POOR SUPPORT

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WHAT IS POOR SUPPORT?

Support in the workplace is the practical assistance and emotional support that managers, supervisors, or co-workers provide to workers. Providing adequate support can help workers get through challenging situations in their work. The availability or quality of support can vary depending on the type of work, industry and location of the workplace.

Poor support is when this practical assistance and emotional support is not provided or is inadequate. This can include when training, equipment, tools and resources, including adequate staffing, is insufficient for a worker to perform their role.

This can lead to impacts such as stress and mental fatigue, which also have physical impacts. Inappropriate responses and harmful behaviour such as bullying may result from a worker not having adequate support to complete tasks or perform their role, leading to further psychosocial hazards.

EXAMPLES OF POOR SUPPORT

There are many examples of poor support in the workplace, which can vary depending on the type of work, industry and location of the workplace, including:

- Insufficient, unclear, or conflicting information or instructions.
- Lack of necessary resources to perform tasks effectively and punctually.
- Frequently competing with others for essential resources required for the job.
- Poorly maintained or inadequate tools, systems, and equipment.
- Inadequate training provided for assigned tasks.
- Supervisors being unavailable to assist with decisions or offer support.
- Insufficient guidance from supervisors or assistance from colleagues.
- Inability for workers to seek help when necessary.
- Workplace cultures that discourage supervisors or co-workers from supporting one another
- Working environments that discourage open communication and discussion.
- Limited emotional support or unsympathetic leadership.
- Infrequent or ineffective performance feedback and discussions.

IMPACTS OF POOR SUPPORT

The impacts of poor support on both workers and organisations is numerous. Some impacts to consider include:

ON WORKERS

Fatigue: acute, ongoing tiredness from mental exhaustion, preventing people from functioning normally.

Increased Stress and Burnout: Insufficient support can cause increased stress levels among workers, especially if they face constant challenges without adequate assistance. Over time, this can lead to burnout and negatively affect their mental and physical health.

Reduced Job Satisfaction: Workers who feel unsupported may become dissatisfied with their jobs, leading to decreased motivation and engagement. They may feel unappreciated and undervalued, affecting their commitment to the organisation.

Physical and Mental Exhaustion: The combination of inadequate support, increased stress, and overwhelming work demands can lead to physical and mental exhaustion. This can manifest as fatigue, sleep disturbances, and even potential health issues.

Impaired Work-Life Balance: Poor support may require workers to invest more time and effort in their jobs, impacting their work-life balance negatively. With limited assistance, they may find it challenging to create boundaries between work and personal life, leading to potential burnout.

Strained Relationships: The stress and frustration resulting from inadequate support

ON ORGANISATIONS

Decreased Productivity: When workers lack the necessary support, it becomes challenging for them to perform their tasks efficiently. This can lead to decreased productivity and lower overall output.

Higher Turnover: Employees who don't receive adequate support are more likely to seek opportunities elsewhere, resulting in higher turnover rates for the company. This can be costly and disrupt the continuity of the workforce.

Decline in Work Quality: Without proper guidance and assistance, the quality of work may suffer. Mistakes and errors may increase, potentially impacting the reputation and credibility of the organization.

Lack of Innovation: When workers feel unsupported, they may hesitate to share new ideas or take risks, leading to a lack of innovation within the company.

Increased Safety Risks: In industries where safety is critical, inadequate support can lead to accidents and injuries due to workers not having the necessary resources or training to perform their jobs safely.

Negative Workplace Culture: A lack of support can foster a toxic work environment, where employees feel isolated and reluctant to collaborate or help each other. This can further exacerbate the issues and create a cycle of poor support.

can spill over into personal relationships, leading to tension and strain with family and friends.

Feelings of Isolation: A lack of support can lead to feelings of isolation and detachment from the workplace community. Workers may feel disconnected from their colleagues and the organisation, impacting their sense of belonging and camaraderie.

Reduced Employee Loyalty: Workers who don't receive proper support may feel less loyal to the organisation, leading to decreased commitment and willingness to go the extra mile for the company.

