

Good Work Design Guide

Optimising work, managing psychosocial hazards

Contents

Purpose of this Guide	2
Understanding Work Design	2
<i>An overview of what work design is, when and why to apply it.</i>	
Good work design checklist	4
<i>For supervisors, HR. A resource for use during recruitment or onboarding, role redesign or organisational restructure to minimise risks from poor work design.</i>	
SMART Work toolkit	6
<i>A resource to support individuals and supervisors to apply SMART work framework for good work design</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>SMART framework explained</i>• <i>Applying the framework – for individuals, for supervisors</i>• <i>SMART prompt questions</i>• <i>Scenarios</i>• <i>Reflection worksheet</i>	
Other Resources	16
<i>Learn more about work design</i>	

Purpose of this Guide

This guide supports supervisors and team members to manage psychosocial hazards by focusing on improving how work is designed and managed. The most effective way to reduce risk is to examine and adjust the work itself to be more workable—not to expect individuals to simply ‘cope better’.

Health and safety is a shared responsibility, and everyone has a role: team members can identify aspects of work design that may be contributing to harm, and supervisors can influence how work is structured, organised, and supported to create safer, healthier work.

Understanding Work Design

What and why

Work design is the deliberate planning and improvement of how work is structured, organised, and supported. It includes tasks people do, how they do them, the environment they work in, and the systems that support their work. It shapes people’s day to day experience, their health and wellbeing, and their ability to work safely and effectively.

Work design is a safety issue because psychosocial hazards—such as high job demands, low control, poor support, and unclear roles—are proven to cause psychological and physical harm. Safety regulations require these risks to be eliminated or minimised so far as is reasonably practicable, and strong evidence shows that the most effective way to achieve this is through better-designed work.

When to think about work design

1. **Before recruitment:** This is the best time to prevent psychosocial risks. HR and Supervisors can collaborate to ensure the role is clearly defined, workloads are realistic, and expectations are achievable. Good design early, avoids issues like unclear roles, excessive demands, and low job control.
2. **Change/restructure:** Organisational change often increases psychosocial risk due to shifting roles, unclear communication, or disrupted support. Reviewing work design during change helps maintain clarity and stability and reduces stress. HSW and HR
3. **During regular operations:** Even when things are going well, periodic check-ins help keep workloads sustainable, ensure staff have enough control and support, and maintain effective systems. Good work design strengthens wellbeing and improves performance.

4. **When there are indicators of harm:** Early indicators—such as persistent fatigue, stress, errors, conflict, rising complaints, or sustained workload pressure—often signal underlying work design issues. Reviewing and improving work design at this point helps address root causes, protect workers’ mental and physical health, and meet safety obligations. Work design review should be considered when
- Indicators of harm are identified (errors, absences, conflict, distress)
 - Workloads exceed sustainable levels for greater than 2 weeks
 - There are repeated complaints or escalating issues
 - There is organisational change
 - A worker reports a psychosocial hazard.

A risk management approach should apply where the potential for harm from psychosocial hazards is identified. The SMART toolkit provides supervisor guidance for this.

Escalation is needed when psychosocial hazards continue to pose a risk despite reasonable local adjustments or redesign efforts.

Supervisors should consult with their HR Client Partner if further redesign is needed, if the hazard exceeds their local decision-making authority, or if specialist support is required to ensure risks are effectively eliminated or minimise

Good work design checklist

This checklist is to be used during key phases of workforce planning to support the application of good work design principles, including:

- **Recruitment and onboarding** – to ensure new roles are clearly defined, safe, and supportive.
- **Role redesign or organisational restructure** – to proactively identify and manage psychosocial risks during organisational change, and any individual or team role changes.

Work design refers to the deliberate planning and structuring of work tasks, roles, environments, and systems to optimise health, safety, wellbeing, and performance. It includes, *how* work is done, *where*, *when*, and *by whom*. Good work design aims to eliminate or minimise risks at the source, enhance job satisfaction, and improve organisational outcomes.

If you identify concerns or need support, contact your local HR Client Partner or [AskHR](#).

