

TIP SHEET 11

Managing change and work-related stress

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.

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 environment itself and focus on job design and on working conditions.

For the risk factor 'poorly managed change', 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.

Communication

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

When communicating proposals for change, either concerning individual work conditions or larger changes to the work-team or person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU), the following may help manage this stressor:

- 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.
- Give workers the background and reasons behind the change.
- Explain what the PCBU wants from the change (key objectives) and discuss expected outcomes and timeframes with workers.

- Be upfront about any significant adjustments that will follow the proposed change (for example a restructure or the need to retrain workers).
- Establish a communication system (for example meetings or emails) that keeps workers up to date with developments.
- Communicate developments quickly, preventing the spread of rumours.
- Try to have an open door policy for workers who want to discuss their concerns with their managers or supervisors.
- Advise workers of the final decision both verbally and in writing.

Consultation and participation

- Ensure workers are consulted about workplace change and as a minimum, note that workers and/or their unions have a legal right to be consulted about significant changes under their award, agreement or industrial relations legislation.
- Ensure workers are supported throughout the change process and are aware of any potential impacts on their roles.
- Provide opportunities for workers to participate in the change process to encourage uptake, increase motivation and promote ownership of the process and outcomes.
- Encourage involvement from individuals and work teams.
- 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.

- Give workers enough time to consider and respond to any proposals.
- Encourage workers to be involved in the planning of change initiative(s) and to provide ongoing feedback on the proposed change.
- Ensure the results of consultations are fed back to the group or individuals and discuss why it may not have been possible to take some ideas on board.
- Implement changes in a timely manner.

Review roles

- Review team and individual work plans after the change to ensure roles, objectives and accountabilities are clear.
- 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.
- Encourage workers to develop their skills to help them undertake new and challenging work produced by the change.
- Ensure workers feel confident in undertaking their job tasks and make sure they receive enough training for them to be competent in their roles.
- Where a change in structure or roles occurs, or re-training is required, use the performance review process as a positive opportunity for workers to have renewed input to the way they complete their work.

Provide support

- Be aware that workers may need additional practical or emotional support during times of organisational change. Refer to Tip Sheet 7 – Support from supervisors and/or co-workers.

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

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