

Psychological health for small business



Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

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Every business, regardless of its size, has a responsibility under Workplace Health and Safety legislation.

The law that covers health and safety at workplaces in Queensland is called the *Workplace Health and Safety Act, 1995*. The aim of this law is to stop anyone from being killed, injured or becoming ill because of a workplace or the work being done.

A workplace can be any place where work is done, so it can include a work vehicle or a client's home. The law says that everyone working or coming into a workplace has a legal responsibility to look after their own health and safety and the health and safety of others at the workplace.

For example:

- People who are conducting a business or undertaking including employers, self employed people and others must look after the health and safety of themselves, their workers and anyone else who is affected by their business (e.g. clients and visitors).
- Workers must not deliberately put themselves or anyone else in danger and must obey any instructions that their employer gives them about health and safety.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland considers psychosocial hazards in the workplace to be a workplace health and safety issue. Psychosocial hazards can create physical or psychological risk to employee health and safety.

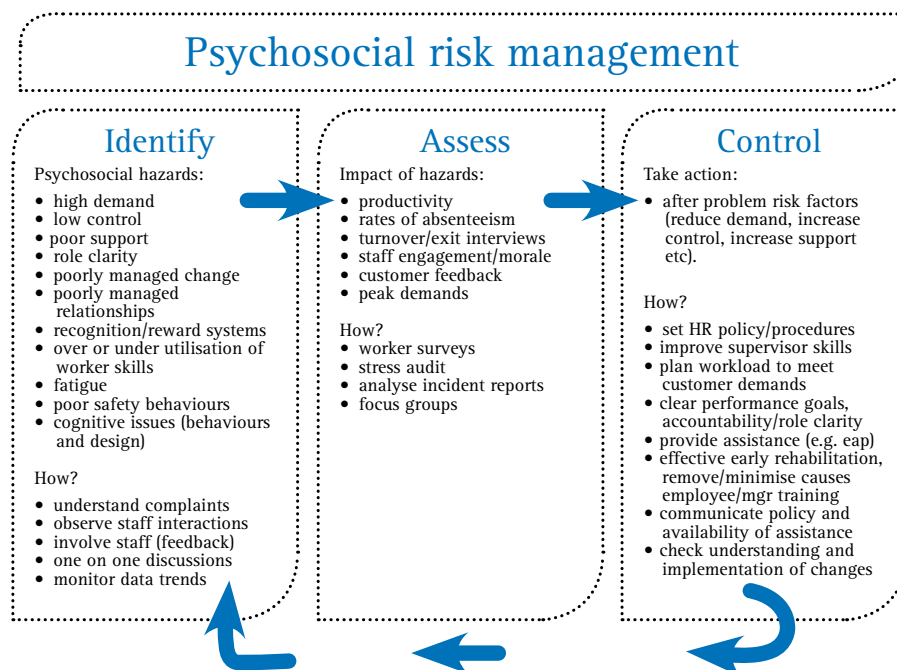
What are psychosocial hazards (or risk factors)?

- Aspects of work that are associated with negative health and safety outcomes
- These hazards can constitute a psychiatric, psychological and/or physical risk to worker health and safety

It is good business practice to proactively risk manage by identifying, assessing and controlling psychosocial risk factors within the workplace.

This process is outlined on the following page.





Monitor and review: The final step in the risk management process is to monitor and review the effectiveness of control measures that have been implemented.

What are the benefits of a risk management approach?

A risk management approach can assist in minimising the risk of exposure to workers. The benefits of doing this will include:

- positive working environment
- job satisfaction – good morale
- possible increase in productivity
- sound decision making
- reduced turnover of staff
- reduction in recruitment and training costs due to retention of staff
- reduction in absenteeism
- reduction in accidents/incidents
- reduction in customer complaints
- improved communication
- loyalty to the organisation.

Outcomes of exposure to unmanaged occupational stress risk factors:

- general low level distress and physical effects
- mental illness
- physical illness
- work-related outcomes – low productivity, high staff turnover, increased absenteeism, lack of customer satisfaction

Small businesses that employ staff need to consider the risks inherent within the job and apply risk management principles to minimise these risks.

Identifying the psychosocial risk factors

Demand

Includes issues like workload, work patterns and the work environment:

- high physical, mental or emotional demands
- tight timeframes and high output
- shiftwork and extended hours of work
- skills are appropriately utilised within work tasks
- working alone/isolated

Control

How much say the person has in the way they do their work?

- performance targets
- resources available
- decision making
- skill discretion

Support

- Level of support provided by the organisation, line managers and peers.

