

Stories from the field:

Case studies of managing change and disruption



Series on supporting mentally healthy workplaces to manage change and disruption

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Australian Government
National Mental Health Commission

Contents

- About these case studies 3
 - Why these case studies exist..... 3
 - A note on language – employees and workers 3
- Case study 1:** Anticipate and plan:
 - ChatGPT and preparing for AI disruption 4
- Case study 2:** Getting to know your people and the unique needs of certain cohorts:
 - Migrant workers in residential aged care services during COVID-19..... 7
- Case study 3:** Putting it all together:
 - How Medibank navigated a major cybercrime event in the Before, During and After phases..... 8
- References 13



About these case studies

All workplaces are affected by change and disruption. In recent years, COVID-19 transformed ways of working for many organisations. Other disruptions such as extreme weather events, the emergence of new technologies and the outbreak of conflict or war can affect many workplaces.

These case studies were developed to support business owners, senior leaders, managers and HR professionals to build mentally healthy workplaces in a world where change and disruption has become the norm. They complement *Mentally healthy workplaces: Managing change and disruption*.

🕒 Why these case studies exist

Developed by the National Mental Health Commission in partnership with Transitioning Well, these case studies emerged as part of the National Workplace Initiative (NWI).

They were developed to share examples of how organisations managed change and disruption to support mentally healthy workplaces. Although each case study is different, they demonstrate a commitment to make work mentally healthy. These organisations are keen to share their experiences and demonstrate the principles in action.

We thank the organisations that shared their experiences and lessons.

🕒 A note on language – employees and workers

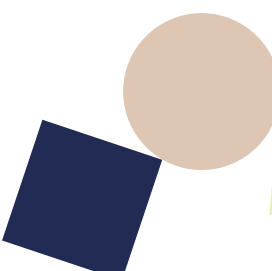
In an environment where employment relationships are changing, it is necessary to consider all workers, not simply those in a traditional employer–employee relationship. Work comes in many guises including ‘gigs’, portfolio careers, contracting, consulting and volunteering. The way that all these types of workers experience work can impact their mental health and wellbeing.

These case studies use the term worker to encompass and consider the needs of all people at work in an organisation.

Anticipate and plan:

ChatGPT and preparing for AI disruption

Disruption events can quickly leave us feeling overwhelmed with decreased capacity for analytical thinking, creative insight and problem solving—qualities that help us plan for and adapt to change.¹ By planning for mental health and wellbeing impacts before an event occurs, you can proactively shape events with an internal source, as well as create plans to use during unanticipated events.



"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn."

Alvin Tofer

The following case study demonstrates how the outcomes of regular risk assessments can help to inform a strong change management plan and risk mitigation activities to protect the health and safety of people during change and disruption.

Until the release of OpenAI's platform, ChatGPT² in late 2022, the idea of generative artificial intelligence (AI) being capable of deeply human tasks was unthinkable. Now, millions of people use ChatGPT at work every day. It has become the fastest growing consumer application, with 1 million users logging on in the first 5 days of its launch. By January 2023, that figure rose to 100 million users.³ The rapid adoption of ChatGPT worldwide points to how we have begun accepting that AI will have a more prominent place in our work lives.

"You can keep a conversation going with ChatGPT, which means it's like a co-worker in many ways," says Nicole Gillespie, KPMG Chair of Organisational Trust at the University of Queensland Business School and member of the National AI Centre Think Tank on Responsible AI.

"It's given people an insight into the future of AI as a co-worker, AI as a coach, AI as a guide, and potentially, AI as a manager."

While the idea of AI as a manager might seem unrealistic for some workers, the fear that AI will replace jobs is very real. A University of Queensland and KPMG Australia study (before the launch of ChatGPT) found 77% of people reported feeling concerned about job loss, and 73% said they were concerned about losing important skills due to AI.⁴

• AI will eliminate jobs, but also create jobs

"AI will disrupt and transform many industries, more industries than the ones that it won't," says Ms Gillespie.

"ChatGPT has already given us insight into the extent to which it can disrupt, and we haven't seen the full effects of that play out yet."

Anticipate and plan: ChatGPT and preparing for AI disruption

Since the Industrial Revolution began, technology has created new employment categories, and many would argue for the better. For example, accountants once worked out everything by hand rather than using calculators and accounting software. Rather than fearing automation and tech disruption, thinking about how technology can make us more productive and create new jobs can be helpful.

Goldman Sachs' research on the impact of AI on economic growth states that "60% of workers today are employed in occupations that didn't exist in 1940, implying that over 85% of employment growth over the last 80 years is explained by the technology-driven creation of new positions".⁵

Without knowing exactly how generative AI will affect jobs in the future, we can look at how the internet has changed how we work for comparison. The disruption of the retail sector during the pandemic is an example. Online shopping soared, which meant fewer jobs were needed in the physical 'bricks and mortar' retail environment. But more jobs were created in fulfilment and delivery, and on the tech side in areas such as website development, customer service, digital marketing and social media management.

During one of the most significant disruptions of our time, with the support of many organisations, workers were able to re-skill or up-skill to stay employable. Governments supported displaced workers, creating a safety net of financial support and skills programs. While the pandemic was an unanticipated event, we know the AI evolution is coming. Organisations and their leaders now can prepare their workers.

