diagnostic procedures are indispensable, it is equally imperative to establish guidelines for sustained intervention. This approach addresses identified risks, particularly considering that certain organizations may lack in-house psychologists to undertake such tasks. A misalignment between the identified issues and the corresponding solutions may undermine the efficacy of the intervention. Our contribution lies in enhancing this process, thus providing significant added value.

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