Allianz ⑪

Beyond Burnout:
A holistic guide to workplace wellbeing and prevention

A guide for employers and employees to support the prevention, and as necessary intervention, of burnout in the workplace.

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Contents

Starting your beyond burnout journey

Purpose of this guide

The rise in reported experiences of workplace stress and burnout necessitates a proactive approach towards fostering mental health and wellbeing in every Australian workplace. As part of our ongoing commitment to supporting mentally healthy workplaces, Allianz's Unpacking the New Workforce research project again highlighted the significant impact that workplace stress and burnout have for both the wellbeing of Australian employees and businesses as a whole. The Unpacking the New Workplace initiative recognises the importance of aligning employers and employees on mental health needs within the modern workforce, highlighting the need for a collaborative approach across all levels of organisations.

This guidebook is tailored to complement and enhance the aims of the Unpacking the New Workforce project. It utilises evidence-based research and focuses on practical and effective measures to equip employers and employees with the knowledge and tools necessary to create and maintain a positive work environment, where stress is reduced, burnout is addressed, and job satisfaction is enhanced.

By addressing key themes, the purpose of this guide is to provide both employers and employees with a robust framework including actionable strategies that can be implemented for creating a workplace culture that not only prevents burnout but actively promotes a thriving, well, and engaged workforce.

To ensure transparency and accessibility, the guidebook includes a reference list at the end, citing evidence-based research supporting the knowledge and recommendations provided.

Developed in partnership with Masters Students from the Department of Occupational Therapy, Monash University, 2024

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Not all injuries or barriers in the workplace are physical. Which is why we believe that prioritising the holistic wellbeing of employees is pivotal to building mentally healthy workplaces.
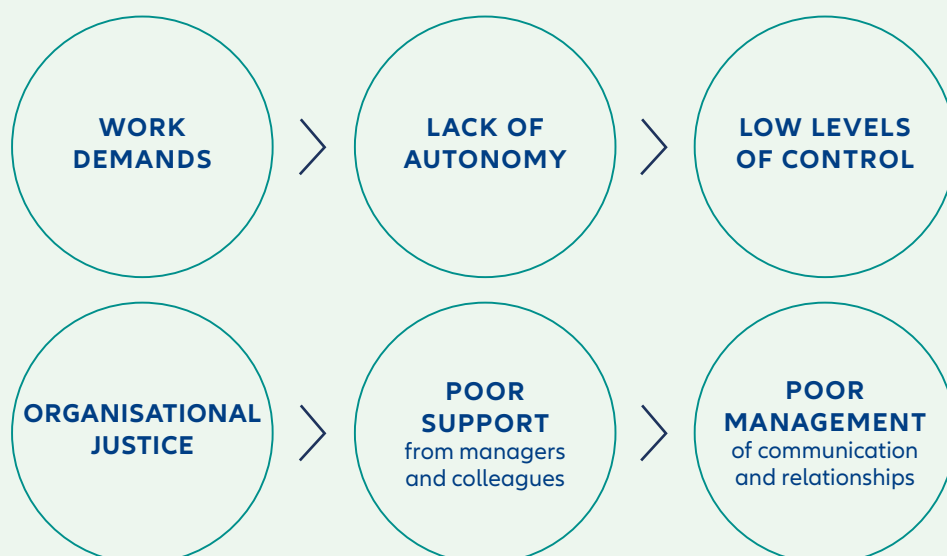
What is burnout?

Burnout is defined by the **World Health Organisation** as an occupational syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.[1]

Three dimensions of burnout

- Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion.

- Increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job.

