

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE: DRIVING MOTIVATION THROUGH STRUCTURE

Creating a healthy and thriving workplace is vital to taking care of an employee's wellbeing. This requires a holistic approach to organisational design that must be supported by leaders of the business. For this to happen, employers need to move past the physical environment of the workplace and instead focus on how employees are integrated and aligned with key business tasks, systems and structures.

Strategic workplace design can increase the success and recognition of employee efforts through meaningful roles, clarified responsibilities and enhanced workplace relationships. However, if employers solely focus on the 'motivators' to guarantee job satisfaction and employee wellbeing, they run the risk of neglecting the separate set of factors that ultimately cause dissatisfaction. Much like when building a house, if the foundations are not strong enough, the house will begin to crumble. Developed by psychologist, Frederick Herzberg, the Two-Factor Theory acts as a strong framework to refocus organisational design on all factors that cause workplace satisfaction *and* dissatisfaction, as they act independently of each other.¹

This guide explores how to leverage some aspects of organisational design to generate a positive working environment.

Identifying, assessing and controlling workplace risks to mental health

Creating a flexible and thriving workplace is critical in reducing mental ill-health, burnout and emotional or physical exhaustion. The *Allianz Future Thriving Workplaces* report revealed more than four in ten (41%) of Australian workers surveyed would like to see their employer implement flexible working options, and this can include working from home or at an alternate location, flexible working hours and offering time in lieu.²

Many employers across many industries are exploring flexible work options, and over a third (35%) of employees say their workplaces have recently applied more flexible working options.³ However, it remains the most desired activity to help address mental health at work and employers should be looking to trial flexible work arrangements for their workers if they are not already.⁴

There are also some instances where, despite flexible working options being offered, employees may feel unable to take advantage of them and support their mental health. Mental health stigma is still one of the most significant barriers preventing mental health initiatives from succeeding at work, with almost one in three employees (30%) saying mental health stigma is a barrier to mental health initiatives taking place at their workplace.⁵





Preventing harm in the workplace is also about identifying, assessing and limiting risks to mental health in the workplace and acknowledging where improvements can be made. In fact, many workers (34%) feel a lack of process for identifying mental ill-health is a significant barrier to mental health initiatives succeeding where they work.⁶

Early intervention can be an important tool in fostering a happy and healthy workplace.⁷ Healthy workers are generally more productive and have better overall morale.⁸ Underpinning any early intervention should be serious self-reflection and acceptance of the drivers that could negatively impact on employees' mental health. This is fundamental in creating a psychologically safe workplace.

This can be achieved by moving beyond the mantra of 'work-life balance' and instead focusing on what is referred to as a holistic 'work-life integration.' This approach helps encourage links between all the areas that define 'life' – like work, home and family, community, personal wellbeing, and health.

As these areas of our lives become increasingly overlapped and challenged in this era of rapid change and disruption, integration cannot only address those flashpoints of dissatisfaction but provide a more viable and practical approach. By focusing on integrating different areas of life, workplace-related mental health risks can be better identified, assessed and properly addressed.

Again, along with asking what satisfies employees, we must also ask what is bothering or frustrating them. Put simply, the work-life integration approach will not work if the right culture is not there to facilitate it.

'Job crafting': How to introduce collaborative job design

Research has shown that jobs which allow for a variety of skills, significance and autonomy can lead to higher level of mental wellbeing and better work outcomes.⁹ Collaborative job design between employers and employees can help to ensure an employee's skills are matched to their job and there is absolute clarity on the role.



However, there is a tendency for traditional job design initiatives to be perceived as a 'top-down' organisational approach in which the worker is mostly passive.¹⁰ This can be problematic, as it risks turning what should be a motivating initiative into a dissatisfying activity for the employee.

To enhance wellbeing, the focus must shift by involving employees in the change process. This shift in approach where employees are proactively involved in designing what they do at work is referred to as 'job crafting.' As employees change their tasks and working relationships, this will ultimately change the perception of their jobs.

Both employers and employees across blue and white-collar industries agree that open conversations and employee check-ins are some of the most valuable tools in properly addressing mental health at work.¹¹

Two-Factor Theory in practice: Hazard reduction strategies for mental health

The well regarded Two-Factor Theory, developed by psychologist Frederick Herzberg, states that people's job satisfaction depends on two kinds of factors; factors for satisfaction (motivators/satisfiers) and factors for dissatisfaction (what is referred to as hygiene factors or dissatisfiers).¹²

Herzberg's approach was focused on the individual in the workplace. He believed that humans have two sets of needs, lower level and higher level. To motivate employees, organisations need to meet both of these, which grew into his Two Factor Theory.¹³



Motivate workers by...

- > Workforce planning to ensure balance between work demands/time pressure.
- > Providing employees with more control over how work is done – consult and where possible collectively agree to work procedures before work commences.
- > Flexible work arrangements where possible, with a focus on 'work-life integration.'
- > Rewarding workers' efforts and avenues for employees to recognise and acknowledge fellow colleagues' good work.
- > Engaging employees in the decision making process.
- > Provide adequate, achievable and accessible avenues for growth. This may include anything from tutorials and further learning to career pathways.



Reduce workplace risks by...

- > Consulting with workers when determining performance targets.
- > Defining job roles so the work activities and the overall scope of the work is clear. This includes regular feedback systems on worker performance.
- > Creating timeframes for workloads that are reasonable and achievable.
- > Appropriate planning, management and communication processes for organisational change.
- > Offer competitive salary and benefit conditions, coupled with a safe and practical workplace environment.
- > Providing adequate systems for employees to raise concerns and report unreasonable behaviour.

References

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