Workplace stress and wellbeing

Couple of takeaways

- Workplace stress can be defined as an imbalance between work demands and resources and affects an individual's capacity to cope.
- Stress is individual, what is stressful for one person may not be stressful for another.
- There are many factors which may contribute to workplace stress.
- Similarly, there are many strategies available, many outlined within this document, which may be utilised to assist in working through workplace stress and wellbeing issues with Hydro Tasmania group workers.

What is this procedure for?

The purpose of this guideline is to provide workers with:

- Guidance in identifying contributing factors, signs, and symptoms of workplace stress
- Guidance in managing workplace stress on an organisational, interpersonal, and individual basis
- Guidance in facilitating preventative and response strategies to manage workplace stress.

This guideline applies to workplace stress and wellbeing across all Hydro Tasmania group owned and operated sites and activities.

How are roles and responsibilities managed?

Level 1 management shall

- Take reasonable action to assess potential impacts arising from strategies on health and wellbeing
- Allocate funding / resources to ensure workplace stress is managed
- Support implementation and compliance with the workplace stress and wellbeing guidelines
- Ensure that adequate information, instruction, training, supervision is provided to workers.

WHS management shall

When required, shall:

- Take reasonable steps to provide advice on potential impacts as requested by the organisation.
- Advise business on legislative requirements
- Conduct audits of workplace stress risk management process
- Recommend workplace stress and wellbeing improvement initiatives to the Leadership Group (LG)
- Manage updates to workplace stress and wellbeing documentation.

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Line manager shall

- Take reasonable action to recognise contributing factors and management of workplace stress from an organisational, interpersonal, and individual level
- Monitor the organisational climate and responses to organisational change
- Follow processes that build relationships with workers and create an opportunity to raise and resolve issues, immediately and effectively
- Recognise individual differences in the response to workplace stress and coping behaviours
- Participate in development of interpersonal and individual action plans to manage/mitigate workplace stressors.

Workers shall

- Take reasonable action to identify and manage workplace stressors
- Raise issues that are influencing health and wellbeing
- Identify support needs and resources
- Access support from available resources - manager of the work health and safety function and employee assistance program (EAP)
- Participate in training and individual action plans in the area of workplace stress and wellbeing

HR team shall

- Provide advice and any specialist support services as required.

WHS team shall

- Provide advice and any specialist services as required
- Coordinate the WHS risk assessments
- Maintain and review WHS documentation

How is the process managed?

Understanding workplace stress

Workplace stress and wellbeing is everyone's business. The value of understanding and managing workplace stress and building a healthy and resilient workplace is motivated, engaged, and productive employees. The cost of workplace stress, often hidden, is compromised mental health, absenteeism, and reduced productivity.

What is stress?

Stress is an imbalance between demands and the resources that are available to manage those demands. This can influence a person's perception of their capacity and whether they can cope with the demands. Stress is individual, what is stressful for one person may not be stressful for another.

We all need some level of stress to live and function. An imbalance can occur when we have "too little" or "too much" stress. "Too little" stress is when we feel bored, under - challenged and lethargic whereas "too much" stress can make us feel overloaded, tense, and worried. Both imbalances can have an effect on our wellbeing and performance. So, it's important to have the right amount of stress so that we can function

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optimally in our performance and wellbeing, that is feel challenged, balanced, and focused.

When we perceive a situation or event to be stressful and threatening, our body reacts physiologically. Stress hormones such as adrenalin and cortisol are released which activate muscles and organs that are important in mobilising the body into action. The body undergoes a range of reactions, all of which have the function of protecting it from harm. This is called the "fight and flight" response - we want to "fight" the danger or "escape" the danger.

The danger or threat can be real or perceived (i.e., a "psychological threat"). Situations or events can be perceived as "psychological threats" if characterised by unpredictability, loss of control or uncertainty about an outcome.

What is workplace stress?

Workplace stress is an imbalance between work demands and resources and affects an individual's capacity to cope. Workplace stress is an interaction between work characteristics and the individual.

It is important to consider both the contributing factors and management of workplace stress on three levels:

- Organisational
- Interpersonal
- Individual

The three levels are interrelated and encourage a "whole of organisation" approach. If we focus on only one level as the source and solution to workplace stress then we will narrow our understanding and actions, which can influence the effectiveness and sustainability of outcomes. If we consider all three levels, then we can broaden our understanding of stressors and the range of preventative and response strategies that can be used.

What are the contributing factors to workplace stress?

