



# Managing Excessive Workloads

## Quick Wins & Proven Strategies

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# Workshop Overview



- Best practice psychosocial risk management for high workloads
- Identifying psychosocial hazards (eg high workloads) and assigning levels of risk
- Create your own psychosocial safety action plan for managing high workloads
- Psychosocial risk preventions/actions/strategies

## PSYCHOSOCIAL RISK MANAGEMENT

### Best practice:

1. Identify psychosocial factors
2. Determine level of risk
3. Design intervention
4. Ongoing evaluation

### Working group members

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# Psychosocial factors at work

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**Psychological + Social = Psychosocial**

**Also called work-related factors**

Includes ***job design, social, organisational*** and ***management*** contexts of work that have the potential to impact worker health and wellbeing.

Cox & Griffiths, 2005



# Psychosocial factors at work

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***Job demands*** require energy, effort, time

***Job resources*** help get the job done



# Job demands - Task related

## Psychological demands

“My job requires working very hard and fast”

“I have enough time to get the job done”

## Emotional demands

“My work places me in emotionally challenging situations”

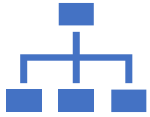
“My work requires suppressing my genuine emotions”

## Physical demands

“I am often required to work for long periods in physically awkward positions”

“I am often required to move or lift very heavy loads”

# Job demands – Work environment



## Organisational change

Restructuring  
Downsizing  
New policies  
New procedures  
Frequent management turnover



## Harassment

Discomfort due to humour  
Unfair treatment due to gender  
Negative comments about race  
Sworn or yelled at  
Humiliated in front of others  
Unwanted sexual advance  
Physically assaulted



## Bullying

Offensive behaviour  
Repeated over time  
Intentional or unintentional  
Creates risk to health and safety



## Work-family conflict

Demands at work interfere with home life  
Job produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfil family duties



# Job resources & support

## Job control

### Skill discretion

- Use of skill
- Learn new things
- Repetitive work
- Creativity

### Decision authority

- Make decisions on my own
- Freedom how I do my work
- Influence what happens in my job

## Job resources

### Rewards

- Financial (e.g., job security)
- Appreciation
- Recognition

### Recovery

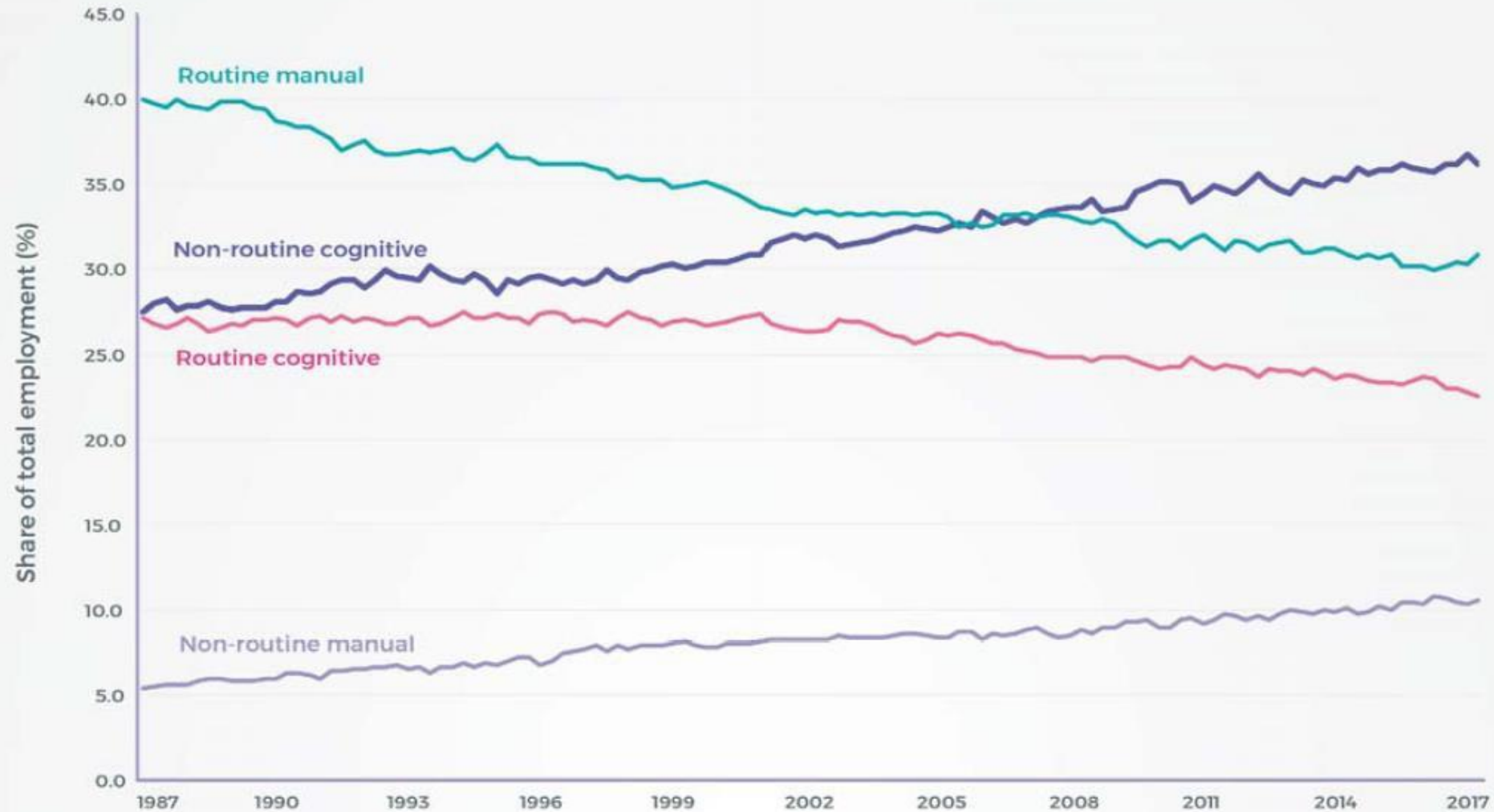
- Regain strength in between work demands
- Fatigued between work periods

## Job support

Supervisor support

Co-worker support

**Figure 4 - Change in share of total Australian employment, by skill type, 1987-2017**

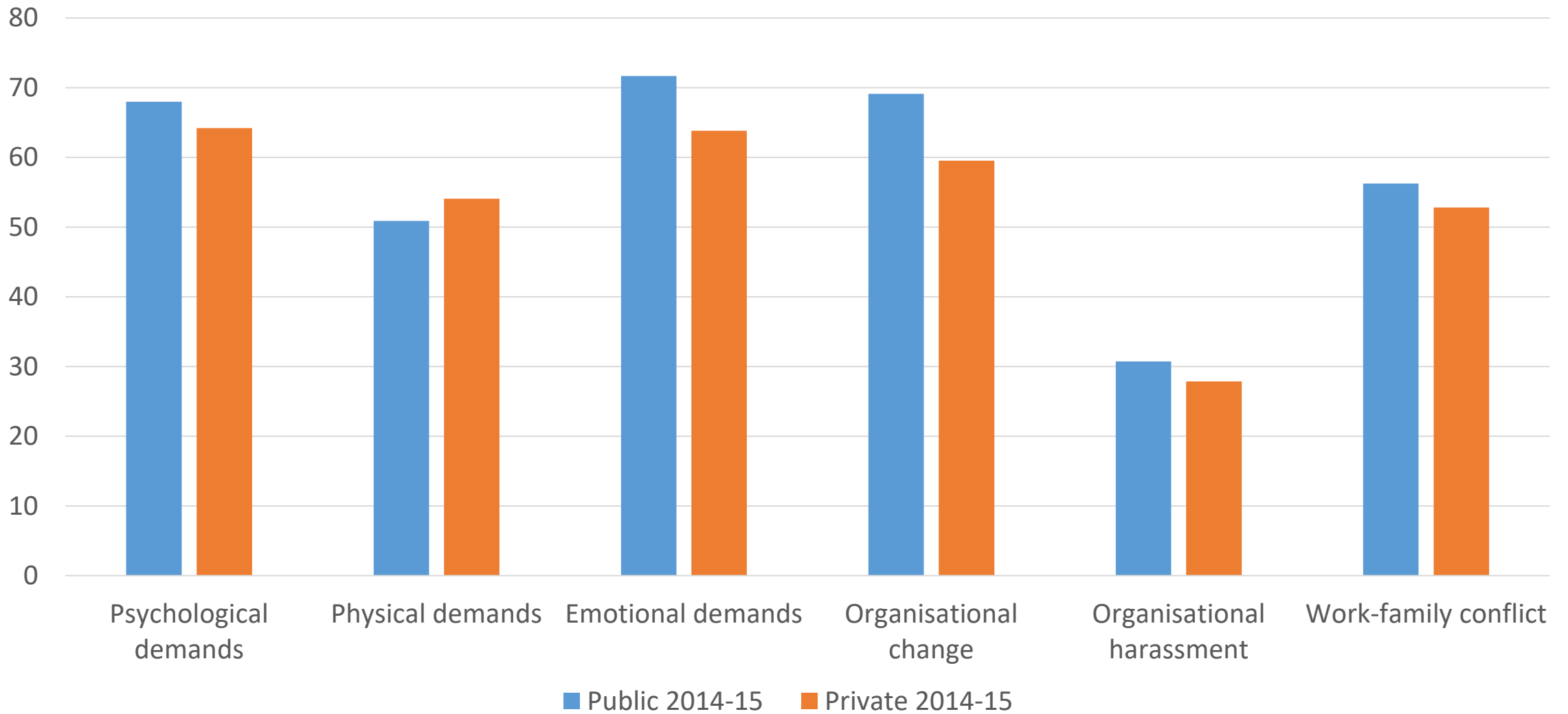


Sources: Reproduced from Reserve Bank of Australia analysis (Health, 2016) using latest data in ABS (2017c).

