Insights.

Sonder

A simple overview of ISO 45003

What the new guidelines mean for managing psychosocial risks in the workplace

Updated

# Contents

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Introduction

In a perfect world, every workplace is safe, every employee is well, every person is engaged and productive, every organisation fulfils its moral and financial objectives, and everyone involved 'does the right thing'. There are no risks to brand reputation, no workplace harassment claims, no compensation costs, no litigations, no retention issues, and no lives lost to suicide.

In reality, we know that in the UK alone, poor mental health costs the economy £118 billion per year. News feeds are full of #MeToo, burnout, boreout, bullying, and headlines such as, "25% of employees say they will change jobs within 12 months."

In the past 18 months, CEOs, board members, HSE professionals, and People and Culture Directors have anxiously watched as:

· Burnout stole the limelight at Microsoft, LinkedIn, Bumble, and Nike, prompting each company to give their employees one week off to recover

26%
say they will change jobs in 12 months
PwC

£118B
PER YEAR
cost of mental health problems on UK economy
LSE

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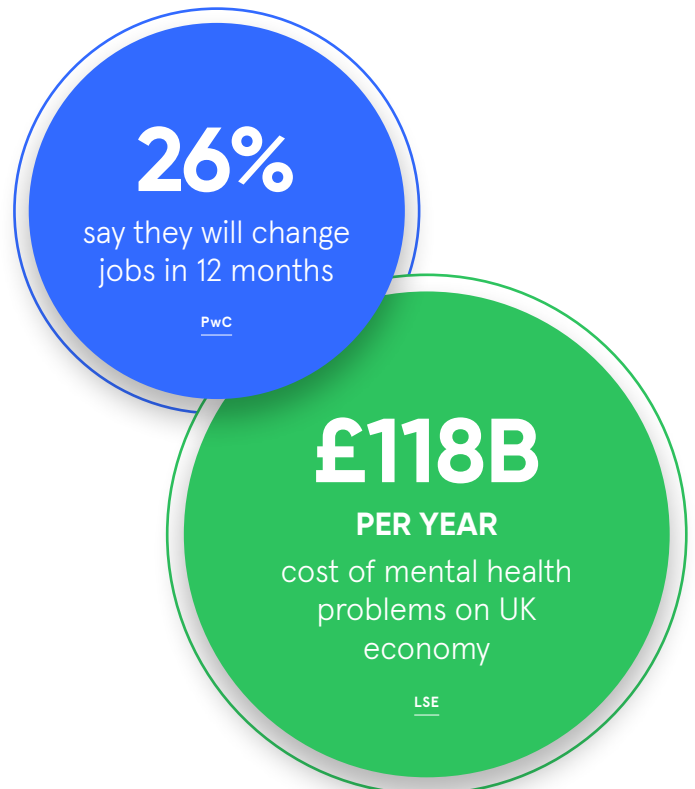
· Almost one-third of UK workers say they've quit a job because of a negative workplace culture, according to a survey from the CMI that underlines the risks of managers failing to rein in toxic behaviour

· The Health and Safety Executive estimated that 30.8 million working days were lost due to work-related ill health in 2021/22. Stress, depression or anxiety and musculoskeletal disorders accounted for the majority of days lost

· A survey by the union Unite found 25% of over 650 staff working for MPs had experienced or witnessed bullying. Allegations of bullying in Westminster have even led to the departure of high-ranking MPs

The launch of ISO 45003 is a timely reminder that organisations have both a responsibility and an incentive to create **safe and healthy workplaces** if they care about employee wellbeing, recruitment, retention, productivity, innovation, brand reputation, and organisational resilience.

What is
ISO 45003?

Published in June 2021, ISO 45003 is the first global standard that provides specific guidance on the **management of psychosocial risks and promotion of wellbeing at work,** in a manner consistent with other health and safety risks in the workplace.

The new standard is applicable to organisations of all sizes and in all sectors. It is intended to be used in conjunction with its parent standard, ISO 45001, which contains requirements and guidance on planning, implementing, reviewing, evaluating and improving an OH&S management system.

At its core, ISO 45003 is a risk management tool to help organisations in their shared responsibility to **build safer and healthier workplaces**. What makes it unique is that it emphasises the business imperative for promoting and protecting psychological (not just physical) health in the workplace.

