SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Link between United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and *CSA Z1003 Psychological health and safety in the workplace – Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation*

Enabling Sustainable Development through Standards







United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Addressed:

SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being
SDG 5 – Gender equality: Achieve gender equity and empower all women and girls
SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth
SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities,
SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

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About CSA Group

CSA Group is a global organization dedicated to safety, social good and sustainability. We are a leader in North American Standards and in Testing, Inspection and Certification around the world. Our mandate is to hold the future to a higher standard. The mission of CSA Group's not-for-profit Standards organization is to enhance the lives of Canadians through the advancement of standards in the public and private sectors. We are a leader in standards research, development, education, and advocacy. The technical and management standards developed with our more than 11,000 members improve safety, health, the environment, and economic efficiency in Canada and beyond.



Prepared for CSA Group by Delphi

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Summary

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of aspirational targets that aim to define global sustainable development priorities and mobilize efforts to address them in a comprehensive and integrated manner. Adopted by all United Nations (UN) member states in 2015, the 17 goals call for worldwide action among governments, businesses and civil society on issues including poverty, gender equality, water pollution and clean energy.

Canadian Standards Association (CSA Group), a North American leader in standards development, has conducted research to demonstrate how standards can help organizations achieve their SDG-related objectives.

This case study examines how CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013 (R2022) *Psychological health and safety in the workplace – Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation ("CSA Z1003")* can contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. Interviews with users of the National Standard and technical experts revealed that implementation of the National Standard could result in progress toward several SDGs (3, 5, 8, 10, 16). As this National Standard is non-prescriptive in nature, many of the links to the SDGs were contingent on implementation and were therefore more indirect or enabling in nature.



1 Introduction

CAN/CSA-Z1003-13/BNQ 9700-803/2013 (R2022) Psychological health and safety in the workplace – Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation, is a voluntary standard that specifies a documented and systemic approach to develop, sustain, and continually improve a psychologically healthy and safe workplace. Published in 2013, it is the first of its kind in the world and has been adopted by diverse organizations in many sectors. This standard is constructed around three pillars of psychological health and safety:

1. Prevention of harm (psychological safety of employees);
2. Promotion of health (maintaining and promoting psychological health);
3. Resolution of incidents or concerns.

The approach outlined in this standard is built around thirteen identified and measurable workplace factors:

1. **Organizational Culture:** a mix of norms, values, beliefs, meanings, and expectations held in common that guide behaviour and problem-solving.
2. **Psychological and Social Support:** supportive interactions and organizational support that entre workers' psychological well-being.
3. **Clear Leadership and Expectations:** effective leadership that provides clear support, expectations, and communication.
4. **Civility and Respect:** a respectful and considerate work environment for all interactions.
5. **Psychological Demands:** Assessment of job demands to identify and mitigate psychological risks.
6. **Growth and Development:** encouragement and support for workers to develop their skills and competencies.
7. **Recognition and Reward:** fair and timely acknowledgement of workers' efforts for achievements.
8. **Involvement and Influence:** inclusion of workers in discussions and decisions related to their work.
9. **Workload Management:** ensuring tasks and responsibilities can be accomplished within the available time with adequate resources.
10. **Engagement:** workers feeling connected, motivated, and committed to their work and the organization's success.
11. **Balance:** acceptance of the need for harmony between personal, family and work demands.
12. **Psychological Protection:** ensuring workers from psychological safety and promoting emotional well-being.
13. **Protection of Physical Safety:** protecting workers from physical and psychological hazards in the work environment.

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These factors encompass working conditions, management practice and the decision-making process. When effectively incorporated into a workplace, they positively impact psychological health and safety.

Improving psychological health and safety creates value for a business by making links with risk mitigation, cost-effectiveness, recruitment and retention, organizational excellence, and sustainability. This standard includes annexes with resources, including a sample audit tool, and descriptions of implementation scenarios for large and small enterprises. Many sectors have customized this standard for different contexts; for example, *CSA Z1003.1 Psychological health and safety in the paramedic service organization*.