These factors can include:

- *Role overload* - When job demands exceed resources to meet those demands. These resources can include tangible resources (e.g. time, staff etc.), psychological resources (e.g. confidence, energy) and skill resources (e.g. competence, knowledge etc.). Role overload can be reflected in excessive work hours

- *Role ambiguity* - When expectations, priorities, performance parameters and evaluation criteria are unclear and / or conflicting

- *Physical environment* - Influence of office layout, location, noise levels, and temperature

- *Workplace culture and climate* - Level of consistency between organisational values and behaviour and actions, type and level of communication and support across the organisation, perceived effectiveness and consistency of organisational policies and processes and the way change is communicated and managed

- *Location and remoteness of workplace* - Possible influencing factors, for workers working in remote and isolated areas, are the extent to which support needs are identified and monitored, accessibility to support avenues, level of self -awareness and monitoring of health and wellbeing and effective management of issues that arise.

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It is also important to recognise that working in remote locations away from family and friends can place additional pressure on maintaining relationships and dealing with home and personal issues. This additional pressure can be felt by the worker and their partner and family.

Interpersonal factors

These factors can include:

- *Nature and quality of the relationship between a manager and an employee* - This relationship can be influenced by leadership style, quality and frequency of communication, accessibility to support and level of support provided, and the type and range of opportunities to raise and resolve issues
- *Interpersonal conflict and the influence of individual differences in operating styles* - Individual differences can be reflected in the way people communicate, relate to each other, process information, make decisions and raise and resolve issues. Frustration and interpersonal conflict can result from people not understanding or learning to work with individual differences within a team environment
- *Challenging interactions with customers* - Customers can present with challenging or aggressive behaviour related to unrealistic or conflicting expectations and unmet needs. Stress may be associated with a cumulative impact of Incidents involving challenging behaviour or the impact of a significant event or situation.

Individual factors

These factors can include:

- *Work-life balance* - Workers may experience difficulty separating work from home and maintaining work-life balance
- *Adjustment to changing circumstances* - Individuals can vary in their capacity to adjust to organisational change and changing circumstances. This may be reflected in "resistance" to change or the way they adjust and the pace that they adjust. If individual differences in responses and adjustment to change are not recognised, considered and managed, then this may contribute to workplace stress
- *Changes in capacity* - Changes in an individual's physical or psychological capacity can impact on their competence and / or confidence
- *Reduced self -awareness* - Individuals vary in their self -awareness of stressors. Some individuals may not be aware of the psychological, physical and behavioural impact of stressors until they reach a crisis point
- *Operating / thinking style* - An individual's operating or thinking style may influence their perception or response to a situation. E.g. they may personalise a situation, or "catastrophise" about an outcome or work excessively beyond what is expected to the detriment of their wellbeing
- *Coping style* - A person's coping style and capacity is influenced by their previous experiences and outcomes, background, and cultural factors. Coping styles such as avoidance, denial, and over -working are not sustainable as a way of managing stress and can impact on health and wellbeing. Cultural differences may also influence accessing help and support. Some people may prefer to access help within their community and family rather than raise issues in the workplace or access professional help.

- *Job or career uncertainty* - A worker may be uncertain about the current status of their job or opportunities for career development. They may also be uncertain about what they need to do to advance or be promoted within the organisation
- *Learning and development needs* - When learning and development needs have not been regularly reviewed or are not task or performance relevant, then this may compromise a worker's capacity and resources
- *Personal and non-work issues* - Whilst people attempt to keep work and personal issues separate, this can be difficult and may influence a worker's capacity to manage stress.

What are signs and symptoms of workplace stress?

The impact of stress is individual, and people can experience a range of signs and symptoms in response to workplace stress. These can be best categorised as physical, psychological, and behavioural.

Physical signs and symptoms

Physical signs and symptoms may include heart palpitations, unexplained aches and pains, disrupted sleep, tiredness, headaches and skin and gastro -intestinal conditions. It is important that physical signs and symptoms are medically investigated to identify the possible range of contributing factors.

Psychological signs and symptoms

Psychological signs and symptoms include the emotional and cognitive effects of workplace stress. Emotional signs and symptoms can include low frustration tolerance, irritability, being over -reactive, mood variability and feeling anxious. People may also feel less confident and experience difficulty navigating new or unfamiliar situations. Cognitive signs and symptoms can include concentration and memory difficulties, change in capacity to process information and / or ability to make decisions.

Behavioural signs and symptoms

Behavioural signs and symptoms include those that relate to the individual and those that relate to their work performance. Individual -related behavioural signs and symptoms can include over reliance on alcohol, increase in smoking, appetite changes, withdrawing from others and less participation in activities that were once enjoyable. People can over-rely on some behaviours to cope with stress which can compromise their capacity to stay in balance. They may "overdo" some behaviours and activities (e.g., alcohol and fast food) and "underdo" other behaviours and activities (e.g. exercise and relaxation). Work performance behavioural signs and symptoms can include absenteeism, errors, accident risk, over working and changes in work quality and output.

