MENTALLY HEALTHY WORK –
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
MODULE 2

Managing Psychosocial Risk

Government
Health & Safety Lead

Hazards, Risks... and Work Factors

What is a psychosocial **hazard**?

Arise from or in relation to:

o the design or management of work

o the working equipment

o plant at a workplace, or

o workplace interactions or behaviours; and

Has potential to cause psychological and physical harm

What is a psychosocial **risk**?

The likelihood and consequence of harm occurring due to exposure to a psychosocial hazard

Psychosocial work factors more broadly...

High Job Demands

Role conflict

Job Insecurity

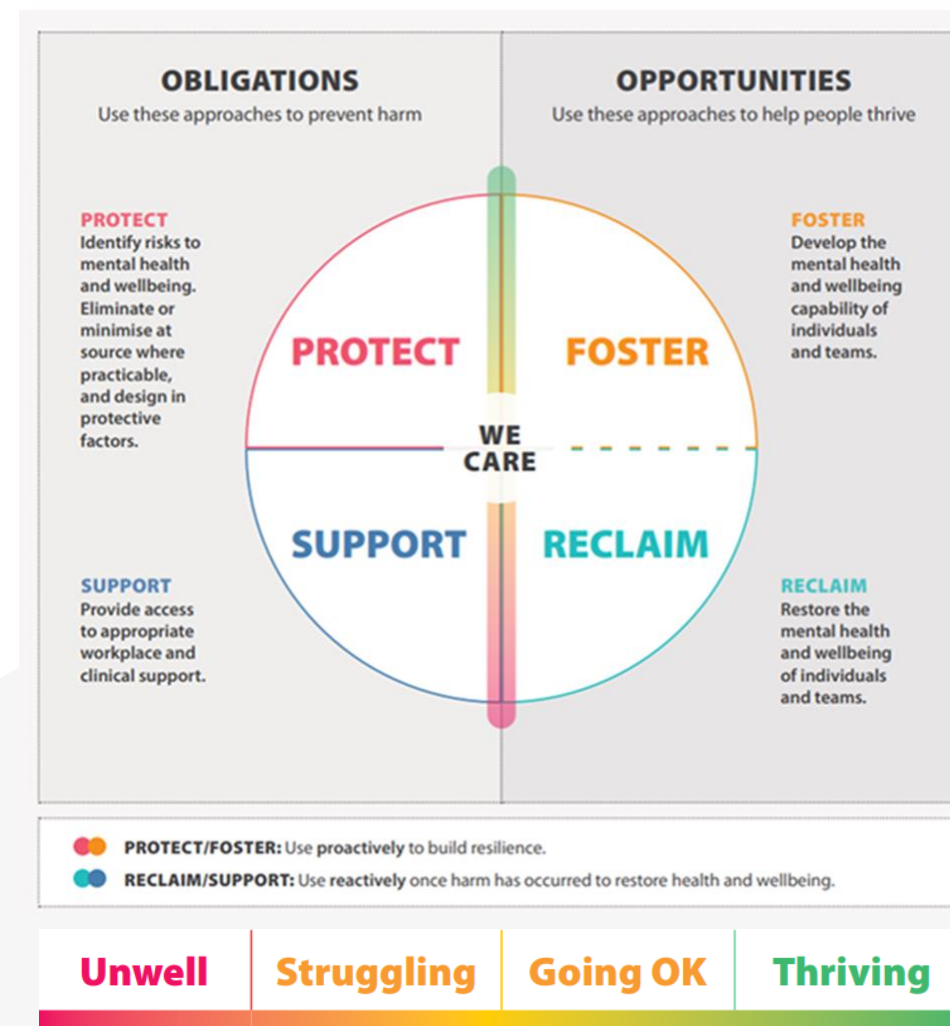| Psychosocial hazards or negative factors	Psychosocial protective factors
Characteristics of work that can cause stress or psychological injury	Characteristics of work that promote mental health and flourishing

Meanful Work

Quality Leadership

Social support from colleagues

Protecting Mental Wellbeing at Work

*Mental wellbeing is not a matter of luck but a matter of design.
It requires a deliberate effort to control psychosocial risks and build in the protective factors associated with 'good work'.*

Psychosocial risk management

Psychosocial risk management involves four steps:

1. **Identify psychosocial hazards** – find out what could cause harm, considering recognised psychosocial hazards (e.g. role overload, low role clarity, low job control).

