

Psychosocial hazards for Supervisors

What are psychosocial hazards?

Psychosocial hazards are anything at work that may cause psychological or physical harm. These stem from:

- the way the tasks or job are designed, organised, managed and supervised
- tasks or jobs where there are inherent psychosocial hazards and risks
- the equipment, working environment or requirements to undertake duties in physically hazardous environments, and
- social factors at work, workplace relationships and social interactions.

Supervisors can influence nearly all aspects of job and task design

Hazard	How leaders support this	Signs there are issues
Job demands are physical, mental and emotional. Excessively high or low can cause harm if severe, prolonged or frequent	- Conduct ongoing/regular assessments of workload and tasks - Set a positive example (e.g., take regular breaks, leave on time) - Be vigilant of periods of peak demands and support the team - Invest in systems that support effective work - Provide supportive environments (such as quiet spaces for demanding work) - Create/encourage conversations within the team around workload	- Reports of high workloads - Reports of low workloads - Staff working excessive hours - Staff not taking breaks - Frequent communications outside of work hours - Lack of engagement - Increased irritability/negativity
Low job control occurs when staff have little to no say in the decisions and processes that affect them	- Match tasks to staff with appropriate capability - Self-reflect on what leaders are 'required' to approve (i.e., avoid 'micromanagement') - Critically review of workflows to minimise non-productive work - Seek feedback from team members relating to their level of job control	- Requiring approvals for routine/low-level tasks/emails - Disengagement from role/work - Delays in work getting done - Increase staff turnover
Support is inadequate when team members do not have information, training, or resources to carry out their jobs	- Make information clear and easy to access - Encourage sharing of information, knowledge and skills within and between teams - Review team training and seek feedback on needs - Ensure appropriate staff coverage (e.g. back filling a role during extended period of absence)	- Team members receiving conflicting instructions - Work does not get done properly and/or on time - Increased interpersonal frustration, tension or absenteeism
Role conflict occurs when there is limited or inconsistent information about duties and responsibilities.	- Provide clarity on team roles and responsibility - Adjust tasks and/or create clarity in response to feedback, queries or inconsistencies - Provide rationale when assigning or altering work/roles - Be vigilant of duplication or conflicts in different members work	- Team members regularly seeking clarity - Differences in assigned or perceived priorities across the team - Increased anxiety, lower morale and engagement - Reduced productivity
Reward and recognition can be harmful there is an imbalance between the work team members undertake and the acknowledgement they receive	- Be fair and consistent when rewarding and/or recognising people - Provide clear, fair and practical feedback - Make sure all team members have access to career development activities - Seek feedback from team members on reward and recognition - Look for opportunities to diversity or adapt rewards (both formal and informal)	- Team members exhibit stress due to feeling undervalued - Decreased morale and motivation - Lack of innovation or creativity
Change management can create significant anxiety when done poorly	- Consult team members before making changes that will affect them (even if seemingly minor) - Keep your team informed during periods of change - Ensure support for your team during periods of change - Acknowledge the potential difficulties people experience during periods of change	- Team members regularly seeking clarity - Differences in assigned or perceived priorities across the team - Increased anxiety, lower morale and engagement - Reduced productivity