What are some outcomes of workplace stress?

There is an increased risk of mental health issues developing or being exacerbated when workplace stress is constant, ongoing and without intervention. Common mental health issues are depression and anxiety.

Depression

Depression needs to be diagnosed according to specific criteria related to the presence of key symptoms for a period of time and with an impact on functioning. It's primarily characterised by low mood and reduced interest and enjoyment. Other symptoms can include worrying and negative thinking, irritability and agitation, changes in sleeping patterns and

appetite, tiredness and low energy, difficulty concentrating and making decisions and feelings of worthlessness, guilt and being self - critical.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal reaction to a real or perceived threat however constant or ongoing workplace stress can contribute to a range and intensity of anxiety symptoms that can significantly impact on functioning. These symptoms can include racing or pounding heart, muscle tension, shaking, sweating, difficulty concentrating, worrying and negative thoughts and feeling nauseous. The range, frequency, intensity, and impact of anxiety symptoms vary across individuals. Anxiety disorders can include generalised anxiety, phobia, obsessive - compulsive disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and panic disorder.

What are some preventative and response strategies?

Preventative and response strategies for managing workplace stress need to focus on three levels:

- Organisational
- Interpersonal
- Individual

Early intervention is essential and plays a significant role in responding to and managing workplace stress.

Organisational Strategies

- Develop operational action plans using information from culture surveys. Operational action plans identify specific workplace strategies that will contribute to building and maintaining a positive, safe and constructive workplace culture. This creates a link between aspirational and operational plans
- Identify actions and behaviours that are consistent with organisational values and recognise these actions when they occur
- Monitor actions and behaviours that are inconsistent with organisational values and provide a clear message that these are inconsistent with a positive, safe, and constructive workplace culture and need to change
- Review position descriptions for accuracy to ensure that responsibilities are consistent with the operational role
- Provide clarity for all workers about expectations, performance parameters and evaluation criteria
- Monitor workflow and workloads and the resources needed to support current and changing work demands
- Manage and communicate change in a consistent way, accounting for individual differences in response and adjustment to change
- Recognise the unique challenges that are associated with workers working alone in remote or isolated locations. It is important to identify support needs and then establish consistent support parameters, processes, and actions. Ensure accessibility to video link technology that can provide face to face contact with employee assistance providers and other support networks
- Incorporate the concept of wellbeing into processes such as the annual performance review so that discussion can focus on both performance and wellbeing
- Provide flexibility and tailor workplace stress management strategies to recognise individual and cultural diversity

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- Provide training opportunities for managers to develop helping skills to identify and manage issues in the workplace
- Establish a manager peer support process where managers can meet to discuss workplace scenarios and obtain support, knowledge and experience from other managers in how to manage a situation. There may be value in including input from the team responsible for work health and safety, encouraging an "all of organisation" resource approach
- Promote support services and resources including the organisation's Employee Assistance Program, and community resources such as beyondblue and Mensline.

Interpersonal strategies

These strategies focus on three Interpersonal areas:

- Managers and those who work for them
- Between workers
- Working with challenging customers.

Build and strengthen relationships between managers and those who work for them - This relationship can be developed and strengthened in the following ways:

- Schedule regular meetings between managers and those who work for them to discuss and review progress
- Manage issues with immediacy and provide feedback on how the issue is being progressed or resolved
- Provide and ask for constructive feedback

- Incorporate discussion about wellbeing and capacity. Sample questions:
- How are you managing (the situation)?
- What is going well?
- What are the challenges?
- What could you / we be doing differently?
- What type of support do you need?
- Identify individual support needs of workers working alone in remote or isolated locations. Establish and commit to regular communication and contact with workers e.g. a fortnightly video link between manager and the worker at the remote or isolated location with a face to face meeting every 3 months, dependant on need and changing circumstances
- Provide opportunities to celebrate success and achievements
- Contribute to occasions for social interaction outside of work.

Build and strengthen relationships between workers - This relationship can be developed and strengthened in the following ways:

- Identify strengths and competencies of team members and their contribution to the team
- Reinforce the value of diversity and individual differences within a team
- Detect and manage early signs of interpersonal conflict
- Provide opportunities to celebrate success and achievements
- Identify, encourage, and recognise actions that are consistent with the team and organisational values and monitor the level of consistency

within the team. Manage immediately, actions and behaviours that are inconsistent with values.

