

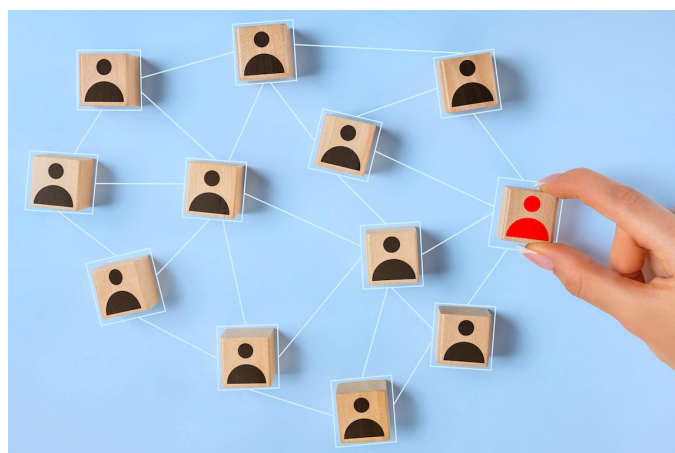
Insight aims to provide useful information, links and tips in the areas of Risk Management, Work Health and Safety, Business Continuity Management, and other areas relating to management systems and corporate governance.

Applying the Hierarchy of Controls to Psychosocial Hazards

The Queensland WHS Legislation and the *Managing the Risk of Psychosocial Hazards at Work* Code of Practice require PCBU's (persons conducting a business or undertaking) to apply the hierarchy of controls specifically for psychosocial risks.

The use of the hierarchy of controls, means that higher-order controls (such as job design changes) must be considered and prioritised over lower-order measures (such as Employee Assistance Programs or educational programs) for managing psychosocial hazards.

The use of the hierarchy of controls is well established and has become second nature when dealing with more traditional 'safety' risks – we can likely all remember examples discussed by the WHSQ in their guidance material about applying the hierarchy when managing work at height risks – but it is notably less straightforward when considering complex psychosocial risks including workplace stress, bullying, and harassment. This is because of the very nature of psychosocial hazards, their inter-related causal factors, and the way these impact each worker differently.

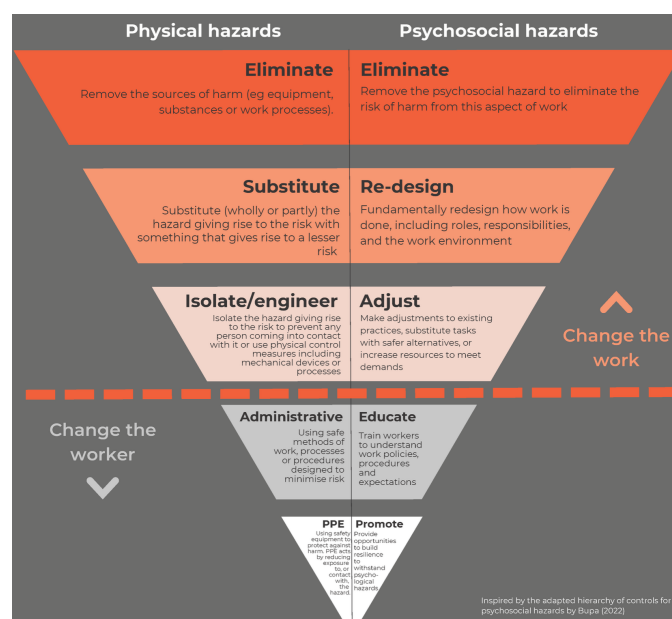


Applying the established framework of the hierarchy of controls to the management of psychosocial risks requires thinking outside the established traditional interpretation. The 'elimination' option still correlates

to eliminating or removing the psychosocial hazard from the workplace, but how do you apply an engineering control to a psychosocial hazard?

Looking interstate there are no real insights that can be gleaned. Primarily this is because few states as yet require this approach. New South Wales, Western Australia and Tasmania do not mandate the use the hierarchy of controls (even though it's encouraged as best practice) and, as at the time of publication, Victoria does not yet have specific psychosocial risk regulations in place (they are expected at the end of the year).

Perhaps a useful approach comes from across the ditch, from the New Zealand regulator, who offers the following guidance to assist with understanding and interpreting the hierarchy of controls for psychosocial risks:



It should also be noted that researchers from La Trobe University have developed a new "Work Systems Hierarchy of Controls" (WS-HOC) to focus the redesign of "work systems in which people are key", recognising that many psychosocial issues stem from how work is organised, rather than individual worker issues. By emphasising the redesign of work systems, this new approach aims to tackle the

complex causes of psychosocial risks more effectively.

Managing psychosocial risks may prove to be challenging and problematic initially when compared to physical risks to health and safety, however, the application of the same risk management approach and utilisation of the hierarchy of controls is the best starting point. As we get more familiar with the management of psychosocial risks, this approach and a focus on the way in which work is done should start to see a reduction in the impact that these risks currently pose to worker health and wellbeing.

Please [contact QRMC](#) for more information.

Big, bigger, biggest...

After spending the better part of the last 20 years in and out of organisations auditing their management systems – be that safety, quality or something more integrated – it is pleasing for QRMC's auditors to see the tide turning (albeit slowly in some quarters) in relation to the look and feel of management systems.

Going back to the early 2000s there was a sort of documentation 'arms race' whereby organisations were almost competing to have the biggest and most complex management system. More and more processes were added to address issues as they emerged and as regulatory requirements evolved. In this period of unrestrained growth, organisations had (and some still do) a myriad of Policies, Standards, Procedures, Work Instructions and Guidelines with overlapping information.

Then the larger more diverse national operations also had Division/Business Unit specific documentation developed and operating in parallel with each other. A Corporate-level Policy or Standard outlined the required content for Business Unit (BU) documents, and subsequently each BU developed specific procedures, incorporating the corporate information and modifying it as necessary to address their own operational requirements.



This approach led to an increase in both the number and length of documents, further complicated by mandatory templates requiring extensive sections—such as Purpose, Scope, Rationale, Definitions, and Responsibilities—before addressing procedural details.

As these systems grew larger and larger without delivering the intended results, the industry reached a turning point, recognising that existing processes were ineffective and only encouraged minimal compliance from busy end-users.

Many organisations have successfully streamlined by consolidating business-unit documents for consistent processes, but further progress is needed. Management Systems need to be targeted to assist Managers, Supervisors and 'point of risk workers' while being conscious of the amount of time these personnel have to read, review and then apply written processes.

The term 'user-friendly' needs to be enshrined as a mantra to make compliance with these processes as easy to understand, straight forward and as foolproof as possible. Inspections, audits, document reviews and management reviews need to not only assess that the system content is current and technically correct, but also that it is presented in a manner that is as end-user-friendly as possible and makes compliance straightforward.

Please [contact QRMC](#) for more information.