



## **Notes on the relationship between good health and safety practice and productivity, using the framework of the 7 drivers of productivity**

### **Introduction**

Good H&S practice is an integral part of good business practice and good employment relations practice. There are obvious advantages in having a safe and healthy worksite such as:

- Cost benefits in decreasing and eliminating accidents and incidents, not only in reducing “down-time” with machinery out of action, people off a production line or out of the workforce, but also in reducing the costs to the workers individually and the impact on workmates who exhibit distress at witnessing or knowing about serious accidents, and the impact on their workmates who have to take up additional work in the absence of a co-worker, which can lead to further loss of productivity if they get overworked and / or stressed.
- Good practice avoids costs in retraining, rehabilitation, replacement of injured workers, and so on.
- Other benefits accrue from investigating near miss incidents and subsequently adjusting systems or work practice, thus avoiding accidents in the future.
- Open active communication on H&S matters flows on to influence other workplace relationships, with the potential to build mutual trust and confidence and a positive workplace culture.

A combination of these factors, legislative obligations and matters arising from the framework of the 7 drivers will help improve H&S and the workplace environment overall.

### **The Seven drivers**

The 7 drivers of productivity have a practical focus relevant to most workplaces. They work together, somewhat like a jigsaw. The drivers are:

- 1. Building leadership and management capability**
- 2. Creating productive workplace cultures**
- 3. Encouraging innovation and the use of technology**
- 4. Investing in people and skills**
- 5. Organising work**
- 6. Networking and collaborating**
- 7. Measuring what matters**

The drivers are complementary, so that changes in one area reinforce changes in another area.

## **1. Building leadership and management capability**

Key issues include:

- Management needs to recognise leadership at all levels of the organisation and the natural leaders in the workplace; for example, the elected H&S Representatives, Learning Representatives and the elected union delegates.
- Managers at all levels of an organisation need to be clear about their legislated responsibilities and their roles in establishing and maintaining H&S systems.
- Management, elected H&S representatives and workers need to work constructively together to keep the H&S policies and procedures 'alive'.
- Management who involve elected H&S representatives and union representatives in reviews and other such processes find they are more likely to establish comprehensive, well-thought-out policies that workers comply with and are committed to.
- Management needs training that complements that of the H&S representatives, and that ensures they know each others' roles – this is invaluable.
- Management must properly delegate authority that matches the level of responsibility required for undertaking the H&S representative role effectively, and allowing the necessary decision-making and so on.
- Management should place high importance on addressing workers' needs in order to gain worker engagement at the workplace. High engagement is beneficial for all parties, not only in terms of individual and company performance, but also employee retention, safety levels and even spinning off to overall wellbeing and life satisfaction (NZ Engagement Study by Gallup in October – November 2004).

## **2. Creating productive workplace cultures**

Paying attention to the above leadership and management issues and having a commitment to H&S will help to cement good faith, build good productive workplace relationships and engender confidence in the systems. In addition, it is likely to enhance the reporting of accidents, incidents and near misses more readily, especially if there is a workplace culture that emphasises the joint ownership and benefits of good H&S practice, rather than focussing on blame when things go wrong.

A positive and productive workplace culture that is also a safety-first culture is more likely to arise where there is:

- positive application of H&S policies, rather than policies being used as a simple marketing or compliance exercise
- a high value placed on workers' health and safety
- acknowledgement of workers' collective and individual rights
- involvement of elected H&S representatives, other worker representatives and workers in the development and ongoing monitoring and review of H&S policies and practice
- recognition and appropriate reward of workers' contributions and innovative ideas around H&S improvements and training
- a safe environment to debate and challenge ideas and / or systems, or to suggest new ideas.

A work environment with a positive culture and a safety culture can result in

- gaining and maintaining efficiencies
- retaining workers who are self-motivated and willing to apply discretionary effort
- avoiding replacement, retraining and other costs associated with accidents and injury.

### **3. Encouraging innovation and the use of technology**

Key issues when introducing new equipment and technology or new work organisation and systems include:

- consultation with H&S representatives and unions to ensure that the H&S issues are addressed, that there are opportunities to trial and assess new systems and equipment, that skills audits are conducted to identify new training needs or needs for work redesign
- avoidance of unhealthy work intensification
- examination of new consequential health and safety issues, for example, the impact of new technology and equipment that may change the identified hazards or risk factors.