Understand and manage challenging customer behaviour

- Create clear expectations about services and delivery of services to customers to reduce the possibility of unclear or unrealistic expectations, which can contribute to challenging behaviour
- Provide workplace training on understanding and working with challenging customer behaviour and apply this training to workplace scenarios
- Identify common issues associated with challenging customer behaviour and develop consistent management strategies that can be applied across business areas
- Ensure that workers are aware of processes and organisational policies for managing aggressive or challenging customer behaviour, as covered under the HR policy framework.

Individual strategies

- Provide workplace information sessions that promote nutrition, exercise, and work -life balance
- Promote mental health awareness to reduce stigma, broaden understanding of mental health issues and the value of a physically and mentally healthy workplace, through HSE approved programmes
- Provide resilience and mental skills training that develops self - awareness and focuses on assertiveness, relaxation, stress management, managing thoughts and broadening coping resources

- Identify and review worker's learning and development needs to ensure that they are task-specific and role-specific
- Provide opportunities for workplace mentoring and coaching
- Provide opportunities for career review, development, and planning
- Identify and monitor support needs - resource support, emotional support, and informational support.

Effective helping skills

Supervisory support has been found to be a buffer to workplace stress. It is important that managers have effective helping skills to identify and respond to worker's issues.

Effective helping skills include being able to:

- Open a discussion
- Identify issues
- Identify possible actions and type of support needed
- Identify follow-up parameters and timeframe required
- Close a discussion

Refer to Appendix A for Effective Helping Skills for Managers.

Workers' compensation and rehabilitation

When a worker has a worker, compensation claim for a psychological injury that is work-related, a rehabilitation plan and return to work process is developed and implemented to assist the worker to

successfully return to work. The manager will play a significant role in monitoring progress and managing issues that may arise.

Return to work support strategies

These are some ways that a manager can support the worker and the process:

- Be clear about the roles and responsibilities of the employee, the team responsible for work health and safety, rehabilitation provider, medical practitioners, and allied health professionals
- Be accessible and communicate with the worker and rehabilitation team
- Be aware of the worker's modified return to work duties, hours and restrictions and ensure that that there is compliance with these return-to-work parameters
- Be actively involved in the return-to-work process and provide support and feedback on progress or workplace issues that have arisen
- Recognise that a return-to-work process is a graduated process, and that progress needs to be consolidated particularly in the initial stages. A worker needs to build their capacity and return to work at a manageable pace.

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Appendix A: Effective skills for managers

Effective helping skills include being able to:

- Open a discussion
- Identify issues
- Identify possible actions and type of support needed
- Identify follow -up parameters and timeframe required
- Close a discussion.

A.1 Open a discussion

One way a manager can open a discussion is to let the person know that they have noticed a change in their behaviour (e.g. late for work, working long hours). The discussion can then focus on obtaining the following information:

- What is the issue?
- What is needed to provide support or to resolve the issue?
- Who can help?
- What is my role and responsibility as manager?
- What response time is required for this issue?

A.2 Identify issues

Use the 'SALT' method:

- **See** – to see the warning signs, look at what a person says, how they act, how they feel and what they are experiencing

- **Ask** – Now that you see a possible invitation to help, be proactive by providing assistance early. Ask questions like "How are you feeling" or as a leading question like "I've noticed …."
- **Listen** – Once you have asked the questions, listen carefully to the answers
- **Take/Tell** – Often you will be able to provide the help that the person needs, but don't be afraid to tell a person that you can't help at that time BUT you will connect them with someone who can. **YOU MUST ACT ON THIS AND FOLLOW UP.**

A.3 Identify possible actions and what support is needed?

- More time to talk and follow -up
- A more detailed assessment of issues
- Further recommendations for action
- Consultation with the team responsible for work health and safety
- Access to professional counselling – Employee Assistance Programme
- What am I able to do within my role and responsibilities as a manager?
- What can others within the organisation do to help the situation? (e.g. the team responsible for work health and safety)
- What can others outside the organisation do to help the situation? (e.g. EAP)
- Who is appropriate, available, and is the preferred support avenue?
- Are there any factors that may influence the person accessing support?

A.4 Identify follow-up parameters and timeframe required

- What type of follow-up is needed?

- What type and level of follow-up can I provide within my role and responsibilities?
- What, if any feedback, do I require from others?
- What is an appropriate and realistic timeframe?
- What step can be made immediately, to start a process?

A.5 Close a Discussion

- Summarise the action plan
- Use closed questions which generate "yes" or "no" responses (e.g. "Are you comfortable with the steps we are taking?")
- Thank the person for sharing their thoughts and, if appropriate, acknowledge that it can be difficult talking about issues and how they are feeling however it creates an opportunity for change and improvement.