



# Strengthening and supporting work ability

## Objective

The workplace implements measures that are proactive, enable employee to stay at work, and support the employee's return to work.

## Why?

Various work ability support measures are needed at the workplace to promote the employees' work ability and address any challenges related to it. These actions need to target

- at different areas of work ability, such as health, competence and motivation - as well as other factors that impact work ability
- at all stages, i.e. proactive and early support and enhanced support

## Methods to strengthen and support work ability

### Set objectives for supporting work ability

To assess the targeting and impact of work ability support practices, there must be objectives for them. The objectives should be aligned with the workplace's business goals. Make the objectives related to the personnel's well-being at work, work ability and occupational safety as practical as possible (e.g. zero occupational accidents).

## Select indicators to monitor the objectives

The achievement of the objectives related to the personnel's well-being at work, work ability and occupational safety is monitored using proactive and recognized indicators.

Predictive indicators help to prepare for possible personnel risks. Predictive indicators include, for example:

- Employee turnover and competence needs
- Number of near misses and deviations
- Customer satisfaction
- Personnel structure.

Reflective indicators describe past events and outcomes. These include:

- The number of sickness absences
- The costs of disability
- The number of accidents at work.

## Manage stress and strength resources

There will always be various stress factors and resources related to work that need to be identified at the workplace. Only identified stress factors can be addressed and identified resources can be strengthened.

Workload management methods are related to the planning and continuous development of work, tools, the functionality of the work community and the work environment.

Job resources contribute to workload management. Job resources include:

- Clear work tasks and objectives
- Meaningfulness of work
- Opportunities to influence the work and how it is done
- Flexible working hours
- Appropriate workload and allocation
- Sense of community.

The Occupational Safety and Health Act obligates the employer to prevent harmful stress. Management requires the participation, collaboration and competence of everyone in the workplace. Occupational health care can help in finding solutions.

## **Carry out a systematic risk assessment**

The employer must identify the hazards and stress factors at the workplace and assess the magnitude of the risks. This is a continuous activity and is carried out in collaboration between the employer and employees. The risk assessment is carried out in writing so that it can be reviewed and used to demonstrate the assessment to the occupational safety and health authority, if necessary. Once hazards and stress factors have been identified, the necessary measures must be taken to eliminate or reduce them, and the effects of the measures must be monitored.

## **Enable competence development**

The requirements of work and the competence of the employees must be aligned, as either too great or too small requirements can cause stress. The ability to develop competencies will boost employees' motivation and commitment to the workplace. Competence development does not always mean participation in training. It can also be done as part of daily work, for example by jointly development of workplace practices, services and products. A performance appraisal provides the supervisor information on the employee's competence, competence needs and future aspirations.

## **Encourage a healthy lifestyle**

Exercise, healthy nutrition, good recovery together with abstaining from smoking and substance abuse all promote work ability. Ways for the workplace to promote these include measures such as enabling regular breaks, encouraging exercise during breaks and offering exercise benefits. The employer can support healthy eating by providing a lunch benefit and healthy snacks for meetings.

## **Modify work when necessary**

Job accommodation is one of the most effective ways to support work ability. An employee may require temporary or permanent job accommodations due to, for example, an injury, illness, life situation, or cultural background. Job accommodation may concern a variety of factors such as work schedules, organization of work, work environment, use of assistive technology or commuting.

Workplace accommodations should be considered together with the employees already before any modifications are relevant for any employee. Many solutions are free of charge. However, the employer may be able to apply for a subsidy for workplace accommodations from employment services if the injury or illness of a new or current employee requires the acquisition of equipment, modifications to the workplace (such as accessible routes or help provided by another employee).

## Take employees in different career and life stages into account

People in different life and career stages have different work–life balance needs. At the workplace, these needs can be met by organizing work and adjusting working hours as well as individual flexibility, such as reduced working hours, reduced night shifts and the ability to work remotely. Such flexibility supports employees' ability to work and continue working.

## Tools

- [Supporting Mental Health at Work | The Mental Health Toolkit \(ttl.fi\)](#)
- [Recovery Calculator | The Mental Health Toolkit \(ttl.fi\)](#)
- [Exercise According to Work | The Mental Health Toolkit \(ttl.fi\)](#)
- [Mind and Job Accommodation | The Mental Health Toolkit \(ttl.fi\)](#)

## Additional reading

- [Occupational health care supporting entrepreneurs | Finnish Institute of Occupational Health \(ttl.fi\)](#) (only in Finnish)
- [Hazard identification and risk assessment | The Centre for Occupational Safety \(ttk.fi\)](#)
- [Supporting work ability at the workplace | Suomi.fi](#)