Presenteeism, Psychological Health and Workplace Performance during the Pandemic

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1. Develop knowledge that promotes prevention in organizational health and occupational health and safety

2. Support organizations and individuals who wish to improve these dimensions of their work environment

To participate in our studies: cgsst.com
The development and execution of our research and knowledge transfer activities would not be possible without the valuable collaboration of our partners.
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Research team

- Project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)
- Co-researcher: Claude Fernet, Full Professor, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières (UQTR)
- Collaborator: Maria Karanika-Murray, Associate Professor, Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom
- Statistician: Hans Ivers, Statistika Consultants
- In partnership with the SOM firm for the data collection: Thank you to all our participants!
Webinar in collaboration with:
Conclusions

1. To treat psychological distress, we must not only treat the individual: we must treat the company and treat the work itself.

2. Creating sustainable, quality jobs: Now more than ever. Don't wait until later.

3. A shared responsibility:
   - I – Individual
   - G - Group
   - L - Leaders
   - O – Organization
Objectives

1. Describe psychological health in the workplace during lockdown
2. Describe work performance during lockdown
3. Describe presenteeism
4. Identify avenues for intervention
During the pandemic

“Corona-coaster

The ups and downs of your mood during the pandemic: one minute you like confinement, and the next, you're crying with anxiety”.

- Anxiety related to deconfinement
- Deteriorating mental health
- Telework: A new reality for many
- Presenteeism

https://www.heart.co.uk/news/coronavirus/hilarious-list-lockdown-lingo/
3 schools of thought to define presenteeism

**European School**
- “Presenteeism as the behaviour of working while ill” (Ruhle et al. 2019)
- Attempt to understand the decision-making process

**North American School**
- Productivity losses associated with working while ill
- Attempt to quantify costs
- Controversy: Presenteeism is defined by its consequences

**Non-work related presenteeism**
- Expand the concept of presenteeism to include non-health-related productivity losses.
- Personal activities during working time
- Controversy: is it deviance, boredom, disengagement?

Prevalence in the Quebec labour force (2008)

Presenteeism: Working while ill

- **Short-term** presenteeism: 40% of Quebec workers do between 1 and 9 days a year
- **Long-term** presenteeism: Nearly 15% do 10 or more days a year
Causes of Presenteeism

- **Environmental**: cultural norms, economics, politics
- **Organisational**: strict absenteeism policies, labour shortages, job insecurity
- **Work-related**: overload, difficulty to get a replacement, lack of support from supervisor, having clients/patients/employees, fear of letting colleagues down, team culture
- **Individuals**: over-commitment (workaholics), financial difficulties, lifestyle, work ethic
Negative consequences

Absenteeism
• Short/Long-term

Presenteeism
• Decrease in quality
• Accidents
• Exhaustion
• Customer dissatisfaction
• Stress and frustration for colleagues
• Health is deteriorating
• Greater risk of absenteeism within 2 years

Present and sick today = exhausted, even sicker and absent tomorrow

WORK IS GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH... ...it's bad working conditions that can be harmful to your health...
yet there are several positive reasons for presenteeism

- Supporting a gradual return to work
- Motivation, sense of accomplishment, performance-related self-esteem
- Reducing workload burden on colleagues during absence
- Reducing economic deprivation due to long-term absences (uninsured, self-employed, contract workers)
- Reduce anxiety of losing control on accumulated workloads
- Showing our commitment to work
- Avoiding a difficult situation at home
Presenteeism as an attempt to balance health and performance

Research to date:

• Considers the number of days of presenteeism, regardless of the degree of health/work performance impairment

• Fails to consider that, in certain contexts, presenteeism could be positive.

Health-Performance Balance: Allows to start untangling the types of presenteeism that different configurations of health and performance can produce

Typology of presenteeism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Work Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Does not apply (person is sick and absent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Does not apply (person is healthy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic presenteeism</td>
<td>Functional presenteeism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysfunctional presenteeism</td>
<td>Overachieving presenteeism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Situation in Quebec during confinement

Methodology

• Data collected by the SOM firm between April 30 and May 7, 2020
• Web panel representative of the Quebec population
• N= 1259 respondents
• Only those who had worked in the past 7 days were surveyed.
### Sample characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th></th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age groups</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>53.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45-64</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65+</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Sec 5 or less</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>College</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University</td>
<td>37.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does not answer</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector</td>
<td>Public administration (mun., prov., fed.)</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health care/social welfare</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emergency services (fire, police, ambulance)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other services open to the public</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job type</td>
<td>Middle/Senior Manager</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Line Manager</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrative or clerical staff</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technician</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Teleworking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Last 7 days</th>
<th>Ordinarily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teleworking</td>
<td>17h</td>
<td>5h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the workplace</td>
<td>19h</td>
<td>33h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>36h</strong></td>
<td><strong>38h</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

38% teleworking only and full time
Indicators of psychological distress

"In the past month, how often have you felt? »

- Nervous
- Hopeless
- Worthless
- So depressed that nothing could cheer you up
- Everything was an effort
- Restless or fidgety

The Kessler Distress Scale is the sum of the answers provided to the questions:

- Never (0)
- Rarely (1)
- Sometimes (2)
- Most of the time (3)
- All the time (4)

Overall score from 0 to 24

Source: EQCOTESST (2011)
Indicators of psychological distress

• Overall score $\geq 7$:
  • Threshold recognized in the literature for its ability to predict the probability of developing a more serious pathology
  • Corresponds to the value of the top quintile of the 2008 EQSP (Québec Population Health Survey) distribution.
  • Threshold used in Québec Population Health Survey 2014-2015 for reasons of comparability
Proportion of people reporting a high level of psychological distress (at risk of or having developed a more serious condition)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quebec population in 2014-2015</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biron et al. (N = 1259 workers in Québec between April 30 and May 7 2020)</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>55.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average = 48%
High distress (%) by employment sector