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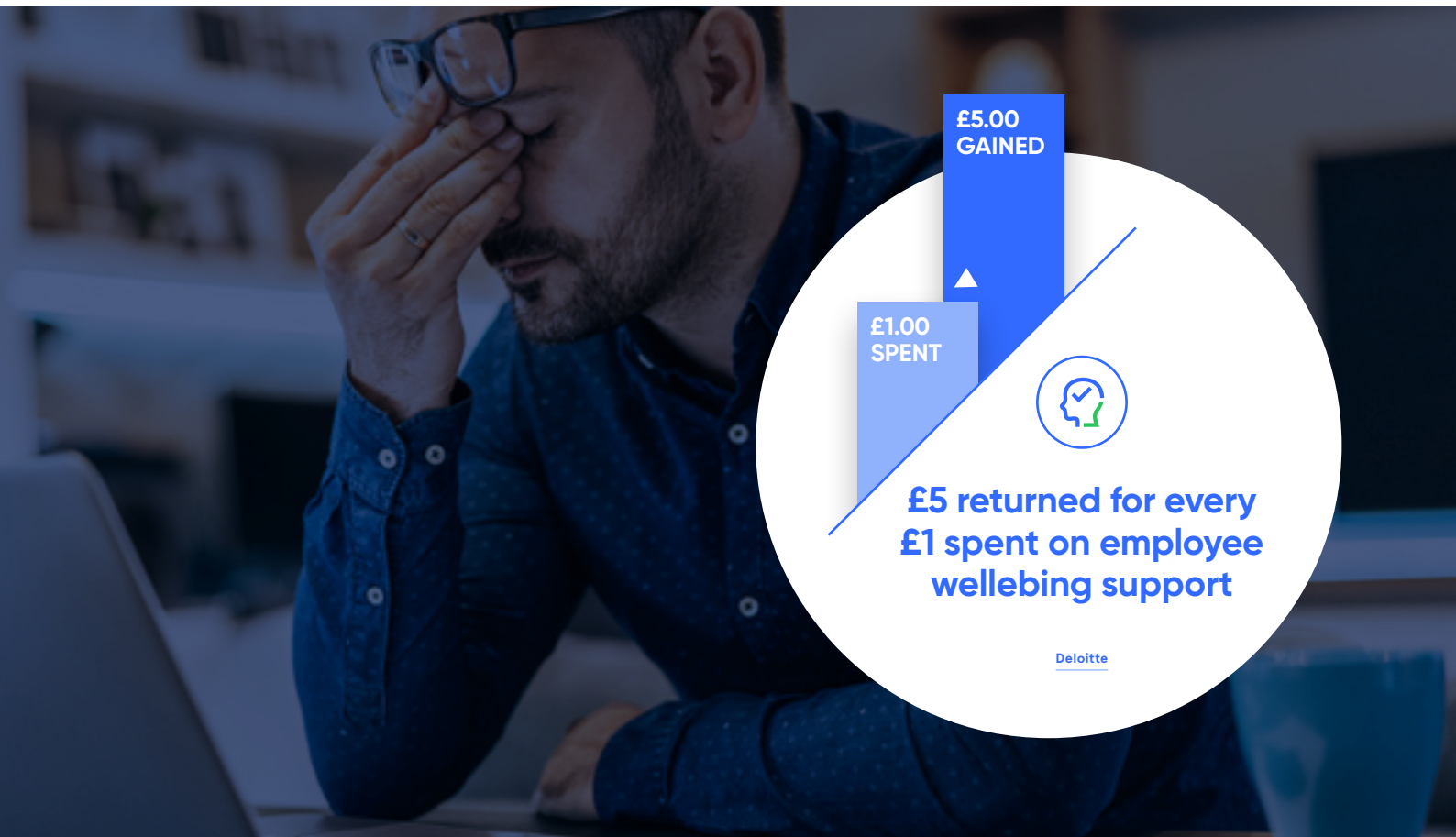
Do organisations need to comply?

From a legal perspective, adherence to ISO 45003 is recommended, but not strictly mandatory, because it is a guidance standard not a requirements standard, with no official certification and no compliance check.

From a business perspective, ISO 45003's best practice recommendations offer many potential business gains, and dismissing the standard might arguably be considered negligent if a regulator were to determine that an organisation was aware of the best practice but chose to ignore it.

The opportunity

The beauty of guidance standards, such as the new ISO 45003, is their window of opportunity for organisations to **lead from the front**.

Peter Kelly, a senior psychologist and an original member on the Standards Committee UK for Management Standards for Psychological Health and Safety, suggests, "Don't see [ISO 45003] as something that's adding a burden, see [it as] a key to opening the doors to get better workplaces for people."

£5.00 GAINED

£1.00 SPENT

£5 returned for every £1 spent on employee wellebing support

Deloitte

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Why is ISO 45003 important?

ISO 45003 represents an affirmative step towards employee wellbeing. It expands the traditional workplace focus on physical health and safety to consider the equally important workplace need for psychological health and safety. Employees and organisations that commit to ISO 45003 and the effective management of psychosocial risks can benefit directly and indirectly, in the short and long term.

