

Good work design

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Screen text: Good work design – Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Rachel Hawkins (Director, Engagement and Insurer Services, Office of Industrial Relations):

Ensuring health and safety by good work design is essential to maintaining your business's productivity and success, its safety record, and to engage and motivate your workers through positive interaction.

Good work is healthy and safe work where the hazards and risks are eliminated or minimised in order to prevent injury. Good work is also where the work design optimises human performance, job satisfaction and business success.

A 'Work designer' is anyone who makes decisions about the design or redesign of work. They not only include experts such as engineers, architects, ergonomists or psychologists but also every-day decision makers in the workplace such as those responsible for staffing rosters, IT systems and the way work is done.

Those with a primary duty of care and those with specific design duties relating to the design of machinery, substances and structures under Work Health and Safety laws also have a role.

To assist with planning and implementing good work design, work health and safety regulators, unions and employer groups nationally have agreed on ten good work design principles.

Let's look at the ten principles and how they have been applied at two workplaces, Holy Cross Laundry and Burstows funeral home.

On screen text: Holy Cross Laundry

Bob: We specialise in providing healthcare linen to the major private hospitals in the Brisbane area.

We employ about 150 people. Of those, 40 people have an intellectual disability.

Mandy: Our WorkCover history was pretty dismal, to be quite honest. The culture wasn't the best it could be.

Bob: We were moving to a situation where our WorkCover claims were more than our annual surplus.

And we've been able to turn that all around.

As a result of the strategies that we implemented, we reduced our claims by 85 per cent over a two-year period.

On screen text: Burstows Funeral Home

Ian: Burstows are a fourth generation funeral home, since 1900. There's about 40 staff in total.

Patricia: The funeral industry is actually quite a high pressure industry to work in.

Ian: You're dealing with families in their most vulnerable times.

Patricia: Those psychosocial risks, no matter how small an issue that it might be, within an organisation, for that individual, it can lead to depression and anxiety, and, a lot of stress for them.

Christopher: The thing that probably stresses me the most about the industry, is um you want to help everyone; and just feeling helpless to go that step further.

Christopher: Grief takes many forms.

Robyn: there are pressures on us for time.

Robyn: If you imagine that I am a wedding planner, that's exactly what I do, except I only have three days to complete the task.

Ian: If we have a funeral at 3 o'clock on such a day, that's exactly what has to happen.

Christopher: Say in a half hour period, we could have six families call up, and they all want us at the same time, to go and meet with them, to bring their loved ones into our care.

Rachel: The ten principles of good work design fit into three sections:

1. Why good work design is important.
2. What should be considered in good work design
3. How good work is designed.

Let's have a look at the first set of principles starting from the outside of the model and moving in.

How is good work designed?

Principle 7. Engage decision makers and leaders

Principle 8. Actively involve the people who do the work, including those in the supply chain and networks

Principle 9. Identify hazards, assess and control risks, and seek continuous improvement

Principle 10. Learn from the experts, evidence and experience

These four 'how' principles are the actions or steps that should be used to achieve good work design.

Screen text: Engage decision makers and leaders

Rachel: Work design or redesign is most effective when there is a high level of visible commitment, practical support, and engagement by decision makers. Steps should be taken to engage them in the good work design process.

Leaders can support good work design by ensuring the principles are appropriately included for example in:

- key organisational policies and procedures
- proposals and contracts for workplace change
- managers' responsibilities and key performance indicators, and
- business management systems and audit reports.

Screen text: Actively involve the people who do the work, including those in the supply chain and networks

Work health and safety laws require employers to consult with their workers and other stakeholders, such as supply chain partners. This step in the good work design process is an effective strategy to give workers a sense of ownership of the change and to use their knowledge and experience to provide solutions for work design problems.

Screen text: Identify hazards, assess and control risks, and seek continuous improvement

Good work design should systematically apply a risk management approach to the key workplace hazards and risks. For the long term sustainability of safe and healthy work, designs or redesigns should be continually monitored and adjusted to adapt to workplace changes. This includes obtaining feedback and new information to continually improve design.

Screen text: Learn from experts, evidence and experience

Continuous improvement in work design also requires ongoing collaboration between the various experts involved in the work design process.

Holy Cross Laundry employed these principles when designing a new laundry facility at Banyo. This was a unique opportunity for them to comprehensively review the work environment and how work is done.

Holy Cross Laundry and Burstows provide an insight into how they managed this redesign process...

Screen text: Holy Cross Laundry

Mandy: We were very serious about it. It wasn't just about ticking a box for us. It was, we, we wanted to make these improvements.

Bob: We were also able to look at how we benchmarked ourselves against other industries.

Steve: I think they've also put a, a big focus on consulting with their staff.

Bob: One of the first things that was undertaken, was a survey of staff on workplace health and safety issues.

