Tip Sheet – Workload & Time Management

Roadmap reference: Build Resilience and Coping Skills

Workload & Time Management

Workload and time management is a major risk factor for the transport, warehousing and logistics sector. This may be caused by working extended hours, inadequate breaks, shift work, excessive workload demands, contracts that don't reflect real-world conditions or pressure to meet unrealistic deadlines.

When staff feel that they are constantly being pushed to their limits it can have mental health implications. Providing employees with increased autonomy, reasonable and sustainable workloads and realistic demands enhances their mental health and wellbeing. Providing effective resources and strategies to help staff build their resilience and coping skills will lead to more engaged and productive staff who feel psychologically safe and thriving at work.

Signs of Workload & Time Management Concerns

There are several different signs to look out for that may indicate workplace demands are unreasonable. These include where:

- Staff appear uncharacteristically irritated, short-tempered or impatient
- Staff engagement and motivation are not at their usual levels
- Staff are repeatedly being asked to stay back later or work more hours than usual
- Staff are taking more sick leave and unplanned absences
- Staff complain of limited control/autonomy over their jobs
- Staff turnover is higher than the industry norm
- There is an otherwise unexplained rise in incidents or near-misses

Managing Workload and Time Management Risks

Effectively managing workload can lead to better mental health outcomes, improved staff morale and lower absenteeism and churn. Below are some ways to help:

1. Identify

Identify the specific concerns staff have related to workload and time management. Analyse records such as overtime, time off or sick leave, resignations, gate house records (for waiting time), injuries or incidents to see if they are outside of usual norms. Compare the actual time it takes to complete a task against the assumptions made in contracts. Observe the work and behaviours of staff to understand if they need more resources or time to complete tasks.

2. Assess

Assess the nature of the workload and time management issues in the workplace, remembering that the root causes may be off-site (such as excessive wait times at customer sites). Consider how long, how often and how much staff workload is impacting the capacity to sustain productivity and the likelihood of this reoccurring. Most people are happy to contribute extra discretionary effort for short periods but will become resentful and even unwell when sustained discretionary effort is expected/normalised.

3. Consult and Address

Consult with staff to help understand the priority issues for immediate addressal. This might be through one-on-one check ins, team meetings, informal workshops, confidential surveys or hotlines.

Identify the right strategy to alleviate excessive workload. This might involve recruiting additional staff, negotiating uprates with customers, performance management, exiting unprofitable services, upgrading systems and offering additional leave beyond existing entitlements. In cases of systemic issues with the broader supply chain it may even be necessary to involve the relevant Regulator, peak industry body or union.

None of these strategies are necessarily easy. The effort and cost required to enact them may seem daunting when the existing workload is already high.

Tips to Prevent Workload and Time Management Issues

- Make sure employees have the right skills for their jobs and provide appropriate training
- Ensure that customer contracts are reasonable and reflect real-world conditions (e.g. impact of traffic congestion on pick-ups and deliveries, cost of fuel and labour)
- Ensure there is enough time provided for staff to complete tasks
- Monitor important workload metrics such as timesheets, sick leave, overtime, waiting times etc
- Encourage employees to speak up if they are not coping with the demands
- Promote work / life balance and taking leave
- Ensure staff take regular breaks
- Acknowledge high and sustained levels of discretionary effort and don't let it continue too long

Additional Resources:

Download a copy of the Workforce Handbook for staff or People Leader Handbook for managers at Member resources at Healthy Heads Trucks & Sheds.

If you would like more information to help manage wellbeing, download the Healthy Heads App.