Notes:

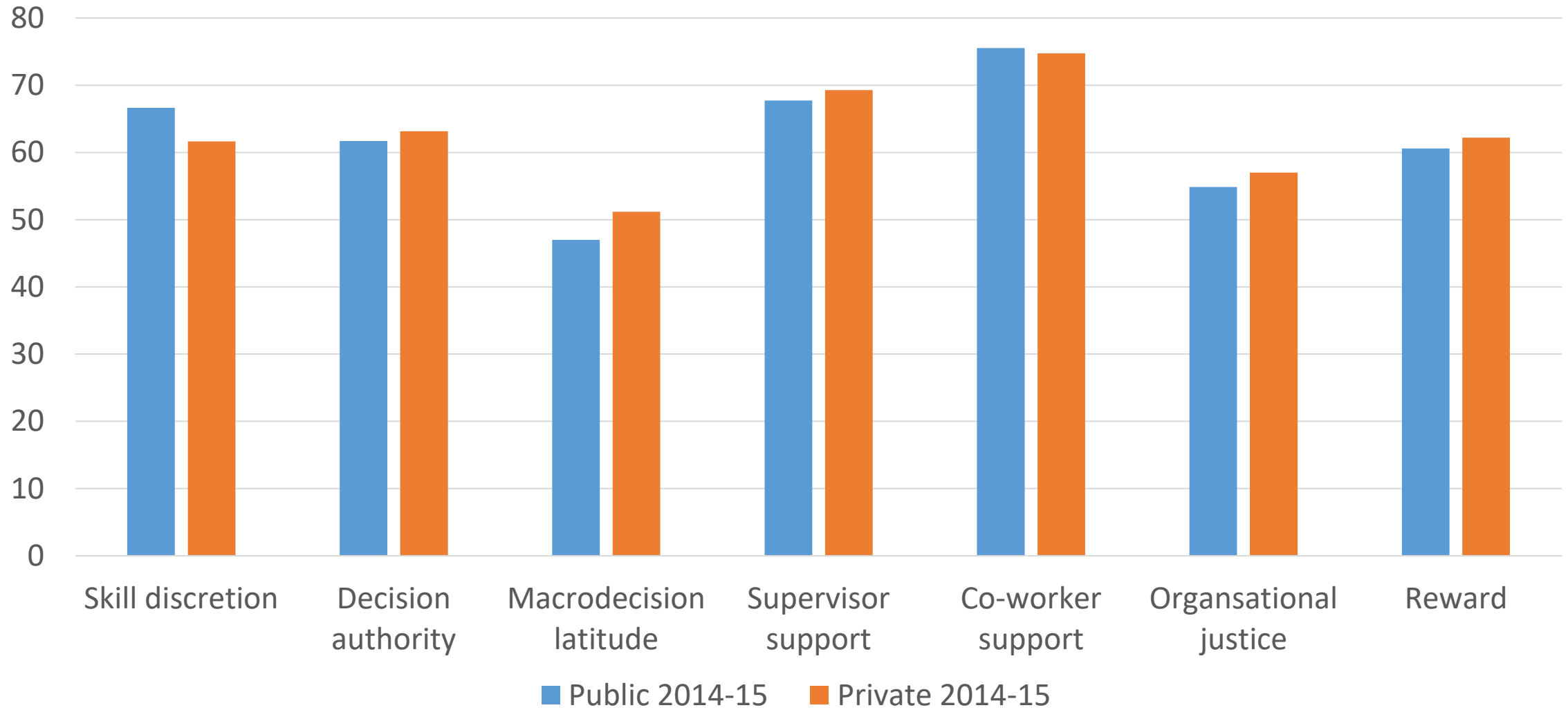
1. Definitions of the four skill categories are provided in text.
2. Assignment to each category is based on the occupation of main job for employed persons.

## Job demands

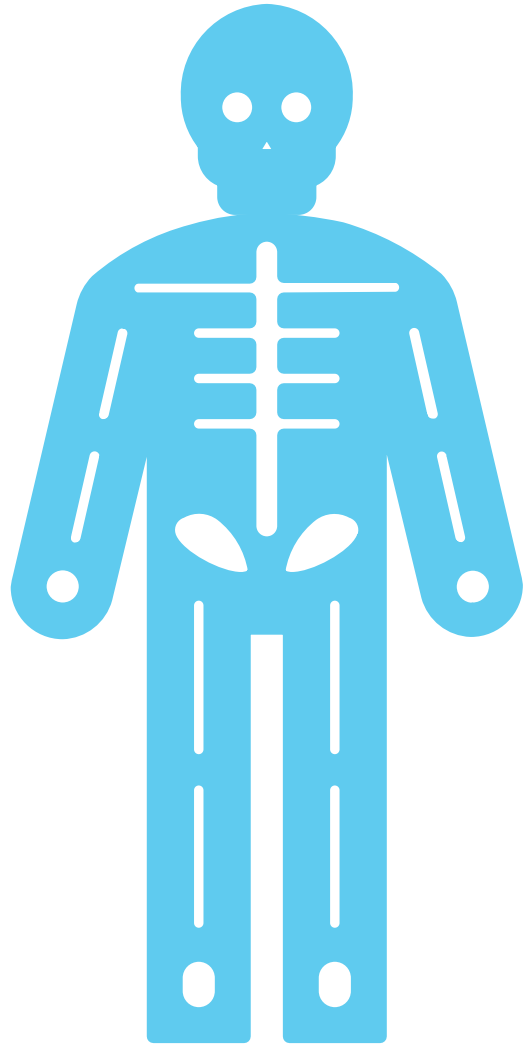


(Bailey, Owen & Dollard, 2019)

## Job resources & support



(Bailey, Owen & Dollard, 2019)



# Work stress models

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**Job Demands-Control model for job strain**  
(JDC; Karasek, 1979)

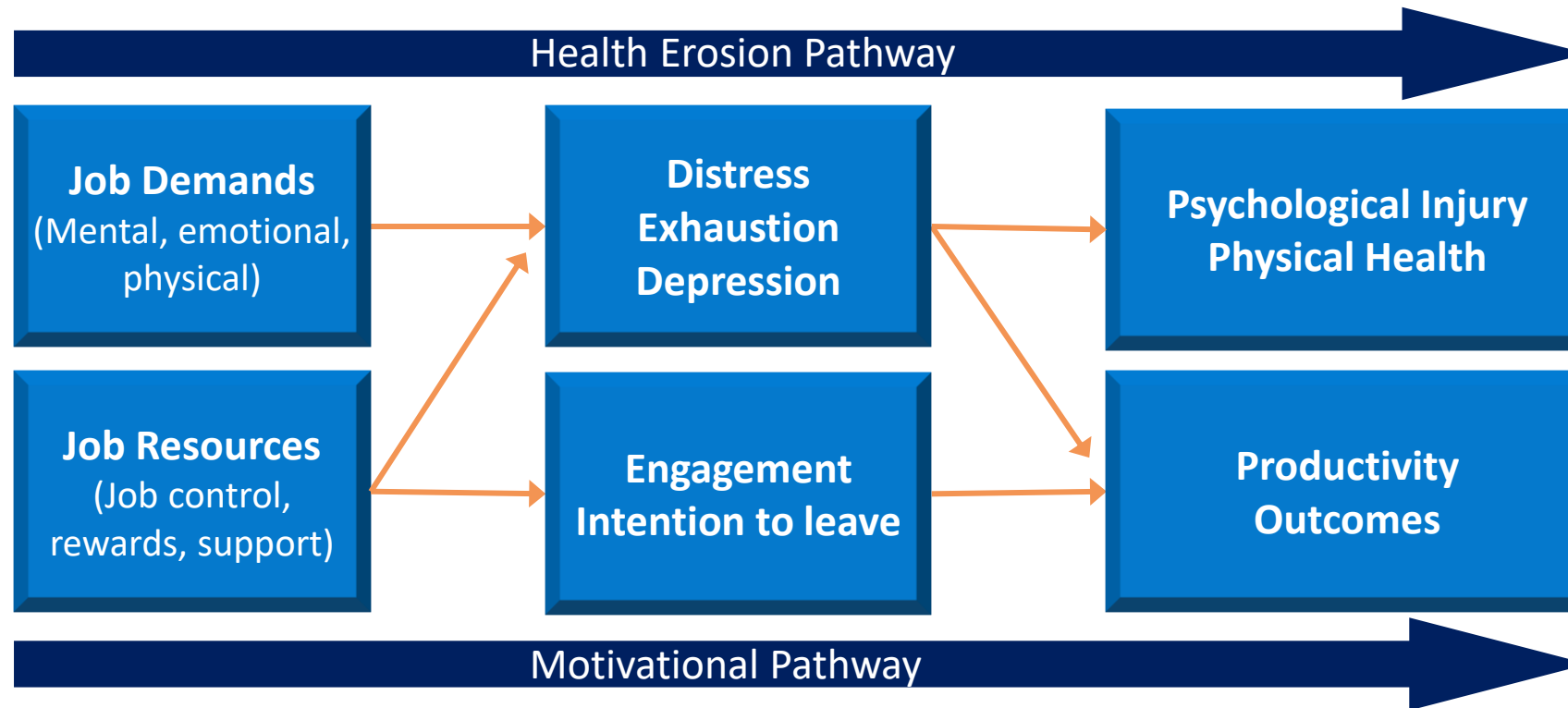
**Effort-Reward Imbalance**  
(ERI; Siegrist, 1996)