According to the Australian Financial Review, CEOs of companies like Coles, Wisetech Global and Quad Lock are asking workers to experiment with generative AI.⁶ The idea that workers have a deep understanding of the capability of AI tools, whether individually or at an organisation's directive, is considered essential to future-proofing careers.

"People who have a combination of both strong data analytics plus a traditional skillset will be more employable in the future, and this will safeguard them against longer-term challenges around work opportunities," says Steven Lockey, AI Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Queensland.

"We're definitely going to need people with data analysis skills and more developed technical skills, but there's evidence to suggest that in this age of AI, having the inherently human skills of empathy and emotional intelligence is going to be more important than ever."

Going beyond a level of basic digital literacy, investing in capabilities to understand emerging technologies, their impacts, and how to interact and use those tools will set workers up well in the future.

"I think that it's smart for workers to invest in a deeper understanding of AI to have the ability to work deeply with, and potentially even play a role in, the co-development of these tools," says Ms Gillespie.

► Ethics and AI

One of the main challenges for workers amid AI disruption is whether their organisations will use AI to make workers more (hyper) productive by increasing workloads or use AI to take away some of the more demanding, menial aspects and allow them to do more meaningful work. It is obvious which organisations will attract the best talent.

In the KPMG study, nearly half of the 17,000 people surveyed globally believe AI will enhance their competence and autonomy at work, yet only 40% of Australians trust using AI at work.⁴ In terms of regulation, 43% of Australians believe their employer has practices in place to support the responsible use of AI.⁴



Anticipate and plan: ChatGPT and preparing for AI disruption

Tech companies like Apple and Microsoft (backers of OpenAI) have long operated on a 'move fast, break things' operandi. However, because of the speed of development, generative AI has many ethical and moral implications, particularly around issues of bias, privacy and misuse of information. The emergence of new technologies will only accelerate in terms of speed, and regulation is falling behind.

With AI's potential to increasingly disrupt the workforce, leaders must prepare for the future practical and ethical implications of workers using emerging technologies in their organisations. Millions of workers have signed up and use ChatGPT every day at work, yet not many organisations have internal policies for workers using these platforms to increase productivity.

"Rather than being an afterthought, government and businesses need to work together to be involved in the emergence of these technologies and understanding it at the forefront so that we don't need to play regulatory catch-up," says Ms Gillespie. "The question we need to be asking is, how do we reimagine governance so that it's fit for purpose in a digital age?"

🕒 How organisations can prepare their people

While adopting new technologies like ChatGPT seems fast, at a practical level, our day-to-day roles are not yet disrupted (slow onset), although when they are, it is likely to be a permanent change (duration), that impacts personal lives as well as work (scope). Therefore, it is a disruption, not just a 'change', which is why people are worried about job security and future impacts.

If AI impacts you, you have a huge opportunity to set the tone for your version of the future of work now in a way that benefits both the organisation and workers. You might want to consider the following factors:

Apply futures thinking – You can navigate the uncertainty of this disruption by using scenario planning and strategic foresight to anticipate potential impacts and plan for imagined futures.

Promote awareness – Educating and communicating about generative AI is a powerful way for workers to understand the technology's potential benefits and limitations and how it can be used to improve their

work processes. Hold training sessions or workshops, invite experts to give talks or webinars and encourage experimentation, hackathons or pilots to test how it can help in specific areas.

Identify skill gaps – New technologies like generative AI create opportunities for innovation and creativity but also require new skills and knowledge. By identifying skills gaps now, you can anticipate the skills and knowledge your workforce will need in the future. By developing strategies to create a more innovative and creative workforce, you can better prepare to stay competitive and adapt to changing market conditions.

Invest in up-skilling and re-skilling – Large firms are investing in long-term digital accelerator programs for staff to learn skills in emerging technology such as machine learning, data visualisation, cybersecurity and robotics. These workers will then seed their skills throughout the firms and assume new roles. While an accelerator program may be unrealistic for every organisation, training your staff to take advantage of any productivity benefits and adapting to the changing work environment makes good business sense.

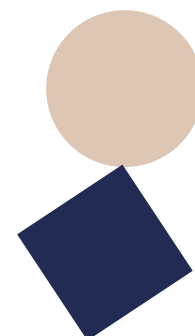
Foster a culture of innovation – You can foster a culture of collaboration and innovation by encouraging people to work together to identify new opportunities and solutions that can be enabled by generative AI, helping to create a more agile and adaptive workforce. Establishing diverse individuals with different backgrounds and perspectives to drive AI innovation can help ensure it is developed and deployed ethically and responsibly, with all stakeholders in mind.

Clearly communicate – By communicating clearly with your workers about the potential impacts of generative AI on their roles and the organisation as a whole, you can help reduce anxiety and resistance to change, and foster a sense of shared purpose and direction.

Provide support and resources – Establish support programs and policies for workers whose roles will be affected by generative AI or who are willing to learn new skills. Provide career planning services to help people navigate the changing job landscape, professionals in career coaching and mentorship, and career development resources that help identify new career paths and opportunities.

