

MAKING LEADERSHIP WORK

EPISODE 2 –CAN YOU SPOT PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS?

Caitlin Ible is a senior associate at MinterEllison, one of Australia's largest law firms, who advises public and private sector organizations about their obligations under work, health, and safety legislation. Here are the key takeaways from our conversation with Caitlin:

- A **Psychosocial Hazard** is an incident, or a series of incidents, an environment, or situation, which contribute towards an increase in work-related stress and may lead to psychological or physical harm. There may be just one hazard, or multiple hazards that accumulate over time and compound the risk of harm. A **Psychosocial Risk** is the possibility that harm might occur when exposed to a hazard.
- The Safe Work Australia Code of Practice identifies a range of psychosocial hazards workplaces need to monitor and if these risks exist workplaces are required to do everything "reasonably practicable" to eliminate or minimize these risks. They include:
 - **Work Design Hazards** – Lack of Role Clarity, Unachievable Job Demands, Low Job Control, and Inadequate Reward and Recognition.
 - **Social Support** – Poor Supervisor Support, Poor Workplace Relationships, Bullying and Harassment.
 - **Work Conditions** - Poor Change Management, Poor Physical Environment and Remote or Isolated Work.
 - **Work Experience** – Poor Organizational Justice, Violent and Aggressive Behaviors, and Traumatic Events and/or Materials.
- Most employees experience some exposure to these hazards at some point in their role. For example:
 - **Unachievable Job Demands** are evident in a workplace when you hear employees talking about having too many tasks, intense time pressure or tight deadlines.
 - **Poor Supervisor Support** is evident when leaders struggle over prolonged periods of time to make time to be available to provide guidance, feedback, and assistance to their team members due to their own workload demands.
 - **Poor Change Management** is evident when gossiping or whispers around the office indicate there may be inadequate communication, and not enough support provided for employees to understand and support with the change.
 - **Poor Organizational Justice** is evident when people are raising concerns that policies aren't being applied in a fair way, and when decisions are being made that impact them in a biased, discriminatory or unfair way.
- A one-off experience does not mean that the employee is at risk of psychosocial harm. When conducting a psychosocial risk assessment, it is important to evaluate the frequency, duration, and intensity of the hazard in that employee's work life, (except for Bullying, Harassment, and Traumatic Events). For most hazards, an employee needs to have a sustained experience of it before it becomes harmful to their psychosocial safety.
- Mitigation of most hazards relies on good organizational planning and work design, but the greatest mitigating factor is regular and open conversations with employees. It is through these regular conversations that employers start to understand where their people might be at risk of harm from a single hazard or many hazards intersecting together.



WHAT CAN YOU TRY?

- **Know the risks** - Conducting a risk assessment is the first step to identifying the frequency, severity and impact of any psychosocial hazards your people might be experiencing. Can you review your processes to better understand some of the hazards your workers might experience? Are there ways you can design hazards out of your workplace, through changing processes or policies?
- **Proactively plan** - Establish control measures to reduce the harm that might emerge from the hazards you've identified. For example, if you have people working alone late at night, what plans are in place to ensure their personal security? be sure to consult your team about the plans you're creating and follow up with them to assess the effectiveness of the agreed actions. How are you proactively planning with your people to do everything reasonably practicable to minimize or eliminate any psychosocial risks they experience?
- **Encourage speaking up** - The most powerful way to mitigate against psychosocial risks, is to encourage your people to speak up quickly when they are encountering hazards. When your people feel safe to ask questions, raise concerns, and suggest new ideas to improve the ways they are working, psychosocial risks have been found to be significantly lower.
- **Keep learning** - You can't adopt a set and forget approach to psychosocial safety. Like any other area of work health and safety, it's a long-term commitment. You must continue assessing potential hazards and reviewing the effectiveness of your plans.



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- Download the **free Leading with Safety and Care Toolkit**
- Contact the wonderful team at **MinterEllison**.
- Dive deeper into the detail of psychosocial hazards with our **E-Learning Program for Minimizing Psychosocial Risks**.