

RETHINKING OUR PACE IN THE WORKPLACE: A TRUE ASSET!

A GUIDE FOR
MANAGERS AND
EMPLOYEES



HUMANS ARE OUR MOST PRECIOUS RESOURCE

MOUVEMENT
SANTÉ MENTALE
QUÉBEC



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**A QUÉBEC-WIDE PRESENCE THROUGH THE MOUVEMENT
AND THE REGIONAL MEMBERS: SMQ — Bas-Saint-Laurent**

SMQ — Chaudière-Appalaches | SMQ — Côte-Nord

SMQ — Haut Richelieu | SMQ — Lac-Saint-Jean

SMQ — Pierre-De-Saurel | SMQ — Rive-Sud | CMHA — Québec City branch

CMHA — Saguenay branch | CAP Santé Outaouais | Centre Accalmie

Comité Prévention Suicide Lebel-sur-Quévillon | CPMH

Nouveau Regard Gaspésie | RAIDDAT



FIGURES THAT SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

According to a longitudinal study by the Observatory on Health and Well-Being at Work, approximately **40%** of workers experience psychological distress.¹

80% of Quebec's population believes that a slower pace in life should be more valued by society.²

Approximately **50%** of employees and students believe that slowing down could negatively affect their careers and lead them to miss out on opportunities—and that slowing down is incompatible with progress.³

59% of managers report that their workloads are too high, and approximately **67%** say that their work is emotionally draining.⁴

66% of SME owners report being close to burnout⁵ and **54%** are concerned about their work-life balance.⁶

1 UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL – OBSERVATORY ON HEALTH AND WELL-BEING AT WORK. FLASH Research: Evolution of mental health indicators in the first three cycles of ELOSOMET study, <https://www.osmet.umontreal.ca/en/flash-recherche-evolution-des-indicateurs-de-sante-mentale-dans-les-trois-premiers-cycles-de-lelomet/>.
2 - 3 (in French) ASSOCIATION POUR LA SANTÉ PUBLIQUE DU QUÉBEC. Perception sur le ralentissement du rythme de vie – Portrait de la situation au Québec en 2023, https://aspaq.org/app/uploads/2024/04/ralentir_infographie-sondage-leger.pdf.
4 BENEVA. Manager Burnout, <https://www.beneva.ca/en/blog/employee-health-and-wellness/manager-burnout>.
5 (in French) LA PRESSE CANADIENNE. "PME : 66% des propriétaires se disent près de l'épuisement," *Les Affaires*, <https://www.lesaffaires.com/mon-entreprise/entrepreneuriat-et-pme/pme-66-des-proprietaires-se-disent-pres-de-lepuisement-2/>.
6 BDC. Entrepreneurs' mental health has decreased significantly compared to last year, warns new survey results from BDC, <https://www.bdc.ca/en/about/mediaroom/news-releases/entrepreneurs-mental-health-has-decreased-significantly-compared-to-last-year-warns-new-survey-results-from-bdc>.

We're Going Too Fast!

For decades, our social and economic worldviews have been based on the idea that growth and performance are synonymous with well-being, progress and success. Being constantly busy is often seen as a symbol of achievement, and so we race from one task to the next, one meeting to the next, one person to the next.

A report by France's Direction générale du travail (DGT) and Centre d'analyse stratégique (CAS) on the impact information and communications technologies have had on working conditions revealed that two-thirds of managers affirmed that they suffer from information overload and are constantly putting out fires. Compared to ten years ago, these workers now receive ten times more information and emails⁷.

Have you taken a moment recently to celebrate a successful project or a problem you solved? Have you experienced the pleasure of focusing on just one task? Of enjoying conversations with your co-workers?

The pandemic brought with it the widespread implementation of remote and hybrid work, as well as an unrelenting increase in hyperconnectivity. Ever since, many of us have seen our working hours become longer and the line between our personal and professional lives become more blurred. Our multiple responsibilities lead to an excessive workload and an enormous mental load, both of which have effects on our physical and mental health. To name only a few examples: chronic stress, burnout, physical illnesses, isolation, an increase in screen time and a decrease in physical activity. How long can we sustain this?