- Reduced professional efficacy.[1]

Factors contributing to burnout

WORK DEMANDS		LACK OF AUTONOMY		LOW LEVELS OF CONTROL

ORGANISATIONAL JUSTICE		POOR SUPPORT from managers and colleagues		POOR MANAGEMENT of communication and relationships

Burnout and workplace stress impact negatively on job satisfaction, and also:

47.5% **Increase** in mental health claims.[2]

2.7m Australians claimed to **quit their job** in the next 6–12 months.[2]

Nearly half (46%) of surveyed Australian employees said cost of living pressures are negatively impacting their job satisfaction.[2]

48% Experienced **fatigue and burnout.**[2]

33% Claimed that they **felt exhausted when thinking** about their sentiment to work in the last 12 months.[2]

Common themes identified

These themes were chosen because they collectively address key factors contributing to burnout in the Australian workforce.

- A fair and equitable workplace fosters a sense of value and respect among employees and reduces feelings of injustice.

- Ensuring manageable workloads and reasonable time pressure prevents employees from becoming overwhelmed and exhausted.

- Clear and open communication builds trust and collaboration, reducing misunderstandings and conflicts that can increase stress levels.

- A supportive workplace culture and environment provides resources and emotional support, reducing feelings of isolation and promoting resilience.

- Empowering employees with autonomy promotes a sense of control and ownership, thus reducing frustration and disengagement that can lead to burnout.

Addressing these themes creates a **positive** work environment where employees feel **valued**, **supported** and **empowered**, ultimately reducing the risk of burnout and promoting overall **wellbeing** and **productivity**.

1 CREATING A JUST WORKPLACE

2 MANAGEABLE WORKLOADS AND TIME PRESSURES

3 EFFECTIVE WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION

4 CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

5 PROMOTING AUTONOMY

Creating a just workplace: Employers

Workplace justice is crucial as it fosters a fair and supportive environment, reduces stressors, promotes employee wellbeing and reduces burnout.[3]

1. Identify hazards

Conduct a Workplace Diversity Assessment

- Identify workplace discrimination by assessing workforce diversity, utilising tools to analyse demographic data, employee surveys, and feedback, effectively addressing and mitigating issues.
- Workplace cultural diversity tool.

Review Policies and Practices

- Assess existing policies for discriminatory elements and pinpoint areas of unintentional bias in processes like recruitment, promotion, and performance evaluation.
- Fair Work Ombudsman workplace discrimination factsheet.

Collect employee feedback

- Implement anonymous reporting mechanisms to foster open communication for employees to voice concerns.
- People at work - a free and validated Australian psychosocial risk assessment survey.

2. Assess risks

Data analysis

- Examine promotion, pay, and disciplinary data to identify disparities, assess risk of discrimination.
- Analyse trends and patterns to assess the risk of discrimination in different areas of the organisation.
- Workplace Gender Equality Agency tools and guides.

Legal compliance review

- Regularly update policies to comply with anti-discrimination laws, assess legal risks, and stay informed about Australian employment and workplace laws.
- Fair Work Commission's Anti-discrimination Compliance.

Training needs assessment

- Evaluate the need for diversity and inclusion training across all levels of the organisation.
- Identify specific areas where employees may lack awareness or understanding of anti-discrimination principles.
- AHRI - Diversity and Inclusion Maturity Model.

STEPS TO CREATE A JUST WORKPLACE

1 Identify hazards
2 Assess risks
3 Control risks
4 Review measures

3. Control risks

Implement training programs

- Conduct regular training on diversity, inclusion, and anti-discrimination policies using scenarios and case studies.
- Australian Human Rights Commission Training.

Establish reporting mechanisms

- Establish a confidential reporting system for employees to report discrimination, with clear procedures for investigation and resolution.
- SafeWork Australia Model Code of Practice for managing psychosocial hazards at work.

Promote inclusive leadership

- Encourage managers to lead by example, promoting diversity and inclusion in their workplace, fostering a culture that values and respects differences.
- Building Inclusion: An evidence-based model of inclusive leadership by the Diversity Council Australia.

4. Review measures

Regular audits, monitoring and feedback

- Regularly audit and assess the effectiveness of anti-discrimination measures, noting areas for improvement.
- Collect employee feedback through surveys to assess the impact of anti-discrimination initiatives.
- Diversity Council Australia - Inclusive Employer Index.

