Guidelines to understanding and controlling Australia Post's critical psychosocial risks

Change Management

Change is an inevitable aspect of organisational life and can be essential for future growth. However, poor management of the change process can lead to team members feeling anxious and uncertain about aspects of their work or employment status.

Team members want to know what's going on in their own workplace. Informed team members are engaged team members. Embrace the appetite for information and get ready to communicate regularly.

Control Measures – Manager Level

Included below are interventions which can be enacted at a manager level

Communication

- establish good communication systems to keep stakeholders informed about change

- include the change initiative on the agenda for team meetings

- ensure workers are aware of any potential impacts on their roles

- check for understanding when communicating about change

- give workers the background and reasons behind the change

- encourage workers to speak up and get involved with change

- provide group information and/or feedback sessions to give workers the opportunity to raise any concerns about the change in a group setting. For example, hold regular meetings or focus groups. Workers may feel more comfortable raising issues in a group rather than individually

Administration

- review team and individual work plans after the change to ensure roles, objectives and accountabilities are clear

- ensure workers feel confident in undertaking their tasks and make sure they receive training for them to be competent in their roles

- encourage workers to develop their skills to help them undertake new and challenging work produced by the change

Support

- respect differences and recognise that workers will respond to change in a range of ways and will have different needs

- provide support to help workers deal with frustrations experienced as a result of change and uncertainty

Control Measures – Systemic

Included below are interventions which can be advocated or accessed at a manager level

- ensure the person communicating the change has the skills and authority to do so. If necessary, train managers or supervisors to support workers through periods of change

- change job descriptions to match the new duties and tasks of the role, preventing ambiguity and role conflict. Workers should participate in this review process where possible

- where a change in structure or roles occurs, or retraining is required, use the performance review process as a positive opportunity for workers to have renewed input in the way they complete their work

- provide mechanisms to guide workers and managers through the change process, with sufficient support for task and people-related impacts

Additional Resource

Tips for Communicating Change (page 8) – HeadsUp
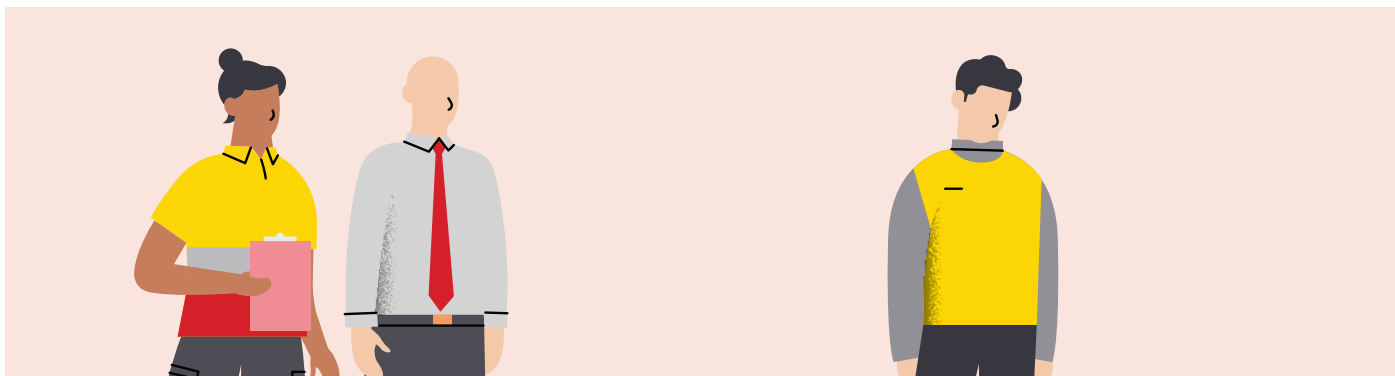
Bullying and Harassment

Prolonged and unresolved relationship conflict may result in conflict known as work-related bullying. Workplace bullying is repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or a group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety.

Supervisors and line managers should intervene when they observe unreasonable behaviour in their work teams, or if they are requested to intervene by a member of their team. If a supervisor or manager approaches an individual directly about their behaviour, they should record the actions taken. Supervisors should know how and when it is appropriate to seek advice or to escalate an issue.