The longer our brains are trapped in crisis mode, the more we become rigid, impatient, judgemental and stressed. We're also more likely to stay in our comfort zones with people we already know.

The good news is, we've noticed a change in the population's expectations and desires towards work. Many people are trying to slow this constant intensification of our workloads, change their work's organizational culture, and improve their work-life balance. This cultural change naturally leads us to question different aspects of our professional lives (including the pace of work, our work-life balance and the impact our workplace has on our physical and mental health) and rethink our way of working.

⁷ (in French) L'ÉQUIPE DYNAMIQUE ENTREPRENEURIALE. "La surinformation, le mal du siècle," *Dynamique Mag*, <https://www.dynamique-mag.com/article/surinformation-mal-siecle.11283>.

Working Well without Burning Out

Recharging your battery is crucial! Taking breaks *at* work, just like taking breaks *from* work, is an opportunity to reconnect with ourselves—our needs, values and aspirations—and relax. **Daily** breaks are essential to recharging our battery. They reduce our stress, making it possible to see new outcomes, and encourage innovation, creativity, openness towards others and efficiency.

That being said, talking about the idea of **slowing** down at work can definitely ruffle some feathers. But slowing down doesn't mean moving at a snail's pace! It just means finding a rhythm that aligns with your reality. Slowing down means putting measures in place to reduce pressure and excessive workloads. It's creating environments that support good health, where the pace of our workdays facilitates, rather than hinders, our individual and collective well-being.

For organizations, **slowing** down means making sure that periods with a heavier workload don't become the norm, as well as being attentive to your team's individual needs and being flexible. We often forget that, as individuals, we only have one pool of energy to use for both our work and personal lives. When we're overloaded, it impacts everyone around us.



It's Good to Take Breaks!

"While some organizations might be concerned that breaks require time and, as a result, may detract from performance, [...] researchers note that taking breaks does not have a negative impact on employee performance. In fact, breaks can improve some performance indicators."

Among the many benefits of taking breaks, researchers have observed decreases in stress, emotional exhaustion, cognitive irritation, sleep problems and the risk of injury.

Quotes from Melissa Shaw, "Working too hard? New SFU research highlights importance of taking breaks"⁸

Even the way we speak has been influenced by performance culture. Taking a "well deserved" break implies that we have to work hard for a break to be considered valid. It's no surprise that taking breaks often comes with a feeling of guilt!

Did you know?

Work breaks can take three forms: physical, mental and social.

BREAKS	HOW DO BREAKS HELP US	IN PRACTICE...
Physical	These breaks reduce muscle tension and mental fatigue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take ergonomic micro-breaks: change your position, stretch or do a breathing exercise, reduce eye strain by looking away from the screen... • Take a walk during your lunch break; • Have a snack or beverage; • _____
Mental	These breaks have similar effects to physical breaks.	<p>The following breaks can be taken in the office or online</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share a joke and a laugh with co-workers; • Play a game; • Look outside—at the sky, the clouds, nature, nearby buildings, people walking by; • _____
Social	These breaks are an opportunity to have stronger bonds with your co-workers or team. This makes it easier to ask for help when you need it, and to share your accomplishments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a moment to chat with your co-workers; • Eat with your co-workers from time to time; • Take breaks with your co-workers; • _____

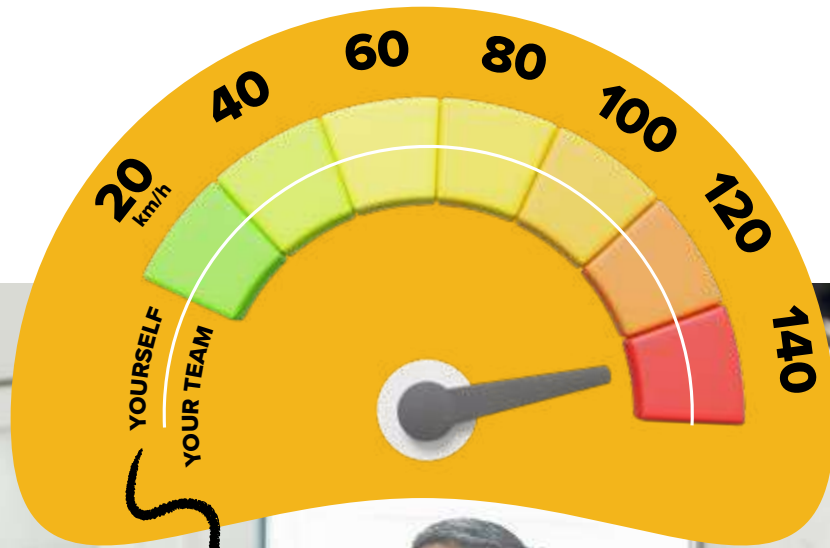
No matter which type of break you prefer, the act of choosing and enjoying it allows you to gain even more of its benefits.

