



LACK OF ROLE CLARITY OR ROLE CONFLICT

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WHAT IS LACK OF ROLE CLARITY?

Low role clarity arises when there is a lack of clarity in workers performance objectives, key accountabilities, their colleagues expectations of them and/or the overall scope or responsibilities of their job. It can include situations where a worker does not understand their role or responsibilities, such as when they have unclear or outdated position descriptions, they have responsibility with no authority, or the role is outside their skills or training.

Role conflict occurs when a worker is required to perform a task which doesn't sit right with their own values or expectations (for example, the worker expects transparency and this does not exist in the workplace). The greater the conflict between the worker's actual role and their values or expectations, the higher the likelihood of a worker experiencing work-related stress.

Conflict can also arise when there is lack of role clarity across various roles, leading to multiple people being given authority over the same tasks, or when there are no clear boundaries with job roles, for example in the instance that one person "steps on someone else's toes" by doing the tasks that are their responsibility. This can be especially problematic in the case of management, where a worker may feel their authority over a task or decision has been undermined by a manager making the decisions for them.

EXAMPLES OF LACK OR ROLE CLARITY

There are many examples of lack of role clarity in the workplace. Some to consider include:

- where workers may have multiple reporting lines or supervisors and as such may have competing demands
- being asked to undertake a specific task with no instructions or detailed information about requirements
- requests to undertake tasks that are not typically part of the roles and responsibilities of the position



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- lack of clarity about what tasks need to be completed, what the deadlines are, and the priorities for individuals, teams and work units.
- unclear or outdated position descriptions, or changing position descriptions and/or areas of responsibility without consultation or discussion.

Indicators include situations where:

- job roles or responsibilities that are frequently changing, inconsistent or unclear
- overlap in responsibilities between workers
- conflicting, uncertain, or frequently changing expectations and work standards
- conflicting, unclear or changing reporting lines
- missing or incomplete task information
- a lack of clarity about work priorities
- inadequate training to perform a task

IMPACTS OF LACK OR ROLE CLARITY

The impacts of lack or role clarity on both workers and organisations is numerous. Some impacts to consider include:

ON WORKERS

Stress and Anxiety: Unclear expectations and responsibilities can create a sense of anxiety and stress in workers as they try to figure out what is expected of them.

Reduced Productivity: Workers may be less productive when they are unclear about their roles and responsibilities, leading to missed deadlines and subpar work quality.

Low Morale: Workers who are unsure of their roles and responsibilities may feel demotivated and disconnected from their work, leading to low morale and decreased job satisfaction.

ON ORGANISATIONS

Reduced Performance: When roles and responsibilities are unclear, it can lead to confusion and inefficiencies in completing tasks, which can lead to reduced organisational performance.

Increased Costs: Lack of role clarity can increase costs for organisations as workers may waste time and resources on tasks that are not aligned with their roles and responsibilities.

Decreased Employee Engagement: Workers who are unclear about their roles and responsibilities may be less engaged in their work, leading to decreased job satisfaction and lower employee retention rates.



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Conflicts and Tension: When there is a lack of role clarity, it can create confusion and conflicts among workers, leading to tension and a negative work environment.

Negative Work Environment: A lack of role clarity can lead to conflicts, tension, and a negative work environment, which can negatively impact morale and motivation.

Decreased Innovation: When workers are unsure of their roles and responsibilities, they may be less likely to take risks and try new approaches, leading to decreased innovation and creativity within the organization.

Turnover: Workers may become frustrated and leave the organization if they feel that their roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined, leading to high turnover rates and increased recruitment costs.

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 Lack of Role Clarity include:

1. **Conduct Role Clarity Assessments:** Regular assessments of roles and responsibilities can identify gaps in clarity and help ensure that they are up-to-date and relevant.



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2. **Develop Clear Job Descriptions:** Clear job descriptions should be developed that outline key responsibilities, expectations, and reporting lines.
3. **Provide Regular Feedback:** Regular feedback and performance evaluations can help to ensure that workers understand their roles and responsibilities and are performing to the expected standards.
4. **Establish Clear Communication Channels:** Clear communication channels should be established to ensure that workers know who to contact for guidance and support.
5. **Provide Training and Development:** Providing training and development opportunities can help workers to develop the skills and knowledge required to perform their roles effectively.

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.

- **Clearly Define Roles and Responsibilities:** Ensure that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, communicated, and understood by all workers.
- **Establish Standard Operating Procedures:** Standard operating procedures should be established to ensure that workers understand how to perform their tasks effectively.
- **Provide Clear Task Instructions:** Clear task instructions should be provided to workers to ensure that they understand what is required of them.
- **Develop Job Aids and Checklists:** Job aids and checklists can help to ensure that workers follow standard procedures and perform tasks correctly.
- **Regularly Review Roles and Responsibilities:** Regular reviews of roles and responsibilities should be conducted to ensure that they remain relevant and up-to-date.
- **Regularly Review position descriptions** to ensure they are up to date and they workers understand them.

DO

provide up-to-date position descriptions

provide an organisational chart that gives a clear view of structure and communication channels, as well as clear contact information for each person

provide an induction to all new workers

develop personal work plans

discuss roles and work plans at team meetings

DO NOT

change job functions or position descriptions without consultation and discussion

undermine an individual's authority by making decision for them or over-ruling them without any prior discussion

put multiple people in charge of the same task



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ensure workers have clear goals and performance standards

encourage feedback from workers

foster an environment where workers may seek clarity and ask for assistance when unclear, feel confident doing so and know who to ask