

TIP SHEET 6

Levels of control and work-related stress

This risk factor addresses the level of influence workers have on how they meet their task demands and the way they perform their work in general. Low levels of job control, where there is high work demand and low support from co-workers or supervisors, may increase the likelihood of work-related stress.

Some jobs are inherently low in control – for example call centres – but it is possible for all persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) to enhance workers' control over their work in a number of ways.

Possible solutions

Decisions need to be made about what practical solutions (control measures) will be used in the workplace to prevent, eliminate or minimise the effect of work-related stressors on worker health.

At the organisational level, controls target the work itself and focus on job design, the work environment, and on working conditions.

For the risk factor 'low levels of control', organisational level solutions address levels of self direction, allowing input into decision making, fostering consultation and communication and supervising workers appropriately.

Choice/self direction

Ideally, a worker's tasks need to be meaningful, varied and allow for an appropriate degree of self direction.

- Where possible, let workers have a say in how their own work is organised rather than imposing direction. Allow them to have input on:
 - how job tasks should be completed (where the order and timing of tasks are not critical to the outcome)
 - how problems should be tackled
 - the pace of their work.

- Ensure workers have the skills required to achieve most of their goals. Where skills are lacking, discuss opportunities for development.
- Use performance reviews as a positive opportunity for workers to have input into the way they do their work, rather than focusing only on inadequate performance.
- Provide opportunities for job rotation to enable skill development and job variation.

Input into decision-making

Everyone in a business or undertaking should feel they have input into their work – not just those in senior positions. There are a number of ways a PCBU can ensure everyone contributes to decision-making:

- Hold regular team meetings during which workers can have input into decisions that concern their work.
- Involve workers in the allocation of responsibility for tasks within teams and in determining work objectives and anticipated outputs, roles, timeframes and resourcing.
- Provide training to develop supportive leaders who delegate and encourage participation and welcome new ideas.
- Encourage a participative approach to management through all of the above.

Consultation and communication

- Communicate with workers about how and why decisions are made. Whenever possible, seek team involvement with making these decisions.
- Develop and maintain a working environment in which workers are consulted and can provide feedback on changes impacting on their tasks.
- Develop a system that enables workers to have input into broader organisational issues (for example a suggestion scheme/box).
- Know when it is appropriate to consult with workers and ensure the outcomes of a consultation process are fed back to them.

Appropriate supervision

- Ensure that managers are competent supervisors.
- Consult with workers when developing performance monitoring systems.
- Provide a method through which workers can review and contribute to the output of monitoring systems.
- Develop team-based targets which assist in building effective teams and by measuring team performance against the organisational goals.

- When assigning work, negotiate objective and reasonable standards to increase workers' perceptions of ownership and fairness.
- Unless necessary, avoid asking workers to regularly stay after hours without prior consultation.
- If a decision is made to use performance monitoring systems, consult with workers when developing policies on the use of these systems.

At the individual level, solutions are aimed at assisting individuals to cope or build resilience.

Appropriate activities to be considered at this level of intervention include:

- corporate induction programs
- access to employee assistance programs
- training about resilience
- health and wellbeing programs
- counselling/therapy for people experiencing distress from sources both in and outside of the workplace.

This tip sheet is one of 12 that refer to work-related stress. For more detail, go to workcover.nsw.gov.au

1. Overview of work-related stress
2. A risk management approach to work-related stress
3. Implementing a work-related stress risk management process
4. Risk factors for work-related stress
5. Work demands and work-related stress
6. Levels of control and work-related stress
7. Support from supervisors and/or co-workers regarding work-related stress
8. Role clarity, role conflict and work-related stress
9. Managing relationships and work-related stress
10. Recognition and reward – minimising work-related stress
11. Managing change and work-related stress
12. Organisational justice and work-related stress

This document was developed by Workplace Health & Safety QLD, Department of Justice and Attorney General worksafe.qld.gov.au

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