



WORK IN INDUSTRY

Industry is Finland's largest sector in terms of turnover. The largest industrial fields are metal, forest and chemical industries. Those working in industry include, for example, process workers, maintenance personnel, engineers, laboratory workers, designers, and product developers. The share of specialist work has increased but still a large part of the work consists of production work. The wide range of professions and work tasks is also reflected in the different workload factors and competence requirements.

There are many ways of managing the workload in industry

Work in industry can be demanding in many ways. Work stress arises from the various physical, psychosocial, and cognitive demands of the work. It is important for employers and supervisors to understand and reduce the workload factors associated with work. This can help prevent sickness absences and permanent disability.

SOLUTIONS



Identify and reduce the risk factors

that increase the physical workload. You can, for example, modify the work and work arrangements, increase variation in work tasks and ensure good work ergonomics and necessary assistive devices. Also ensure adequate work induction.

Strengthen the job resources

that support well-being at work and work ability. Resources may relate to, for example, the work tasks, the organisation of work, work-related support and influencing and development opportunities.

Develop effective working-time arrangements.

The development can be related to, for example, self-scheduling of working hours, work breaks, recovering from work, or common rules for time management. Also reinforce employees' opportunities to influence their working hours.

Strengthen competence.

Make sure that employees' competence responds to future work needs. Invest also in the competence of managers and supervisors, including from the perspective of work ability and mental health.

Provide sufficient support for work ability.

Ensure effective practices for early support, sick leave monitoring, returning to work and occupational health collaboration. Build a work culture that tackles work ability challenges at a low threshold and early enough.

Musculoskeletal diseases are by far the most common reason for disability in blue-collar professions

49 %

for men

60 %

for women

Mental health problems feature prominently especially among women working in specialist positions

19 %

of all primary diagnoses among women working in specialist positions in industry

Source: Varma's data, 2018–2021

What do we know?

Work in industry is demanding in many ways. Various risk factors exist in the work environment, and the work can be physically demanding. Industrial work also involves several stressful working-hour characteristics. The psychosocial workload can be associated with, for example, management challenges, working alone or constant change and insecurity. The increasing role of knowledge work in work tasks may increase cognitive workload.

Many of the positive features of a job, such as good opportunities to influence the work and working hours, meaningful and important work, development opportunities, good supervisory work, and a good work community, can protect an employee from the stress factors related to work.

Why is this important?

Workload factors can, if they persist, have many negative effects on well-being at work and work ability. Musculoskeletal diseases are the most common reason for sick leave in industry. In the worst-case scenario, prolonged workload and an imbalance between job demands and resources can lead to permanent work disability. In many industrial professions, disability is more common than on average.

What should be done?

It is important for workplaces to identify and prevent workload factors. The key is to come up with organisation-level solutions for managing the workload. Solutions can involve, for instance, developing management and supervisory work, the organisation of work, improving influencing opportunities, developing competence, work modification, or developing practices to support work ability.

Functional solutions for promoting work ability always require a careful analysis of the situation, the job, and the operating environment.



KEY WORKLOAD FACTORS IN INDUSTRY

- Awkward working postures, manual lifting and moving, standing for long periods
- Irregular working hours, evening, and night shifts
- Excessive amount of work, time pressure and tight deadlines
- Unclear goals, challenges in management and supervisory work
- Challenges in interpersonal relations at work, e.g., lack of support from colleagues
- Constant changes and feelings of insecurity

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HOW THE BUSINESS BRIEF WAS MADE:

The solutions are based on Varma's publication series "Tietoa työkyvystä" (in Finnish), which examines, mostly based on Finnish research literature, the challenges and resources related to work, as well as work ability in industry.

Read the publication on [our website](#) (in Finnish).

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