Control Measures – Manager Level

Included below are interventions which can be enacted at a manager level

- regularly consulting with workers and health and safety representatives to find out if bullying is occurring or if there are factors likely to increase the risk of workplace bullying

- setting the standard of workplace behaviour

- developing productive and respectful workplace relationships through good management practices and effective communication

- prioritising measures that foster and protect the psychological health of employees

Control Measures – Systemic

Included below are interventions which can be advocated or accessed at a manager level

- designing safe systems of work by clearly defining jobs and providing workers with the resources, information and training they need to carry out their work safely

- implementing workplace bullying reporting and response procedures

- providing information and training on workplace bullying policies and procedures, available support and assistance, and how to prevent and respond to workplace bullying

Additional Resource

Pocket Guide to Workplace Bullying Support
– Work Safe VIC

Poorly Managed Relationships

Interpersonal disagreements and frictions with one's colleagues can arise from differences in personal style, values and norms. Relationships with managers, peers and subordinates can positively or negatively affect the way a worker feels. Situations that may lead to poor workplace relationships:

- incivility in teams or departments that is tolerated by management

- experiences of abrupt, rude or inappropriate behaviour of workers or managers

- aggression, harassment

- a lack of fairness and equity in dealing with workplace issues or where performance issues are poorly managed

Control Measures – Manager Level

Included below are interventions which can be enacted at a manager level

Communication

- hold regular team meetings to enable workers to discuss any potential task conflict

- promote the concept that differences in workers' ideas and opinions is a positive

- address inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour with workers, providing empathetic, respectful and effective feedback

Administration

- monitor the work environment for potential disagreements, factors or situations that may result in conflict and address these promptly

- ensure everyone has a current role or position description, which includes the role, purpose, reporting relationships and the key duties expected of them

- give group rewards based on performance of a team rather than any one individual

- encourage workers to have input into procedures and tasks. When possible, involve workers in the decision-making processes which will impact on their job tasks

- respond in a timely and effective manner to worker complaints about conflicts, interpersonal issues and work-related bullying

- confront people issues and manage their resolution

Support

- create a culture where colleagues trust and encourage each other to perform at their best

- promote a team culture in which workers assist each other and provide support when required

- provide sufficient opportunities for workers to get to know each other and build positive relationships

- ensure workers feeling upset or harmed by workplace conflict are provided with appropriate support by a supervisor or manager they trust, this may include a referral to a health professional or employee assistance program if available
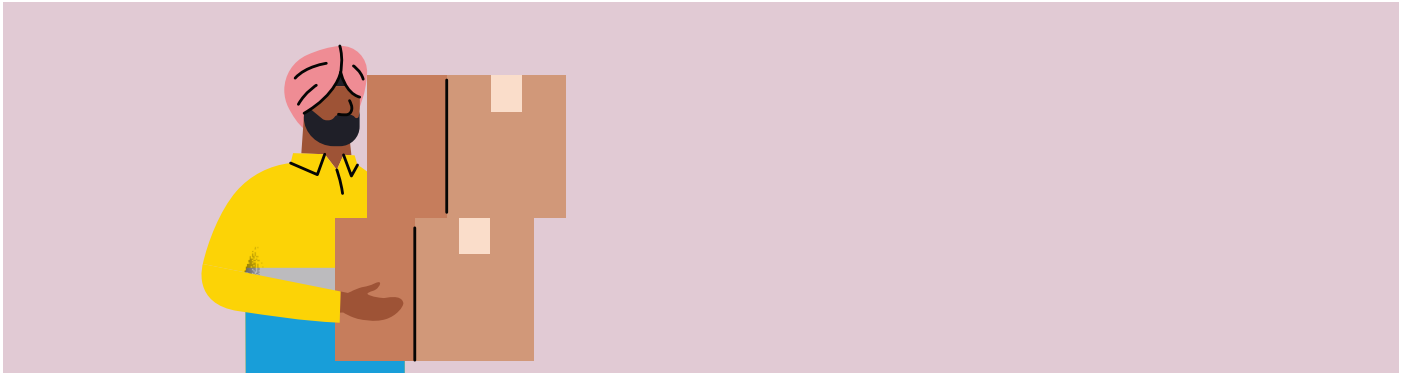
Unreasonable Work Demands

Unreasonable work demands generally fall into two categories:

Role overload – occurs when an individual feels pressured by excessive workloads, difficult deadlines, and a general inability to fulfil organisational expectations in the time available. Situations that may lead to high levels of role overload include:

- allocating tasks to workers that are beyond their level of competence or capacity
- excessive expectations on new or existing workers to learn new tasks quickly
- inequitable distribution of work tasks within a team
- unreasonable deadlines
- poor job design
- lack of resources required to complete tasks and projects, be it people, financial or physical resources
- increased pressure due to absence of team members through illness and planned or unplanned leave

Cognitive demands – degree to which an individual must engage in cognitive monitoring and attentiveness in order to meet the demands of their role. Situations that may impact cognitive demand include:

- analysing complex/detailed information
- making complex decisions in situations with no guidelines or procedures
- needing to quickly evaluate complex situations, reach sound judgments and make effective decisions under pressure
- determining effective strategies/solutions to respond to complaints or issues
- have little mental stimulation or problem solving
- require people to undertake repetitive tasks with little variety

Control Measures – Manager Level

Included below are interventions which can be enacted at a manager level

Communication

- Create an environment in which workers feel comfortable raising concerns and speaking up about difficulties coping with work tasks.
- Engage in regular conversations with workers about work expectations, workloads, deadlines and instructions, and ensure there is agreement on what is required.