Hazard	How leaders support this	Signs there are issues
Organisational justice can create cause harm when applied inconsistently or unfairly	- Ensure policies and 'rules' are consistently and transparently applied - Do not penalise staff for things they cannot control - Involve all parties in decisions that affect them - Create an accessible workplace for all team members (i.e., implementing reasonable adjustments)	- Increased interpersonal frustration or tension - Loss of trust in leaders and the workplace generally
Remote/isolated work can make people more susceptible to psychological injuries	- Minimise requirements for remote/isolated work - Ensure risk assessments and controls are in place - Provide appropriate supervision - Ensure remote/isolated workers have a connection to the rest of the team	- Limited communication from team members who work remotely or travel frequently - Difficulty contacting team members - Lessening engagement from remote workers
Poor workplace relationships can lead to psychological injury if this experience is severe, prolonged or frequent	- Encourage your team members to discuss differing ideas constructively and provide platforms to do this - Agree on rules for communication and behaviour - Try to catch and resolve signs of relationship conflict early - Educate yourself on recognising unacceptable behaviour and conflict resolution strategies	- Inappropriate behaviours between or directed toward individuals (e.g. offensive language; rumours) - Recurring/unresolved confrontations and/or disagreements
Exposure to Traumatic events/materials can severely impact their mental or emotional well-being, this can represent a traumatic event for staff.	- Modify tasks where possible to reduce the risk of exposure to high-risk situations - Limit or protect access to potentially distressing or traumatic material (e.g. password protection or document flagging) - Regularly promote access to mental health resources, such as employee assistance programs	- Team members have been exposed to or witnessed distressing events at work (e.g. fatality, accident) - Team members who are exposed to traumatic material (e.g. victim/survivor testimonies)
Environmental conditions that are unpleasant or hazardous can lead to psychological or physical injury	- Look to eliminate poor conditions wherever possible (e.g. report maintenance and facility issues) - Encourage hazard reporting in UQSafe - Make sure your team members understand their obligations to support workplace cleanliness and safety	- Excessive noise, unpleasant odours - Exposure to chemical or biological hazards (e.g. in offices) - Poor air or water quality

Bullying, harassment, violence and aggression

- Set a zero tolerance policy
- Make sure your team understands expected standards of behaviour
- Empower team members to stand up to poor behaviour
- Make sure your team has the means to seek help
- Take disclosures of bad behaviour seriously

UQ has single point for complaints and appeals:
<https://www.uq.edu.au/complaints-appeals>

Sexual misconduct

When someone experiences sexual assault or harassment, the people they choose to talk to about it play a vital role. Your role is to:

Listen → Support → Refer

Reports of sexual misconduct must be kept confidential.

Refer to:

- [UQ Respect](#)
- [Helping a survivor](#)
- [UQ Sexual Misconduct Support Unit](#) (support for survivors of sexual assault and harassment)

Crisis Support

[Support for students](#)

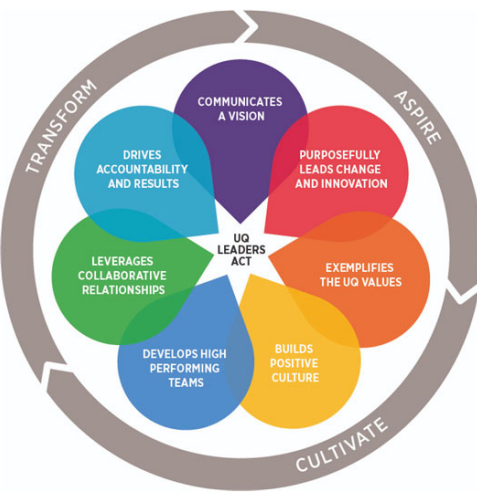
[Support for staff](#)

Building supervisor and leadership skills

[The UQ Leadership Framework](#)

[UQ Managers toolkit](#)

[Leadership Development at UQ](#)



Learning more about psychosocial hazards

Formal training & resources

- [UQ Resources](#)
- [Safe Work Code of Practice](#)
- Courses available in [WorkDay](#):
 - "Understanding and Managing Psychosocial Risk for Supervisors"
 - "Trauma Informed Practice"
 - "Understanding Vicarious Trauma"
 - "Disability inclusion Course"
 - "Mental Health Champions Introduction Session"

Experiential learning activities

- Reflect on each of the psychosocial hazards and how they relate to your team – involve your team
- Develop a formal psychosocial risk assessment and management plan for a particular role or task (seek support from your local Health, Safety and Wellness / HR team)
- Identify a process in your organisational unit and try to modify it to address a psychosocial hazard

Learning from others

- Shadow another supervisor (e.g. sit in on a team meeting or development conversation)