In addition, it is important to:

- Ensure there are good mechanisms for workers to contribute their ideas about improvement to work organisation or systems that enhance H&S (workers usually know the answers but often don't get asked)
- Ensure that their ideas are given recognition and not 'stolen', which can have negative impact on workplace culture, and reluctance by others to make contributions in the future
- Note the clear link between outdated computer equipment, low job satisfaction levels, workplace ailments and increased sick leave (independent survey conducted for ViewSonic Feb and March 2006 in UK, France, Germany)
- Understand that workspace comfort affects workers' ability to do their best job; for example, poor temperature control, poor lighting, inappropriate desk / workspace layout can lead to eye strain, headaches, OOS, especially for young workers. And untidy / poor layout can lead to accidents and inefficient and frustrating process.
- View computers and computer monitors as productivity tools, not as indicators of status. Thus, for example, the workers who do screen-intensive work need up-to-date high-quality monitors.

### **4. Investing in people and skills**

Actions that can contribute to improved H&S environment include:

- Utilise the CTU H&S training on offer, at all 3 levels, to enhance knowledge and skills relating to good H&S practice. This training has no direct cost, apart from the time away from the workplace.
- Note that the CTU training is reportedly more comprehensive than many others on offer, and provides practical tools and abilities to apply back at workplace, so is a good investment.
- Note also that the stage 3 training includes making a business case around H&S improvements, with particular focus on productivity gains.

- Remember that training is not a one-off event, and that H&S considerations are not static. This means that there is a need to keep up with training that is appropriate for all of the management and workers, as well as the H&S representatives.
- Recognise that investment in H&S training and good systems and practice pays off in productivity gains when workers feel safe, reduces their risk-taking and provides the cost-savings benefits mentioned above.
- Identify literacy issues that may prevent workers from fully understanding the safe work procedures, and do not assume that a tick-off at orientation of new employees means they have actually read and understood a policy or a written process and how these apply in practice.
- Recognise the importance of people having appropriate work, especially in light of the aging population and other demographic trends. This recognition might mean changing / redesigning jobs or reallocating tasks to accommodate changing physical abilities, and includes considering health and safety and meaningful work, workforce planning and succession planning.

## **5. Organising work**

Organising work includes the flow of work, good communication and decision-making structures. Aspects to consider in improving productivity in the context of good H&S practice include:

- The actual physical layout of the workplace is a basic consideration: clean, tidy, safe environment with the right tools to do the job, available at the time needed, and in the right condition to do the job. Such organisation avoids accidents, lost time searching for necessary tools and resources, or having to carry out maintenance before use that could have been done during another down time period.
- Comprehensive health and safety policies and practices will be achievable and more effective when workers and their elected representatives (for example, H&S representatives, union delegates) are involved in their development and ongoing monitoring, and when they have access to information and effective communication channels to raise issues
- Task allocation and work needs to fit individual workers' abilities to ensure maximum productivity and to avoid accidents through mismatch
- Well-designed work places / work spaces lead to natural efficiencies and less likelihood of accidents and injury
- The right 'tools' for the job are essential, along with good workspace design and set-up, to avoid OOS-type injury
- Regular ergonomic reviews can be a good investment in the long run
- Issues such as employee well-being and work-life balance can also be addressed in other policies, practice and terms and conditions of work.

## **6. Networking and collaborating**

Useful sources of new ideas to enhance H&S policy, practice and overall safety include:

- Participating in industry-level organisations
- Providing release for training for elected H&S representatives, especially when attending sessions with representatives from other types of workplaces and organisations

- Subscribing to specialist journals, magazines and reports
- Using the worksafe reps website
- Activating in-house H&S committees and other forums
- Joining the ACC Partnership Programme
- Utilising union structures, websites, resources and experiences in other workplaces.

## **7. Measuring what matters**

To enhance understanding and compliance with good H&S practice:

- Make sure that measures are relevant, achievable and visible.
- Establish information systems that ensure transparent and meaningful measurements that are open to discussion and debate.
- Involve the elected H&S representatives, union delegates and other workers in developing the measures as they will generally know what will be effective and useful.
- Introduce user-friendly, easily accessible reporting systems.
- Review measures and policies and practice regularly to ensure ongoing relevance.