**Demand-Induced Strain Compensation + Recovery**  
(DISC-R; de Jonge, 2018)

**Job Demands-Resources**  
(JDR; Demerouti et al., 2001)

# Job Demands-Resources (JDR)

Demerouti et al., 2001



# When does a psychosocial factor become a hazard?

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- Not all job demands result in stress
- Work design and management are not necessarily positive or negative by nature

A sense of **challenge** where workers are **supported** and have access to **resources** can be **energising and motivating**



# Psychosocial hazards

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Job design and management contexts lead to psychological harm when:

- Job demands cannot be met
- Job demands are unreasonable
- Adequate resources are not provided

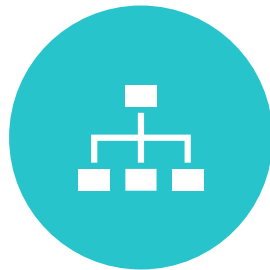
***Satisfaction*** turns into inadequacy, ***exhaustion***,  
***and stress***, leading to ***illness and injury***



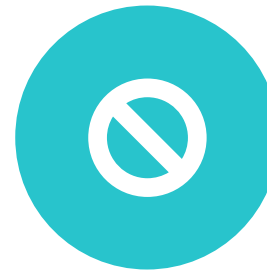




EXCESSIVE OR  
UNREASONABLE  
JOB DEMANDS



POORLY MANAGED  
ORGANISATIONAL  
CHANGE



BULLYING &  
HARASSMENT



LACK OF SUFFICIENT  
RESOURCES &  
SUPPORT

## Psychosocial hazards

# Summary

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Job ***demands*** (psychological, emotional, & physical) tend to impact worker ***health***



Job ***resources*** reduce impact of demands on ***health*** and improve ***motivation***

Job control  
Rewards  
Resources & supports



Resources & support need to ***match*** job demands



Allow for ***recovery***

### Working group members

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# What is psychosocial risk?

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Psychosocial risk is the ***potential*** of a psychosocial hazard occurring and the ***likelihood*** that it will cause harm

(Leka et al., 2017)



## **Psychosocial Climates predict:**

*Potential* – levels of job demands and resources

*Likelihood* – impact on worker health and wellbeing

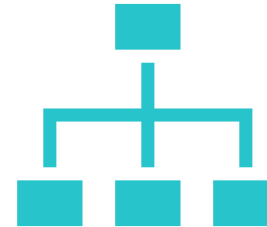
# What is the Climate for Psychological Safety?

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**Policies, practices, and procedures for the protection of worker psychological health & safety:**

- Senior management priority
- Leadership trust
- Worker confidence
- Worker participation

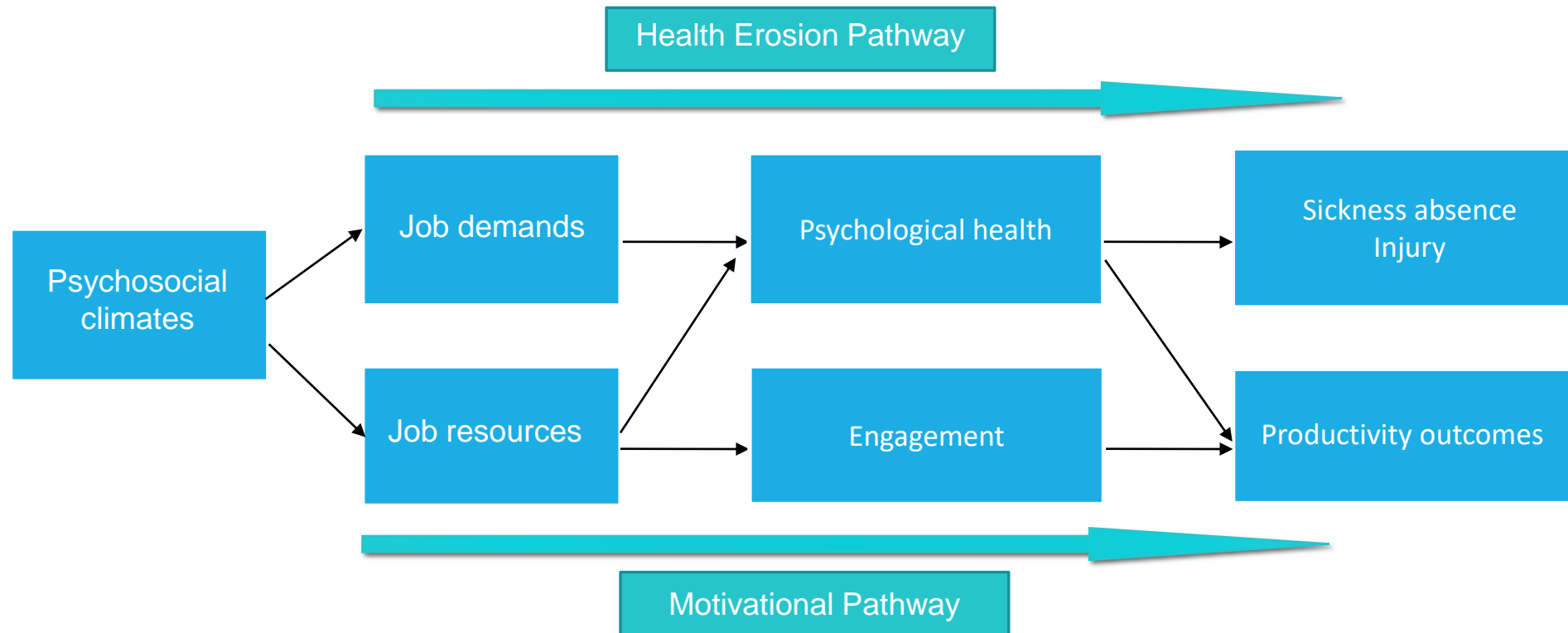


**Exists at organisational, unit, team level**

Climates predict:

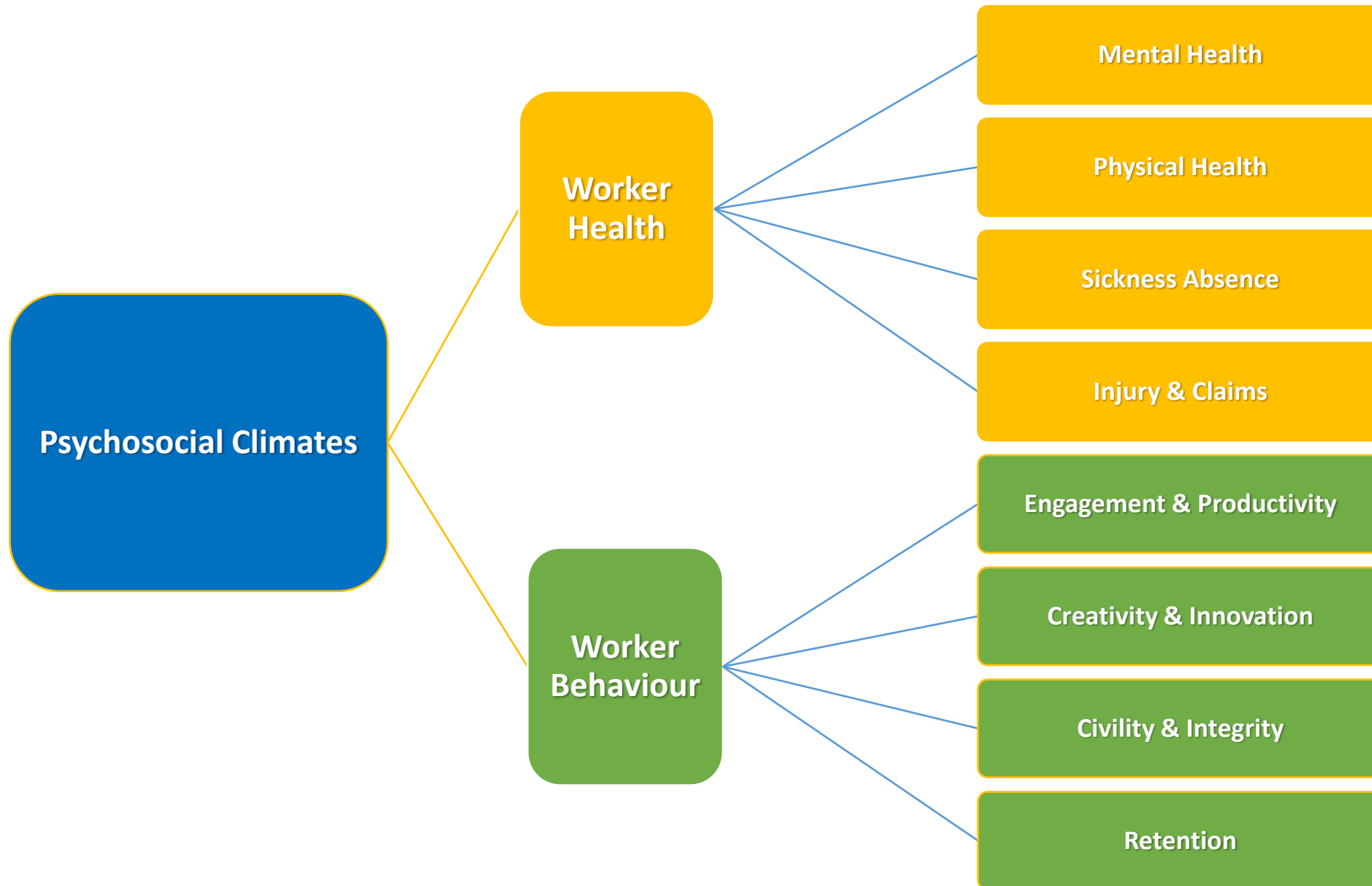
- Job demands
- Job resources
- Worker health
- Productivity