⁸ SHAW, Melissa. Working too hard? New SFU research highlights importance of taking breaks, Simon Fraser University, <https://www.sfu.ca/sfunews/stories/2022/08/working-too-hard-new-sfu-research-highlights-importance-of-taki.html>.

Downshifting to Prevent Burnout

Remote work and hyperconnectivity have made the boundary between our personal and professional lives even more porous. As a result, the “right to disconnect” is an important part of preventing burnout at work.⁹

What is your cruising speed? What has your team’s cruising speed been over the past few months? Are you at risk of getting a speeding ticket?



Is modulating our pace at work during different periods of our lives utopic?

Certain periods of our lives require more energy from us than others. For example, working while studying, having a child, dealing with an illness, caregiving, or returning to work after a time of absence. One thing is clear: the first step to take in these situations is to talk about it with colleagues, management or human resources. We know that many workplaces have found ways to adapt workloads based on a worker’s circumstances.

On an individual level, allowing ourselves to take a step back, question certain habits or policies, reflect, and rethink our tasks, priorities and processes protects ourselves from being overloaded. On an organizational level, slowing down means creating policies that support a healthy pace for everyone that supports their well-being.

DO YOUR ORGANIZATION’S POLICIES...	YES	NO
... encourage opportunities for recharging your battery?		
... include the right to disconnect?		
... support and encourage taking breaks?		
... provide opportunities for preventative time off, not only for time off when you’ve become ill?		
... allow for you to regularly review your workload?		
... encourage a good work-life balance?		

7 Ways to Recharge¹⁰




Taking the time to reenergize is an essential protective factor for your mental health. It’s one of our 7 ways to recharge, all of which form a solid foundation that helps improve and maintain mental health. **Reenergizing** serves as a pillar for the other 7 ways, which may need to be “recharged” from time to time so you can continue applying them.



⁹ (in French) CENTRALE DES SYNDICATS DU QUÉBEC. Se déconnecter du travail – Guide de bonnes pratiques, <https://www.lacsq.org/services/sante-securite-du-travail/se-deconnecter-du-travail/>.

¹⁰ (in French) Mouvement Santé mentale Québec (2014). Campagne 7 astuces, <https://mouvementsmq.ca/campagnes/7-astuces>.

FOR PEOPLE WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION	FOR THE ORGANIZATION
 TAKE ACTION	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowing the purpose behind our work, finding meaning in it, having your values be aligned with those of the organization (as much as possible). Recognizing what is going well in our work gives us energy. Making choices gets us out of feeling powerless. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be consistent between the organization's values and its actions. Take workers' experiences into account when determining how work is organized.
 FEEL THE MOMENT	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize your own emotions and those of your colleagues, accept them and determine how to respond to the needs that triggered these emotions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try to see emotions as a barometer: take the time to listen to them and address any specific irritants as needed. Implement and maintain a safe space in which staff members feel free to express their needs, expectations and concerns.
 ACCEPT YOURSELF	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Celebrate your own strengths and skills as well as those of your colleagues and develop your ability to confidently set boundaries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the strengths of both teams and individuals, and find ways to incorporate and celebrate them. Working with your strengths takes less energy and can even help to reenergize staff and teams! Acknowledge that everyone has their own boundaries that need to be respected.
 EXPLORE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the various sources of pressure that might keep you from recharging your batteries or changing your pace. Are they coming from your organization, from society, or from within yourself? Take a step back, develop some strategies to find the right pace for you, and give yourself time to adjust to changes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leverage the strengths of different teams. Create opportunities to find the many different ways a more balanced pace can be achieved. Explain the reasoning behind choices and changes.

