THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

CREATE CHANGE

Psychological Safety and Well-being Guide

Table of Contents

Psychological safety and well-being guide

1. Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to increase understanding of psychological safety in the workplace, outline the risk management approach to psychological hazards, as well as promote positive well-being amongst UQ staff.

2. Scope

This guide applies to all University of Queensland workplaces including, remote and regional satellite campuses.

3. Obligations

Persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) have a primary duty of care to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the psychological health of workers, in the same way that their physical health must be taken care of.

In addition, all workers have a responsibility for workplace health and safety, specifically ensuring reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves and others.

4. Psychological safety and well-being

4.1 What is psychological safety?

Psychological safety is the absence of harm and/or threat to mental health and well-being that an employee might experience in the workplace.

4.2 What is well-being?

Well-being is a combination of a person's physical, mental, emotional and social health factors. A state of well-being is more than the absence of illness; it is a state of experiencing positive emotions, feeling engaged and a sense of thriving in everyday life.

4.3   What is mental health?

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stressors of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to the community.[1]

4.4   What defines a psychologically healthy and safe workplace?

A psychologically healthy and safe workplace is defined as one that promotes employees' mental health and well-being, protects mental health by reducing work-related risk factors and actively prevents and addresses mental illness and injury from occurring.

The attributes of a psychologically healthy workplace include[2]:

- Open and honest leadership
- Fair and respectful culture
- Inclusion and influence
- Good job design
- Prioritising mental health
- Work/life balance
- Employee development
- Workload management
- Mental health support

4.5   What are the risks of a psychologically unsafe workplace?

The risk to individuals and to university workplaces from a psychological injury could include:

- Poor individual health and/or reduced functioning
- Increased staff absenteeism
- Potential high staff turnover

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[1] World Health Organisation
[2] www.headsup.org.au: Nine attributes of a healthy workplace

- Low morale and motivation
- Lost productivity
- Inability to deliver objectives
- Increased Workers' Compensation claims

5.   WHAT CAN CAUSE PSYCHOLOGICAL INJURIES?

In general, undertaking work activities are accepted to be good for a person's psychological and physical well-being. Good work is good for well-being. However, there are aspects of the workplace that, if not appropriately managed, have the potential to negatively affect an individual's mental health, sense of well-being, physical health, as well as the effectiveness of an organization to fulfil its operational requirements.

Workplace factors that may contribute to psychological injuries include:
- elements of the work environment;
- management practices; or
- the way that work is organised or designed.

The psychological well-being of a workforce can be enhanced by minimising the impact of known workplace risk factors and maximising the impact of potential protective factors.

A **risk factor** is a condition, behaviour or attribute that may increase the risk of injury or illness.

A **protective factor is** a characteristic associated with a lower likelihood of negative outcomes or that reduce a risk factor's impact.

In order to create a more psychologically healthy workplace, strategies are needed at the individual, team and organisational level to eliminate or reduce risk factors and promote protective factors.

6.   WHAT IS A PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARD?

In relation to work, a psychosocial hazard is a workplace factor, such as an adverse workplace interaction or condition of work, that compromises a worker's health and well-being.

If addressed appropriately these factors have the potential to positively influence employees' mental health, psychological safety and engagement. If these factors are not managed appropriately they have the potential to lead to psychological and/or physical injury.

Psychosocial hazards can include[3]:

- high and low job demands

- low job control

- poor support

- poor organisational change management

- poor organisational justice

- low recognition and reward

- low role clarity or role conflict

- poor workplace relationships

- remote and isolated work

- violent or traumatic events

6.1   Psychosocial Risk Management

Psychosocial risks can be managed in the same systematic way as other workplace health and safety risks. A risk management approach includes:

1. Understanding the key psychosocial hazards
2. Undertaking a risk management process (identify, prioritise and control)
3. Undertake meaningful consultation with staff
4. Ensure appropriate resources and processed to control risks
5. Maintain, monitor and review control measures.

