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ISO 45003

Psychological health
and safety management
– Most asked questions

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What is ISO 45003?

ISO 45003 is a new occupational health and safety guidance standard designed to support organizations to appreciate and achieve psychological health, safety and well-being in their workplace, to avoid psychosocial risks and unlock the full potential of their people.

What type of organization can use ISO 45003?

ISO 45003 is designed to be used by organizations of all sizes and across all sectors. It has been written to provide clear and simple guidance with relevant examples that will support organizations irrespective of scale or sector.

Is this standard mandatory or voluntary?

All standards are voluntary. The only exception to this is when a standard is cited in a particular country's legislation. Conformance with a standard can also become a contractual requirement.

Do I need to be an expert or doctor in psychological health to use ISO 45003?

No. It's important to understand that psychological health and safety management needs the same skills and approaches as other health and safety risks. You don't need to be a psychologist. As with any health and safety risk, you do need to be able to identify the hazards, assess the risks and know what organizational level changes are needed to manage the risk. ISO 45003 is designed to help you do this for psychosocial risks.

How does it relate to other ISO standards?

ISO 45003 mirrors the structure of ISO 45001 and is written so that psychosocial risk is managed as part of an ISO 45001 based management system. The structure is also aligned to other ISO standards such as ISO 14001, ISO/IEC 27001 and ISO 9001. This means that it can be easily integrated with other standards.

How does it relate to ISO 45001 – occupational health and safety management system?

ISO 45003 has been designed to be used with ISO 45001 as it is about the management of health and safety risks, but ISO 45003 recognizes that psychological health, safety and well-being are not always fully addressed within existing health and safety management. Ideally, organizations will use ISO 45001 and ISO 45003 together, however organizations don't need to be using ISO 45001 to use and get the benefits from ISO 45003.

What are psychosocial risks?

This specific term is used to describe potentially negative impacts on psychological health and safety in the workplace. It describes the factors within the workplace and the work we do that can negatively impact a worker's psychological and physical health. Psychosocial risks can be introduced by the way we work, including workloads, deadlines, the type of work, isolation, and work/life balance. Contributing social factors include culture, working relationships, bullying, harassment, fairness, and career development. Other hazards that can give rise to psychological harm include high noise levels, thermal discomfort, pain from musculoskeletal disorders, fear of violence and aggression, or even witnessing an incident:
Watch the video

How does ISO 45003 relate to ISO 9001 (and IATF 16949 and AS/EN/ JISQ 9100) – quality management systems?

ISO 45003 can be used to support conformance to Clause 7.1.4 to provide a suitable environment for the operation of the processes for quality management. This includes social, psychological and physical factors.

Who are the right people in my organization to implement ISO 45003?

This varies from organization to organization. As ISO 45003 is designed to support ISO 45001, for many organizations the health and safety team may lead implementation. For others, it may be the HR team or even the quality team. Whichever function 'leads', it will be essential for functional teams to work together, in particular health and safety and human resources, as ISO 45003 will draw on expertise from both areas.

What can we do to identify psychosocial hazards in our workplace?

It is important to understand that ISO 45003 is about managing organizational risks, and not individual issues. Organizational hazards can be identified in a number of ways, for example: analysing tasks, schedules and location, consulting with workers, worker surveys, exit interviews, standardized questionnaires, audits and data sources such as complaints, grievances, absence and attrition rates.

How do you assess and manage psychosocial risks?

You approach it the same way as you would any type of health and safety risk. Once you identify the hazards, you identify who may be harmed, the likelihood and consequence. You can then use the same quantitative or qualitative methods that you use for other health and safety risks to identify the level of risk. As with other health and safety risks, the aim is then to eliminate that risk at an organizational level, and where it can't be eliminated to put in other measures to reduce the risk as much as possible.

Can ISO 45003 help organizations with the challenges and opportunities arising from COVID-19 and changes like more flexible/home working?
Yes. Change is one of the most common psychosocial hazards that can arise, and there is a lot of change going on as a result of the pandemic. This can create risks and opportunities for psychological health and safety management. For instance, more flexible approaches to working locations, such as home can introduce opportunities for improved work/life balance through reduced commuting; or risks associated with feelings of isolation or challenges 'switching off'.

Can ISO 45003 help organizations create fair and respectful workplaces that are diverse and inclusive?
Many psychosocial risks that arise from poor psychological health and safety management are directly linked with poor practices in relation to equity, diversity and inclusion, and failing to create a decent, fair and respectful workplace. This is why ISO 45003 reinforces the need to assess psychosocial risks by considering the diversity of the workforce. Psychological health and safety management is an essential part an organizations equity, diversity and inclusion strategies.

How does ISO 45003 contribute to workplace well-being?
ISO 45003 provides the first international definition on workplace well-being: f*ulfilment of the physical, mental, social and cognitive needs and expectations of a worker related to their work*. However, ISO 45003 does not provide guidance on what workplace well-being programmes need to include. ISO 45003 focuses on promoting well-being by managing psychosocial risk. To understand what best practice in workplace well-being looks like, organizations can use BSI Prioritizing People Model©

Can my organization be certified to ISO 45003?
ISO 45003 is a guidance standard, not a requirements standard like ISO 45001. This means ISO 45003 cannot be awarded an 'accredited' certification like ISO 45001. However, BSI will be offering a non-accredited certification globally. This will be available for organizations that use ISO 45001 and organizations that use other health and safety management system approaches. The process for ISO 45003 certification will be the same as for any other form of BSI certification.

Will there be any training in place to support implementing ISO 45003?
Yes. BSI has developed a one-day training course on ISO 45003, which is available globally now. It is suitable for anyone who is involved in supporting your organization's psychological health, safety and well-being and psychosocial risk management. It may include line managers as well as health and safety, occupational health, human resources, compliance and risk and operational teams and managers.

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A full ISO 45003 FAQ document can be found here.