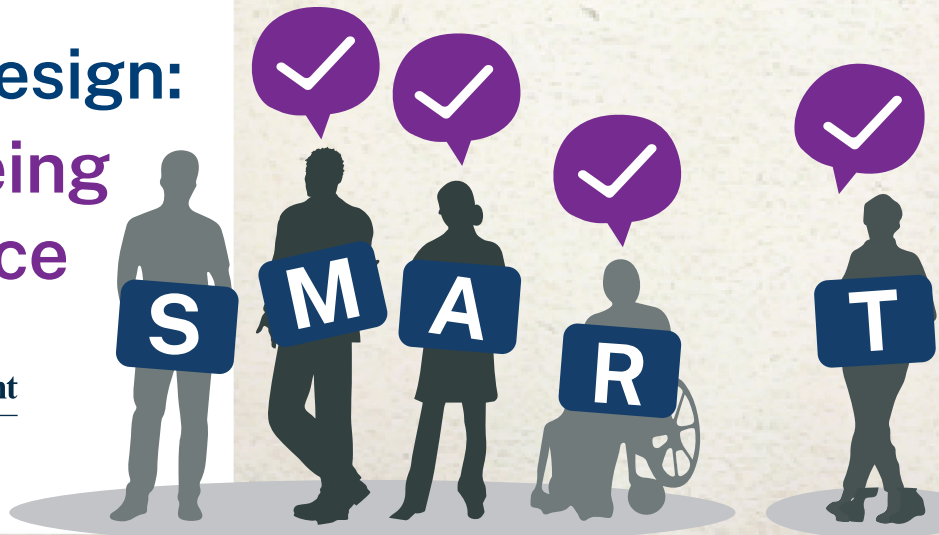


SMART Work Design: Support wellbeing and performance



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This team talk is part of a series created to help you discuss good work design with your team. Read the team talk to your team and use the questions to start a discussion.

In 2024, only 23% of surveyed Australian workers reported feeling engaged at work and 50% reported feeling a lot of stress on a daily basis.¹ Poor work design is a root cause of problems like these, affecting health and wellbeing, performance and innovation.

Work design shapes how tasks and roles are structured, how we interact with others at work and how we perceive our roles. The **SMART Work Design Model**—developed by Curtin University—offers a fresh perspective to help us make work better.

SMART Work Design

The SMART model is based on 5 key characteristics of work that promote motivation, satisfaction, wellbeing, and performance.

In this SMART framework:

- **Stimulating** work challenges us, uses our skills, involves a variety of tasks and includes problem-solving demands. When work isn't stimulating enough, we tend to feel bored, and we can disengage.
- **Mastery** at work means we really feel like we own our jobs—we have the skills, we know the work and we're performing to our potential. We develop mastery from having role clarity, taking a task from beginning to end and getting feedback on our performance.
- **Agency** means having a sense of autonomy and control over how our work is scheduled, the methods we use to achieve outcomes and our ability to make decisions.
- **Relational** work is about the quality of our work relationships, particularly how much support we have from managers and colleagues, as well as how connected we feel to others and to the purpose of our work.
- **Tolerable work demands** are those we feel are sustainable. We can meet them without feeling over or under stretched, and the demands don't create role conflict.

The **S**, **M**, **A** and **R** elements represent **job resources**, while the **T** represents **job demands**. Demands can pose a risk to health when they are not balanced by resources that support wellbeing. When we build up the right resources in our jobs, we can better cope with work demands when they increase, without feeling overwhelmed.

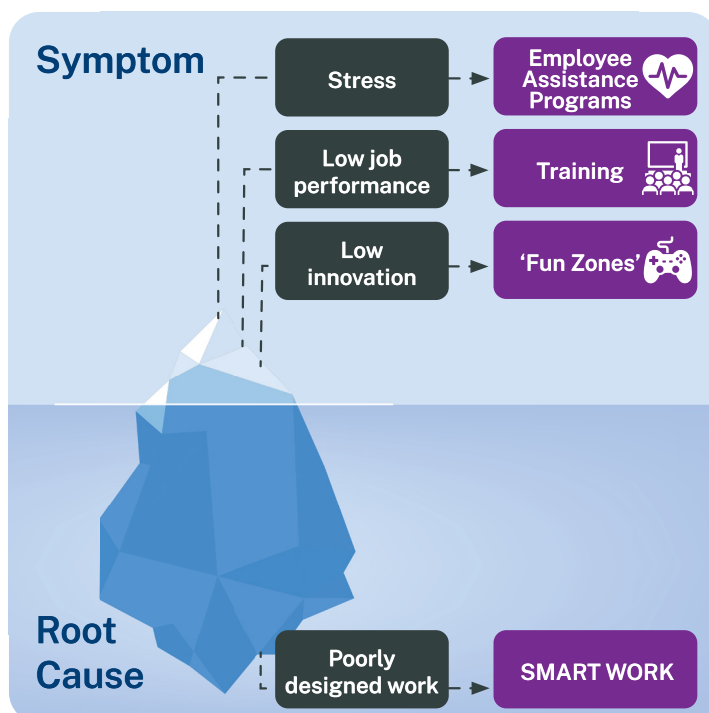


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¹ Gallup, 2025. State of the Global Workplace Report.

