

PSYCHOSOCIAL RISK MANAGEMENT

Sydney Water

This case study is an overview of a current effort to identify, manage and improve the psychosocial conditions across Sydney Water.

Background

Sydney Water's regulator has been vocal about its need to manage psychological risks the same as physical risks are managed, although how to proactively avoid these risks is a topic of great uncertainty in many organisations.

Sydney Water has made a significant investment in understanding how to identify and manage psychosocial risks, as well as how to prevent these risks from occurring through influencing work design and organisational climate.

Implementation

The initial investment Sydney Water made was to partner with the University of South Australia to use their Psychosocial Safety Climate tool (PSC-12) to help survey the organisation's climate for health, safety and wellbeing.

Once a baseline has been established, the organisation set a target of reducing its PSC as a primary aim. This is due to the extensive research on PSC and its use in the Australian Workplace barometer has demonstrated that reduced PSC is associated not only with improved individual outcomes (i.e. reduced depression, increased engagement) but also improved organisational outcomes (i.e. reduced psychological injuries, absenteeism).

Sydney Water implemented an organisation wide mental wellbeing program, including various levels of training, partnerships with new Employee Assistance Program (EAP) providers and a fitness passport as well as efforts to embed wellbeing in the way business is undertaken.

Further, this project allowed Sydney Water to identify groups that were high and low in PSC and take further steps to understand what workplace psychosocial factors were setting these teams up to thrive or languish.

These psychosocial factors were identified by partnering with the University of South Australia and using scales from the Australian Workplace barometer which allowed Sydney Water to reference these psychosocial levels against utility and state averages to provide some context.



Benefits and outcomes

Sydney Water was awarded the 2019 Australian Psychological Societies Workplace Excellence Award in the highly competitive category of health, safety and wellbeing due to the impact of their 2018 mental wellbeing program which saw a significant reduction in PSC, along with the above associated individual and organisational outcomes as predicted.

Action plans are put in place to address any identified hazards or risk factors and the groups are resurveyed again to ensure risk levels have been controlled.

Finally, teams with high PSC were discovered to experience positive psychosocial factors such as increased support and positive relationships. These factors create high PSC and are known to offset the risks associated with high work demands as well as lead to positive outcomes such as performance, engagement and positive health.