Positive outcomes for employees

- ✓ Greater wellbeing at work
- ✓ Motivation to perform well
- ✓ Clear role clarity and better workload balance
- ✓ Peace of mind that work is a safe place
- ✓ Diverse and collaborative environment
- ✓ Sense of pride in the workplace
- ✓ Improved health and health behaviours
- ✓ Enhanced job satisfaction
- ✓ Increased job productivity
- ✓ Less need for workers' compensation
- ✓ Supportive environment for speaking up
- ✓ Decreased inclination to quit

Positive outcomes for organisations

- ✓ Higher employee wellbeing rates
- ✓ Engaged and high performing workforce
- ✓ Reduced performance management and retraining
- ✓ Safer and more inclusive work environment
- ✓ Greater idea sharing and innovation
- ✓ Enhanced reputation and ability to attract talent
- ✓ Reduced absenteeism and presenteeism
- ✓ Higher retention and lowered recruitment costs
- ✓ Improved productivity and work/product quality
- ✓ Reduction of workers' compensation claims
- ✓ Fewer workplace investigations and less litigation
- ✓ Strengthened organisational resilience

50% OF EMPLOYEES
currently feel or have felt **bullied or harassed at work**

35% OF EMPLOYEES
have experienced workplace aggression **from managers**

42% OF EMPLOYEES
have taken time off work in the last 12 months due to concerns about **their mental wellbeing**

Source: October 2021 Sonder survey (conducted by McGregor Tan) of 1,025 employees in Australia working a minimum of 20 hours per week.

Definitions

Psychosocial risks

Psychosocial hazards

relate to how work is organised, social factors at work, and aspects of the work environment, equipment and hazardous tasks.

ISO

Psychosocial risk

relates to the potential of these types of hazards to cause several types of outcomes on individual health, safety and wellbeing, and on organisational performance and sustainability.

ISO

Psychosocial risks at work

are factors that may affect a worker's psychological response to their work and workplace conditions, and may result in poor health and poor health behaviours (including reduced productivity and absences from work).

ISO

- Lack of manager support
- Lack of job clarity
- Workload too high or too low
- Exclusion, remote or isolated work
- Bullying and harassment
- Remote or isolated work
- Violent or traumatic events
- Poor change management
- Lack of control of the work, working methods and decision making
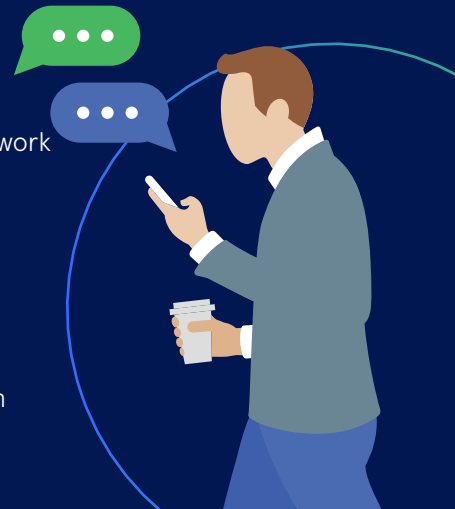
Poor health

- High stress, anxiety and burnout
- Fatigue
- Impaired immune response
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Sleep disorders
- Musculoskeletal disorders
- Cardiovascular disease
- Inflammation disorders

Poor health behaviours

- Poor diet
- Smoking
- Aggression
- Substance misuse
- Self-medication
- Withdrawal from social activities
- Low levels of physical activity
- Failing to show up for work
- Lack of adherence to prescribed medication

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Wellbeing at work

Wellbeing

"Encompasses the health of the whole person – physical, mental, social and emotional" and "is most likely to flourish in a supportive and inclusive environment".

Be You

Workplace Wellbeing (ISO 45003)

Defined in ISO 45003 as the "fulfilment of the **physical, mental, social** and **cognitive** needs and expectations of a worker related to their work". It "relates to all aspects of working life, including work organisation, social factors at work, and work environment and hazardous tasks". It "can also contribute to the quality of life outside of work".

ISO

Workplace Wellbeing (ILO)

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) considers workplace wellbeing "a key factor in determining an organisation's long-term effectiveness [as] many studies show a direct link between productivity levels and the general health and wellbeing of the workforce".