Impact on Customer Service: In customer-facing roles, poor support can affect the quality of service provided, leading to dissatisfied customers and potential loss of business.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk Management involves identifying potential risks, assessing their likelihood and impact, and developing strategies to mitigate or control them. It is a proactive process that seeks to prevent risks from occurring or minimise their impact if they do occur.

No person should be injured in their workplace, including psychological injury. To meet their duties to ensure health and safety, employers must identify and eliminate or minimise psychosocial risks so far as is reasonably practicable. How long (duration), how often (frequency) and how significantly (severity) workers are exposed to psychosocial hazards impacts the level of risks. Hazards interacting or combining with each other may also impact this. Further guidance on the risk management process is available in the Code of Practice: *How to manage work health and safety risks.* For more information on the risk management process for psychosocial hazards, please view *Section 2 of the Model Code of Practice.*

Mind Your Head advocates for *prevention* – that is, identifying risk, implementing or changing systems to prevent worker harm or injury *before it occurs.*

Examples of Risk Management Strategies for Poor Support include:

Job design, safe work systems and procedures:

- Job Design and Task Allocation: Design jobs in a way that considers the workload and complexity of tasks, ensuring they are manageable and achievable within reasonable timeframes. This can prevent employees from feeling overwhelmed and unsupported in their roles.
- Resource Allocation: Adequately allocate resources such as staff, equipment, and tools to ensure workers have the necessary means to perform their tasks efficiently and effectively.

- Training and Development: Provide comprehensive training and development programs to equip employees with the skills and knowledge required to carry out their responsibilities successfully. This can help prevent issues arising from inadequate training.
- Clear Communication Channels: Establish clear lines of communication within the organization, ensuring that workers know whom to approach for support, guidance, and problem-solving.
- Performance Feedback and Recognition: Implement regular performance feedback and recognition mechanisms to acknowledge employees' efforts and provide constructive feedback. This can boost morale and motivation.
- Promote a Supportive Culture: Foster a work culture that encourages teamwork, mutual support, and open communication. This can prevent feelings of isolation and encourage a collaborative environment.
- Work-Life Balance Initiatives: Implement work-life balance initiatives to promote employee well-being and prevent burnout. This could include flexible work arrangements or wellness programs.
- Conflict Resolution Strategies: Develop conflict resolution procedures to address issues between employees and supervisors promptly, reducing tensions and fostering a harmonious work environment.

Increasing Support:

- Enhance Communication and Collaboration: Conduct regular team meetings to address challenges, support needs, and training requirements, fostering open discussions among workers.
- Promote Cooperative Work Culture: Cultivate a workplace culture that values cooperation over competition by setting team-oriented goals and acknowledging and praising collaboration.
- Review and Maintain Tools and Equipment: Ensure that tools, systems, and equipment are well-maintained and suitable for the tasks at hand. Consider upgrading equipment for better efficiency if necessary.
- Schedule Supervisor Availability: Schedule meetings to align with workers' regular hours, ensuring supervisors are available to address issues and answer questions promptly.
- Provide Extra Support during Peak Periods: Increase support during demanding tasks or busy periods by rostering more workers or providing additional check-ins.
- Backfill Roles and Distribute Work: Fill in vacant roles or redistribute tasks when workers are absent or on leave to maintain support continuity.
- Strategically Design Rosters: Design rosters so that supervisors are accessible during challenging or busy times, providing timely assistance when required.
- Set Clear Work Goals: Clearly outline work goals and tasks to workers, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of their responsibilities.
- Comprehensive Training: Provide workers with thorough training on their job tasks, relevant tools, equipment, systems, and policies.
- Promote Open Communication: Establish an open-door policy and encourage workers to share concerns early, fostering a safe environment for voicing issues.

- Recognise and Reward Supportive Behaviour: Encourage and reward workers who support each other, creating a positive and cooperative work environment.
- Strengthen Working Relationships: Invest in team planning and building activities to foster positive working relationships among employees, facilitating team discussions.
- Develop Interpersonal Capabilities: Enhance the team's interpersonal skills, such as emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, communication, and feedback abilities.
- Promote Empathetic Leadership: Encourage supervisors to demonstrate empathy in their leadership by addressing worker concerns sensitively and offering assistance when needed.
- Supervisor Role Understanding: Ensure supervisors fully understand their roles in supervising workers, providing guidance and support.