2. **Assess risks** – understand the nature of the harm that could be caused by the psychosocial hazards, the likelihood of it happening and the amount of harm that could be caused.

3. **Control risks** – implement the most effective control measures that are reasonably practicable in the circumstances.

4. **Review control measures and monitor hazards** - ensure controls are working as planned, continue to monitor psychosocial hazards.

Underpinned by two enablers:

1. **Leadership and management commitment –** managing psychosocial hazards and risks by leaders and managers is essential for systematic WHS risk management.

2. **Consultation –** sharing information, giving staff reasonable opportunities to express views, taking those views into account, and advising staff of the consultation outcomes.

Identifying Psychosocial Hazards

Consider sources of hazards

- Nature and type of work
- Design and management of work
- Supply chain interactions
- Interactions with the public, community, clients etc
- Significant organisational change
- External expert review

Consult the workforce

- Workshops/Focus groups/Listening sessions/1:1
- Health and Safety Committee meetings
- Human Resources Business Partners
- Manager-led discussions on wellbeing and work

Review available information

- Position descriptions
- Support services usage
- ACC claims and Injury Management
- Complaints and investigations
- Wellbeing data
- Survey data
- Absenteeism and Turnover data
- Performance agreements

Observe work activities

- Differences between position descriptions and task requirements
- Interpersonal interactions
- Rushing
- Procrastination
- Mistakes

Psychosocial risk assessment

Likelihood
(Considers exposure)

&

Consequence
(Considers impact)

&

Interaction with other psychosocial work factors

Psychosocial hazard exposure

Severity

+

Frequency

+

Duration

Exposure to e.g. work pace, role conflicts, job insecurity. Can be cumulative or one-off

e.g. burnout, absenteeism, presenteeism, psychological distress, psychological injury claims

Includes consideration of individual or group characteristics

= **Overall Risk**

A psychosocial risk assessment should provide insights into the likelihood of, and potential consequences from, exposure to a specific psychosocial hazard.

Consult the workforce to understand risk

What does the hazard look like?

Day-to-day experiences?

Certain times of day, week, year?

Contributing factors?

How are we managing the risk?

What existing controls are in place?

How effective are they?