# Climate extended JDR model

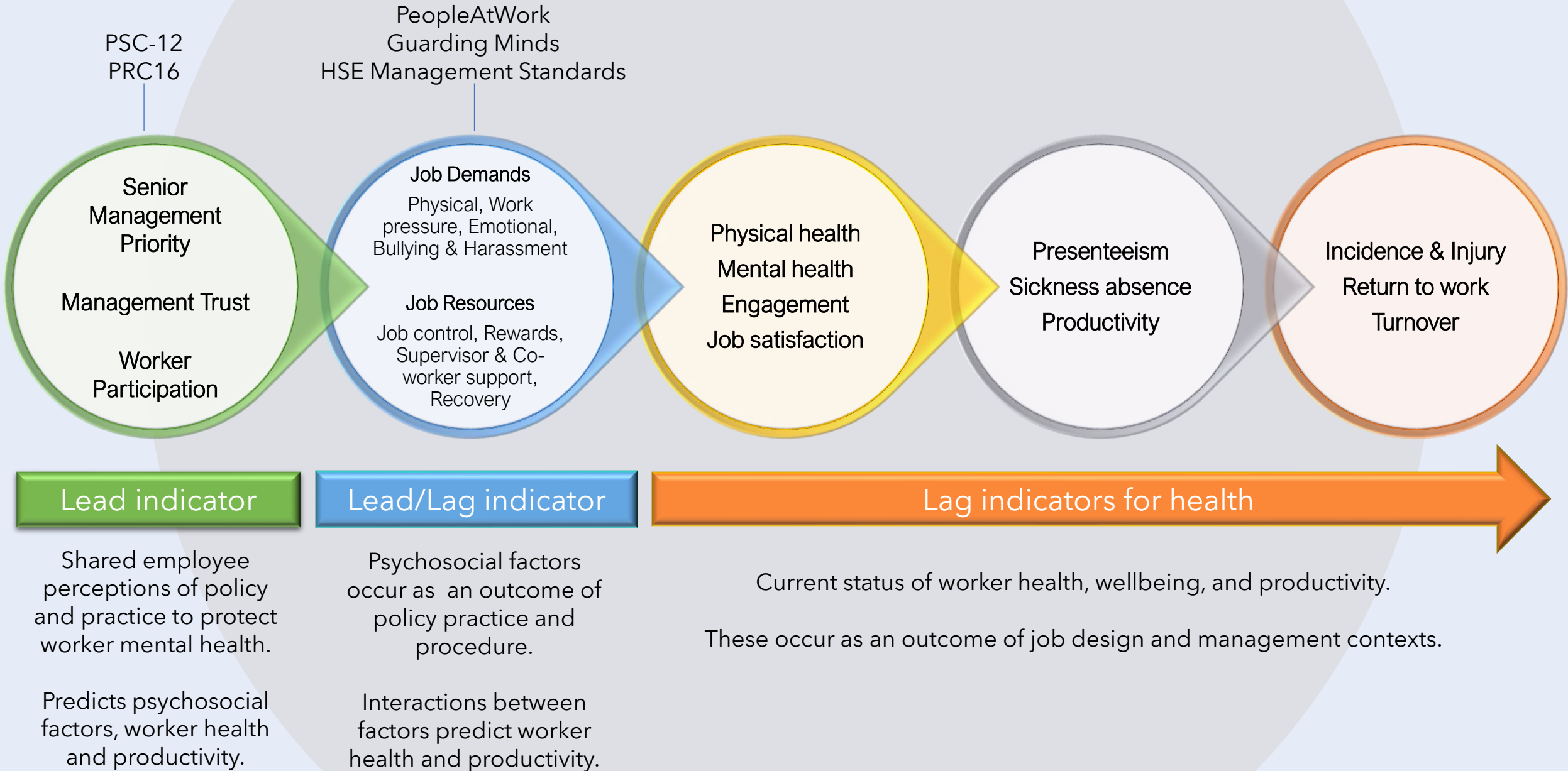


Dollard & Bakker, 2010; Edmundson, 2014

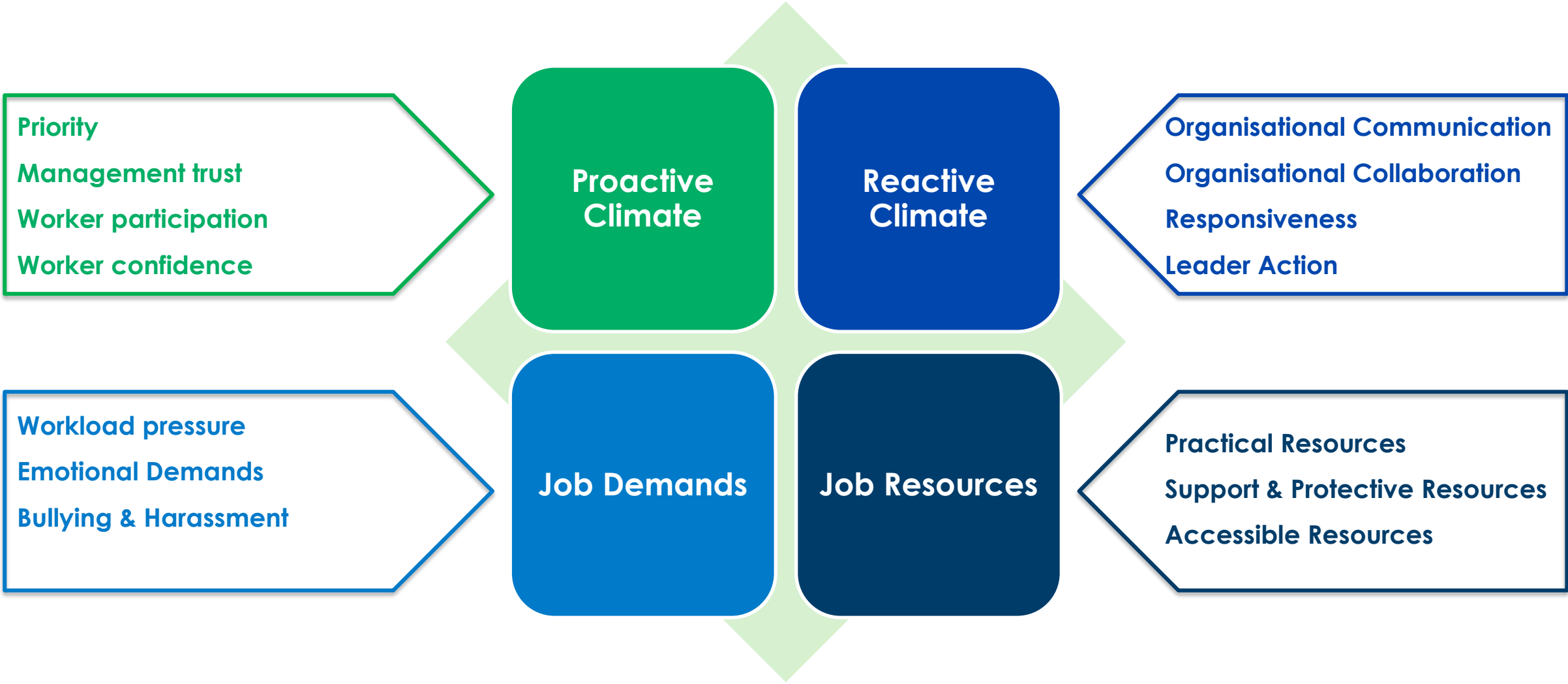


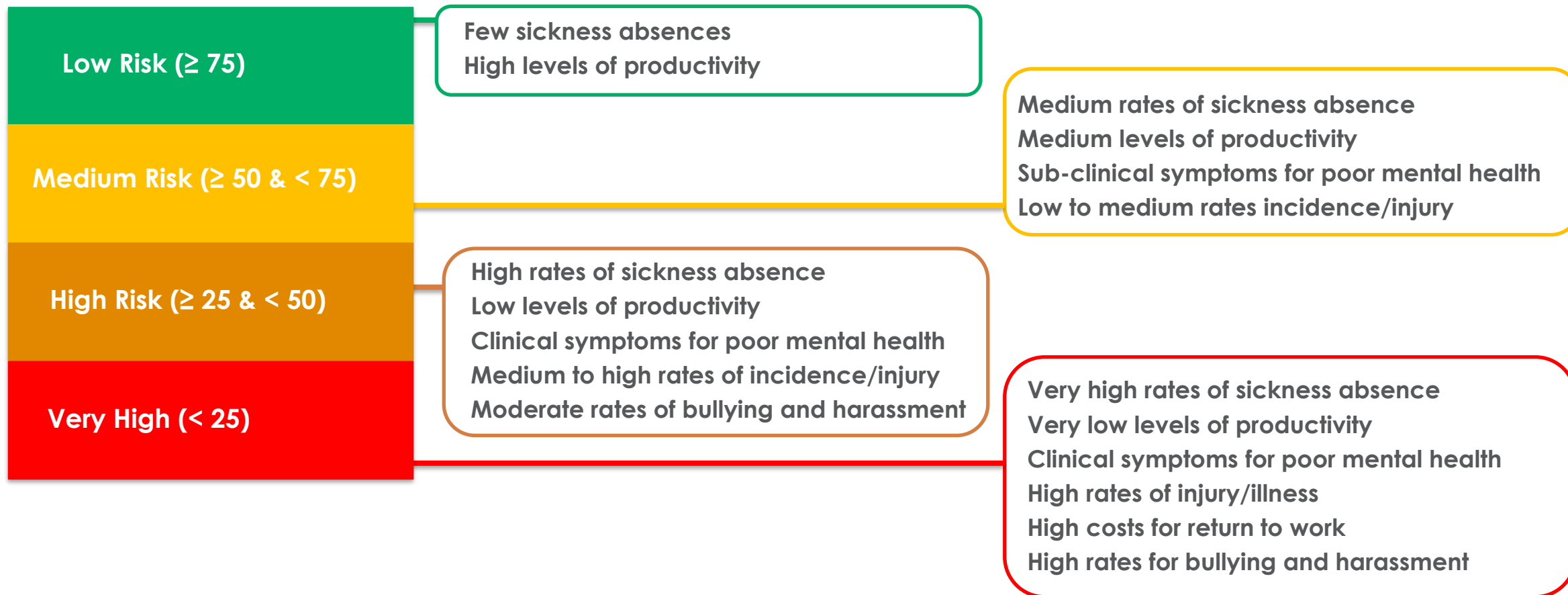


# Psychosocial safety indicators for worker health

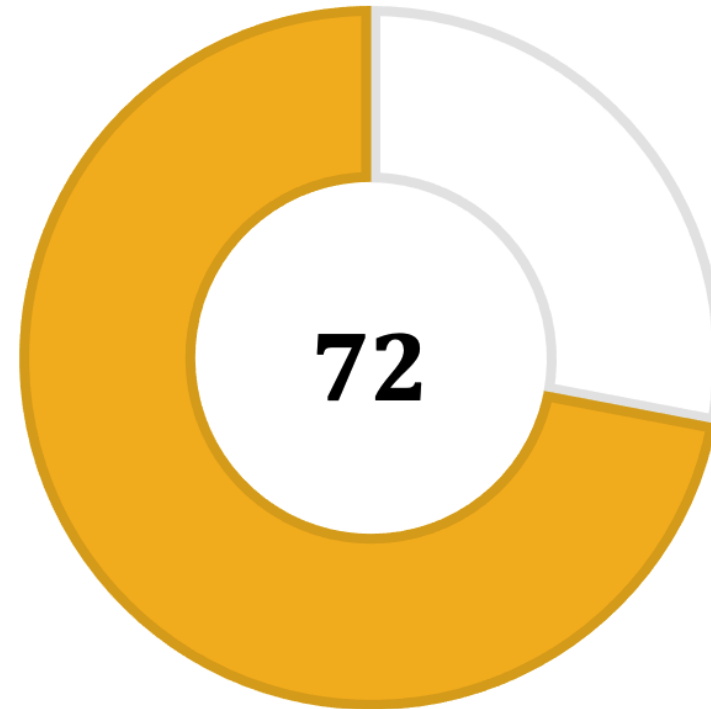


# PRC16 Domains and Sub-Domains





## Your Overall PRC16 Risk Rating



Medium Risk

Example PRC Risk Rating



### **Proactive Climate**

**Medium risk** to worker psychological health and safety with a score of **68**.



### **Job Demands Indicator**

**Medium risk** to worker psychological health and safety with a score of **65**.



### **Reactive Climate**

**Low risk** to worker psychological health and safety with a score of **76**.

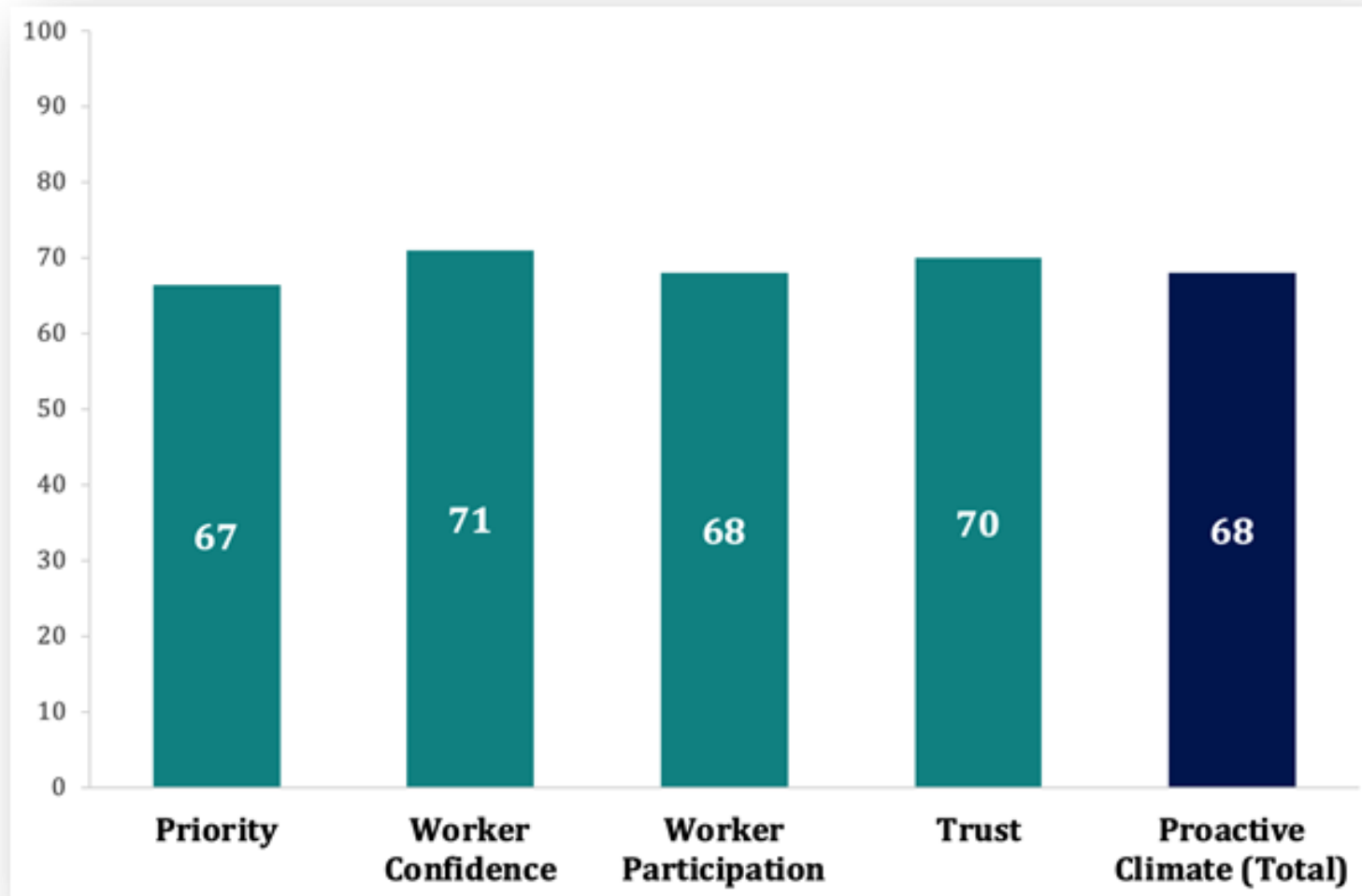


