



Australian Government

Comcare

Knowledge session: Words that work— using SMART language for better work design conversations

Thursday 30 July 2026



Overview of today's session

- ▶ The problem with everyday language
- ▶ Using SMART language instead
- ▶ Shifting the conversation and practical prompts
- ▶ Applying SMART in different roles
- ▶ Using SMART language in the real world
- ▶ Q&A

Activity: Spot the SMART signals

Jordan works in a busy team delivering urgent work.

- Tasks often arrive with **tight deadlines and high volume**
- Jordan has **little say in how or when tasks are done**
- Feedback is **infrequent**, and expectations are sometimes unclear
- The work can feel **routine and repetitive**
- The team is friendly, but everyone is **too busy to offer much support**



The problem with everyday language



“It’s a high-pressure role”

“The team is stretched”

“People just need to be more resilient”

SMART work design language



STIMULATING

Varied, interesting, meaningful work which you use and develop your skills



MASTERY

Clarity about your goals/ responsibilities, you receive feedback and know where your job fits in



AGENCY

Autonomy over when, how, and where you do your work



RELATIONAL

Social contact and support from others, being part of a team, and making a difference to others



TOLERABLE DEMANDS

Having emotional, cognitive, workload and other demands that are experienced as tolerable

Shift the conversation

Instead of saying...	Try asking...
“The team is under pressure”	“What is driving the workload or time pressure?”
“This role is stressful”	“Which parts of the job are hardest to manage?”
“People aren’t coping”	“What support or resources are missing?”
“There’s confusion”	“What’s unclear about expectations or priorities?”

Practical prompts

For everyday conversations

- “Can we unpack what’s behind that?”
- “What’s making that difficult in practice?”
- “Which parts of the job take the most effort?”

To move toward solutions

- “What would make this more manageable?”
- “Where could we give more control or clarity?”
- “What small change would make the biggest difference?”

Applying SMART in different roles



People leaders

Shift from performance labels → work design factors

Ask: “What in the job is driving this?”



HR / WHS

Use SMART to guide risk conversations

Translate complaints into design issues



HSRs / employees

Raise issues using specific examples

Focus on what's happening in the work

3 step conversation shift



Name the issue (what you're hearing)



Make it specific (SMART lens)



Ask what can change (design, not just behaviour)

Key takeaways

1

Vague words describe problems without offering solutions

2

SMART language makes work design more visible

3

Better conversations lead to better work design