

chnnl

chnnl playbook:
Psychosocial Risk



Introduction

We have the right to be physically safe at work. We also have a legal right to be psychologically safe at work. Just as no worker should go home with a broken leg, strained back or worse - people should also not go home with symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress or burnout. At first this area may seem like a problem that is insurmountable, after all people, work and how we interact is inherently complex.

As with all complex problems we can define it, break it down into categories and help you to start the journey of continuous improvement. The first step is to identify the hazards and start talking about them. It is the checks and balances, the systems and processes, and whether or not it is talked about and prioritised that makes the difference.

Psychosocial risks: learning outcomes

One

The three main categories of psychosocial risks in line with ISO45003 standards.

Two

A basic process for identifying psychosocial risks in your organisation.

Three

A manageable approach for working better together.

Psychological Safety & Psychosocial Risks

Psychological safety is a key element for organisations and teams to function well and meet their potential. Amy Edmondson's definition is that Psychological Safety is, "a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking."

This is a good starting place for understanding the relationship and differences between psychological safety and psychosocial risks. Psychological safety improves productivity, innovation, and is also an ethical and moral imperative.

Our ability to live fulfilling lives depends a great deal on how we work. This includes the demands of our workload, if we feel productive and valued, how we are supported, if we are paid fairly, and day to day interactions with peers and leaders.

Psychosocial risks are defined as "... those aspects of work design and the organisation and management of work, and their social and environmental context, which may have the potential to cause psychological or physical harm". Cox and Griffiths (1995)

Psychological Safety

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Psychosocial Risks

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Psychosocial Risks

The first global standard for managing psychosocial risks was published in June 2021. It is known as ISO45003 and is designed to sit alongside the ISO framework for physical safety ISO45001. The framework provides specific guidance on managing psychosocial risks and promoting wellbeing at work and promotes a similar approach to how we manage other health and safety risks. This framework is voluntary in most jurisdictions however that is changing and dismissing the standard might arguably be considered negligent if a regulator were to determine that an organisation was aware of the best practice but chose to ignore it.

One of the most important steps for any organisation is to identify what your psycho-social hazards are. Here are places that provide good insights into the possible hazards

- HR data such as sick leave, personal grievances, turn over, exit interviews
- EAP data
- Employee wellbeing/engagement surveys
- chnnl data

You may decide to supplement this data by conducting focus groups and one-on-one interviews.



Identifying Hazards

To help us identify Psychosocial risks, the ISO45003 divides hazards into 3 categories. How work is organised, social factors and environmental factors. Here we outline the hazards and what good looks like.

How Work is Organised

Hazard	What good looks like
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unacceptable workload• Repetitive or unchallenging tasks• Hectic work• Unrealistic time frames or targets• Inadequate or insufficient equipment• Understaffed• Poor match between skills & work requirements• Unclear goals or expectations• Lack of autonomy or control of task or pace of work• Lack of involvement in decisions• Poor physical working conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acceptable workload• Variable, challenging tasks• Well paced work• Realistic timeframes and targets• Adequate, sufficient equipment• Adequately staffed• Match between skills and work requirements• Clear goals and expectations• Autonomy & control of task or pace of work• Appropriate involvement in decisions• Good physical working conditions

Identifying Hazards

Social Factors

Hazard	What good looks like
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult or destructive work relations • Threatening, harassing, or bullying work relations • Irregular or unsocial working hours • Unsupportive leaders or colleagues • Inadequate or ambiguous communication • Lack of appreciation or recognition • Unclear or conflicting roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive, respectful work relations • Non-threatening, supportive work relations • Regular, social working hours • Supportive leaders & colleagues • Clear & transparent communication • Meaningful appreciation & recognition • Clear, distinct roles

Environmental Factors

Hazard	What good looks like
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote working in difficult conditions • Concern about exposure to harmful chemicals, bacteria/virus, people • Shift work, disrupted sleep or anti-social hours/location • 	<p>Difficult working conditions carefully designed to include: adequate safety process and equipment, good training and ongoing communication, access to support, appropriate remuneration, flexible and sufficient time off for rest and relationships.</p>

Activity: Identifying and Analysing Hazards

Let's go through a scenario in order to consider how we might analyze the hazards for their risk potential. From here consider how you might eliminate or reduce these risks, and also look at the support that people might need if they are exposed to potentially harmful environments. Finally, you will decide how you will monitor and review these hazards.

Scenario: you are gathering a project team to work on a new exciting initiative.

- What's the project?
- How long is it expected to take?
- How many people?
- Where will you be based?