CSA Group has identified an opportunity to raise awareness about the SDGs among standards users and explore how standards might help them achieve their SDG-related objectives. As part of this initiative, CSA Group conducted a mapping exercise in which this standard and others were mapped to the 17 SDGs and links were identified. This case study will complement existing case studies published by CSA Group and further explore these links.

This case study was written based on information gathered from publicly available sources (e.g. CSA Group and the United Nation's SDG websites) but primarily focused on interviews with users and other experts on CSA Z1003. The goal of the interviews was to better understand how the standard is being used in practice and what benefits are being observed as a result, allowing an assessment of the potential contributions to the SDGs.

This research validated the results of CSA Group's previous mapping exercise, which suggested links to SDG 3, 8, 10, and 16, and uncovered additional potential contributions to targets with those goals as well as goal 5.



SDG 3 – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.



SDG 5 – Gender equality: Achieve gender equity and empower all women and girls



SDG 8 – Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.



SDG 10 – Reduce inequality within and among countries.



SDG 16 – Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.



2 Results and Impact

2.1 Industry Use and Perception of Codes

Interviewees for this case study included a consultant in mental health and wellness (whose firm was one of the early adopters of the standard), a practitioner in HR and workplace mental health, and members of the Technical Committee for the standard.

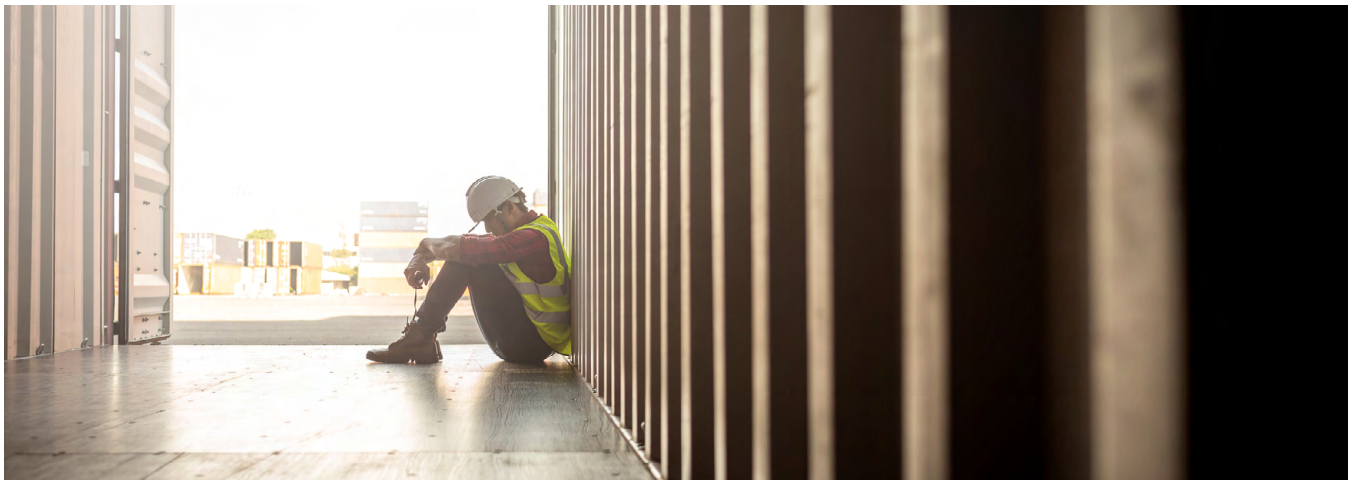
Interviewees shared examples of actions that were taken as a result of implementing the standard. These included the creation of wellness committees, spring challenges to get employees out for walks, biweekly huddles to connect, check-ins for remote workers, sharing relevant articles, and bringing in speakers on mental health topics. In some organizations, job descriptions had a health and safety component to them, identifying psychological risks related to the role (e.g., sitting for prolonged periods of time, tight timelines, occasions where there is excessive work). Interviewees highlighted the importance of engaging employees and hearing their concerns, for example through team/individual meetings, or anonymous surveys. One organization sends out a survey every year asking employees which of the 13 workplace factors are the most challenging for them. This actively helps the organization identify where it needs to focus efforts year to year. The importance of having buy-in from leadership also emerged as a key issue.