ILO

Physical

Social < **Wellbeing** > **Mental**

Cognitive

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Inside ISO 45003

ISO 45003 is structured into ten sections and three tables, as follows:

Sections

1 **Scope**

2 **Normative references**

3 **Terms and definitions**

4 **Context of the organisation**

- Understanding the organisation and its context
  - General
  - External issues
  - Internal issues
- Understanding the needs and expectations of workers and other interested parties
- Determining the scope of the OH&S management system
- OH&S management system

5 **Leadership and worker participation**

- Leadership and commitment
- OH&S policy
- Organisational roles, responsibilities and authorities
- Consultation and participation of workers

6 **Planning**

- Actions to address risks and opportunities
  - General
  - Hazard identification and assessment of risks and opportunities
- Objectives to address psychosocial risk

7 **Support**

- Resources
- Competence
- Awareness
- Communication
- Documented information
  - General
  - Confidentiality

8 **Operation**

- Operational planning and control
  - General
  - Eliminating hazards, reducing OH&S risks and promoting wellbeing at work
    + Psychosocial risk control measures
    + Signs of exposure to psychosocial risk
  - Management of change
  - Procurement, contracting and outsourcing
  - Emergency preparedness and response
- Rehabilitation and return to work

9 **Performance evaluation**

- Monitoring, measurement, analysis and performance evaluation
- Internal audit
- Management review

10 **Improvement**

- General
- Incident, nonconformity and corrective action
- Continual improvement

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Tables

TABLE 1

Aspects of how work is organised

· Roles and expectations
· Job control or autonomy
· Job demands
· Organisational change management
· Remote and isolated work
· Workload and work pace
· Working hours and schedule
· Job security and precarious work

TABLE 2

Social factors at work

· Interpersonal relationships
· Leadership
· Organisational/workgroup culture
· Recognition and reward
· Career development
· Support
· Supervision
· Civility and respect
· Work/life balance
· Violence at work
· Harassment
· Bullying and victimisation

TABLE 3

Work environment, equipment and hazardous tasks

FAQs

Is ISO 45003 mandatory or recommended?

The ISO 45003 is voluntary. The only exception to this is when a standard is cited in a particular country's legislation. Compliance with a standard can also become a contractual requirement.

It is intended to complement the requirements in ISO 45001 and guide organisations on how to address OH&S issues relating to psychological health within their general OH&S management system.

What if the psychosocial risks are from home, not from work?

For those in hybrid or remote work arrangements, the assessment of psychosocial risks should take into account all risks, regardless of where work is performed.

How does ISO 45003 fit into the ISO 45000 family?

ISO 45003:21 Occupational health and safety management — Psychological health and safety at work — Guidelines for managing psychosocial risks is a child standard of *ISO 45001:2018 Occupational health and safety management systems — Requirements with guidance for use.* ISO 45003 provides more specific psychological risk guidance and helps users satisfy the requirements of ISO 45001.

Does ISO 45003 give specific metrics around performance measurement or examples of how to best capture incident data?

No. ISO 45003 gives general guidance, but more specific details are expected in *ISO/WD 45004 Occupational health and safety management — Guidelines on performance evaluation,* which is currently in development.

Are there psychosocial risks associated with returning to the office?

Whether returning to the office after an absence from work, a worker may experience change (for example, to routines, office set up, team structure, face time, and more) and this can be considered a psychosocial risk. Following ISO 45003 guidelines, the key to managing these risks is genuine consideration, honest consultation, and clear communication.

Do we need ISO 45003 certification?

No, unlike ISO 45001, there is no official certification available for ISO 45003. It is a guidance standard, not a requirements standard.

Next steps

ISO 45003 offers a standard for best practice, not a magic wand. As the ISO states, "The success of psychosocial risk management depends on commitment from all levels and functions of the organisation, especially from top management".

Perhaps the best advice comes from Mary Ann Baynton, who was instrumental in crafting *The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (2013)*. She suggests that wherever an organisation is on their maturity scale,

" start where you are at. Think about what you'd like to be different... Don't delay starting to address psychological health and safety because you don't have the ability to do it all. Just find something... There [are] lots of ways to start, but start."

Mary Ann Baynton, 2021

Disclaimer
This document covers legal and technical issues in a general way. It is not designed to express opinions on specific cases. It is intended for information purposes only and should not be regarded as legal advice. Further advice should be obtained before taking action on any issue dealt with in this document.

About us

Sonder is an Active Care technology company that helps organisations improve the wellbeing of their people so they perform at their best.

Our mobile app provides immediate, 24/7 support from a team of safety, medical, and mental health professionals - plus onsite help for time-sensitive scenarios.

Accredited by the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS), our platform gives leaders the insights they need to act on tomorrow's wellbeing challenges today.

Immediate assessment

Chat with a Sonder care specialist in 15 seconds or less - day or night

In-person response

Get on-the-ground assistance so you're not alone in difficult times

Sonder specialists

Access our clinical team of registered nurses, doctors, psychologists, and more

Wellbeing resources

Build a happier, healthier you - in just a few minutes a day

Safety scanning

Avoid unsafe situations and outcomes before they arise

Care in
your hands

Sonder