TIP SHEET 12

Organisational justice and work-related stress

Organisational justice refers to workers' perceptions of fairness at work. Procedural fairness relates to how procedures are implemented and relational fairness relates to the degree of dignity and respect given to workers. It is important for a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) to promote a positive and fair working environment as the experience of injustice can be harmful to both the worker and the PCBU.

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, work environment and working conditions.
>
> For the risk factor 'organisational injustice', organisational level solutions may include ensuring procedures are unbiased, consistently applied, use accurate information and are open to appeal processes.

Procedural fairness

Work procedures where unfair practices commonly occur include management of poor performance, selection and recruitment, promotion, the allocation of tasks and resources and the performance review process.

The following can help ensure that procedures are regarded as fair:

Consistent and unbiased

- Design procedures so they can be consistently applied to all workers and work groups. For example, have a structured performance review process so all workers are reviewed using consistent criteria.

- Carry out procedures the same way each time they are applied (for example, job selection and performance management).

- Ensure decision makers are impartial and that they collect unbiased and accurate information to guide their decisions.

- Listen to the concerns of all workers being impacted by a procedure and allow workers to request additional information or clarification if needed.

- Appoint or promote workers based on performance, using valid and reliable selection and recruitment methods.

- Provide workers with a mechanism to appeal the result of a procedure. Where a worker may perceive unfair work practices, encourage them to access the appeal process.

- Regularly review the effectiveness of procedures to ensure they are meeting their objectives.

Consultation and communication

- Familiarise workers with organisational policies and procedures, both during induction and ongoing. Ensure they are easily accessible – online and in hardcopy – so that workers know what to expect.

- Encourage a participative approach to management by encouraging workers to have input into decisions that directly affect them.

- Encourage worker involvement and ownership of procedures by engaging workers at all levels of the organisation during their development.

- Develop and maintain a working environment whereby workers are consulted and can provide feedback on changes impacting on their job tasks.

- Communicate the reason for a change in policy or procedure to workers. They are more likely to accept a decision, even if unfavourable, if they are given a clear explanation of its background and aims. Successful strategies for communication include:
    - internal newsletters
    - direct email
    - website
    - team meetings
    - noticeboards.

- Develop a system that enables workers to have input into broader organisational issues (for example a suggestion scheme/box).

Relational fairness

Relational fairness refers to the way managers interact with workers as well as the way workers interact among themselves.

The following can help manage this situation by ensuring fairness is maintained in the workplace:

- Treat workers with respect, dignity and politeness at all times.

- Ensure that management structures across the organisation and reporting lines within work teams are clear. This will help workers know who they are accountable to and where they can go for help with work problems.

- Ensure workers have an up to date role or position description, which includes the role purpose, reporting relationships and the key duties expected of them.

- Have a direct supervisor provide a worker feedback on their performance as they need to be familiar with the requirements of the role and how well the worker is meeting their task demands.

- Use performance reviews as a time to provide positive and constructive advice for future performance, including opportunities for skill development.

- When investigating issues of misconduct, ensure all parties have equal opportunity to respond to allegations.

- Train managers in how to have difficult conversations with their workers. Refer to Fact Sheet 9 – Managing relationships.

Managing poor or under performance

- Provide workers evidence for decisions made about their work performance.

- Allow workers to have input in the process (for example, allow workers to respond to issues raised about their work performance).

- Do not focus on placing blame. Instead use this process as an opportunity for learning and improvement.

- Choose the meeting location carefully when having difficult conversations to maintain privacy and confidentiality.

- Inform workers of the consequences of continued poor performance and ensure they are aware of the process used to manage this issue.

- Ensure grievance and complaint handling procedures are applied fairly to all workers.

Provide support

- Practical or emotional support from a supervisor and/or co-worker can have a positive impact on a worker's perception of fairness. Refer to Tip Sheet 7 – Support from supervisors and/or co-workers).

- Provide and promote an employee assistance program that responds to individual issues or concerns, both work and non-work related.

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

Appropriate activities and assistance 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

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