

Scenario 4

Construction company

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 medium-sized residential construction company is currently managing several projects, some are not on schedule, and there is a backlog of work.

The manager is responsible for organising the contractors, apprentices, ensuring supplies and equipment are delivered to different sites.

An electrical subcontractor is engaged for all the sites, and the building manager is aware that one of the electricians has been verbally aggressive with a first-year apprentice engaged by the construction business. He tells the apprentice that this is how the industry is, that he does not have time to deal with this and that he needs to toughen up and get on with his work.

The apprentice just wants to learn but makes regular mistakes and is afraid to ask for help. He wants verbal aggression to stop.

Psychosocial hazards and risks

Poor emotional and practical supervisor and manager support: The manager does not acknowledge the apprentice's concerns or have the time to manage the training of apprentices.

Occupational violence and poor workplace relationships: Verbal aggression by the electrician, which could escalate to physical aggression if not stopped, is also having a negative impact on the apprentice's ability to focus on his work. This is also stopping him from asking for help when he needs it.

Low job control: the apprentice has little say in his work.

Role overload demands: the manager and workers experience a high workload with competing deadlines.

Psychosocial controls

The business owner, after consulting the manager and workers to address **poor workplace relationships, support and role overload**:

- meets with the electrical subcontractor to develop behaviour standards for all their workers when undertaking work at the same sites and processes for addressing safety concerns, including violence and aggression
- informs workers that aggressive behaviour can be reported to him directly
- speaks with the apprentice to check on his wellbeing and provide information about psychological support services
- reviews the supervision and support of apprentices
- decides to reduce the demands on the manager by providing assistance with managing contracts and tenders.

The manager, to improve **support and job control**:

- starts daily toolbox talks with all workers, including contractors, to provide relevant information and instructions
- sets time aside each week to understand the first-year apprentice's learning requirements, assess his progress, develop learning goals, gets the supervisor to give him responsibility for some tasks he should be competent to do, and allocates a third-year apprentice to buddy the first-year apprentice to support him on various tasks.

Review and improve

After consulting with the manager, the business owner:

- to identify and assess risks and adequacy of controls gets staff to periodically complete the [People at Work psychosocial risk assessment survey](#)
- implements more regular 'look and listen safety walks' multiple times each build
- integrates support and mentoring of apprentices into their systems
- checks in with the apprentice to verify that the verbally aggressive behaviour has stopped
- arranges training for supervisors of apprentices, particularly on managing young and inexperienced workers
- arranges regular reviews of workplace behaviour grievances and training to be included in the organisations WHS systems
- ensures the WHS systems are capable of capturing reports of high work demands and harmful workplace behaviour
- creates (with workers) a safety culture charter displayed prominently in project offices, around the site etc.

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.