### **Job Resources Indicator**

**Low risk** to worker psychological health and safety with a score of **75**.

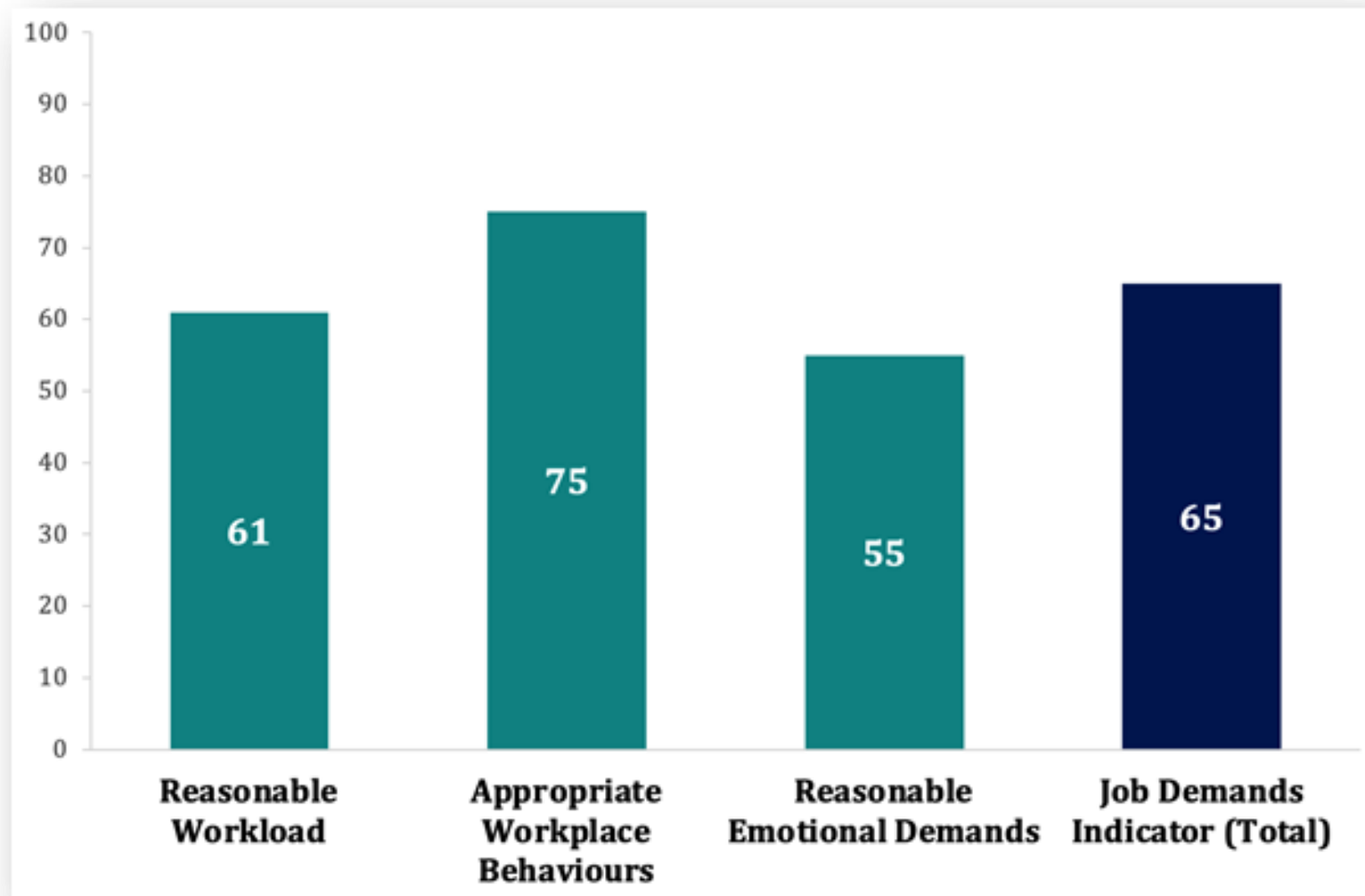
Example

PRC Domains



Example

Proactive  
Sub-domains



Example

Job demands  
Indicators



	PRC	PC	RC	JDI	JRI
<b>Sustainability</b>	49	42	51	44	67
<b>Operations &amp; Service Delivery</b>	53	47	53	50	61
<b>People, Safety &amp; Culture</b>	56	49	57	51	65
<b>Strategy and Innovation</b>	58	51	60	55	68
<b>Customer Service</b>	58	52	65	55	75
<b>Office of Chief Executive</b>	63	59	64	67	65
<b>Legal &amp; Finance</b>	64	58	68	62	70

### Working group members

Names: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Psychosocial Safety Action Plan

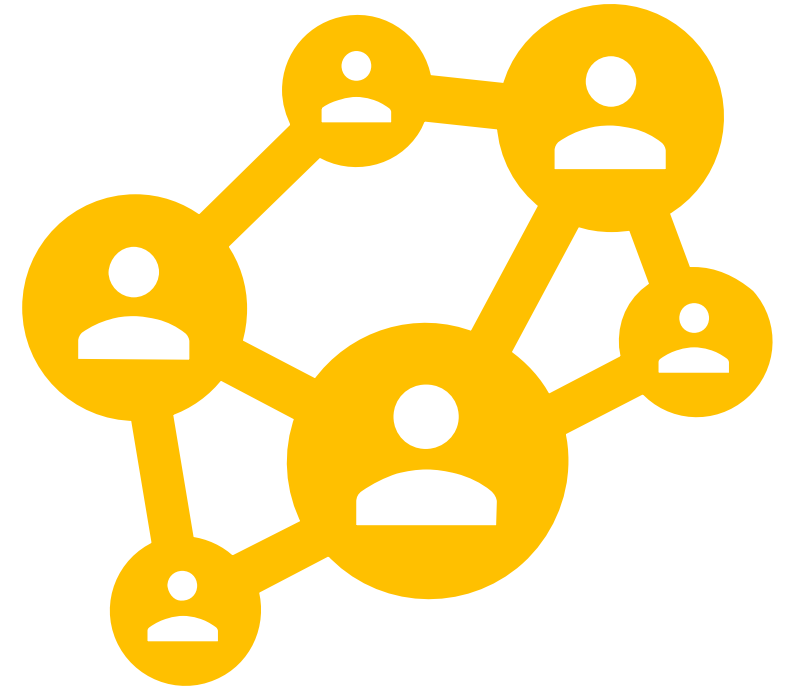
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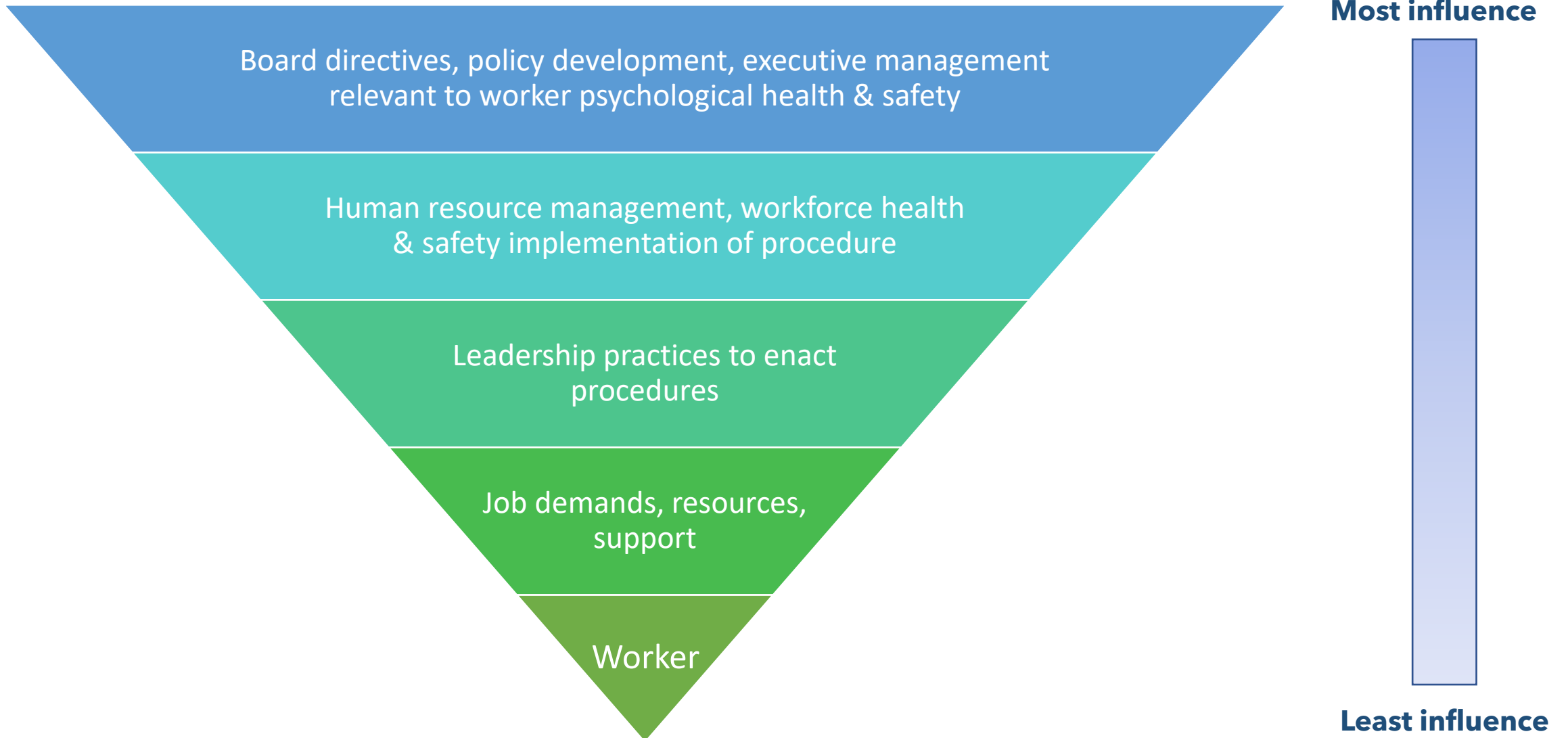
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# Key personnel

