



WHAT IS WORK ABILITY MANAGEMENT

Work ability management is goal-oriented and systematic work that is carried out daily to promote the personnel's work ability. The key point in work ability management is the company management's engagement, the personnel's active participation and smooth co-operation. Effects of work ability management are increased by a proactive and holistic approach as well as continuous development of operations.

Work ability management is a way to promote employees' work ability in small enterprises

Small enterprises can promote employees' work ability in many ways. It is important that the company management and supervisors understand how work ability can be managed. This makes it possible to prevent employees' sick leave and permanent disability.

SOLUTIONS



Manage work ability in everyday work.

At its best, the promotion of work ability is part of everyday encounters at the workplace and daily discussions among the company management, supervisors and employees. Just like business management, work ability management should be an integral part of the company management's agenda. Knowledge-based management supports work ability management.

Anticipate work ability risks.

Work ability should be supported in a proactive manner: it is cost-efficient and yields results. For example, personnel surveys, risk assessments and sick leave monitoring may give valuable information about the key workload factors and problem areas. Measures can be related to various aspects, such as the development of competence, work and work arrangements, leadership or the functioning of the work community.

Provide early support to employees.

It is important that the workplace has well-functioning practices for early support, sick leave monitoring and co-operation with occupational health care services. It is crucial to create operating methods that take the workplace's needs and circumstances into account. Supervisors play a key role in supporting employees' work ability.

Take effective actions

that promote work ability, ability to continue at work and return to work. There is strong evidence of the impacts of work modification, alternative work tasks, partial sickness allowance and the promotion of healthy lifestyle, for example, on work ability. Combining various measures is a more effective approach than taking individual measures separately. (Ervasti et al. 2022.) Impact assessment is also an important part of work ability management.

Co-operate.

Occupational health care is a key partner for a small enterprise in promoting occupational health and work ability among employees. Occupational health care must be arranged for the personnel if there is even one employee in the enterprise. Good co-operation between the company management, HR, occupational safety, the personnel and the occupational health care is a key prerequisite for the effective promotion of work ability. Work ability is a result of joint efforts!

34%

of disability pensions among employees of small enterprises are due to musculoskeletal diseases

17%

of disability pensions among employees of small enterprises are due to mental health and behavioural disorders

18%

employees of small enterprises have had their work tasks made lighter or modified before they have applied for disability pension

Source: Varma's data, 2018–2022

What do we know?

Small enterprises are significant providers of employment and the majority of companies in Finland have less than ten employees. As the personnel is a key asset for a small enterprise, it is important to look after employees' work ability. Research has shown that the employees' perceived poor work ability is related to later sick leave and disability pension. Work ability management is a way to reduce the costs of disability and strengthen the employer image of companies. In a small enterprise, limited time and human resources may pose challenges for work ability management.

Why is this important?

Legislation requires that employers look after employees' health and occupational safety. Disability causes considerable costs for companies, due to sick leave, for example. On the other hand, in small enterprises, working when ill, i.e., presentism, may be a more common phenomenon than taking sick leave. This is alarming as presentism may also lead to permanent disability.

What should be done?

Small enterprises can promote employees' work ability in many ways. It is important to look after work ability in a proactive manner and at the same time support those employees whose work ability is threatened. The promotion of work ability requires co-operation. Solutions may be related to, for example, work ability management, anticipation of work ability risks and early support, support for returning to work and network co-operation.

Future work ability is a result of joint efforts!

WORK ABILITY MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST

At your workplace

- are matters related to work ability regularly on the company management's agenda?
- have concrete goals to promote work ability been set?
- are there clearly defined roles and responsibilities for promoting work ability?
- are there indicators used for knowledge-based management of work ability?
- are the key workload factors known?
- have measures been taken to manage workload?
- is work ability developed systematically and proactively?
- has the personnel been engaged in the promotion of work ability?
- is there regular work ability dialogue between the company management, supervisors and employees?
- are there operating methods and models for supporting work ability – for sick leave monitoring, early support and return to work, for example?
- is co-operation in work ability matters with internal and external partners functioning well?
- is there regular co-operation with occupational health care services?
- is there continuous monitoring of work ability and development of operations on the basis of monitoring results and feedback?

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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 work ability management and ways to promote work ability in small enterprises.

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

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