When asked to share examples of how using the standard benefited their organization, interviewees spoke about challenges related to measuring outcomes. However, the consensus was that the results were positive. One interviewee stated that potential employees approach them and say "I have heard so many great things about your organization and how mental health is ingrained in what you do. I want to work for that kind of company." They also commented that the turnover rate in their organization was very low, something they attributed (at least partly) to their positive psychological health and safety practices. Others pointed to the fact that the standard provides something concrete to reference when encouraging employees to embrace the spirit of the workplace factors. A Mental Health Commission of Canada study[i] that investigated the progress of 40 organizations that implemented CSA Z1003 found a measurable improvement in psychological factors in all cases, supporting the potential of the standard to lead to positive outcomes for organizations.

2.2 Links to UN SDGs

Overall, there was enthusiasm for the concept of the SDGs, but users of the standard have not adopted them in their organizations. One user commented that, although it had not been a focus within their organization, they had been hearing a lot more about climate change and are being asked in Request for Proposals (RFPs) to identify what they are doing around Environment, Social, and Governance (ESG). Many of the interviewees were active in the 'social' aspects of ESG within their organizations, perhaps not surprising given their areas of expertise and practice. The Technical Committee members were familiar with the SDGs in the context of CSA Group's mapping exercise.

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The research revealed that the standard has the potential to contribute to a number of SDGs, including those previously identified in CSA Group's mapping exercise (SDG 3, 8, 10 and 16), as well as additional SDGs that had not been previously linked (SDG 5). They are described in more detail below.

UN SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Target 3.4: *By 2030, reduce by one-third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being.*

The UN indicators for this target are 1) the mortality rate attributed to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, or chronic respiratory disease, and 2) suicide rates. There is a well-documented link between stress and negative physical outcomes. Studies have shown that psychological distress is associated with an increased risk of mortality from several major causes of death including cardiovascular disease and cancer.[ii] Interviewees agreed that improving psychological health and safety could reduce mortality rates by reducing workplace-related stress. One interviewee commented on the wording used in the target reflecting on the significance of going beyond mental illness. Another interviewee referenced a report that found employees that feel higher levels of inclusion were less likely to go on disability or use sick time.[iii]

Target 3.5 *Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol.*

Given that there is a well-documented connection between mental health and substance use[iv], this is another potential link that could be explored. In reflecting on the interrelatedness of these issues (and the standards that relate to them), one interviewee commented on *CSA Z1008 Management of impairment in the workplace*, which recognizes that impairment originates from all sorts of different cognitive and physical factors, including substance use, which is closely tied to mental health issues.

UN SDG 5 Gender equality: Achieve gender equity and empower all women and girls

Target 5.1 *End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.*

Target 5.5 *Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making, economic and public life.*

Interviewees felt that the National Standard contributes to this SDG including both targets listed above. One interviewee felt it contributed to equality and inclusion simply by asking "what needs to be different? How or what is your experience of the workplace?". The interviewee reflected on research they had conducted, including interviews with 40 inclusion experts, saying

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"I walked away from it realizing that inclusion IS psychological safety. It's the same thing. So, if we want equity for everyone, regardless of gender, then psychological safety is the way to do it in the workplace because every voice is heard. Every person feels safe to speak up and issues are addressed and resolved. It's gender equality, race equality, and disability and ability equality." This sentiment was echoed by other experts, who highlighted the connection between equity and psychological safety. One interviewee noted that a psychologically safe workplace is one in which diverse definitions of what it means to have a fulfilling career are recognized. While the standard does not explicitly address gender issues, it indirectly allows for a contribution toward this goal by considering the diversity and psychological safety of all individuals.

UN SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Target 8.8 *Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.*

This target addresses the development of safe and secure working environments, which include both psychological safety and physical safety. Interviewees emphasized the interconnectedness of the two. Physical safety is one of the workplace factors listed in the standard. As one interviewee stated, "If you go into work afraid that you might be hurt because the equipment that you need to be safe is not available to you, then that has an impact on psychological health and safety."

Interviewees mentioned vulnerable workers and new Canadians, who may be at higher risk for workplace injuries, may not feel comfortable speaking up due to language or cultural barriers. One interviewee emphasized that employees may be reluctant to advocate for themselves, especially as economics become more stressful and people are worried about their financial health. The interviewee highlighted how the Standard speaks to that by facilitating cultures that remove fear and encourage all voices to be heard.