Task Design

Consider what tasks will be performed in this role:

- Are there a variety of tasks involved in the role (e.g., problem solving tasks collaborative tasks, practical tasks)?
- Are tasks monotonous or repetitive? If so, can they be time-bound to short periods, rotated or redesigned?
- Are tasks sequenced logically to support efficiency?
- Are tasks clearly defined with expected outcomes?
- Are tasks meaningful (i.e., have a clear purpose) and aligned with organisational goals?
- How will employees receive recognition and reward for their work?
- Are there opportunities for skill use and development?

Cognitive and Emotional Demands

- What level of attention, memory, and decision-making is required?
- Are tasks likely to involve high emotional labour?
- Are there support systems in place for emotionally demanding work?
- Can there be flexibility in task scheduling for tasks with high demands (e.g., so that employees can rotate cognitively demanding tasks with less cognitively demanding tasks)?

Workload and Demands

- Are workload expectations realistic for the time and resources available?
- Is there a system to monitor and adjust workload during peak periods?

- How will clear priorities for tasks and deadlines be communicated / negotiated?
- Is there a risk of role overload or underload?
- Is there a single supervisor with comprehensive knowledge and oversight of all tasks assigned to the role (as reporting to more than one supervisor can increase role ambiguity and workload)?
- Is the supervisory line appropriately aligned with the operational work?

Autonomy and Control

- Does the role allow for reasonable decision-making and task control?
- Can the worker influence how and when tasks are completed?
- Are there flexible work arrangements available? (If not, identifying clear opportunities for decision making in task scheduling or other aspects of work is important).
- Is there scope for innovation or problem-solving?

Social and Relational Aspects

- Does the role include opportunities for positive social interaction?
- Is the role co-located with other team members?
- Are there risks of conflict, isolation, or poor relationships?
- Are supportive supervision and mentoring available?

Physical and Environmental Design

- Is the work environment safe and accessible? (consider lighting, noise, ventilation temperature). Has it been designed to minimise exposure to hazards?
- Are tools, equipment, and technology fit for purpose?
- Are there suitable spaces for taking work breaks?
- Is the layout conducive to efficient and safe task execution?

Role Clarity and Job Fit

- Is the role description clear and up to date?
- Are tasks clearly defined?
- Are performance expectations well defined?
- Do employees receive regular, timely, constructive feedback on their work (i.e., outside of APD)?
- Are any inherent physical or psychosocial hazard exposures related to the role clearly articulated?

This guide integrates principles from Curtin University's SMART Work Design Framework, SafeWork NSW guidance, and Safe Work Australia's Good Work Design Handbook.

SMART work toolkit

SMART framework explained

The SMART model¹ is an evidence based and efficient framework to manage psychosocial hazards because it targets root causes across multiple risks at once while also supporting performance and wellbeing. It was developed by Curtin University and this toolkit provides a summary of the framework and how supervisors and individuals can apply it. You can learn more at [S.M.A.R.T Work model - Resources](#).

The SMART framework is based on 5 key characteristics of work which align closely with common psychosocial hazards.

S – Stimulating: variety, challenge and meaningfulness

Stimulating work uses our skills, challenges us, includes problem solving, and a variety of tasks. If work is not stimulating enough, we can feel bored and disengage.

(supports protection against low job variety, low job demands)

M - Mastery: role clarity, training, feedback

We feel like we can do our job – we have the skills, we know what is expected, and we are performing to our potential. We develop mastery by having role clarity, seeing or understanding a task from beginning to end, and getting feedback on performance.

(addresses low role clarity, inadequate training, poor performance feedback and recognition)

A - Agency: autonomy, influence and decision control

Agency means have a sense of some control over how our work is scheduled, the methods we use to achieve our outcomes and our ability to make decisions.

(addresses low job control)

R- Relational: support, teamwork, connection

This is about the quality of our work relationships – how connected we feel to others, the support we have from manager and colleagues, as well as our sense of connection to the purpose of our work.