Creating a just workplace: Employees

Creating a just environment is not only the responsibility of employers. The actions and contributions of all employees also significantly influence workplace culture and experiences.[3]

Three strategies to adopt

1. Utilise available resources

Dealing with workplace injustices can be emotionally challenging. **Seeking support** provides a **safe** outlet to express feelings, reducing stress and promoting overall mental wellbeing.

By **utilising resources** and support pathways proactively, employees can address any sense of **injustice early, preventing** the escalation of issues and concerns.

Helpful resources:
- Your employer's internal policies.
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- Jobwatch.
- Fair Work Ombudsman.
- Australian Unions.

2. Speak up and advocate for others

Speaking up against injustices is the **key** to creating a fair workplace. It fosters mutual **support** and encourages open dialogue with managers, **driving positive change** and ensuring a respectful workplace for all.

Initiating a constructive conversation:
- Identify the appropriate channel such as a manager or HR team member.
- Review company policies on reporting injustices.
- Prepare relevant information about the concern.
- Choose a convenient time for an uninterrupted conversation.
- Clearly express your concerns and desired support.
- Follow up if necessary to ensure your concerns are addressed.

3. Document and share concerns

Documenting concerns regarding unjust experiences in the workplace, including detailed records of dates, times, individuals, and impacts on wellbeing and job performance, allows employers;
- To be more **aware** of recurring issues.
- To easily **identify patterns**.
- To have **clear communication** with all managers and employees.
- To **understand** the impact on employee wellbeing.

Helpful resources:
- Template for documenting incidents.
- Worker template: how to document incidents.

Manageable workloads and time pressures: Employers

In the fast-paced world of professional environments, the challenge of balancing tasks and deadlines can lead to overwhelming pressure, stress, and burnout among employees. The root causes are diverse, ranging from understaffing and high expectations to poor time management, tight deadlines, and a pervasive lack of work-life balance.[4] Excessive workloads and time pressures place individuals in situations where tasks surpass their capacity, resulting in physical and mental exhaustion.[4] The consequences are far-reaching, impacting job satisfaction, performance, and personal relationships.

Collaborative workload management sessions:

- Effective workload management is essential for preventing burnout.[5-6]
- Canada Life has created a series of free workshops and resources focusing on improving workplace mental health. These include easy to follow step by step facilitator guides, presentation slides and employer workbooks.

Example outline of a session:

- Participants brainstorm specific actions to prevent and reduce workload stress.
- The collaborative approach involves voting on strategies identified, ensuring collective input and agreement on effective solutions.
- The goal is to implement at least one strategy by the end of the session, fostering a proactive and collaborative approach to workload management.

Regular breaks and downtime:

- Supporting regular breaks and downtime promotes employee wellbeing, preventing burnout and fatigue. This, in turn, leads to improved focus and productivity during active work periods.[7-9]
- This practice allows employees to recharge helping to maintain consistent performance levels and preventing the accumulation of stress over time.[7-9]

Categories of healthy break activities:

Calming
These activities aim to reduce stress, promote a sense of tranquillity and enhance concentration.

- Deep-breathing exercises
- Mindful meditation
- Listening to calming music
- Click here for more examples

Energising
These activities aim to boost energy levels and alertness, often involving physical movement or stimulation.

- Brisk walks around the office
- Desk stretches
- Taking the stairs
- Click here for more examples

Relaxing
These activities focus on unwinding and releasing tension. They typically involve creating a soothing environment.

- Reading during breaks
- Enjoying herbal tea
- Short breaks for eye-rest
- Click here for more examples

Regular check-ins and feedback mechanisms:

- Regular check-ins enable early detection of workload-related issues, allowing for timely intervention and tailored support.[10]
- Frequent communication and feedback mechanisms create a positive work culture, preventing burnout by addressing individual workloads and fostering trust between employers and employees.

