Action planning guide

People
AT WORK

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Introduction

An action plan is a useful way of bringing all the information together that has been collected in your People at Work (PAW) survey and focus group/s to guide future actions to address psychosocial hazards and factors. The aim of action planning is to decide on a set of interventions or 'controls' to ensure that workers are protected from risks to their physical and psychological health and safety.

This guide provides tips and examples of how to develop an effective action plan.

Action planning purpose

Action planning generally results in a statement about what the workplace wants to achieve over a given timeframe. The action planning process assists workplaces (or workgroups) to focus on a desired end state and to reach agreement about what steps and resources are needed to reach intended goals. A key feature of an action plan is that it has built-in deliverables with deadlines and clear accountabilities.

The process of action planning helps workplaces to:

- state intended goals in a clear and succinct manner

- decide on the actions/steps needed to get from start to finish

- identify the resources needed

- nominate the people responsible for the goals

- develop a timeline for achieving the goals

- develop monitoring activities.

The purpose of your PAW action plan is to effectively manage the risk of psychological harm by implementing control measures that address the work environment and systems of work. This approach treats psychosocial hazards and factors much the same as physical hazards.

Controls for work health and safety hazards generally involve interventions or prevention strategies. Safe Work Australia has published guidance materials that can assist with this, including information on how to **manage work health and safety risks**, systematically **prevent psychological harm and support recovery**, guidance for employers on **preventing and responding to workplace bullying** and **principles of good work design**.

The types of controls used will vary depending on what is **reasonably practicable** for each workplace. A combination of controls at the individual, environmental and organisational level may be needed to reduce the risk of psychological harm.

The aim is to achieve the best fit between the working environment, the systems of work and the needs and capabilities of workers.

The action planning process

The following steps will guide you through the action planning process.

Step 1 - Preparation

When preparing to develop your action plan, make sure the following activities are completed well in advance of the action planning session:

- results from the PAW survey distributed and debriefed

- results from the follow-up focus group/s distributed and debriefed

- action planning facilitator nominated

- invitations sent to participants outlining the purpose of the session

- logistics arranged (for example, venue, name tags, writing materials and refreshments).

If organisation-wide goals are to be developed, it is best to create an action planning group that consists of representatives across all levels of the workplace. However, if an action plan is going to exist for each department or work group it is best to do action planning at just this level and then report the results of the session to relevant stakeholders.

Step 2 - Goals

Establishing clear goals or objectives is critical for setting your action plan up for success. The following steps can help guide the discussion:

1. Review the results from the PAW survey and focus groups.

2. With the help of the group, identify the general themes and write them on a white board. At this stage, do not attempt to discuss the appropriateness of the themes or eliminate conflicting issues.

3. Ask participants to rank order the issues for (a) level of importance and (b) level of motivation to change them.

4. Search for areas of consensus and prioritise the issues.

5. Choose the top five issues and turn them into goal statements. For long-term goals, it might be necessary to identify short-term, more obtainable goals. Remember, goals need to be challenging enough to be stimulating but not so complex that people become discouraged.

6. Identify any apparent areas of goal conflict. Goal conflict can occur when a workgroup has different ideas about whether goals are relevant and how they should be achieved. Those that are sufficiently important to cause significant conflict may need to be assigned to a sub-group for discussion of methods for resolving or managing these points of difference. The final list of goal statements is discussed to see whether the group accepts them. At this point in time, team members will need to endorse, or modify, the goal statements.

7. As the last step, devise an overall statement of the goals for the group that is as simple and as concrete as possible.

Top tip:

Ensure goals are SMART goals:

| Smart |
| Measurable |
| Attainable |
| Realistic |
| Timely |

Example goal

Topic: *Conflicting job demands between project and operational work.*

Goal: *To resolve or reduce conflicting job demands between project and operational work by engaging in resource planning in advance of deadlines.*

Reference:
Doran, G. T. (1981). There's a S.M.A.R.T. way to write management's goals and objectives. Management Review, 70, 35-36.