¹ The SMART Work Design model is based on the following research paper: Parker, S. K. & Knight, C. (2024). The SMART model of work design: A higher order structure to help see the wood from the trees. *Human Resource Management*, 63, 265-291

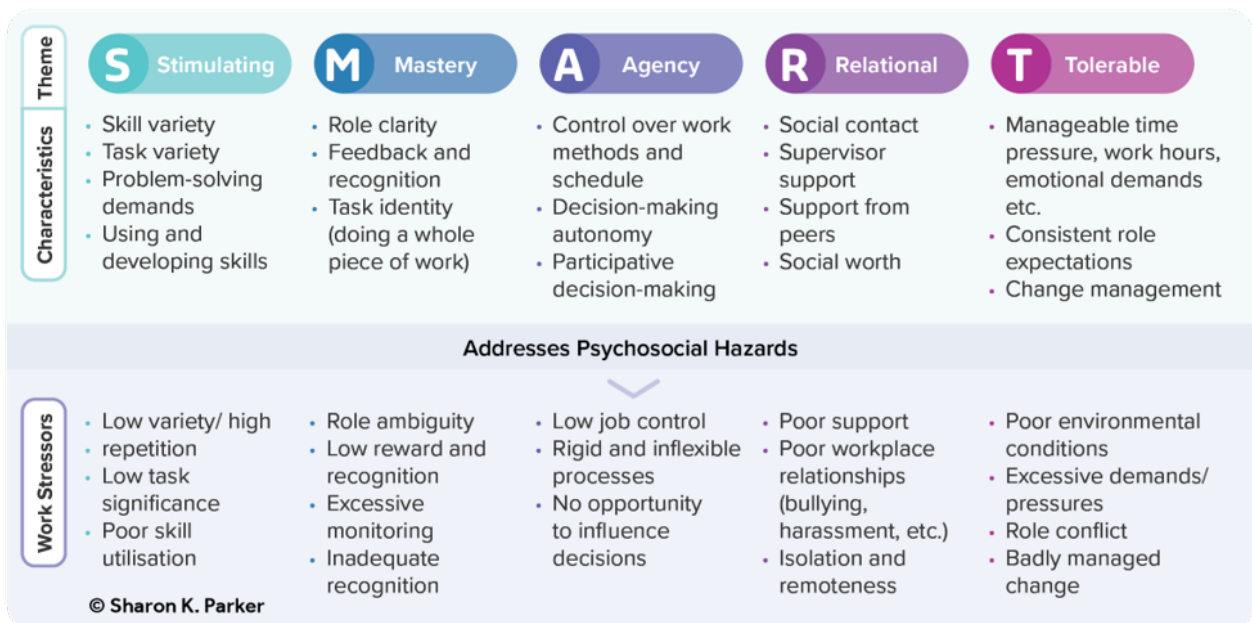
(strengthens buffers against poor support, conflict, isolation)

T – Tolerable Demands: workload, pace, recovery

The demands of work may vary at times but are overall sustainable. We can meet them without feeling over or under stretched and the demands of the role are not conflicting.

(directly links to managing high job demands, emotional load, role conflict, fatigue)

S, M, A and **R** elements represent key job resources, while the **T** represents job demands. Noting that when S, M and A resources are low, T is likely to increase. Balancing these is important – when we have the right resources for our jobs, we can better cope with work demands when they increase, without feeling overwhelmed.



©Professor Sharon Parker, Centre for Transformative Work Design, Curtin University. This image is the intellectual property of the authors and is reproduced with permission.

How physical hazards fit with this framework

The SMART framework is not a physical hazard framework. However, the physical environment is a major part of work design, and physical factors can and should be considered in SMART analysis when they contribute to psychosocial hazards or demands. The SMART question prompts include these items to prompt consideration of the physical hazard environment:

S: does the physical set up limit task variety of meaningful work?

M: Do equipment/tools/environment help or hinder skilled performances

A: Can workers control features of their environment that affect their work?

R: Does physical layout support restrict connection and support?

T: Does the environment add unnecessary physical, cognitive or sensory load?

For individuals – Job crafting using SMART

Each of us can use the SMART framework to consider small adjustments to our own work. Job crafting is when individuals make small, proactive adjustments to how they approach their tasks, relationships, or work processes to improve how well the job functions. It's valuable because these bottom up changes can help make the demands of the role more achievable, strengthen clarity, autonomy- and support, and reduce psychosocial risks.

Recommended steps are:

1. Think about your work using the [SMART questions](#) as prompts.
2. Can you identify aspects of work that could be altered to boost your job resources or reduce your demands? What could help your wellbeing and performance at work?
3. Identify if there is anything already in your control that you could adjust. Identify any potential adjustments you could discuss with your supervisor.
Make some notes or use the reflection sheet to assist you.
4. Initiate a conversation with your supervisor or discuss your suggestions with your supervisor at your next 1:1 meeting.