What about for infrequent or abnormal situations?
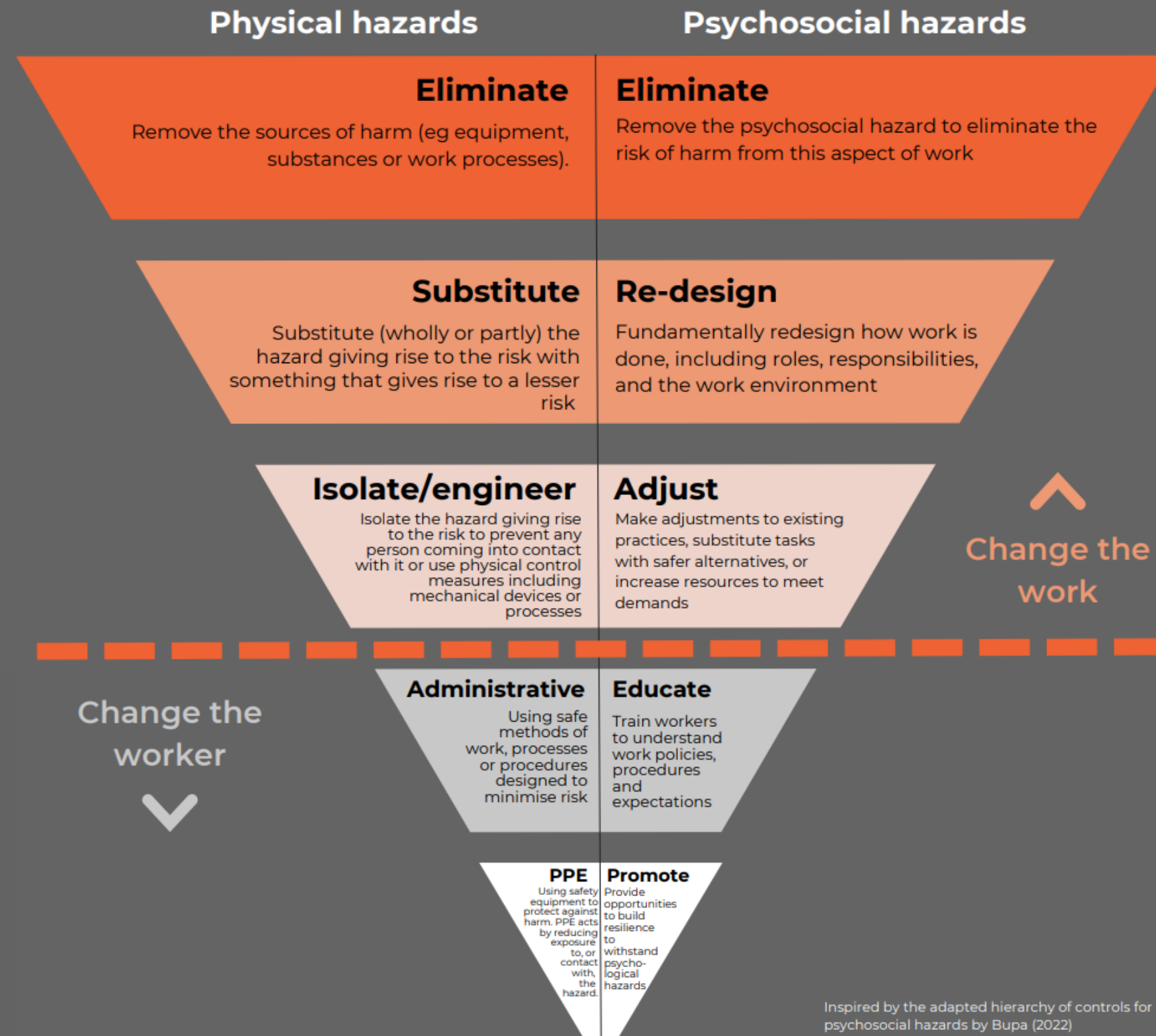
How can we reduce exposure?

Frequency

Duration

Degree of impact on wellbeing

Hierarchy of Controls for Psychological H&S

Physical hazards   **Psychosocial hazards**

Eliminate
Remove the sources of harm (eg equipment, substances or work processes).

Eliminate
Remove the psychosocial hazard to eliminate the risk of harm from this aspect of work

Substitute
Substitute (wholly or partly) the hazard giving rise to the risk with something that gives rise to a lesser risk

Re-design
Fundamentally redesign how work is done, including roles, responsibilities, and the work environment

Isolate/engineer
Isolate the hazard giving rise to the risk to prevent any person coming into contact with it or use physical control measures including mechanical devices or processes

Adjust
Make adjustments to existing practices, substitute tasks with safer alternatives, or increase resources to meet demands

Change the work

Administrative
Using safe methods of work, processes or procedures designed to minimise risk

Educate
Train workers to understand work policies, procedures and expectations

Change the worker

PPE
Using safety equipment to protect against harm. PPE acts by reducing exposure to, or contact with the hazard.