Step 3 - Actions

This step is about trying to reduce the difference between the current state and the desired future for the workplace or workgroup. To develop actions, take each goal statement in turn and develop a specific action or series of actions required to accomplish the intended goal. This may involve:

- listing what is to be achieved by a certain time frame

- making sure that someone takes responsibility for implementing the actions

- considering potential obstacles or problems that may be encountered, and provide contingency plans for high-risk strategies

- identifying resources needed to implement the action

- identifying rewards to keep the team motivated

- including appropriate feedback mechanisms for determining whether plans are working and are on schedule.

The actions in your action plan are the specific strategies that you will implement to control psychosocial hazards and factors identified through PAW.

> **Remember it is important that action plans are tangible and action oriented as they are about doing and delivering.**
>
> **Example action**
>
> **Topic:** *Conflicting job demands between project and operational work.*
>
> **Goal:** *To resolve or reduce conflicting job demands between project and operational work by engaging in resource planning ahead of deadlines.*
>
> **Action:** *Team leader to implement a 30-minute meeting each week with all workgroup members in which a brief is provided on upcoming projects - skill requirements and time commitments to be identified and documented.*

Example controls

Developing a list of clear controls may take some time and effort. To assist, some examples that may be considered in different contexts are as follows:

Environmental

The work environment, for example:

- placing a barrier between customers and bank tellers where there is a risk of workplace violence

- having higher partitions between workstations to reduce noise

- increasing lighting in darker areas.

Organisational

The systems of work and the design of work and work processes, for example:

- workforce planning to ensure there is a balance between work demands/time pressure and workers capacity to meet those demands

- consulting with workers when determining performance targets

- defining job roles so the work activities and the scope of the work are clear

- making time frames for completing work reasonable and achievable

- providing the worker more control over how the work is done by consulting and agreeing to work procedures before work commences. Where a worker has autonomy to make decisions about their workload, rate and pace of work, the risk of injury from work demands may be minimised

- flexible work arrangements where possible, by allowing a degree of freedom in how work is done
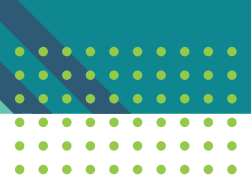
- suitable planning, management and communication processes for organisational change
- providing support systems (for example, buddying and mentoring for new workers)
- rewarding workers' efforts
- providing regular feedback on worker performance
- engaging workers in decision-making
- providing systems for workers to raise concerns and report unreasonable behaviour.

Training and education

It is important for workers to understand their role and have the relevant skills to do the job. Providing information, instruction, training and supervision can help to protect workers from psychological health risks.

Training, instruction and information should include:

- workplace practices concerning psychological health and organisational values
- induction information on the expected workplace behaviour and policies and procedures relevant to conduct (for example, the prevention of bullying, harassment and violence at work)
- training to assist managers and supervisors support workers, identify hazards and risks at work and manage conflict.

Individual

Protecting workers from workplace conflict, bullying, harassment and discrimination, for example:

- developing policies and procedures that set the standard of workplace behaviour and enable workers to raise concerns and report unreasonable behaviour
- providing access to worker assistance programs or counsellors.

The least effective approach is to try to change the worker's behavioural responses as this does nothing to change the inherent risks. Health and wellbeing programs and worker resilience training may still be a useful supporting approach, when combined with higher order controls including work design and management.

For more information on control measures for each of the psychosocial hazards and factors measured by PAW, please see Controls for Managing Psychosocial Hazards at **www.peopleatwork.qov.au/resources.**

Example action plan template

Use the example action planning template to ensure the actions are easily associated with psychosocial hazards and factors of importance for the workplace or workgroup.

Psychosocial risk management action plan workplace/workgroup X												
PRIORITY	Psychosocial hazard (taken from survey and focus group results)	Possible causes (taken from focus groups)	Goals (controls or solutions to address psychosocial hazards and factors)	Actions steps	Potential obstacles	Contingency plans	Resources	Due date	Responsible person to execute actions	Responsible person to review actions	Sign-off complete
1				1. 2. 3. 4. 5.							
2				1. 2. 3. 4. 5.							
3				1. 2. 3. 4. 5.							
4				1. 2. 3. 4. 5.							