You can also take a [free online short self assessment quiz](#) from the Centre for Transformative Design. Your PDF results will be emailed to you.

For supervisors – applying SMART principles with your team

With individual team members

- Be open and supportive when staff raise concerns about their work.
- Use the SMART prompts to explore what might be contributing to difficulties or dissatisfaction.
- Identify which SMART elements could be strengthened (e.g., clarity, autonomy, support, workload).
- Collaborate on practical, achievable adjustments—small changes can significantly reduce psychosocial risk.
- Follow up to check whether changes are helping and what else may be needed.

If you identify that one of your team is having challenges or is dissatisfied at work, view the work through the SMART lens, and consider which of the prompt questions may be helpful to seek to understand how they can best be supported.

Working with your team

- Team-based SMART discussions work best when psychological safety is high - people need to feel safe to raise issues and share ideas.
- SMART conversations are most valuable when the team's work is interconnected, requiring shared decision-making or coordination, rather than when individuals operate in isolated or highly discrete functions.

Some proactive ways to use the SMART framework with your team are:

Regular check-ins

Use the SMART framework in team meetings or planning sessions as a structured pulse check. Options include reviewing all SMART elements or focusing on one (e.g., Agency or Tolerable Demands).

- What is working well or not working well?
- How could we strengthen this SMART element for our team?

This approach keeps the conversation focused, practical, and solution-oriented.

When concerns or emerging risks appear

Use SMART as a diagnostic tool when you notice early signs of strain— rising errors, increases in low-level conflict, workflow bottlenecks, or signs of disengagement.

Apply this simple risk management cycle:

Identify	Notice the hazard, receive reports
Consult	Talk with your team using SMART prompts to explore root causes
Assess	Clarify what the hazard is. Map the issue/s to SMART categories to clarify which work design factor may be contributing.
Control	Identify and implement feasible work design actions. Not all concerns need to be addressed at once; agree on one high-leverage work design change that is likely to address the root cause rather than the symptoms. Document the issues identified and the agreed actions and communicate this to the team. Trial the change for 2–4 weeks.
Review	Monitor the impact, and review with the team (or representatives) to assess whether risks were reduced, and if strategies should be refined, expanded, or replaced.

Seek support from your HR Client Partner if matters are escalating or adjustments to work design have not been effective. HSW can provide support with any risk management process.

SMART work prompt questions

Stimulating	<p>Variety, challenge, meaningful work</p> <p>What aspects of your role do you find most stimulating?</p> <p>Does your role offer the opportunity to engage in a variety of different tasks?</p> <p>Does your role offer you the opportunity to use and develop a variety of different skills?</p> <p>Does your role allow you to address challenges by problem-solving?</p> <p>When are you most engaged at work and when are you least?</p> <p>Does the physical set up limit task variety of meaningful work?</p>
Mastery	<p>Role clarity, training, feedback</p> <p>Do you understand what is expected of you in your role? Do you understand your responsibilities and duties, including expectations for achievement of goals and objectives?</p> <p>Are you clear about your priorities?</p> <p>Do you receive timely feedback on your work from a manager or colleagues? Could something be changed to make feedback more useful? How do you prefer to receive feedback?</p> <p>Do you report to more than one person? If so, does this cause confusion?</p> <p>Do you feel you have the skills needed to succeed in your role?</p> <p>Can you clearly see how your tasks contribute to the final product or outcome?</p> <p>What opportunities exist for you to build your competence and mastery?</p> <p>Do equipment/tools/environment help or hinder skilled performances</p>
Agency	<p>Autonomy, influence, decision control</p> <p>How much autonomy do you feel you have in how you complete your tasks? Are there decisions you wish you had more influence over in your role?</p> <p>How comfortable are you with prioritising your own work?</p> <p>What could be changed to give you more control over how you do your job?</p> <p>Do you feel trusted to take initiative?</p> <p>Can workers control features of their environment that affect their work?</p>
Relational	<p>Support, teamwork, connection</p> <p>Do you feel connected to your colleagues?</p> <p>Are you able to ask your colleagues for help if needed?</p> <p>Do you feel your work is valuable for the end users/people who benefit from the work you do? Would you like to have more connection to the people who benefit from your work?</p> <p>Do you feel a sense of value in the work you do?</p> <p>How could your role better support collaboration and connection?</p> <p>What aspects of your work feel particularly meaningful to you? Is there something you'd like to be more involved in?</p> <p>Does physical layout support restrict connection and support?</p>
Tolerable Demands	<p>Workload, pace, recovery</p> <p>Are the demands of your role reasonable? Are there any tasks or pressures that are consistently draining?</p> <p>What do you find most demanding about your role?</p> <p>Do you have multiple roles that make it hard to determine expectations and meet demands?</p> <p>What changes could help make the demands of your workload more tolerable or reduce feelings of stress?</p> <p>Is there time to recover after peak periods?</p> <p>Does the environment add unnecessary physical, cognitive or sensory load?</p>

