

TRAUMA INFORMED PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

Responding To The Challenge



Stress at Work

Work-related stress leading to illness, injury and weakened organisational performance can come from many sources, both work and non-work.

Organisations are not able to control workers' personal lives and the stressors they may encounter there, however they do have a legal obligation to minimise their exposure to work-related factors that can increase the risk of work-related stress.

Risk factors for work-related stress are aspects of work that are associated with psychiatric, psychological and/or physical injury or illness.

The eight risk factors for work-related stress are interrelated, so it is best not to consider them in isolation. There is a greater risk of work-related stress when a number of these stressors or risk factors act in combination.

Stressors or risk factors for work-related stress include:

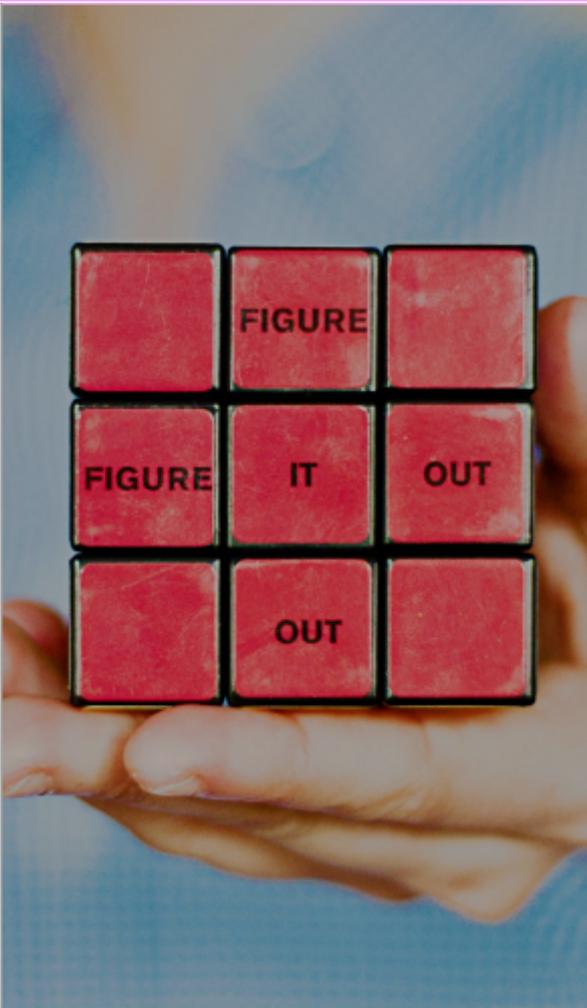
- high work demands (emotional, mental, physical)
- low control
- poor support
- lack of role clarity
- poorly managed change
- poorly managed relationships
- low levels of recognition and reward
- organisational injustice

Authored by

KERRY HOWARD

Trauma Prevention Strategist
Principal Psychologist





92%

of serious
work-related
psychological injury
claims are attributed to
work-related mental
stress each year

The Problem

One of the most significant risk factors for psychological injury is poorly managed change.

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 workers feeling anxious and uncertain about aspects of their work or employment status.

This risk relates to how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated to staff. Change can be related to alterations in individual work conditions such as a change of role, shift roster or the introduction of new technology; or can be related to work, team or organisational level changes such as mergers, acquisitions, restructures or downsizing. Poor management of this process can lead to workers feeling anxious and uncertain about aspects of their work or employment status.

Organisational level solutions should address communication before and during a change process, consultation and participation throughout the process and revision of job roles following any changes that occur.

Communicating what the organisation needs to achieve through the change and involving and supporting workers throughout the process is crucial.

Four Keys for Preventing Injury

Communication

The most important strategy in achieving successful change. Failure to effectively communicate changes in the workplace may increase worker distress.

Consultation and Participation

Ensure workers are consulted about workplace change throughout the change process and are aware of any potential impacts on their roles.

Access to Support

Workers may need additional practical or emotional support during times of organisational change.

Post Transition Review

Check role allocation for fit, and then update team and individual work plans after the change to ensure roles, objectives and accountabilities are clear.



The Solution

According to Safe Work Australia, a serious claim is an accepted workers' compensation claim for an incapacity that results in a total absence from work of one working week or more.

Psychological injuries are classified under diseases. Diseases were responsible for 11.5 per cent of serious claims, with the most common being mental health conditions.

Among claims involving disease, mental health conditions recorded the largest increase in time lost, rising from 11.2 working weeks in 2000–01 to 17.3 weeks in 2016–17 - an increase of a whopping 54 per cent. Mental health conditions have recorded the highest compensation paid for all diseases in recent years. Each psychological injury claim costs over \$32,000 on average. This is more than double the median compensation paid for all serious claims - \$12,100.

The agencies reported to be responsible for affecting mental health recorded the largest percentage increase in median time lost, increasing by 9 per cent over the period. This may be representative of poor workplace culture, resulting in increased worker's compensation claims.

34%
of all COVID-19
related workers
compensation
claims are for
mental health

Change or Performance Management is not Bullying

Not all behaviour that makes a worker feel upset or undervalued is workplace bullying.

Differences of opinion and disagreements are not generally workplace bullying. However, when conflict is not managed, it may escalate to the point where it becomes workplace bullying.

Workplace Bullying and Harassment

According to Safe Work Australia, workplace bullying is repeated and unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety.

It is a risk to health and safety because it may affect the mental and physical health of workers. Taking steps to prevent it from occurring, and responding quickly if it does, is the best way to deal with workplace bullying.

Prevention is Better than Cure

Organisations can minimise the risk of workers compensation claims by taking a proactive approach to identify early, any unreasonable behaviour and situations likely to increase the risk of psychological injury occurring.

Key Findings From The Australian Workplace Barometer Project

\$6.3 Billion

total cost of depression to Australian employers due to presenteeism and absenteeism per annum

154%

performance loss at work from psychologically distressed workers than those who are not

12%

more sick days per month in workers with low engagement costing employers \$4796 annually

Workplace Culture

Research from Beyond Blue around emergency service workers highlights that a dysfunctional workplace is just as likely to cause a person to develop PTSD as being routinely exposed to traumatic experiences in the field.

Improving management commitment to psychological health and safety could be an innovative strategy to reduce lost productivity, as well as substantially improve the wellbeing of workers.

The most inspiring leaders can feel powerless in the face of challenging workplace culture, as it feels overwhelming and confusing. Most people believe that there is little that can be done to resolve it without creating more issues, so they try to ignore it. However, avoidance of the issues just compounds the problem.

For many leaders this can feel like an embarrassing problem that they just want to go away. They want to feel confident that they can find the expertise to understand how it develops, what perpetuates it and how to resolve it in a completely confidential manner.



Author
Speaker
Facilitator
Mentor
Consultant

Want To Know How To Better Support Your People?

Get in touch with us:

PsychNEXUS
(02) 6239 6191

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kerryhoward.com.au