Strategies that can be used:

Individual connections
Allocate time for private one-on-one check-ins, creating a supportive space for team members to openly discuss their workload and stressors.

Employee self assessment
Encourage employees to regularly evaluate their workload and stress levels using a scoring system, facilitating consistent tracking and offering a clear understanding of how workplace factors impact stress.

Team gatherings
Plan informal team huddles to provide a refreshing break and foster an environment for casual, non-work-related conversations.

Check-in questionnaires
Integrate validated tools like online polls into regular check-ins for a holistic view of team wellbeing, workload, and morale, without singling out individuals.

Quick snapshots
Establish a simple coding system, such as colours or emojis, for quick snapshots of team members' current capacity, promoting an environment where honesty about workload and time constraints is comfortable.

Flexible work arrangements:

- Flexible working arrangements enable employees to balance work and personal life, reducing their stress.[11]
- It is important to develop and communicate clear policies on flexible work arrangements to employees.
- The Fair Work Ombudsman Flexible Working Arrangements – Best Practice Guide provides employers with practical tips on how they can best implement flexible working arrangements and a template on how to respond to a request.
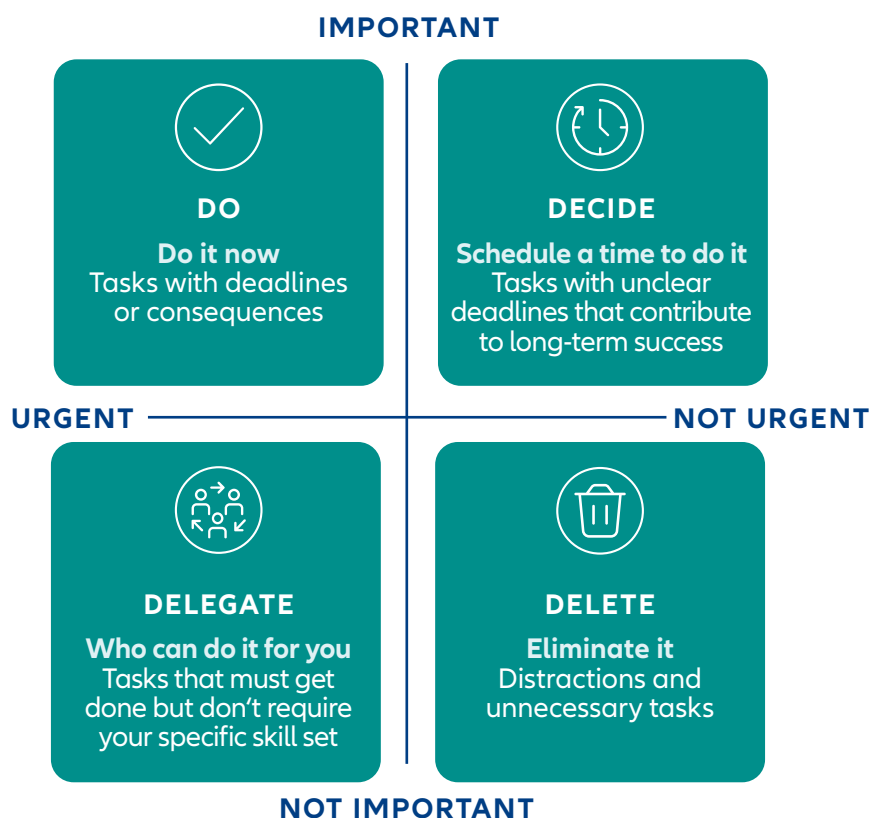- Manager Flexibility Toolkit.

Manageable workloads and time pressures: Employees

Time management techniques — the Eisenhower Matrix:

An evidence-based tool to help prioritise tasks based on their urgency and importance.[12]

The main purpose of the Eisenhower Matrix is to:

- Provide a systematic approach to decision-making and task management.
- Help users focus on high-priority activities.
- Delegate tasks when possible.
- Avoid spending excessive time on less critical activities.