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[3] Worksafe QLD: Preventing and managing risks to work-related psychological health

6.2 Understanding Psychosocial Risks and Controls

Descriptor	Potential Controls
High Job Demands **Examples: Mentally and emotionally demanding work, time pressures, challenging work hours (e.g. shift work), physically demanding roles, poor environmental conditions**	Regular team meetings to discuss projected workload, monitor work flow Address anticipated absences/leave Allocate appropriate resources Develop personal work plans Give realistic deadlines and workloads Review positions descriptions to ensure up to date Rotate staff through mentally/emotionally/physically demanding tasks Job design to ensure manageable workloads Ensure staff are taking allocated breaks and using annual leave entitlements Regular individual meetings incorporating well-being checks and provide avenues for support/professional supervision Ensure physical workplace complies with relevant safety requirements Ensure applicants are informed at pre-selection stage of nature of emotionally demanding roles
Low Job Demands **Examples: Too little to do, or highly repetitive or monotonous tasks**	Don't under- utilise skills Rotate staff through repetitive tasks Staff development and skills building
Low Job Control **Examples: Where workers have little say in how they do their work, take breaks, where workers are not involved in decisions that affect them or clients.**	Engage staff and allow them to participate in making decisions about the way they do their work Provide opportunity for skills development Recognition and development processes can be an opportunity for staff to have input Consult with staff on changes, performance indicators and resources
Poor Workplace Relationships **Examples: Conflict about responsibilities, relationship conflict (bullying and interpersonal) and/or lack of**	Ensure all staff aware of the Code of Conduct, organisational values, and expected behaviour Ensure managers have skills to identify and manage conflict and ensure managers know where to get support (e.g. HR) Be aware of systems and policies in place and how to access

work and interpersonal boundaries	Monitor the work environment for potential disagreements- manage accordingly and swiftly
	Promote a positive team culture and build positive team relationships
	Ensure all staff have up to date position description and are aware of expectations and individual/team responsibilities

Poor Support

Examples: Organisational, supervisors, peers, lack of timely feedback, support and guidance from supervisors and / or support from co –workers, including work tasks

Clear reporting lines to ensure staff know to whom they are accountable and where they can go to for help

Ensure supervisors are trained in people management and leadership skills

Supportive leadership skills- open door, accessible, genuine

Regular team and 1:1 meetings (weekly)

Promote a positive and psychologically safe team culture

Poor Change Management

Examples: Poorly managed changes to organisational structure, procedures, roles; lack of involvement in decisions, poor communication

Ensure appropriate framework for change management

Robust consultation and engagement with staff

Provide reasons and background to the change

Keep staff informed

Low Role Clarity or Role Conflict

Examples: Staff unclear about job's objectives, accountabilities, expectations and reporting lines

Provide up to date position descriptions, review regularly

Provide up to date organisational charts

Clear induction processes for new staff (organisational and work area)

Develop personal work plans

Discuss roles and work plans at team meetings and clarify any role conflict

Establish clear expectations for the team and ensure these are clearly understood

Poor Organisational Justice

Examples: Inconsistent application of policies and procedures, unfairness or bias in decisions about allocation of resources and work, or poor management of underperformance

Foster a culture of transparency, openness, respect and equity

Implement appropriate performance monitoring and management

Ensure there is a transparent grievance and appeal process

Ensure workplace rules and decisions are applied fairly and consistently

Low Reward and Recognition Examples: A lack of positive feedback, an imbalance in recognition of efforts, lack of opportunity for skills development	Implement a regular review process with staff which ensures staff are provided with positive and constructive feedback Regular 1:1 meetings and team meetings where contributions are expressed and valued Understand that people like to be acknowledged in different ways, e.g. privately, within the team, with incentives (time, financial etc.) Consider implementing a job rotation or mentoring system to enrich staff interest and motivation to broaden skill set Ensure workers are being provided with feedback that is timely, specific and practical.
Remote or Isolated Work Examples: Remote work locations or work where there are few or no other people around, where access to help from others may be difficult	Review workplace layouts to ensure access to safety and security systems Check in and check out procedures (UQ Safe Zone) Maintain regular contact and communication both team and individual Ensure communication systems and emergency procedures are developed and in place Involve the remote area in consultation, decision making and provide access to resources, training and activities available to non-remote staff.
Violent or Traumatic Events Examples: Exposure to abuse, threat or actual harm that causes fear and distress and/or injury	Working in pairs or teams where possible Ensure physical environment and security are appropriate and well-designed Establish robust work systems and procedures, e.g working in isolation, opening and closing, monitoring of remote or isolated staff. File flagging, early warning systems Training in violence prevention/de-escalation techniques Zero tolerance of aggression towards workers

7. LEVELS OF INTERVENTION FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS

Strategies to address psychosocial hazards in the workplace can be addressed at the primary, secondary or tertiary levels of intervention.

Primary interventions are targeted at the organisational level, with an emphasis on the need to identify and manage causes and practices within the organisation that may be contributing negatively to worker well-being.

Secondary interventions are primarily aimed at improving worker strengths and capability, including education and training, as well as the provision of resources to assist with individuals with stress management, resilience, interpersonal skills and conflict management.

