Psychosocial risk management during workplace change

Organisations have a legislative responsibility (*Work Health and Safety Act 2011*) to ensure the health and safety of their workers.

During times of change, it is important to ensure work health and safety (WHS) systems are considered and integrated into the change process to monitor and prevent risks to workers. When change is supported through consultation and effective communication, it is received more positively by workers and can improve health and productivity.

In contrast, when change is not well managed, it can lead to psychological injures, poor health outcomes and a decrease in productivity.

Self-assessment tools

These tools are guided self-assessments to identify key risks and possible corrective actions to minimise the risks of change to our people. They have been designed to assess what systems and processes currently exist in workplaces, enhance those systems if needed, and to ensure the health and safety of workers impacted by the change.

The tools can be used by anyone with a level of responsibility for the change process, including change managers, WHS managers, human resources managers, project managers or people with leadership responsibilities.

Identifying risks and risk controls

Prevention is the key to creating a safe and healthy workplace for employees affected by change. This can be achieved by systematically addressing the risks associated with organisational change that may lead to injury, prior to and after employees have commenced work in the changed circumstances or environment.

Some of the more common psychosocial risks and risk controls especially during organisational changes include the following:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Risk | Considerations | Risk controls |
| Poor change management | * How open and transparent is organisational change managed and communicated?
 | * Communicate changes clearly, frequently and effectively.
* Communicate regularly even if there is limited new information to update.
* Ensure managers personally communicate changes to their employees.
* Be transparent and authentic in your communication.
* Invite employees to participate in consultation meetings about change implementation.
* Ensure ongoing arrangements are in place to provide regular feedback and consultation with employees impacted by the change.
 |
| Lack of role clarity | * If their role will exist in the new arrangements, will it be the same or different?
* Do people understand

their role within the organisation?* Is there role conflict with others?
 | * Be clear about roles, tasks and priorities.
* Redesign work to minimise confusion.
* Clarify new work location and expectations of role.
* Allocate meaningful work.
* Support the understanding of the link between individual’s role and the organisation’s purpose and goals.
 |
| Poor support | * Is emotional support for employees being provided by supervisors and colleagues?
* Do employees have the resources to get the job done?
 | * Offer support to employees regarding the changes.
* Ensure employees are aware of the assistance that is available to them.
* Ensure managers know how to access and use support for their team members and themselves.
* Ensure managers have the capability to recognise early warning signs of employee distress and low morale and refer appropriately, if required.
* Encourage employees to talk to their managers if they have concerns.
 |

Communication, consultation, and participation

**Principle:** Consultation for change is comprehensive, ongoing and involves workers in decisions that affect them.

Consultation is a requirement under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* when changes affect people at work. When consultation is conducted transparently and effectively, workers are more likely to understand the reasons for change, participate in the process of change and view it more favourably.

|  |
| --- |
| **Self-assessment:** tick the boxes that most apply to you and find out how you rate. If your agency is primarily operating in the medium or high-risk columns, take corrective action to transition to the low risk column.  |
|  | **Low risk** *Demonstrates good practice; monitor and review for continual improvement* | **Medium risk** *Review for improvements* | **High risk** *Immediate action required* |
| **Organisational actions**  | * Consultation plan in place, including how the results of the consultation are provided to employees.
* Evidence that change has been communicated to all employees.
* Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs), consultative committees and other groups in the organisation have been provided with ongoing information to reduce rumours and other stressors related to the changes.
 | * Consultation policy in place.
* Discussions about how changes can be implemented have been undertaken.
 | * Changes have not been communicated to employees.
 |
| **Manager actions**  | * Managers have been briefed about the requirement for consultation during workplace change.
* All managers have personally communicated the changes to their employees, including how this is relevant to the employees’ role and purpose.
* Feedback process is in place (to consider feedback).
 | * Some managers have communicated changes to their employees.
 | * No support or guidance for managers to communicate change.
 |
| **Individual actions**  | * Employees have been provided with opportunity to participate in the change process through consultation sessions, meetings, or discussions on change implementation.
* Employees impacted by change have been identified (including people off work) and consulted on changes that will affect them.
* Feedback process is in place (to consider feedback).
 | * Changes have been communicated to employees directly impacted.
 | * Employer (PCBU – Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking) has not used consultation provisions under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*.
 |

Prevention, early intervention and support for employee wellbeing

**Principle**: Assessment and mitigation of WHS hazards and support for employee health and wellbeing is prioritised. When this happens, employees have clarity about their role and support and resources to perform work.

|  |
| --- |
| **Self-assessment:** tick the boxes that most apply to you and find out how you rate. If your agency is primarily operating in the medium or high-risk columns, take corrective action to transition to the low risk column.  |
|  | **Low risk** *Demonstrates good practice; monitor and review for continual improvement* | **Medium risk** *Review for improvements* | **High risk** *Immediate action required* |
| **Organisational actions**  | * Organisational change program has risk management plan which includes WHS risks (with consideration of harm to physical and mental health and wellbeing).
* Risk assessments have been conducted on work arrangements (existing and new work arrangements) considering physical and psychosocial risks, and management of the work environment (demands, support, role clarity, control, relationships and change).
* HSRs have been involved in risk assessment processes.
 | * Physical and psychosocial risk assessments have been conducted on some work arrangements.
* HSRs and working groups in place.
 | * No risk assessments conducted.
 |
| **Manager/ Team actions**  | * Teams or groups who are identified to be impacted significantly by changes are provided with support/advice and training (as required).
* Managers have been trained to identify psychosocial risks in the work environment.
* All managers have assessed the risks to physical and mental health during and after change.
* Managers are looking out for signs of distress in each employee and working to support them.
 | * Training support advice is available to all employees.
 | * Employees are not provided with information, training and supervision on new duties or any WHS procedures.
 |
| Individual actions  | * Inductions have been provided to employees in new work areas or refreshed for existing employees. This includes an overview of the culture and workplace expectations.
* The demands and controls of new roles are assessed and matched to employee capability.
* All employees have a performance development plan that incorporates a wellbeing plan.
 | * Some employees have been provided with information and supervision on new duties and WHS procedures.
* Some employees have a performance development plan that incorporates a wellbeing plan.
 | * No induction provided.
* No performance development or wellbeing plans in place.
 |

Additional resources

For more detailed information about the risks of workplace change:

* [Supporting your workers during times of change available](http://www.comcare.gov.au/preventing/prevention/supporting_your_workers_during_times_of_change) (ComCare)
* [Work related psychological health and safety](https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/work-related-psychological-health-and-safety-systematic-approach-meeting-your-duties) (Safe Work Australia)