UN SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Target 10.2 *By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.*

This was identified as a potential area for contribution by CSA Group's previous mapping exercise. Interviewees were initially unsure, due to some confusion around the wording of the goal ("among countries" was interpreted to mean at the country level). After some discussion, interviewees felt there could be a potential to reduce inequality (mostly within countries) and make contributions to target 10.2, Higher inclusivity in the workplace, which is linked to increased psychological safety, could help organizations contribute to this target. One interviewee highlighted the potential for flexible work policies to support more inclusion.

UN SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Target 16.1 *Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.*

The UN indicators for this target measure the proportion of the population subjected to three kinds of violence: physical violence, psychological violence, and sexual violence. As discussed in previous sections, there is a strong link between physical safety and psychological safety. This target sets out goals around a reduction in violence everywhere, which includes the workplace, where the standard can have an impact.

Target 16.7 *Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.*

The UN measures progress against this target based on the proportion of the population who feel decision-making is inclusive and responsive by sex, age, disability and population group. This could apply to

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decisions made in government or other institutions but could also apply to workplace decisions. A psychologically safe work environment is one in which individuals feel comfortable speaking up and feel that they are heard, as discussed in previous sections of this case study on equity and inclusion. The indicator for this target is a good example of data that could be gathered to demonstrate progress towards this goal; for example, a survey that asks employees to what extent they feel decision-making is inclusive.

3 Discussion

Given the non-prescriptive nature of this standard, the extent to which it contributes to any of the SDGs depends on how it is implemented by an organization. There is a risk the standard could be implemented as a "check box" exercise, which would reduce contribution to the SDGs. For example, the standard asks for "meaningful participation" from employees, but there can be wide variation in terms of how that is operationalized.

Users commented on the changing nature of this space, particularly after the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, with respect to both the increase in mental health challenges and the challenges of fostering connection in more remote and isolated work environments.

A key objective of CSA Group's research on the SDGs is establishing standards as a tool to help organizations make meaningful connections to the SDGs. Demonstrating measurable progress against targets is often a challenge for organizations. While the standard requires organizations to (1) document psychological health and safety objectives and targets for relevant functions at all levels of the organization (4.3.7), and (2) monitor and measure psychological injury and illness statistics (4.5.2.2), there are no specific requirements for how these activities should be done. Some data is difficult to collect, and some organizations may not measure or report on the information.

Some organizations have a mandate to share this information (e.g., governments and schools), but data collected in these contexts may not be transferable to other settings. Even with the right data, there are many confounding variables in trying to predict outcomes



related to psychological health and safety, making it difficult to establish a connection between the implementation of the standard and a contribution to the SDG targets. Interviewees mentioned challenges in drawing a correlation between the use of the standard and a particular outcome due to a lack of consistency in terms of how the standard was implemented, other resources or tools that were used, and/or cultural changes in a particular sector. Despite this, interviewees felt that, anecdotally, there is potential to make a strong connection between the standard and the SDGs listed above, but also emphasized the importance of having evidence to back up any claims.

4 Conclusion and Next Steps

This research validated the results of CSA Group's previous mapping exercise, which suggested links between CSA Z1003 and SDG 3, 8, 10, and 16. In addition, it has uncovered potential contributions to SDG 5. These contributions were often a result of the connections between psychological safety and equity, inclusion, and physical safety. Interviewees also mentioned future revisions of the National Standard may focus more explicitly on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) considerations, which could further strengthen its connection to several SDGs.

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Endnotes

i Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2017. Case Study Research Report Findings

ii Russ et al, 2012. Association between psychological distress and mortality: individual participant pooled analysis of 10 prospective cohort studies. British Journal of Medicine; 345

iii Lee-Baggley, D. Howatt, B. 2023. Employees' perceived psychological health and safety experience during COVID-19 through an inclusion lens. Canadian Standards Association, Toronto, ON

iv Sinha, R. 2009. Chronic stress, drug use, and vulnerability to addition. Annals of the New York Academy of Science Journal

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