



Australian Government

Comcare



PEOPLE MATTERS WITH MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT CHANGES

FACTS

Australian Public Service (APS) workers have reported a generally poor experience of how change is managed in their agencies:

- > Across seven years of APS Census results (to 2019), an average of only 35 per cent of workers agreed that change was managed well in their agency
- > About half of employees agreed their senior leaders manage organisational change effectively in 2019, with a similar portion reporting a positive experience of change
- > In 2021, agencies reported change management as one of the top areas of skills shortage.

NOTE: Data is from the Australian Public Service Commission's State of the Service reports. The APS Census has not captured data on workers' perceptions of change since 2019.

WHY IT MATTERS

Organisational and workplace change is a fact of working life and can bring about positive changes for organisations and employees such as increased productivity, clarity of role and increased work satisfaction.

Change can be challenging and if not managed well, can affect morale and employee engagement. Consequences may include reduced work performance, increased absenteeism and the potential for psychological or other injuries which may result in workers' compensation claims.

High performing agencies need to be flexible, adaptable and able to respond quickly to changes in government direction or in their operating environment – for example, Machinery of Government (MoG) changes.



HOW IT'S DONE

Prevention is the key to creating a safe and healthy workplace for employees affected by change

This can be achieved by systematically addressing the risks associated with organisational change (physical and psychosocial) that may lead to injury, before and after employees have commenced work in the changed circumstances or environment.

Early intervention is the key to supporting employees who are not coping with change

Responding early can often prevent the employee from becoming ill, taking long-term sick leave or needing to claim workers' compensation. The following actions are important:

- > Provide managers with information so they can recognise early warning signs of employee distress and low morale, including unplanned absences, increased conflict, withdrawal and deteriorating work performance
- > Ensure employees are aware of support and assistance that is available to them, such as Employee Assistance Programs, and ensure managers know how to access and utilise support and assistance that human resources areas may provide
- > Use organisational health data to proactively identify and respond to hot spots

Rehabilitation

Ensure arrangements are in place to support employees returning to work or who are off work due to injury or illness. When an employee is not at work due to a work-related injury or illness they may feel isolated and detached from the workplace. It is particularly important to include these workers in communication of change and provide the necessary support to facilitate a return to work.

Consultation is a legal requirement under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (WHS Act)*

Consultation is an essential part of managing health and safety. Section 47 of the WHS Act requires a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) –who is usually the employer – to consult, so far as is reasonably practicable, with workers who carry out work for the business or undertaking and who are (or are likely to be) directly affected by a health and safety matter.

During MoG changes, consultation should be focused on how the changes are going to be implemented and there should be ongoing communication and consultation with workers about their transition to new work arrangements.

Self-Assessment tool

Comcare has developed a guided self-assessment tool to identify key risks and corrective actions to minimise the psychosocial risks of change. It contains a checklist for assessing change management processes and a worker perception pulse check to assist with consultation about changes.

The tool is available on Comcare's website: [Self-assessment tool: REDUCING THE PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS OF WORKPLACE CHANGE](#)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Comcare:

- > Self-assessment tool: [REDUCING THE PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS OF WORKPLACE CHANGE](#)
- > [Supporting mentally healthy workplaces](#)
- > [Preventing harm and injury at work](#)
- > [Intervene early and know the warning signs](#)
- > [Office Safety tool](#)

Safe Work Australia:

- > [Work-related psychological health and safety: A systematic approach to meeting your duties](#)
- > [Model Code of Practice: Work health and safety consultation, cooperation and coordination](#)
(Review the federal register of legislation for the "in force" version of this code)

Fair Work Ombudsman:

- > [Consultation and cooperation in the workplace – Fair Work Ombudsman](#)