Mandy: We did total risk assessments on every single piece of equipment um that was in the laundry.

We've done that through partnerships; with different people; with our external consultants; with Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, with our team members, taking feedback on board. We've done all that to, to make those changes, be they big or small; be it the purchase of a piece of equipment, or be it some additional training.

The management team here have been very hands-on in the design of that building, and the workflow of the building.

Every consideration that we can possibly think of, every scenario that we can think of, has been built in to that laundry, to make it as safe as it can, as efficient as it can be.

Steve: Employers are always introducing new processes in their existing workplaces; introducing new plant and equipment into their workplaces.

All of those types of changes are an opportunity to design out hazards that exist in your workplace.

Mandy: We do everything that we can to make it more comfortable, when we go to the new place the environment will be much more amenable.

Rachel: Burstows funerals also looked at work redesign to better manage work-related stress.

Screen text: Burstows Funeral Home

Patricia: Ian felt that there was some psychosocial risks within the organisation but couldn't really pinpoint any one particular thing.

The survey tool was provided to Burstows, and then they went about surveying their own organisation.

Ian: It highlighted three areas for potential improvement.

Patricia: And they related to time pressures, the emotional demands of the job, and also team conflict within the organisation.

Christopher: So after the survey, we had quite a few changes.

Patricia: They're consulting more with their staff.

Ian: We created a branch and department managers meeting.

Christopher: Anything that is a potential issue we sort of get on to it before it happens.

Maryanne: People know who they need to go to, to have something changed, improved, updated.

Ian: It had to be upper management, middle management, staff, all working as a team, to create an environment that is a happier, a better, closer team.

Patricia: 12 months later, Burstows underwent, and completed the same survey, those key factors that were identified in the first survey around time pressures, emotional stress, and conflict, were virtually non-existent.

Ian: Management should be really getting to know their staff, and getting to identify what makes them tick, and what's important to them, and so that they can get the best out of the staff. Let's make them happy. Let's help them enjoy their work environment.

Rachel: What should be considered in good design of work?

Principle 4. Good work design addresses physical, biomechanical, cognitive and psychosocial characteristics of work, together with the needs and capabilities of the people involved

Principle 5. Good work design considers the business needs, context and work the environment

Principle 6. Good work design is applied along the supply chain and across the operational lifecycle

The 'what' principles should be considered by those people in the organisation that have design responsibilities.

These three principles are a good way to consider all aspects of the work that should be included in the design or re-design. To identify potential risks and hazards you need to look at the key characteristics of the work as shown in this diagram.

Screen text: Good work design addresses physical, biomechanical, cognitive and psychosocial characteristics of work, together with the needs and capabilities of the people involved

Rachel: It is important to look at these in combination. For example, introducing a new computer-based monitoring system may change:

- the force, movement and posture required and the vibration associated with tasks
- physical, chemical or biological hazards
- the intensity, complexity and duration of tasks
- job control, supervision or peer support required.

Screen text: Good work design considers the business needs, context and work environment

Rachel: The business needs, context and work environment can be important factors in work design, for example the organizational structure and culture.

Screen text: Good work design should be applied along the supply chain and across the operational lifecycle

Rachel: Good work design should be applied along the supply chain and at all stages of the operational life cycle, from start-up, routine operations, maintenance, downsizing and cessation of business operations.

At Holy Cross, workers and managers identified what needed to be considered in the design of their new facility by looking in a holistic way at issues across the workplace:

Screen text: Holy Cross Laundry

Mandy: We're, we're pulling and tugging at linen. We're separating linen.

Bob: Trolley movement is a big issue in terms of if a lot of trolleys need to get pushed around the plant.

Mandy: The maneuvering of the trolleys, because that's a, a danger itself, where the trolleys can be heavy.

Steve: The trolleys were being pushed around in, in tight, confined areas, which was leading to a lot of crush injuries, people getting fingers jammed between the trolley, and , and fixed structures, and people being struck by trolleys as well.

Bob: One of the other major things that we needed to do, was to change the culture in the organisation.

Bob: We've looked at how the bags are handled, so that we can, as far as possible, reduce the weight of the bags on the individual.

Mandy: We extended the conveyor belt at the foot of the, the sorting area.

Bob: To enable bags to be dropped on to the conveyor, so people don't have to take the weight.

Mandy: It was right there. It was slightly raised. So we minimized the bending, the, the lifting, the, the pulling, the tugging, and all of that, that we needed to happen. So, we sort of redesigned that area.

Steve: They also had some issues with their loading docks, and, and people potentially falling off those loading docks.

Mandy: So when we came to purchase new trucks, we sort of said, 'Well what can we do here, in the design of the truck, to improve that?'

Bob: We implemented a system whereby we had spring up rails on the side of the tailgate.

So when the tailgate was lowered, the side rails would, would come up.