Role

- Understanding of the role the employee has within the organisation.
- The organisation ensures the person does not have conflicting roles.
- Lack of role clarity between small business owners and employees or co-workers can lead to tension and conflict which may develop to become perceived as workplace harassment.

Relationships

- Includes promoting positive working to manage conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour such as workplace harassment.

Change

- The way change is managed by the organisation and communicated to staff.
- Change in the work environment which workers may perceive as directed at them or about them and the perception that change (which is poorly managed) is a form of workplace harassment.

Organisational Justice

- Organisational Justice refers to the perception of fairness about work procedures and how they are enacted.

Recognition and Reward

- Rewarding workers efforts within their work tasks.

Assessing the risk

Once the risk factors have been identified the level of risk that these factors present needs to be assessed. Methods of assessing the level of risk include evaluating levels of productivity, rates of absenteeism, gathering information from staff, evaluating staff morale, and gathering feedback from customers. This information can be captured using tools such as a worker survey, conducting a stress audit, analysing incident reports, and holding focus groups.

Demands

DO

- Hold regular team meetings to discuss projected workload for the following week, address anticipated absences.
- Meet with individuals to discuss workload and identify challenges encountered or anticipated.
- Develop personal work plans to ensure staff are aware of their job responsibilities.
- Identify peaks and troughs for workload and incorporate into staffing rosters.

- Allocate resources such as time and equipment to ensure staff can undertake their jobs properly.
- Ensure utilisation of skills within everyday work.
- Ensure staff have adequate time management skills and provide training where needed.
- Give realistic deadlines.
- Minimise environmental distractions e.g. noise, vibration.

DON'T

- Ask people to undertake tasks they are not trained or skilled to do.
- Expect people to work longer hours than rostered to complete tasks.
- Increase an individual's workload without appropriate resources for the task.
- Under utilise skills.
- Limit employees to repetitive and monotonous tasks.

Control

DO

- Engage workers in making decisions about the way they do their work
- Allow workers to participate in the decision making processes about issues that effect their work
- Performance review processes can be an opportunity for staff to have input into the way they do their work
- Provide opportunities for skill development

DON'T

- Expect staff to stay after hours without prior consultation

Support

DO

- Provide a workplace culture that supports open communication so staff feel comfortable in discussing issues.
- Provide training , skill development and employee assistance services to staff.
- Promote work/life balance by allowing for flexibility is work.
- Utilise annual performance reviews as a time to provide support and constructive advice for future performance.
- Encourage team skills – promote cohesiveness, communication and job satisfaction.
- Provide opportunities for career development such as acting in managerial roles during the manager's absence.

DON'T

- Use annual performance tools as a disciplinary measure.
- Discriminate against people.

Role

DO

- Provide up-to-date position descriptions.
- Provide an organisational chart – enables clear view of structure and communication channels.
- Provide an induction to all new staff.
- Develop personal workplans.
- Discuss roles and workplans at team meetings and clarify and role conflict.

DON'T

- Change job functions or position descriptions without consultation and discussion.

Relationships

DO

- Provide education on workplace harassment and conflict resolution.
- Define what is acceptable behaviour within the workplace e.g. Code of Conduct.
- Promote communication.
- Provide information on services available and how to access them such as an Employee Assistance Scheme.
- Put processes in place which address action to be taken in the event behaviour is unacceptable – e.g. complaints handling and investigations, potential disciplinary actions.
- Treat each case individually and ensure that it is addressed in a fair and just manner.

DON'T

- Allow unacceptable behaviour to continue.

Change

DO

- Involve employees in the change process via communication and consultation.
- Identify the key issues of the change and provide information to employees.
- Ensure staff are informed of the implications of the change on their respective positions and roles.
- Identify methods of communication to meet the needs of staff in advising of the change process – meetings, emails

DON'T

- Disregard the impact it may have on individuals or teams, as even minor changes can effect individuals.
- Keep workers in the dark – keep them informed.

Organisational justice

DO

- Ensure that workplace rules are applied fairly, consistently and in an unbiased manner.
- Ensure there is a transparent grievance and appeal process.
- Promote and encourage a positive and fair work environment.

DON'T

- Ignore unfair work practices. The experience of perceived injustice at work can be harmful to both the individual and the organisation.

Recognition and reward

DO

- Recognise individual and team contributions and achievements within the organisation.
- Ensure recognition and rewards are appropriate and relevant for the employee or team.

DON'T

- Show overt favouritism to a worker or group of workers.

More information

To obtain a copy of the *Prevention of Workplace Harassment Code of Practice 2004* or for other workplace health and safety legislation and information:

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Website: www.worksafe.qld.gov.au Infoline: 1300 369 915

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