Promote
Provide opportunities to build resilience to withstand psychological hazards

Inspired by the adapted hierarchy of controls for psychosocial hazards by Bupa (2022)

Choosing controls

First eliminate risk

- Remove the hazard or negative work factor if possible
- Good work design

Then minimise risk

- Safe systems of work
- Processes and instructions
- Training
- Environment & conditions
- Tools & objects

Then consider worker

- Address individual experiences
- Reasonable adjustments
- Coaching

Example – Violence & Aggression

First eliminate risk

- Remove the hazard or negative work factor if possible
- Good work design

Then minimise risk

- Safe systems of work
- Processes and instructions
- Training
- Environment & conditions
- Tools & objects

Then consider worker

- Address individual experiences
- Reasonable adjustments
- Coaching

| Install physical barriers | Increase staff numbers on-floor | Policy – customer behaviour | Alternative duties / Reasonable accommodations |
| Remote customer support | Security guards | De-escalation training | Psychological support or supervision |

Example – Distressing content

First eliminate risk
- Remove the hazard or negative work factor if possible
- Good work design

Then minimise risk
- Safe systems of work
- Processes and instructions
- Training
- Environment & conditions
- Tools & objects

Then consider worker
- Address individual experiences
- Reasonable adjustments
- Coaching

| Automated workflows | Triage case assignments | Severity ratings & Load-sharing | Debriefing |

| Image modification technology | Job rotation |

Example – Work Overload

First eliminate risk

- Remove the hazard or negative work factor if possible
- Good work design

Then minimise risk

- Safe systems of work
- Processes and instructions
- Training
- Environment & conditions
- Tools & objects

Then consider worker

- Address individual experiences
- Reasonable adjustments
- Coaching

Accurate Position Descriptions	Meetings policy	Regular workload review	Utilisation of leave allowances
Work forecasting & schedule balancing	Task management technology	Weekly priorities standup	Proactive Vitality Management

Case Study – Work Overload

Employment Relations Authority: Perry v The Warehouse Group Ltd [2023]

Mr. Perry worked as an Education Specialist for Noel Leeming. Amongst many organisational and role changes, a 2020 restructure disestablished the after-sales administrative team significantly affecting his responsibilities and increasing workload. Concerns first raised in 2020 about work-life balance led to Mr. Perry suffering burnout by June 2021. He resigned in October 2021.

Key findings:

1. Mr. Perry successfully argued for constructive dismissal, on the basis his employer had breached its employment duties to him contending that he had **not been provided with a safe working environment**.

2. From June 2021 it was evident that Mr. Perry was contemplating resignation due to burnout. Despite this, TWG did not discuss concerns with him again until months later. A meeting took place in September 2021 during which he indicated an intention to resign, the continuing issue of burnout was not escalated further.

3. **It was reasonably foreseeable that Mr. Perry's continued employment would be untenable unless his burnout concerns and other issues were adequately addressed**. The Authority commenting that although he was offered EAP and additional leave *"A fair and reasonable employer with TWG's resources would have taken **more formal and proactive steps** to understand Mr. Perry's mental health situation at the time"*.

Takeaway:

Employers have obligations to employees to ensure proactive steps are taken to understand what is causing the issue, and what is required to address it.

