People at Work

**People at Work Survey
Action planning guide**

Contents

Introduction

An action plan is a useful way of bringing all the information together that has been collected in People at Work (PAW) survey and focussing group/s in an effort to guide future actions to address psychosocial hazards and risks. The ultimate aim is to decide on a set of 'interventions' or strategies 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. It will enable your organisation to follow up the PAW survey and focus groups by developing action plans for managing psychosocial hazards and factors in the workplace.

Action planning purpose

In general, action planning results in a statement about what the organisation wishes to achieve over a given period of time. The action planning process assists organisations (or workgroups) to focus on a desired end state and to reach agreement on 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 organisations 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 goal attainment
- develop a timeline for achieving the goals
- develop monitoring activities.

The action planning process

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

Step 1 - preparation

In preparation for action plan development, ensure 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 (NB: if organisation-wide goals are to be developed, it is best to create an action planning group which consists of representatives across the organisation, and at all levels. However, if an action plan is going to exist for each department, it is best to do action planning at just this level and then report the results of the action planning session to relevant stakeholders in the organisation)
- logistics arranged (e.g., venue, name tags, writing materials, and refreshments).

Step 2 - goals

Establishing the goals or objectives that are to be achieved is critical to ensure action planning is set up for success. The following steps can help guide the discussion:

1. Start by reviewing 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 to eliminate conflicting issues.

3. Have participants 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 5 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 change, 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:

| Specific |
| Measureable |
| Attainable |
| Relevant |
| Timely |
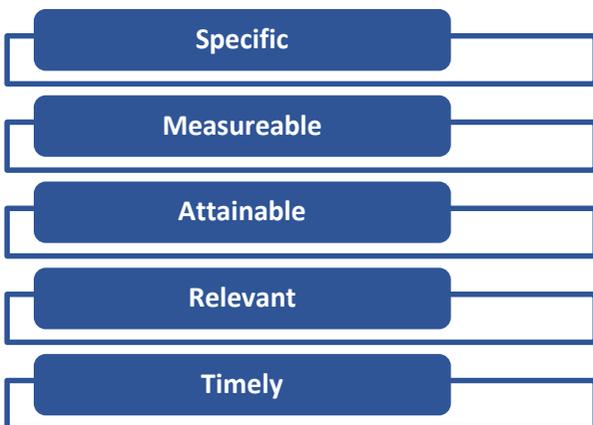
Example Goal

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 discrepancy between the current and the desired future for the organisation or workgroup. To develop action plans, take each goal statement in turn and develop a

specific action or series of actions required to accomplish the intended goal. Issues to consider include:

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

- make sure that someone takes responsibility for implementing the actions

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

- identify resources needed to implement the action

- identify rewards to keep the team motivated

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

Remember it is important that action plans are tangible and action-oriented as they are about <u>doing</u> and <u>delivering</u>.

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 in advance 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 actions

Developing a list of succinct actions may take some time and effort, particularly if there are few people in your organisation that have specific expertise in this area. To assist, some examples are provided below.

Of great importance to note, the risk of psychological harm can be managed by implementing effective control measures addressing the work environment and systems of work. In this regard, treating psychosocial hazards much the same as physical hazards, and determining the most effective strategies to eliminate or manage the risk of harm to persons in the workplace. Such controls generally involve interventions or prevention strategies. Safe Work Australia has published several guidance materials that may assist with this, including information on how to prevent psychological injury, guidance for employers on preventing and responding to workplace bullying, and how to manage work health and safety risks.

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 injury. Ensure your action planning process has been undertaken, and where multiple suggested actions have been provided, consider all of these if it is reasonable, rather than just picking the 'best' one.

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

Control measures that may be considered include:

Environmental

The work environment – implementing the hierarchy of controls, 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 work load, 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

Workers need 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 conduct relevant policies and procedures, 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 psychosocial hazards and factors, please see:

- [Work-related stress tip sheets](#)
- [Guide to managing the risk of fatigue at work](#)
- [Guide for preventing and responding to workplace bullying](#)
- [Guide for preventing and responding to work-related violence](#).

Example action plan template

Use an action planning template (example below) to ensure the actions are easily associated with psychosocial hazards and factors of importance for the organisation or workgroup.

Psychosocial risk management action plan Organisation/wCorkgroup X											
PRIORITY	**Psychosocial risk factor** (taken from survey and focus group results)	**Possible causes** (taken from focus groups)	**Goals** (solutions to address psychosocial hazards and factors)	**Actions steps**	**Potential obstacles**	**Contingency plans**	**Resources**	**Due date**	**Responsible to execute actions**	**Responsible 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.							4