SMART Work Design Framework

Domain	S Stimulating	M Mastery	A Agency	R Relational	T Tolerable
Work Characteristics	• Skill variety • Task variety • Problem-solving demands	• Feedback from job • Feedback from others • Role clarity • Task identity (doing a whole piece of work)	• Control over work methods • Control over timing of work • Decision-making control	• Support from supervisors and peers • Interdependence • Task significance • Connection with end-users and beneficiaries	• Low role conflict • Manageable emotional demands • Moderate time pressure and work load

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The Centre for Transformative Work Design has videos on each of the SMART model elements that can help us understand them better. Let's watch the [Mastery](#) and/or [Agency](#) videos together now.

Using SMART in teams

Teams like ours can use the SMART model to explore our work design – to find out what is working well, what needs adjusting and what can be built on.

We can start by having conversations about work design in:

- weekly 1:1 check-ins
- conversations about development and performance
- conversations about workplace adjustments or support, early intervention or return to work
- team meetings or planning days
- any other time it would be useful to reflect on work design.

We can pick and choose questions from the list below and/or make up our own.

Discussion

Which SMART element would you like to discuss today and why?

What is working well and/or not working well?

How could we strengthen this SMART element?

Tip: remember that strengthening S, M, A and R can reduce the impact of high work demands.

As a team, when and how should we talk about our work design?

While we can talk as a team about our work design, each of us as individuals can also have conversations with our direct managers about our own work design – and any of us can initiate a work design conversation. So, let's also discuss how we'd like to talk about our work design in our 1:1 check-ins.

Notes

This section can be used to record agreed actions arising from your discussion and/or attendance.



I don't know where to start

?

Let's work out your priorities

Manager support and role clarity help us meet work demands



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SMART questions

S

S – Stimulating work

Questions focused on task variety, challenge, and meaningfulness:

- What aspects of your role do you find most engaging or stimulating?
- Are there parts of your work that feel repetitive or unchallenging? Do you often feel bored at work?
- How often do you get to solve complex or interesting problems in your role?
- Do you feel your work is meaningful or contributes to a larger purpose?
- How can we make your work more intellectually or creatively stimulating?

M

M – Mastery

Questions around role clarity, feedback, task identity:

- How well do you feel you understand your responsibilities and duties? What about expectations for achievement of goals and objectives?
- Do you always feel clear about your current priorities, or do you sometimes feel confused or uncertain?
- How do you currently receive feedback on your performance? Do you get feedback from both the outcome of the job and from others at work?
- Is the feedback you receive timely and helpful, or could something be changed to make it more useful? How would you prefer to receive feedback?
- Can you clearly see how your tasks contribute to the final product or outcome? Do you have visibility of tangible results or outcomes?
- Are you getting the chance to take a process, project or deliverable from start to finish?

A

A – Agency (Autonomy)

Questions that address control over work and decision-making:

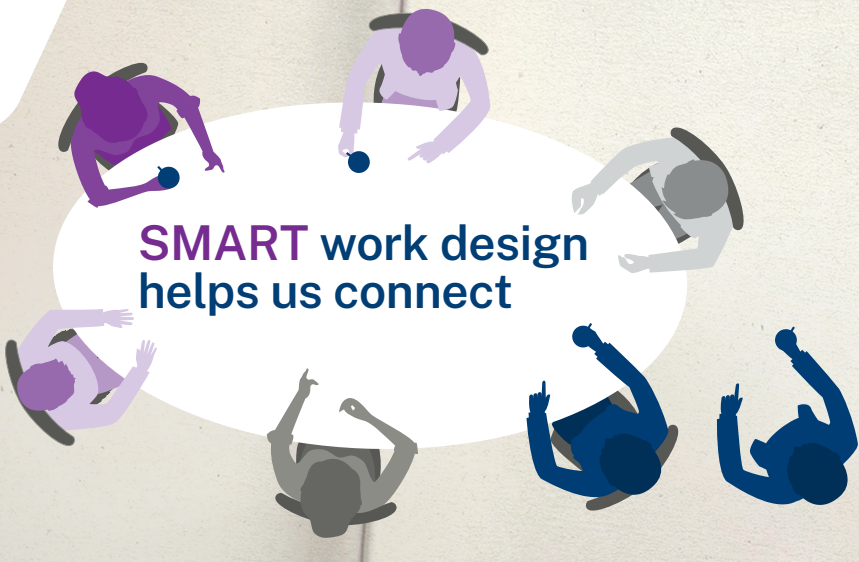
- How much autonomy do you feel you have in how you complete your tasks?
- Are there decisions you wish you had more influence over in your role?
- How comfortable are you with prioritising your own work?
- What could be changed to give you more control over how you do your job?
- Do you feel trusted to take initiative?

R

R – Relational

Questions around social support, sense of purpose and social contact:

- How connected do you feel to your colleagues and team? Do you feel respected and valued by your peers and manager?
- Who do you turn to for support or advice at work?
- Do you feel your work is valuable for the end-users or people who benefit from the work that you do? Would you like to have more connection to the people who benefit from your work?
- What aspects of your work feel particularly meaningful to you? Is there something you'd like to be more involved in because it feels purposeful to you?



SMART work design helps us connect

T

T – Tolerable demands

Questions focused on workload, stress, and work-life balance:

- How manageable do you find your workload?
- Are there times when your work feels overwhelming? What helps you to cope at those times?
- Are there any tasks or pressures that are consistently draining?
- What support or changes could help reduce feelings of stress?
- What strategies help you maintain a healthy work-life balance?

General questions

To bring it all together and inform goal setting for SMARTer work:

- Looking at all aspects of SMART work design, what's one area we could strengthen together?
- What motivates you most about your work, and how can we build more of that into your role?
- What's one thing that I can do differently to better support you?