Tertiary interventions are supportive steps implemented after an injury or illness has occurred, including facilitating appropriate rehabilitation or return to work programs, provision of an Employee Assistance Program etc.

The goal of any organisation should to manage the risk at the source, rather than rely only on interventions to assist workers after an injury has occurred.

8.   JOB DESIGN

Job design is an example of a primary intervention to address psychosocial hazards. In the context of psychosocial hazards, job design is the process of determining the job tasks, roles, duties and processes to best promote employee psychological health and well-being. This includes the provision of:

- adequate resources to undertake the duties,
- consideration of work pace and timing,
- flexible working hours where possible,
- appropriate skill utilisation and task variety,
- adequate support and feedback,
- decision making input or control whenever practical,
- manageable emotional demands,
- opportunities for learning, training and career development.

9. PROMOTE A POSITIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE

Workplace culture is the collective view of employees. Workplace culture can shape how people interact and engage with others, how things get done and what is acceptable behaviour.

Where there is a negative workplace culture employees may be at greater risk of exposure to psychosocial hazards. A toxic or hostile work environment will likely result in poor workplace relationships, increased worker apathy, stress and burnout, as well as increased absenteeism, attrition and reduced organisational outcomes.

In contrast, a positive workplace culture can boost employee wellness and help serve as a protective factor against psychosocial risk.

Applying psychosocial risk management measures can help to shape a positive workplace culture. Establishing a culture of caring and trust through supportive leadership is also essential.

9.1 Leadership competencies for healthy workplaces[4]

Leaders play a vital role in the psychological health and safety of workers and creating a positive workplace culture. Leaders with a 'people focus' can help protect and buffer workers against psychological injury and enhance individual well-being at work. Where possible, supervisors and managers should develop and utilise the following competencies to support healthy workplace environments.

9.1.1 Communication and collaboration

To support the growth and development of workers clear exchange of information is required. Leaders need to be transparent in decision making, change management, feedback and what a worker needs to do their job successfully.

Leaders should encourage inclusion by getting to know their teams and inviting contributions from all team members. Importantly, regular and timely feedback and recognition is a significant contributor to a worker's well-being in the workplace. In addition, encouraging collaborative efforts will also help to support a worker's success and well-being, as well as a positive workplace culture.

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[4] National standard of Canada for psychological health and safety in the workplace

9.1.2 Positive role-modelling

Leaders need to act in ways to support the values and behavioural expectations in the workplace. By serving as a facilitator of 'psychologically safe' interactions a leader can reinforce expectations and trust within the workplace. Additionally, role-modelling appropriate psychological self-care, including self-regulation and work-life balance, will support workers to enhance their own psychological well-being.

9.1.3 Problem solving and conflict management

Leaders should demonstrate clear, fair and consistent approaches to resolving conflict. Facilitating effective discussion, consultation and seeking worker contributions to problem solving is also a sign of healthy leadership.

9.1.4 Safety and Security

Security and safety involves supporting a safe environment through proactive, prompt, and effective responses to any threats to psychological or physical safety. Along with supporting physical safety, appropriate environmental conditions and security, leaders should ensure team cultures that encourage trust and connection with others. A psychologically safe work environment limits 'interpersonal risk', where a worker feels encouraged to speak up around sensitive issues or share novel ideas without concern of negative judgement or consequences.

9.1.5 Fairness and Integrity

Effective leadership involves engaging workers in an honest, sincere and ethical manner. Fairness and integrity involves leadership that is transparent, and consistent, where there is fairness and equity in decision-making.

9.2 Promote well-being for the individual

In addition to addressing psychological risks at the organisational level, as part of an integrated approach to psychological safety and well-being in the workplace, consideration of how to enhance individual well-being is also important. While not a substitute for addressing psychological hazards at the source (i.e. addressing

organisational factors) secondary interventions aimed at enhancing individual strengths and capabilities should be considered.

This can be achieved by supporting staff to participate in programs or initiatives designed to build effective skills in coping resources, managing stress, self-awareness, effective communication skills and resilience.

Promotion of, supporting and role-modelling flexibility and work-life balance suitable to the individual's personal circumstances can not only improve an individual's level of well-being, it can also provide numerous benefits to the organisation, including employee retention, engagement and morale.

In addition, building organisational capacity through training and education of staff in recognising and supporting mental health concerns can assist addressing individual well-being concerns at the early intervention stage.

Ensuring workers have access to and awareness of support services available to them, such as the Employee Assistance Program is also an important aspect of an integrated approach to psychological safety and well-being in the workplace.

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