- Others (teachers, restaurants, drivers, arts, etc.): 55%
- Essential services opened to the public: 51%
- Emergency (firefighters, police, ambulance): 29%
- Health/social services: 61%
- Private: 42%
- Public administration (municipal/provincial/fédéral): 45%

$p<.0001$
Sleep problems

- No problem: 25%
- Weak intensity: 39%
- Moderate intensity: 25%
- High intensity: 11%
High psychologique distress and sleep problems

- No problem: 22%
- Weak intensity: 48%
- Moderate intensity: 61%
- High intensity: 84%

p < .0001
Perception of work performance (10=best possible performance)

- 9 ou 10/10: 43%
- 8/10: 27%
- 7/10 and less: 30%
High Distress and Perception of Job Performance

- Performance 9/10 or 10/10: 34%
- Performance 8/10: 53%
- Performance 7/10 or less: 65%

p < .0001
Presenteeism (working while ill)

Number of days of presenteeism during past week

37%

Aucun, 63%

1-3 days, 14%

4-7 days, 23%
Presenteeism and teleworking

No significant difference

You can do presenteeism while teleworking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Travail en présentiel</th>
<th>Télétravail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aucun présenteeisme</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 à 3 jours de présenteeisme</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4+ jours présenteeisme</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Breakdown by type of presenteeism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Work Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present and healthy (not presenteeism)</td>
<td>Sick and absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic</td>
<td>Dysfunctional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>Overachieving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From: Karanika-Murray & Biron 2019
Whose responsibility is it? IGLO

Individual

Group

Psychosocial risks, psychological health, presenteeism

Leader

Organisation (Governance)

Nielsen et al. 2017
What senior management can do (O)

"Shared Perceptions of Policies, Practices and Procedures for Protecting the Psychological Health and Safety of Workers".

Values - balance between productivity and workers’ health

Dollard and Bakker 2010
Psychosocial safety climate

Management commitment
Senior management acts quickly to correct problems and situations that affect the psychological health of the staff.

Priority
Senior management considers the psychological health of staff to be as important as productivity.

Communication
Information regarding workplace wellness is regularly sent to me by my immediate supervisor.

Participation
In my organization, stress prevention involves all levels of the hierarchy.

Psychosocial safety climate

Management commitment
Senior management show support for stress prevention through involvement and commitment

Priority
Senior management considers employee psychological health to be as important as productivity

Communication
Information about workplace psychological well-being is always brought to my attention by my manager/supervisor

Participation and involvement
Participation and consultation in psychological health and safety occurs with employees’, unions and health and safety representatives

Psychosocial safety climate, psychological distress, and performance at work

- 24% in the proportion of people reporting high levels of distress
- 12% increase of high-performing workers

% high distress

- Weak psychosocial safety climate
- Strong psychosocial safety climate

High performance at work (9 et 10/10)
What Leaders (L) Can Do - Psychosocial Risks and % Reporting High Distress

- Social support supervisor: 58% low, 60% high, 16% decrease
- Workload: 40% low, 60% high, 20% decrease
- Recognition: 62% low, 38% high, 24% decrease
- Job control: 55% low, 44% high, 11% decrease
Resources for Action (in French)

https://www.inspq.qc.ca/publications/2371

Resources in English:
What we can do collectively (G) - Co-worker support and % reporting high levels of distress

- Weak social support (colleagues): % high distress 56, % de haute performance (9 ou 10/10) 42
  - 14% decrease in the proportion of people reporting high distress

- Strong social support (colleagues): % high distress 37, % de haute performance (9 ou 10/10) 47
  - 10% increase in high-performance workers
Idle time : an unexpected protection factor

A colleague, talking about the discussions around the coffee machine:

"What is sad is that, in our accounting view of things, these moments are a waste of time: they will not contribute to any performance index...These moments are worth their weight in gold...I can think of several striking words that encouraged me, supported me, made me see another point of view; words that highlighted the safety net that exists between me and the cliff. These words were all spoken, without agenda or objective, around the coffee machine" (Belleville, Spultin 2020).

"For many, it is perceived as "wasteful" when in fact it is an essential element of psychological health and well-being in the workplace. We are not robots, at least not yet, and we have needs, even in a professional context. (Truchon 2020)
What we can do individually (I)

Connect…
Be in touch with the people around you. Family, friends, colleagues, neighbours. At work, at home, at school or in your community. Think about investing time to develop these relationships. Build relationships that will provide support and enrich your life.

Be active…
Go for a walk or a run, ride your bike, garden, go dancing. Exercise is a great way to stay physically and mentally healthy.

Be mindful…
Be curious, notice things around you. Notice the seasons, the present moment, the world around you.

Continue learning…
Try something new. Rediscover old hobbies. Set yourself a goal you'll be happy to achieve.

Invest yourself…
Do something nice for a relative, for a stranger. Say thank you to someone. Volunteer. As the saying goes, "Charity begins at home", so take time for yourself too.
Conclusions

1. To treat distress, we must not only treat the individual: we must treat the company and treat the work itself.

2. Creating sustainable, quality jobs: Now more than ever. Don't wait until later.

3. A shared responsibility:
   
   I – Individual
   G - Group
   L - Leaders
   O - Organization
On a positive note: a message from the fairies

Thank you!

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