- Executive/General Manager
- WHS representative
- HR representative
- Supervisor
- HSR/Union representative

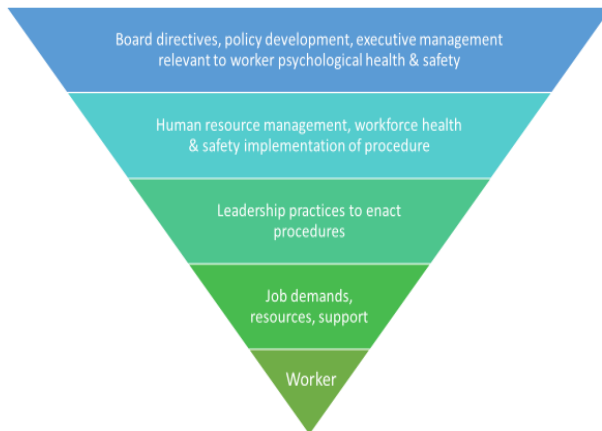


# Psychosocial Safety Hierarchy of Control



# LEVEL 1: SENIOR MANAGEMENT VALUES

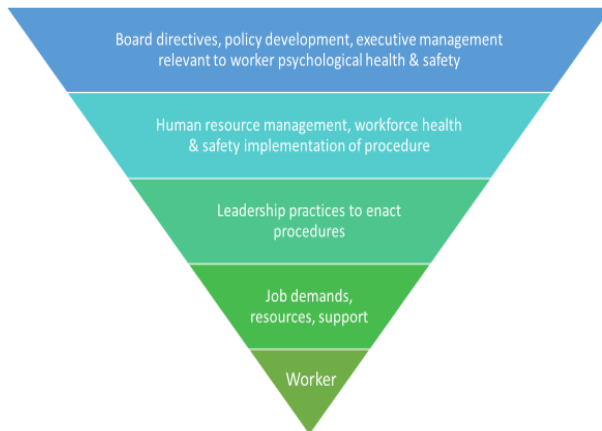
## Psychosocial Safety Hierarchy of Control



- Is there policy regarding psychological health and is it communicated to employees?
- Do organisational policies promote reasonable demands and adequate resources?
- Are there procedures for identifying and managing psychosocial factors?
- Is it clear that inappropriate behaviours will not be tolerated, and action will be swift if it occurs?
- Is there top-level management support for psychological injury prevention and priority for wellbeing?

## LEVEL 2: ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Psychosocial Safety Hierarchy of Control

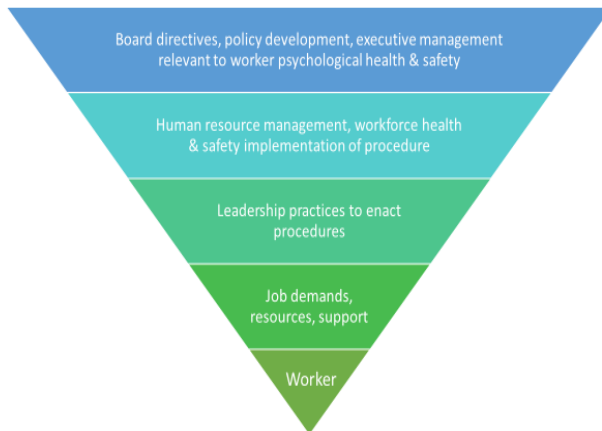


- Are all employees fully aware of policies relating to psychosocial factors?
- What methods are used to determine that each employee understands the policy and procedure requirements?
- Is there a system to identify psychosocial risks such as an employee surveys or audits?
- Are there clear methods for employees to report psychosocial hazards and are these reports appropriately managed?
- Are appropriate workplace behaviours made clear at induction and reinforced at other times?
- Is training available for managing specific psychosocial risks or hazards?
- Would employees benefit from further awareness training or campaigns?



## LEVEL 3: LEADERSHIP

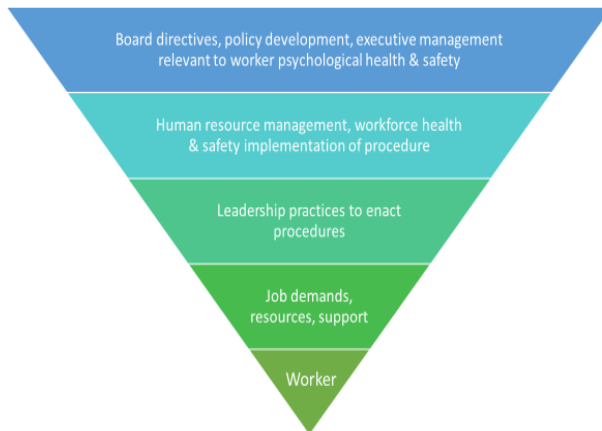
### Psychosocial Safety Hierarchy of Control



- Are leaders promoting and supporting positive working relationships?
- Are leaders modelling appropriate behaviours?
- Are leaders appropriately trained in identifying and managing psychosocial hazards?
- Do leaders know how to identify and support workers showing poor mental health symptoms due to external/internal factors?
- Is leadership behaviour for managing psychosocial factors assessed as part of performance and/or promotion?

# LEVEL 4: JOB DESIGN

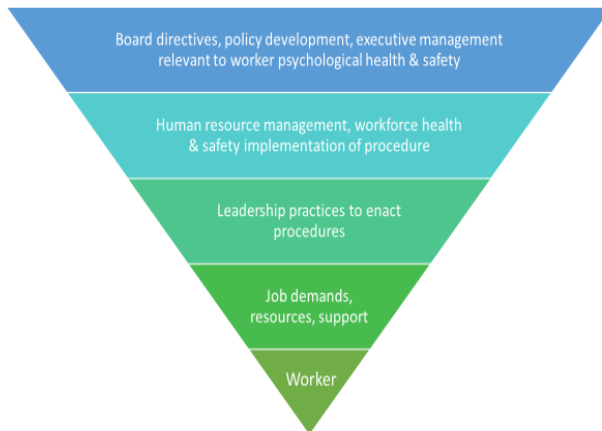
## Psychosocial Safety Hierarchy of Control



- Is job design contributing to creating an environment that protects workers from psychosocial risk factors?
- Are there excessive levels of job strain (e.g., high demands, low resources) in the workplace?
- Do the reward systems encourage negative/positive workplace behaviours?
- Do resources match job demands?

# LEVEL 5: WORKER

## Psychosocial Safety Hierarchy of Control



- Are individuals aware of and/or utilising available job resources and supports?
- Are individuals using the appropriate processes to report psychosocial hazards as they arise?
- Are individuals behaving appropriately at work?
- Are individuals able to contribute to designing safe systems of work?

## Psychosocial Safety Action Plan

### Working group members

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# Job Demand Indicators

**Workload demands** involve how hard and fast employees are working and whether or not work demands are reasonable and appropriate.