IMPORTANT

DO
Do it now
Tasks with deadlines or consequences

DECIDE
Schedule a time to do it
Tasks with unclear deadlines that contribute to long-term success

URGENT —————————————— **NOT URGENT**

DELEGATE
Who can do it for you
Tasks that must get done but don't require your specific skill set

DELETE
Eliminate it
Distractions and unnecessary tasks

NOT IMPORTANT

Adapted from the original Eisenhower matrix, this figure represents a tool for task prioritisation to reduce burnout.[12]

Setting boundaries

Establishing boundaries is vital for employees to manage their workload and time effectively, safeguarding against burnout by defining reasonable limits on the tasks and commitments they take on.[13]

Types of boundaries:

- **Mental** — protecting thoughts and values.
- **Physical** — guarding personal space and time.
- **Emotional** — protecting feelings.

Ways to set boundaries:

- Communicate clearly, saying no in a respectful manner.
- Set limits on overtime.
- Manage interruptions.
- Use technology wisely.
- Seek support when needed.
- Exercising self compassion.

Setting realistic goals

Utilise time blocking:

- Allocate time for priority tasks, meetings, breaks, and personal activities.
- This technique helps you focus on one task at a time and prevents overcommitting to unrealistic deadlines.[14-15]

Apply the 2-Minute Rule:

- If a task takes less than 2 minutes to complete, do it immediately.
- This prevents small tasks from accumulating and becoming overwhelming.[16]

Break down goals into manageable tasks:

- Break down larger goals into smaller, more manageable tasks.
- This approach allows you to focus on incremental progress, making the workload more digestible and preventing feelings of being overwhelmed.[14-15]

Flexible work arrangements:

- In collaboration with employers, flexible work arrangements allow employees to better manage their workload and time, creating a schedule that accommodates their personal needs.[11]
- This allows employees to foster a healthier work-life balance, increasing productivity.
- Employees can use these templates from the Fair Work Ombudsman when writing their own requests.
- Template letter and Example letter.
- Employee flexibility toolkit.

Effective workplace communication: Employers

Good communication practices are crucial in preventing workplace issues and swiftly resolving any concerns that arise. It is the joint responsibility of both employers and employees to engage in clear and timely communication. Poor communication can escalate problems, adversely affecting morale, productivity, employee engagement and trust.[17]

Engaging in open and respectful dialogue can effectively address issues, preventing minor concerns from snowballing into significant problems in the future.

Allianz's five tips on leading a crucial workplace conversation

Personalise your crucial conversation

- Every conversation can be different.
- Ensure clarity regarding the primary concern and establish the objective at the outset to steer the conversation effectively.

Keep it open and trusting

- Approach every crucial conversation with respect and care for the team.
- Recognise the sensitivity of the discussion at hand.

Set the tone for the proper discussion

- Approach discussion with compassion and empathy through the use of body language and tone of voice.
- Allow employees to share their thoughts on the issue before jumping to conclusions.

Drive progress following your conversation

- Crucial conversations must always be followed up, whether via email or face-to-face.

Play an active role in shaping a healthy workplace

- Perform regular check-ins with team members.
- Encourage staff to switch off after work to ensure work-life balance.[18-19]
- How to navigate crucial conversations: A guide for managers.

Training programs that can assist managers to implement effective workplace communication

- Difficult conversations in the workplace — employee course by the Fair Work Ombudsman.
- Effective Communication by the Australian Public Service Academy.
- Effective Workplace Communication by the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Workplace communication strategies for employers

- Set clear expectations from the onset of employment and ensure ongoing role clarity and transparent performance measures.
- Ensure important workplace information is readily available for employees.
- Provide transparent and clear guidance regarding expected workplace behaviours and conduct. Templates from the Fair Work Ombudsman can assist.
- Ensure clear processes and communication regarding leave and entitlements. The Fair Work Ombudsman recommend three best practice tips:
  - Provide information about leave balances.
  - Communicate the process to ensure employees know the expectations and restrictions about requesting leave.
  - Outline where staff can access dispute resolution processes.
- Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman workplace communication.

