

## Scenario 3

# Government call centre

Example scenarios for managing psychosocial hazards and risks at work



The control measures you choose must suit the organisational and worker needs and effectively control the risks to the highest level that is reasonably practicable. Below is an industry-specific scenario example featuring common psychosocial hazards and risks, example controls and approaches to maintain, monitor, review and achieve continual improvement of the risk management approach.

## Scenario context and work content

A government department located in Sydney and a regional city deals with customers' telephone inquiries, some face-to-face requests for help, and takes complaints.

There are tightly scripted responses, protocols and service standards to deal with the calls or interactions with limited time allocated to spend with each person.

Workers always do the same tasks and their break times are regimented. Customers can become abusive due to long wait times and uncomfortable waiting areas.

A recent restructuring occurred, and workers are unsure about their roles and future workloads. A new IT system with new performance monitoring software is making workers anxious as they have not yet all had training on it.

## Psychosocial hazards and risks

**Role overload, emotionally demanding work and role conflict** from the constant time pressures and required response times which are not adequate for complex matters and risk of verbal or physical abuse from distressed clients.

Low **job control** and **lack of task variety** as work is tightly scripted and roles narrow, generally with poor support and recognition of efforts.

Lack of **role clarity** and poor **change management** around new IT systems and the restructure.

## Psychosocial controls

The organisation, after consulting supervisors, workgroups and HSRs to reduce **role overload** and **role conflict**:

- is renegotiating service level agreements and response times so they are manageable with existing worker numbers
- has addressed some of the reasons for the role overload, and customer abuse - improved scripts, provided a concierge who triages and offers customers alternatives if wait times are lengthy, and has installed more comfortable furniture in waiting areas.

The supervisor, to reduce **role overload/conflict, emotional demands, low job control, lack of task variety, poor support** and **change management**, is:

- triaging complex issues - sending these to more experienced workers first or where this is not possible junior workers can flag if they need help
- providing task rotation so workers can build new skills and get a break from stressful calls/interactions
- ensuring workers take short breaks, away from their workstation
- providing emotional support during and following abusive interactions (e.g. ability to escalate the issue to a supervisor, debrief time and to recover away from the general work area if required)
- developed call monitoring policies in consultation with workers and uses these for coaching
- ensuring training on the new IT system is provided before it is introduced and relaxes the performance targets until workers are familiar with the new systems.

## Review and improve

The organisation:

- to identify and assess risks and adequacy of controls gets workers to complete the [People at Work psychosocial risk assessment survey](#) and monitors and reviews other WHS data
- ensures the leadership team have all completed training on their WHS duties and good work design and are applying these to future restructures and planned IT upgrades
- supports workers who want temporary secondments to other parts of the department for two-way learning and a break from the regimented work.

The supervisor:

- supports workers who want to develop technical or specialist skills, and provides technical and specialist workers with the opportunity to mentor new workers, and
- became a member of an industry Mental Health Community of Practice to get ideas and support on managing psychosocial hazards and risks from other peers in the industry.

Refer to SafeWork NSW's [Code of Practice Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work](#) for more information or [Designing Work to Manage Psychosocial Risks](#) which also includes four case studies illustrating organisational and team level work design, and team and task level work design.