Review control measure effectiveness
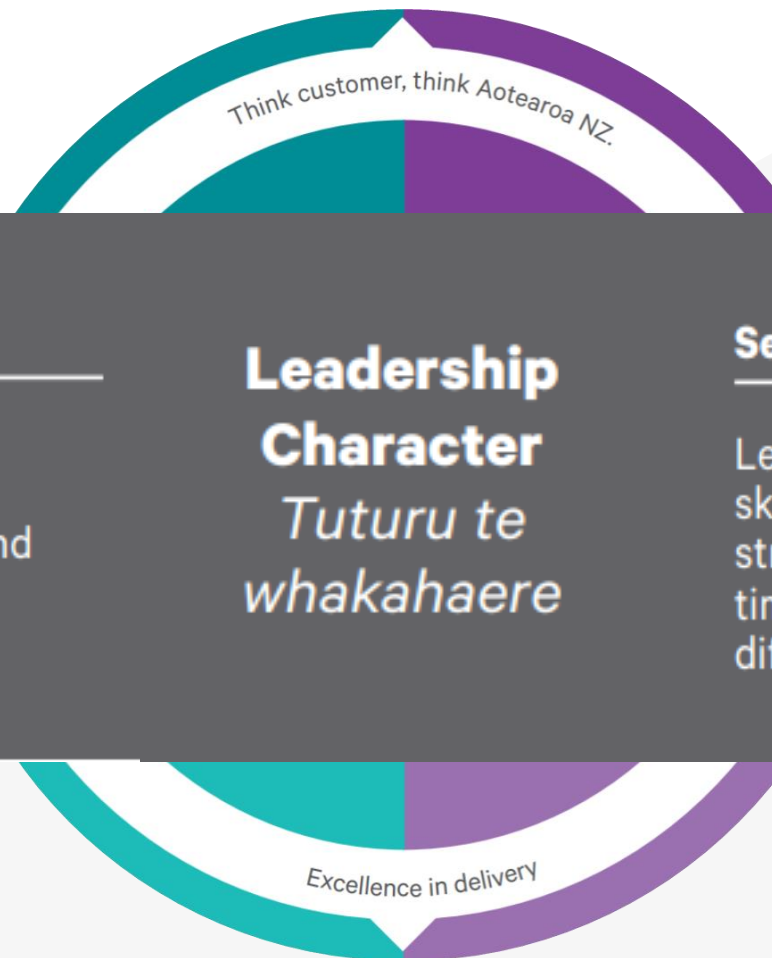
Conduct a review when:

- A new hazard or risk is identified
- A control measure is not effective
- A significant change is planned
- Consultation indicates it is needed
- H&S Representatives request a review
- Agreed review dates are reached

Revise control measures if necessary

Seek assurance control measures are effective, and sufficient

Psychosocial Leadership

Honest & Courageous

Deliver the hard messages, and makes unpopular decisions in a timely manner; to advance the longer-term best interests of customers and New Zealand.

Curious

Show curiosity, flexibility, and openness in analysing and integrating ideas, information, and differing perspectives; to make fit-for-purpose decisions.

Leadership Character
Tuturu te whakahaere

Self aware & agile

Leverage self-awareness to improve skills and adapt approach; to strengthen personal capability over time and optimise effectiveness with different situations and people.

Resilient

Show composure, grit, and a sense of perspective when the going gets tough; to help others maintain optimism and focus.

Think customer, think Aotearoa NZ.

Excellence in delivery

Better Work By Design

Context: Economic, social, political, etc.

Work Group(s)

Clear **Complicated** **Complex**

Leading Safety guidance and process support

1. **Readiness** – establish organisational commitment

2. **Discovery** – understand the work and its impacts on wellbeing

3. **Sense making** – make sense of people's experience of work factors (impacts, frequency, duration, interactions, etc.)

4. **Design** – design better work (at organisational, team, role, and/or task levels) and agree an implementation plan

5. **Realisation** – implement, monitor, refine, etc., better work

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Resources (Managing Psychosocial Risk)

[Government Health and Safety Lead – Psychological Hierarchy of Controls](#)

[Government Health and Safety Lead – Psychosocial hazard data sources worksheet](#)

[Leading Safety – Thinking hub](#)

[Business Leaders' Health & Safety Forum – Mental Wellbeing at Work](#)

[WorkSafe NZ – Managing Psychosocial Risks at Work](#)

[Safe Work Australia – Model Code of Practice: Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work](#)

[People at Work – A Free and Validated Psychosocial Risk Assessment Survey](#)

[NSW Centre for Work Health and Safety – Psychosocial Hazard Work Re-Design Tool](#)

[The International Organisation for Standardization – ISO 45003](#)

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