

Work Design Case Study 3

Education

Example case studies illustrating organisational and team level work design, and team and task level work design



Organisational context and work situation

A morning administrative meeting has been introduced by senior leaders in a school. Workers must attend the meeting in addition to their current work requirements. Workers were not consulted prior to the announcement.

Workers emailed the principal with concerns about the process and additional workload. Workers felt that their workload had grown out of control, was impacting on their health and their family relationships, and the new imposed additional meeting was the 'last straw'. One worker experienced an escalation in psychological distress and lodged a claim for workers compensation for a psychological injury.

Psychosocial hazards and risks

The principal took immediate action to suspend the proposed new additional meeting so the executive could revisit the suggestion and review the existing meetings workers needed to attend in addition to their teaching duties. A confidential survey was also sent out to all affected staff so that their views could be considered. A range of psychosocial hazards and risks were identified through the review, priorities were:

- Risk of poor organisational change consultation if workers were not involved in design decisions.
- High workload
- Low control.

Work design process and control measures to manage psychosocial risks

Following the review, the executive decided the additional morning administration meeting would go ahead beginning in the following term. This would allow staff to make childcare arrangements where necessary. Other meetings that were currently being held once a week would only occur on an as-needs basis, which would be determined by the affected staff.

Overall, the review showed that staff valued the concept of a whole staff weekly administration meeting, that had a clear start and finish time, an agenda circulated in advance, and opportunities for additional items to be raised. Workers said they did not believe they could manage this meeting without other requirements being reduced to fit it in. The principal set that in peak periods no meetings should be held at all, and any urgent administrative matters could be dealt with by email in those weeks.

At the educational department level, while conducting a regular review of incident reports, the People and Culture team noticed a spike in the number of claims for psychological injury. They also noted feedback from workers that too many work hours along with an intensification of work was contributing to many workers feeling burnt out. This trend was discussed at the senior executive level. The department issued advice to principals that they needed to consult with staff and consider staff members' time when allocating work tasks and setting expectations.