Example Scenarios

Scenario 1 – Job crafting with SMART for an individual employee

Amelia is a junior lecturer (Level B) who teaches two undergraduate units that require frequent Blackboard updates, weekly announcements, online queries, and multiple assessments. She is the sole coordinator of one unit despite being relatively new to the discipline. She is supervising three honours student (who each require intensive one on one meetings and feedback). Other commitments include the Teaching and Learning Committee (whose meetings often occurred at short notice), and meeting the milestones to progress to publication of her research, which is important to her personally but also for her probation requirements. Amelia enjoys her role, the demands on her time and cognitive load have become increasingly difficult to manage.

Amelia used the SMART prompt questions and made notes on the self-reflection sheet.

S - Task variety is stimulating but with repetitive admin requirements low valued tasks can feel like they dominate.

M - There is infrequent feedback, with this occurring mainly at the end of semester.

A - whilst there is autonomy is strong for teaching delivery she feels it is limited for workload planning with committee meetings at short notice, and a sense her calendar is 'owned by others'.

R- Feels isolated dealing with complex student issues; unsure how to prioritise competing academic demands.

T - The clearest pressures are 2 marking periods that collide with a grant EOI deadline, the volume of emails that derail her day, and managing her competing and often all urgent responsibilities between teaching, research and committees.

Amelia asked to meet with her supervisor and shared her reflections on work challenges that she felt were causing persistent higher levels of stress for her. After discussion and considering options they agreed on these work design improvements to implement: -

Relational: Weekly 15-min co-teaching huddle for problem-solving support; mentoring with an experienced academic.

Agency: Protected research time (two half days); supervisor to negotiate minimum notice for committee meetings.

Tolerable Demands: Marking support provided; assessment deadlines staggered next semester.

Follow-up: Mid-semester feedback and review meeting scheduled.

Scenario 2 – Applying SMART work with a team where there is an emerging risk

Liam manages a Student Services Administration Team responsible for enrolment processing, academic progress interventions, graduation checks, and general student enquiries. During census date and semester transition periods, application volumes increase sharply, while service expectations remain unchanged.

Over recent months, Liam notices:

- extended unpaid overtime becoming common
- staff skipping breaks to “keep up”
- increased errors requiring rework, and
- staff reporting they feel “constantly behind,” even when working hard.

Recognising these as indicators of sustained load and stress, Liam initiates a structured consultation with his team using the SMART Work Design framework to identify where work design is contributing to psychosocial risk.

Preparation for Consultation

Prior to the meeting, Liam takes the following steps to support effective consultation and psychological safety:

- Acknowledges the workload pressures he has observed and explains that team input is essential to understanding current work design challenges.
- Clearly communicates that the focus of the discussion is on **how work is organised and managed**, not on individual performance or efficiency.
- Provides assurance that open and honest feedback is encouraged and that there will be no negative consequences for raising concerns.
- Introduces the SMART framework, explains how it will be used in the discussion, and provides two to three reflective questions for each SMART element in advance, allowing team members time to consider their experiences.

SMART insights - team consultation

During the meeting, Liam facilitates a structured discussion, working through each element of the SMART framework and capturing key themes and issues raised by the team on a whiteboard.

The following issues are identified:

- **Stimulation:** Tasks are often repetitive, and concentration and engagement can diminish as the day progresses, particularly during high-volume periods.
- **Mastery:** Time pressure increases the fear of making mistakes, contributing to stress and self-doubt.
- **Agency:** Work is allocated without visibility of overall capacity, and staff feel unable to slow down, push back, or say no when workloads are high.
- **Relational:** Staff are concerned about burdening colleagues and are reluctant to ask for help during peak periods.
- **Tolerable Demands:** Workload peaks can last several weeks with no reduction in expectations, and opportunities for recovery are informal and inconsistent.