Effective workplace communication: Employees

It is crucial to recognise the importance of workplace communication. Clear and open communication ensures that employees understand their roles, tasks, and objectives, enabling them to perform effectively and collaborate with the team. Effective communication also fosters productivity, job satisfaction, and successful prevention of burnout.[17]

Employee's guide to important workplace conversations

1. State the problem

- Begin the conversation by explaining the current situation clearly, address:
  – What the issue is, why it is important and how it is affecting your work.
- Avoid blaming or making accusations.
- Use "I" statements such as "I feel" rather than "You made me feel".

2. Listen and question

- Focusing on listening more and talking less, considering the other person's point of view.
- Hints and tips for good listening: give the conversation your full attention, including using body language to show engagement, ask questions to clarify any concerns, keep an open mind.

3. Reassess your position

- Clarify your position. Has it changed based on the information the other person provided?
- Be assertive. It is more likely to resolve a situation.

4. Look for solutions

- Suggest ways to resolve the issue. Always come prepared with possible solutions.
- Invite the other person to propose their solution.

5. Close the conversation

- Summarise the discussion and agree on action steps.
- Recap the issue, discuss what both parties did to resolve it, and decide on a follow-up meeting if required.
- Fair Work Ombudsman: An employee's guide to resolving workplace issues.

Other tips for employees

When discussing sensitive topics, including personal concerns:

- Be prepared and practice the conversation if needed.
- It's okay to be nervous, but consider some strategies that can help you navigate these feelings ahead of the conversation.
- Share expectations and needs clearly.
- Bring an open mind.
- Plan and agree to the arrangements for a follow up conversation and any next steps.
- How to navigate crucial conversations: A guide for employees.

Creating a supportive environment: Employers

A supportive workplace environment is vital as it directly impacts employee wellbeing and organisational success. When supported, employees are more likely to seek help and support.[21] A supportive environment also promotes better work-life balance initiatives such as more flexible scheduling, which can be a robust preventive measure against burnout.[21]

Increasing support for employees

- Hold regular team meetings to discuss any challenges, issues and support needs.
- Build a supportive workplace culture that appreciates collaboration and cooperation rather than competition.
- Ensure that employees are trained to use tools, systems and equipment. Consider if there are other tools, technology, or ways of working that would better support job design and efficiency.
- Schedule supervision sessions so employees can raise issues and ask for help.
- Increase support levels during peak work periods, including providing more frequent check-ins.
- Redistribute work or backfill roles when employees are on leave.
- Design rosters to make sure that managers can help during difficult times.
- Set clear goals and tasks to avoid confusion.
- Refer to Australian Government Comcare poor support and Safe Work Australia Model Code of Practice: Managing psychosocial hazards at work.

Evidence-based recommendations for creating a supportive environment[22-24]

Foster genuine and high-quality relationships with employees

- Managers should be empathetic and understand the other person's point of view through the use of perspective-talking.
- Managers should guide employees to develop ways of achieving their goals.

Provide opportunities for employees to reflect on their work

- Employees can benefit from reflective practice by sharing ways they can cope with stress and having a safe space to air concerns, frustrations and ideas.

Reduce stressful and unnecessary interactions

- While important, there can be times where despite the best of intentions social interactions actually add to stress and exhaustion.
- Establish norms to make clear that everyone's time is precious.
- Have meetings only when necessary. Avoid collaboration for collaboration's sake.

Recognise the importance of the non-work realm

- Encourage social support from family, friends and community.
- How to prevent and combat employee burnout and create healthier workplaces during crises and beyond.

Ensuring effective and practical support

- Provide employees with the right tools, equipment, systems and resources to ensure their jobs are done well and safely.
- Allow employees to access necessary information quickly using a good information-sharing system.
- Encourage employees to support and learn from each other as a first point of assistance. To promote this there needs to be availability of meeting spaces, opportunities for mentorship and effective communication platforms.
- Develop skills of managers to provide sufficient support.
- Ensure that cooperation is the key to workplace culture.
- Hold regular and necessary team meetings to discuss challenges and potential solutions.
- Safe Work Australia poor support.