Administration

- ensure that tasks are matched to the skill and capability level of your workers
- give workers some control over the way they do their work including work pace and order of tasks.
- schedule regular breaks throughout the day and ensure that workers are taking required breaks and getting adequate rest
- provide workers with sufficient time to perform the tasks assigned and provide suitable, appropriately maintained equipment.
- redesign the work where possible through reducing time pressure or adjusting job requirements to reduce cognitive demands.
- act immediately to prevent excessive workloads which are causing stress and strain
- ensure sufficient breaks are taken over long shifts
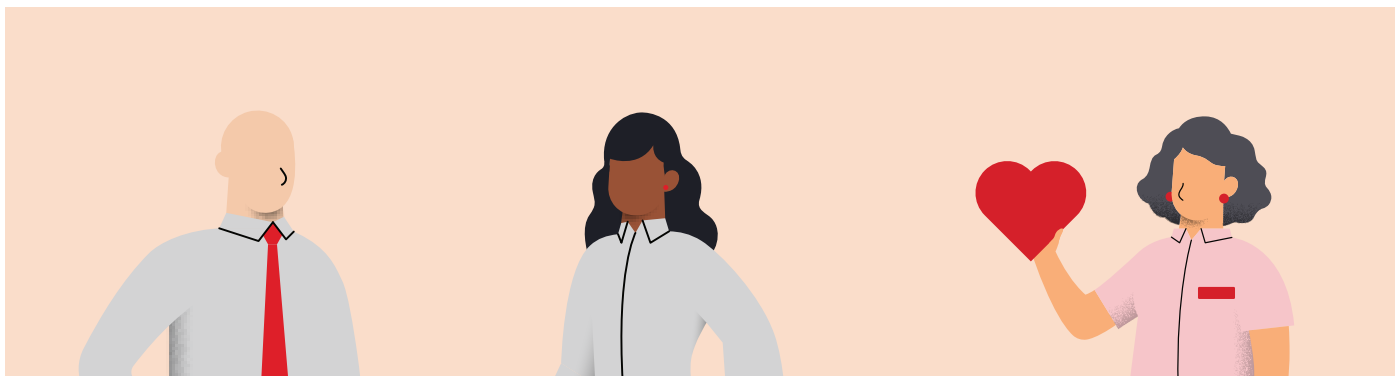
Support

- offer counselling support to workers who are experiencing high stress levels
- provide practical assistance when workers are doing challenging tasks
- encourage workers to manage stress and fatigue during periods of increased work demands
- encourage workers to take leave to recover from periods of high demands

Control Measures – Systemic

Included below are interventions which can be advocated or accessed at a manager level

- design the completion of work tasks in a way that complex tasks are undertaken by multiple team members, where appropriate, to share the load
- ensure jobs are designed to ensure manageable workloads
- implement systems to support workers when they are required to make difficult decisions or when there are negative consequences to decisions they have made
- rotate tasks and activities so that workers aren't overexposed to cognitively demanding work or recurrent monotonous work

Poor support from manager

Manager support can generally be broken into two categories.

Instrumental Support - offering practical help to solve problems or providing tangible assistance or aid in the form of knowledge or advice needed to resolve the issue.

Emotional Support - offering care or listening sympathetically to another person.

Control Measures – Manager Level

Included below are interventions which can be enacted at a manager level

Communication

- encourage workers to share their concerns about work-related stressors

- check in with workers to see how their work tasks are going, how they feel about their work, and ensure they feel valued and supported

- promote an open-door policy

- ensure that workers are being provided with feedback that is timely, specific, practical, and attributed back to the what, how and why of their performance

- hold regular team meetings to discuss pressures and challenges within the work unit

Administration

- step in and help with work tasks during difficult or busy times

- help workers to set, monitor and achieve work goals

- ensure adequate backfilling of roles or redistribution of work when workers are out of the office or away on leave

Support

- encouragement, compliments, and other gestures of appreciation

- demonstrate genuine care and consideration for workers

- share resources

- debrief difficult situations

- foster a culture where it is common practice to recognise workers not just for their hard work, but also for their ideas, behaviours and contributions over and above what is expected in their roles

- promote a team culture in which workers assist each other

- encourage workers to recognise the contributions of others, rather than expecting this to always come from supervisors/managers

Control Measures – Systemic

Included below are interventions which can be advocated or accessed at a manager level

- ensure that management structures and reporting lines within teams are clear. This will help workers know who they are accountable to (either overall or for particular tasks) and where they can go for help with work problems

- provide supervisors and workers with a range of strategies to recognise others, understanding that people like to be acknowledged in different ways

- ensure praise and recognition is built into leadership development opportunities, helping leaders to understand how they can best praise and recognise others