Steve: Holy Cross Laundry had some significant challenges, primarily due to the age of the workplace that they were working in.

Murray: It's a fairly hot, sweaty environment here and I don't, it doesn't take me much to sweat at all. I just have to think about work and I start sweating.

Mandy: The airflow isn't the best. Yes, we've got industrial fans. Yes, we've got everything that we can put in place, to make it as comfortable as possible. You know, during the very hot times, we take more breaks. The team members have ice pops.

Murray: Which we all appreciate, I'm sure! And you grab one, and then hide it behind your back, and say, 'Can I have another one? I haven't got one yet.'

Mandy: It's about health and wellbeing of our team. It's nice when you come to work that you can actually enjoy being at work.

Rachel: At Burstows.

Screen text: Burstows Funeral Home

Ian: The other thing that came out of it was an evaluation of my leadership style [laughs]... the famous 360.

Patricia: Where the worker gave 'him' feedback on his performance.

So one of the key things that came out of that 360 feedback, was to um restructure the organisation, and in such a way that Ian didn't have so many people reporting to him.

In the organisational structure, there was Ian, and then there was all the workers underneath him. So he didn't have any supervisors, or team leaders, or other managers that worked for him.

Robyn: But then, we branched out with having each little location having their own manager.

Marianne: That in itself, created more of team work, um a cohesiveness that everyone was part of the overall team.

Christopher: They made some great efforts to integrate our teams.

Burstows integrated a um counselling service for its staff and our families.

Marianne: Whether or not it's um something to do within work, or if it's something in our private life that is actually causing us stress.

Patricia: If people in specific areas needed certain tools or um certain um processes to be implemented, to be able to do their job better, and in a less stressful way, Burstows went about um setting up processes and systems to provide that to their staff.

Ian: One of the key things, I think, that came out of it too, was ... we'd talked about emotional stress, and part of that happens with, in funeral services, in relation to people transferring people from hospitals and homes to our funeral home.

And one of the things that they were, they showed concern about, was bariatric patients, which are overly obese.

We created a special-s unit for our transfer vehicles, that can enable us to carry people of any weight, you know; 300, 400, 500 kilos, if necessary, um with no ergonomics issues at all, because the, the unit does the, the whole lot of it.

Rachel: Why is good work design important?

Principle 1. Good work design gives the highest level of protection so far as reasonably practicable

Principle 2. Good work design enhances health and wellbeing

Principle 3. Good work design enhances business success and productivity

The last three principles, the 'why' principles outline the benefits of good work design.

Good work design will assist you to comply with work health and safety laws. Good work design prevents harm but can also enhance the health and wellbeing of workers because satisfying work and positive social interactions are good for people's physical and mental health. Good work design can lead to direct cost savings particularly when problems are addressed before they arise.

Screen text: Burstows funeral home

Bob: Yes, what we've done here is, we've tried to remove as much manual handling as we can.

Ellie: My favourite thing in the new laundry, is the trolley tipper, and, the bag hooker.

Racquel: My favourite things are the bag tracks and the new conveyor belts. Because it helps us not to lift those bags anymore.

Mandy: The trolley tipper now empties the bags on to the conveyor belt. The conveyor belt takes it on a journey to the bag rail system that takes it on a journey and it comes up here on this platform to the, to the sorting deck.

When it's on the sorting deck just behind me, the team members just needs to loosen the cord.

So we've removed all those manual handling concerns that we had.

Murray: We don't have to necessarily push and pull the big trolleys around the place.

Mandy: We now have conveyor belts that do that, not only in the main sort area, but in the, in the clean sort area as well. So we've reduced the amount of trolley traffic that is there.

Racquel: I think it's less chance of accidents, because we get more, a wider space to go through.

Bob: So we're trying to improve the working conditions.

One of the things that we've done, which hasn't been done before, is to isolate the driers from the rest of the plant, because they generate the most heat, lint and noise.

Mandy: We've got very high ceilings so we've got a lot more natural light coming in.

Bob: The roof's been designed so that we get a cross-flow of ventilation.

Mandy: We've got cooling systems near the, the sorting deck so it's a more pleasant environment for them to work in.

Bob: I believe that the new laundry will set a benchmark for how workplace health and safety practices can be adopted in a broad range of industries.

Screen text: Burstows funeral home

Ian: We ended up with longer term staff. There was less turnover. A happier, better, closer team.

Marianne: The changes have been observable, you can see it in people's performance, you can see it in people's camaraderie, marked respect for each other.

Rachel: The ten principles of good work design can be applied to help support better work health and safety outcomes and business productivity. They are deliberately high level and should be broadly applicable across the range of Australian businesses and workplaces. Just as every workplace is unique, so is the way each principle can be applied in practice.

To explore how good work design can be useful for your workplace, visit www.swa.gov.au.

Work safe. Home safe.

Worksafe.qld.gov.au