Psychosocial risk management plan

01

Start by identifying the potential hazards in the 3 main categories:

How work is organised

- Do you have the right expertise?
- Do you have too many or too few people?
- Do you have clearly defined roles? Who will be responsible for what?
- What is the time frame? What challenges will this create?
- Will the workload be acceptable- where are the pain points? Will the project be over and above people's normal workload?
- Where will the work be done? Will it require everyone to work in the same place? How much flexibility will people have over their working hours? If everyone will be working remotely, what challenges will this create?

Social factors

Example: The project requires innovation and creativity to develop a new solution. We foresee that there will be differences of opinion during the project. We will:

- select a group who will provide diversity of thought
- support them to build safe working relationships with each other,
- develop a code of conduct that will allow for differing opinions to be discussed,
- ensure we have leaders who can facilitate robust discussions,
- have a plan for when we disagree,
- Provide a clear chain of authority
- Provide role clarity and define the scope of work
- identify regular ways to recognise and reward success
- Understand what people value outside of work and where possible, provide flexible working and appropriate work/life balance

Environmental factors

Identify the potential hazards such as remote working, exposure to traumatic events, exposure to potentially hazardous materials (including health issues like Covid 19), exposure to difficult stakeholders (internal/external) etc.

02

Consider which of these hazards you can control for. Where can you eliminate and minimise risk? Where do you need to provide support when exposure cannot be avoided?

03

Decide how you will monitor and review these hazards. This could include 1-on-1s, regular anonymous surveys, facilitated team discussions, reporting of concerns, changes and issues with resourcing (including illness) that impact the team as the project progresses. Remember to include success stories, when things have worked well.

Example outputs

Example:

Everyone will need a new piece of software installed. If there are issues with the software then it will cause a large amount of disruption and frustration. Therefore we are going to make sure that the software has been tested, any bugs rectified and training completed before the project begins to reduce the likelihood of psychological harm that results when crucial IT tools malfunction. We will also invest in a team to provide IT support.

Example:

This is a new team and they will all be working remotely. In order to develop and maintain good working relationships, we will budget for bringing the group together when the project starts and then at regular intervals for the duration of the project. The travel/accommodation costs will be offset by the anticipated lift in productivity that this is likely to achieve and the likelihood that someone might resign due to feeling isolated/frustrated if we don't help the group to build good foundational relationships.

Example:

The technical lead of the project is not always the best communicator. They will be responsible for the technical aspects of the project, but people management and support will be provided by another senior leader with expertise in communication and group facilitation. This will enable the Technical Lead to focus their energy where their skills lie, and for the team to have leadership and support from a skilled people leader.

Psychosocial Pillars

Now that we have looked at psychosocial risks for a project you may want to broaden your focus to your organisation. Here are a few things to bear in mind:

1

Research conducted on psychosocial climates shows that these four pillars need to be in place in order to create a climate where psycho-social safety exists. The first focus must be on establishing these pillars.

- Commitment from Senior Management
- Prioritisation from Senior Management
- Effective Organisational Communication
- Organisational participation

Reference PSC Domains (Tuckey, 2016).

2

Take time to make sure that you have good quality data so that you really understand why this is important to your organisation and your team. Consider things like sick leave, annual leave, turnover, exit interviews, wellbeing and engagement surveys. Remember to also make note of what is going well and what people value.

3

Aim for two changes that you can implement fairly quickly in response to the data that you have received. For example:

- A company wide agreement that messages will not be sent outside of normal office hours
- No internal meetings to be scheduled between 12 - 1pm so that everyone can have a lunch break
- Pre-agreed company wide focus time one morning a week where no meetings are scheduled so that people have one morning a week of uninterrupted focus time.

Psychosocial Pillars

4

Finally, look for one longer term project that will take 3-10 months to complete. Maybe this is about training, new technology, research into new ways of working or work allocation, or increasing staff numbers. Use the data to establish where the greatest pain points are and which of these can be prioritised.

It is much better to resolve 3 issues over a 12 month period than to talk about 15 issues but not take any significant action.

Closing

Wherever you and your organisation are in terms of culture and psychosocial risk, remember, sometimes small, authentic actions that show your people that you care can make a big difference. Talking about your own challenges and vulnerabilities gives others permission to be themselves. Helping your people to disagree with kindness, support each other with compassion and celebrate the contribution of every member in your team will make a big difference to the lives of the people you work with. As a people leader, you do not need to have all of the answers - but to facilitate your team to try and make everyone's day just a little bit easier and more rewarding.