Possible solutions to prevent and minimise workplace stressors

PRACTICAL SUPPORT

INFORMATION PROVISION	TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT	CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK
Assist employees with practical solutions to work-related issues. Provide sufficient information to enable employees to perform tasks competently.	Offer task specific and general training to ensure employee confidence and capability. Give employees managerial responsibilities that allow them to better understand their tasks.	Provide clear feedback on employee task performance. Formally or informally congratulate employees when work is done well. Provide practical advice.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Support open communication that allows employees to share their concerns on workplace stressors. Be aware of non-work-related stressors and allow flexible arrangements on working time.	Consider formal and informal team-building activities. Establish a peer support network. Promote a positive team culture where employees assist one another.	Demonstrate interest in employees' lives beyond the workplace setting. Allow time to talk through problems. Pay extra attention to employees whose behaviour is out of character.

Activities that promote support

- Corporate induction programs.
- Access to employee assistance programs.
- Training on stress management, coping strategies, wellbeing and self-management.
- Health and wellbeing programs.
- Access to professional psychological services for employees experiencing stress.
- Support from supervisors and/ or co-workers regarding work-related stress.

Promoting autonomy:
Employers

In the workplace, autonomy fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among employees. This leads to increased job satisfaction and motivation, as employees feel trusted and valued by their employer.[25]

Increasing levels of job control

Increase choice and self-direction

- Allow employees to influence how their work is organised rather than directing and instructing them.
- Employees should have input in:
  – how they complete their job tasks
  – how problems could be tackled
  – the pace of their work
- Make sure employees have the skills to achieve their goals and performance requirements.
- Adapt performance review and 1:1 processes to ensure they provide employees with an opportunity to have input into the design of their work.
- Promote job rotation to enable job variation and skill development.[25-27]

Input into decision-making

- Hold meetings where employees can contribute ideas to decisions that might concern their work.
- Allocation of task responsibility should involve employees and allow them to determine work objectives and anticipated outputs.
- Promote a participative approach to management.

Consultation and communication

- Ensure that employees are informed about the process and rationale behind decision-making; involve employees in the decision-making process.
- Establish a workplace culture that encourages feedback from employees.
- Implement a system that facilitates employee input on larger organisational matters, including change management.
- Recognise the appropriate times to engage with employees for consultation purposes.
- Safe Work NSW: Levels of control and work-related stress.

Recommendations for business leaders

Consider a systematic measurement-based approach to mental health

- Evaluating existing levels of employees' autonomy is crucial before implementing any interventions.
- Self-report surveys offer a straightforward and effective method for assessing autonomy levels and other stressors.
- Attempting to enhance autonomy in situations where it is already high may not yield significant benefits.

Provide upskilling and training to support managers and employees with dynamic job design

- Ensure managers are equipped with the skills to empower their employees to work productively and effectively balance personal preferences with workplace needs. A positive psychology approach can assist.
- Ensure employees are equipped with the skills and knowledge to prioritise, design and undertake routine work tasks independently and in a way that provides them with choice and flexibility where possible.

An individualised approach with young employees

- Younger employees (under 25) are more significantly influenced by personality factors than work-related factors when it comes to their perception of workplace autonomy.
- Tailored programs and interventions that provide mentorship, a sense of graduated responsibilities, and opportunities, help younger employees to understand their role and contribution to the broader business.
- WELLCOME: Employee autonomy research.

Promoting autonomy: Employees

Job crafting toolkit[29-30]

- Job crafting is a powerful tool for individuals to enhance their autonomy, creativity, and sense of ownership over their tasks.

- The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations provides valuable resources, including the introduction to job crafting resource, a job crafting toolkit, and resource on ensuring job crafting success.

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