FOR PEOPLE WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION	FOR THE ORGANIZATION
 MAKE CHOICES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With help from your co-workers and managers, differentiate between things that are urgent, high-priority, necessary, nice to have, or to be postponed. Try to limit multitasking whenever possible and give your brain a break by choosing to fully engage in one task at a time—it really helps! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set priority levels for tasks. Revisit plans as needed. Allow for a certain level of autonomy at work.
 FOSTER RELATIONSHIPS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage social interactions. They do more than make the workplace more pleasant, they're also a safety net for when things get tough. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide and facilitate mentoring. Organize communities of practice for management. Organize an event to celebrate and recognize staff!¹¹
 REENERGE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build in break times between each meeting to help switch gears and recharge. Take physical, social and mental breaks. Allow yourself to unplug so you can mentally detach from work. If possible, take time off preventatively, before you get sick. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make the right to disconnect a key element of your organizational culture. Don't send emails, texts or other messages outside of office hours unless it's an emergency. Set the expectation that everyone has the right to a break during their shift, even if it's less than 5 hours. Be flexible in how workers use break time. For example: allow 15 minutes in the morning for co-workers to have coffee together, allow workers to skip a break and leave 30 minutes early (when possible, given their role and the tasks involved). Examine the possibility of having a 4-day work week, meeting-free days, or set times for uninterrupted work... Create a "recharge space" at the office where workers can relax.



To learn more about how to apply our 7 tips, visit etrebiendanssatete.ca (in French only).

11 (in French) Mouvement Santé mentale Québec (2014). La Fête des voisins au travail, <https://mouvementsmq.ca/sante-mentale-et-travail/fete-des-voisins-au-travail/>.



Take a Moment to Reflect

(for employees and management)
 Inspired by a workshop developed by organizational development consultant Lise Moisan.

On a scale from 1 to 5, choose the answer that best reflects your experience over the past few months.

1 Very low **2** **3** **4** **5** Much too high

The **level of stress** you most often experience on a daily basis at work.

The **degree to which you feel overloaded** each week at work.

The **level of mental load** that you most often carry by yourself at work.

The **mental space** that work occupied outside of your working hours.

The **level of interpersonal tension** in your workplace.

Choose the answer that best reflects your reality over the past few years.

1 Completely disagree **2** Somewhat disagree **3** Somewhat agree **4** Completely agree

Periods of excessive work and stress have been getting closer together.

My once-a-year vacation is not enough for me to fully recharge.

I do the work of two people... or I try, anyway!

I regularly need to work overtime.

When I get home, there's a whole other workload waiting for me.

I often feel tired.

I get sick often.

I often feel irritable.

My current workload makes me feel demotivated.



What are the main obstacles that keep you from having a pace that better suits you at work? Are these obstacles personal, organizational or systemic in nature? Or do they fit into two or three of those categories?

What did you learn from this exercise? Keeping in mind that this is a shared responsibility, what is within your power to act on right now? What kind of changes would you like to make for the future?



One Step Closer

Jean-Pierre Brun, a professor at Université Laval's school of management, has suggested that, when faced with a situation or a change, it's important to ask yourself:

- What can I do?
- What can the union do?
- What can management do?
- What can the organization do?

What changes can we create? What first step can we take to guarantee our right to recharge our battery and encourage slowing down within the organization?

No one person should have to carry the responsibility of changing their organization's pace. It's a shared responsibility, within which each step combines with those taken by others to generate a collective movement.



1 What can **I** do?

2 What can **management or supervisors** do?

3 What can the **union** do? (if you have one)

4 What can the **organization** do?

(In French)



**Tell us
what
you
think!**

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Promouvoir. Soutenir. Outiller.

**Working together
to promote
mental health!**

We thank:

Québec 

 GROUPE
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Thank you

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