The Worker

- Hire Qualified Supervisors: Recruit supervisors with the necessary skills, experience, and training to effectively perform their roles and support their teams.
- Supervisor Development Programs: Offer development programs to enhance supervisors' skills and leadership capabilities.
- Comprehensive Inductions and Training: Establish comprehensive inductions, training, and mentoring programs, including buddy systems, to support new workers in their roles.

WAYS TO MANAGE RISKS

Consult workers and HSRs. Establish Health and Safety Committees with at least 50% representation from workers. Encourage feedback, especially on any changes.

Consider how long, how often and how severely workers are exposed to hazards. The longer, more often and worse the low job control, the higher the risk that workers may be harmed.

Utilise surveys and tools to assess psychosocial risks in the workplace, particularly for businesses with over 20 employees.

Establish a system for workers to report their concerns, while ensuring anonymity and treating their concerns with respect and seriousness to encourage reporting.

Observe work and behaviours, such as prolonged work duration, excessive paperwork, or customer frustration, which may indicate low job control.

Review available information, including employee retention, incident reports, complaints, time-off records, injuries, incidents, and workers' compensation to identify potential hazards.

Identify other hazards present and evaluate how they may interact or combine to create new, heightened risks. For instance, low job control could pose a greater risk in workplaces with high job demands if workers are unable to take breaks or switch tasks to manage fatigue. Finally, consider the

duration, frequency, and severity of workers' exposure to hazards, as prolonged and severe exposure to low job control could increase the risk of harm.

CONTROL MEASURES

Control measures are specific actions or procedures that are put in place to manage or mitigate identified risks. They are reactive measures that are implemented after risks have been identified and assessed as part of the risk management process. Control measures are designed to reduce the likelihood or impact of risks, and they can take many forms, including administrative controls, engineering controls, and personal protective equipment.

Efficient Information Sharing: Implement effective information sharing systems to enable workers to access the necessary information promptly for their job tasks. This includes keeping databases up-to-date and user-friendly.

Optimised Work Design for Supervisors: Design job roles in a way that allows supervisors to manage manageable workloads, access sufficient resources, and have an appropriate span of control for effective supervision. This includes providing supervisors with time to address questions and assist with challenging tasks.

Regular, Fair, and Goal-Focused Feedback Discussions: Establish systems to ensure regular and constructive feedback discussions between workers and supervisors regarding work tasks and support or development needs. For example, implementing end-of-shift debriefs or quarterly check-ins for supervisors.

Clear Management Structures and Reporting Lines: Provide well-defined management structures and reporting lines to ensure workers understand whom to approach for help and guidance. This may include providing organisational charts or clarifying reporting hierarchies.

Provision of Necessary Resources: Provide workers with the appropriate tools, equipment, systems, and resources they need to perform their jobs safely and efficiently. Ensure these resources are easily accessible and conveniently located, so workers do not need to compete for access.

Access to Supervisors: Ensure workers have access to supervisors, either by locating them close to their working area or by providing tools like videoconferencing for remote workers.

Culture of Cooperation and Help: Design the work environment to promote cooperation and support among employees. This includes providing suitable meeting spaces and facilitating easy discussions among workers, encouraging them to ask for help when needed.

DO

Foster a workplace culture that supports open communication, enabling workers to feel comfortable in discussing issues.

Provide training, skill development, and employee assistance services to workers, empowering them in their roles.

Promote work-life balance by allowing for flexibility and implementing flexible work arrangements that accommodate employees' personal needs.

Enhance supervisor and managerial skills through coaching, mentoring, and relevant training initiatives.

Utilise regular performance reviews for managers and workers to provide support and constructive advice for future performance.

Provide opportunities for career and professional development, such as allowing employees to act in managerial roles during the manager's absence or higher duties.

Prioritise effective early rehabilitation for all injuries to ensure employees receive timely support and assistance during their recovery process.

DO NOT

Implement performance tools as a means of disciplinary action.

-Engage in discrimination or bullying tactics to manipulate performance outcomes.