The team also discusses factors that increase task demands and suggests options that could make current workloads more tolerable. Liam commits to considering these suggestions, exploring feasible options, and discussing potential changes with his manager before proceeding.

Following consultation and further consideration, the following work design changes are implemented.

1. Rotation system to reduce accumulated load

To reduce sustained cognitive and workload pressure:

- Staff are rotated off high-demand tasks after set periods.
- Student-facing work is alternated with processing and lower-intensity tasks to balance workload and support recovery.

2. Team capacity traffic light system

A team-level capacity system is introduced, with **pre-agreed controls** to guide timely action when demand increases.

- **Green – Business as Usual**
Workload is manageable, and normal service standards apply.
- **Amber – Increased Demand or Complexity**
The supervisor activates prioritisation and pause rules, including pausing non-essential meetings, increasing supervisor check-ins, and clearly identifying work that can wait.
- **Red – Demand Exceeds Sustainable Capacity**
Formal controls are triggered, including extending service timeframes, escalating issues to faculty leadership, stopping intake of low-priority work, and planning post-peak recovery time.

Liam discussed these new arrangements a team meeting, then sent an email to staff summarise these arrangements. The traffic light system with agreed controls was written up on the whiteboard, and a few printed copies placed in visible locations in the open office area. An additional team meeting was scheduled for 3 weeks to review these changes.

SMART Work Design Reflection Worksheet – Job crafting

SMART		Questions to ask yourself	Your reflection
Stimulating	Skill Variety Task Variety Problem solving demands Information processing	Work should be mentally engaging and offer opportunities to learn and grow. What aspects of your role do you find most stimulating? Does your role offer the opportunity to engage in a variety of different tasks? Does your role offer you the opportunity to use and develop a variety of different skills? Does your role allow you to address challenges by problem-solving? How can you make your work more engaging?	
Mastery	Enable you to do your work successfully Feedback/Role clarity/Task identity	Work should allow you to use and develop your skills and feel competent. Do you understand what is expected of you in your role? Are you clear about your priorities? Do you receive timely feedback on your work from a manager or colleagues? Do you report to more than one person? If so, does this cause confusion? Do you feel you have the skills needed to succeed in your role? What opportunities exist for you to build your competence and mastery?	
Agency	Autonomy Control over work methods/timing Influence over work – decision making	Work should provide freedom and control over how tasks are completed. How much control do you have over your work tasks and schedule? E.g., how, when and where you do your work? Are you able to contribute to decision-making within your team / area? Do you feel that your ideas and views are heard? What is within your control to change about your work?	
Relational	Social aspects of work – connection Support from supervisor/peers Task significance	Work should foster positive relationships and a sense of belonging. Do you feel connected to your colleagues? Are you able to ask your colleagues for help if needed? Do you receive feedback from end users about the positive impact you have had? Do you feel a sense of value in the work you do? How could your role better support collaboration and connection?	
Tolerable demands	Moderate time pressure/workload Manageable emotional demands Low role conflict	Work should be manageable and not cause excessive stress or burnout. Are the demands of your role reasonable? What do you find most demanding about your role? Do you have multiple roles that make it hard to determine expectations and meet demands? What changes could help make the demands of your workload more tolerable?	

Personal SMART Action Plan

Reflect on results of your SMART survey and identify an area to focus on where you could make a positive change in your role. This could be one area of the SMART characteristics that you scored the lowest in.

Action Plan	Notes
Which SMART element will you focus on and why?	
Reflecting on your notes above, what will you do?	
Who can support you?	
When will you do it?	
How will you know it's working?	
Set a date to follow-up with yourself. What worked? What didn't work? How can you move forward? Are there other things you can do?	

Other Resources

- Centre for Transformative Work Design, Curtin University
[What is work design](#) – useful short videos: what work design is, the theory, how to re-design work.
- Workplace Health and Safety Queensland
[Good work design](#) video
- SafeWork NSW
[Designing Work to Manage Psychosocial Risks](#) Guide
- Centre for Transformative Work Design, Curtin University
[SMART work design model](#)