## Example actions:

- Clarification of expectations for service delivery and task allocation e.g., remove tasks/processes wherever possible, avoid allocating tasks outside of one on one or by email, always include reasonable timeframes, change the language around staffing or KPI's, abolish meetings and replace with check ins, reevaluate priorities with team members.
- Targeted recruitment for vacant positions.
- Identify high demand tasks and provide strategies in advance to reduce impact.
- Develop FAQ to reduce incoming enquiries.
- Individual flexible working arrangements and increase job control where appropriate.
- Prioritise recovery e.g., encouraging workers to take breaks when needed/as per policy, strategic pause to reassess sense of urgency, micro breaks to recover from high job demands, no meetings on Friday afternoon.
- Emails not to be sent outside of work hours and/or emails to include message e.g. "I work flexible hours, this time suits me, please do not feel required to reply outside of your work hours".
- Set boundaries around communications during and outside of work hours e.g. Email Auto reply – we only respond to emails between 9am and 10am or 4pm and 5pm, if the matter is urgent please call us directly.

# Job Demand Indicators

**Emotional demands** involve emotional efforts required at work such as facing emotionally challenging situations or suppressing genuine emotions. This can include emotionally demanding tasks and interactions with seniors, co-workers, colleagues, or customers/clients.

## Example actions:

- Identify potential sources of high emotional demands i.e., emotionally challenging work tasks, interpersonal issues etc.
- Set clear expectations about interacting with emotionally demanding tasks that reduces risk of exposure where possible and systems for support when they do arise.
- Clarify expectations about interpersonal interactions that pose risk with focus on preventing exposure and de-escalation.
- Provide resources such as recovery from emotionally demanding work tasks where possible.
- On-site EAP regularly attending work groups with excessive emotional demands.
- EAP being proactive in contact staff, with their consent.
- Be transparent with workers about how these demands are being managed to minimise risk of exposure and harm.
- Provide opportunity for workers to formally and/or informally debrief.

# Proactive Climate

**Priority** that both the Organisation and Senior Management gives to prevention of exposure to psychosocial hazards.

## Example Strategies:

- Review policy and update to reflect emphasis on psychological health and psychosocial safety.
- Identify opportunities for Senior Managers to convey priority for policy that focuses on prevention of exposure to psychosocial hazards e.g., town hall, skip level meetings, WHS agenda item, meeting guidelines, email etiquette strategies.
- Include guidance for clear implementation of policy relevant to psychological health and psychosocial risk e.g., example case studies from within the organisation.
- Leaders normalise discussions about psychological health and wellbeing e.g., safety moments in meetings, share the positives.
- Greater transparency of activities at management level in relation to protecting worker mental health.
- Coaching down sessions for leaders to ensure consistent approaches and strategies.
- One hour once per month free time for your own mental health for yourself.
- Transparent processes for selection and promotion e.g., include questions on how leaders protect their own and their co-worker's psychological health.
- KPI's for leaders on psychosocial safety indicators.



# Proactive Climate

**Worker Participation** involves opportunity for workers to participate in developing safe systems of work that prevent exposure to psychosocial hazards.

## Example actions:

- Review policy and practice to clarify consultation processes with workers regarding prevention of exposure to psychosocial hazards.
- Identify opportunities for worker representatives to participate in processes that target reasonable and practicable protections from psychosocial hazards.
- Mental health champions to be formally identified for work groups.
- Be transparent in how consultation with workers is being utilised to design safe systems of work where possible.
- Psychosocial safety (general or specific hazards) as an agenda item in WHS and/or team meetings.
- Psychosocial hazard management reporting systems.
- Mental health champions to be formally identified for work groups.
- Feedback forums for staff consultation to ensure resources are matching staff needs.
- Debrief after training (e.g., mental health first aid) to determine how it applies in context of organisation's existing policy & procedure.

## Case study

In February 2022, staff were facing a high level of workload, due to reduced staff numbers and the additional administrative requirements associated with COVID reporting and notifications.

Goals were to work on strategies that prevent staff exhaustion by managing workloads in a manner that prioritises quality of care in balance with good mental health for staff.

The Director worked with her team to identify daily priorities that aligned with staffing levels and focused on quality of care at the core.

The team agreed to trial removing their 2 hour weekly staff meetings and instead to have 10 min team check in at the start and at the end of each shift.

During the start of shift check in's there was clear messaging that on days when they are short staffed quality of care is the priority for the day and other administration tasks can be attended to on days when there is full staffing.

On days when there is over staffing workers can prioritise personal and professional development.

## Case study

During the end of shift check in's staff were encouraged to focus on what they have achieved for the day, e.g. prioritising quality of care was verbally recognised, rather than leave work focusing on what they haven't achieved e.g., administrative duties.

The Director prioritised a review of administrative processes to removed any non-essential tasks and streamline essential tasks to require minimal time from staff without risking obligations e.g., duty of care.

The Director encouraged opportunities for staff to spend time recovering when appropriate – micro breaks, walking meetings, optional celebrations outside of work hours.

Staff reported that they feel their workplace is mentally healthier.

A staff member stated that the reframe of expectations for priority and service delivery gave them permission to interact with systems in a manner that balanced quality of care with staff mental health. These good practices increased confidence to suggest how other systems can be improved to better align with core values.

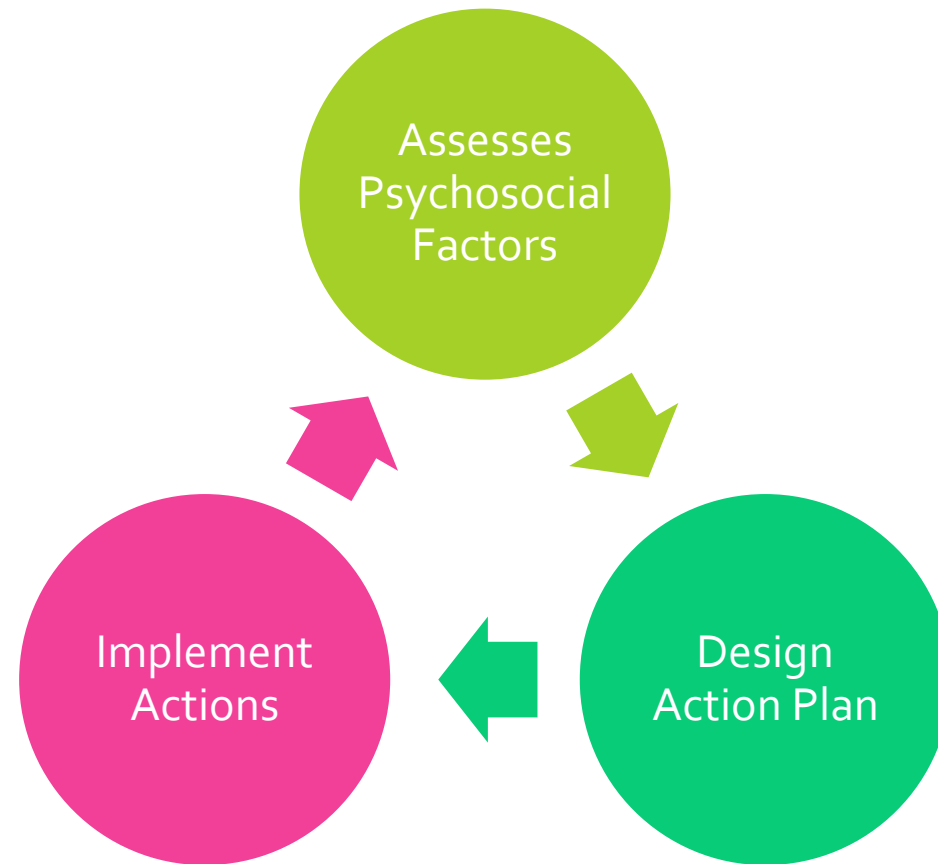


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## 4. ONGOING EVALUATION





## Facilitators

Recognition by safety representatives that psychosocial hazards are present

Consistent support from leaders to address psychosocial factors



## Barriers

Financial restraints

Competing priorities

Lack of senior management support

# BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS





# WORKER PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH PROTECTION – DUE DILIGENCE

1. Holistic framework for managing psychological health
2. Include measurable performance indicators
3. Regular use of psychosocial risk assessment
4. Sufficient qualified workers to assess and control risk
5. Consultation with workers on controls
6. Implementation and evaluation of controls
7. New regulations require “Prevention Plan”



# CONCLUSION

- Each organisation is *unique* and will need to manage psychosocial risks and hazards in their own particular workplace taking into consideration:
  - Organisation size and distribution
  - Existing expertise and resources
  - Types of factors
  - Reasonable and practicable controls



# CONCLUSION

- Risk to worker health and safety due to high workloads for cognitively demanding tasks is *increasing*
- Employers are *obligated* to be aware of emerging risks implement controls, evaluate if controls are adequate
- External consultation, training, and support may be required to *integrate* psychosocial risk management into WHS systems and processes at all levels
- Wide range of *benefits* to work environment, systems, worker health, productivity, safety outcomes, retention, and reputation



“Workplaces with a positive approach to psychological health and safety are better able to recruit and retain talent, have improved employee engagement, enhanced productivity, are more creative and innovative, and have higher profit levels. Other positive impacts include a reduction of several key workplace issues including the risk of conflict, grievances, turnover, disability, injury rates, absenteeism and performance or morale issues”  
(BNQ/CSA Group/MHCC, 2013).



## Q & A

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