Getting to know your people and the unique needs of certain cohorts:

Migrant workers in residential aged care services during COVID-19



Knowing your people is about creating genuine relationships that form the foundation of a disruption-resilient organisation. It is important for leaders to have the knowledge and confidence to support people's individual needs, recognise when someone is not coping, and connect them with the appropriate supports.

As part of getting to know your people, you also need to consider the personal circumstances that may impact their response to a change and disruption. Research suggests some cohorts have increased risk of experiencing mental ill-health following change. We often refer to these as 'vulnerable populations', but importantly these groups are not inherently vulnerable. Rather, societal and other environmental factors (such as discrimination or inequalities) often contribute to this risk.

The following case study uses the experience of migrant workers in residential aged care services during COVID-19 to demonstrate how this phenomenon occurs in practice.

Personal care attendants and nurses in residential aged care services were an especially vulnerable group of healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly before vaccinations rolled out. Most of the deaths from COVID-19 in 2020 occurred in aged care residential facilities, where workers were more likely to contract COVID-19 and show higher levels of distress.⁷

This group experienced 'baseline' vulnerabilities such as:⁸

- often being socioeconomically disadvantaged
- migrant workers commonly from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- predominantly female-dominated.

This group were also significantly affected by:

- higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 at work given patients or clients with limited ability to comply with COVID-safe practices due to dementia and/or disability
- a lack of equipment and resources, such as insufficient or inappropriate personal protective equipment
- delays in translating, communicating and implementing recommendations from government and other aged care agencies.

Due to pre-pandemic financial stress, many migrant workers continued to work at more than one residential aged care site despite restrictions, which increased the spread of COVID-19. When this information was released in the media, these workers experienced racism, discrimination and stigma from the public or within their individual workplace. Further, some experienced increased work-related violence, aggression and incivility from members of the public.

Workers' mental health was further impacted by serious illness or death of colleagues or clients in aged care facilities and instances of severe moral stressors (for example, unable to deliver care in the way they had been trained, unable to grant access to family members to be at the side of a dying relative). These issues were compounded by increased work demand and isolation from supports (for example, family overseas, social isolation due to local lockdowns).

Putting it all together:

How Medibank navigated a major cybercrime event in the Before, During and After phases

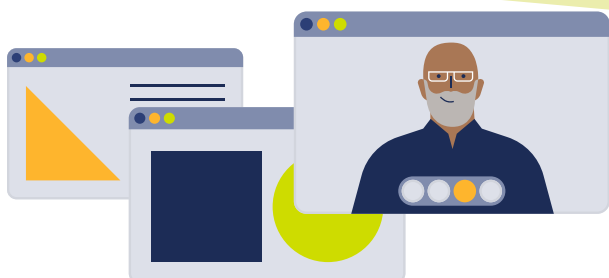
In October 2022, health company Medibank Private was targeted by an anonymous ransomware group. At the time, it was the largest data breach of its kind in Australian history. About 9.7 million past and present customers—including 5.1 million Medibank customers, 2.8 million ahm customers and 1.8 million international customers—were affected in the breach, including current and former Medibank workers.

Cybercrime is increasingly common. In Australia, cybercrime is reported every 7 minutes. Ransomware attacks have increased by nearly 500% since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹ The latest Annual Cyber Threat Report shows the Australian Cyber Security Centre recorded 76,000 cybercrime reports between 2021 and 2022—a 13% increase from the previous financial year.¹⁰ For many organisations, it is a case of when, not if, a cyberattack will occur. To minimise distress for their workers and customers, organisations must be prepared, act quickly, and design clear communication and mental health strategies to protect their people's and customers' wellbeing.



"A crisis shouldn't be the first time you start talking about health and wellbeing in the workplace."

Karen Oldaker
Senior Executive Wellbeing & Community, Medibank



Putting it all together: How Medibank navigated a major cybercrime event in the Before, During and After phases

The following case study demonstrates how Medibank used the principles outlined in the *Mentally Healthy Workplaces: Managing change and disruption* guide to navigate a major cybercrime event.

◉ Before the event

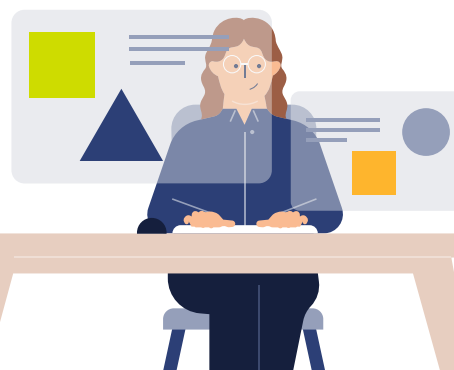
As an event caused by an outside source, there was less control, but there is opportunity to bring teams together. As the speed of this event is almost immediate, having groundwork in place can be crucial to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of workers.

Fortunately, at the time of the attack, Medibank already had a well-established suite of wellbeing support and initiatives, including: an online mental health hub, wellbeing tools, a worker advocate network and a focus on managing psychosocial risks.

“Having an existing cultural emphasis of health and wellbeing and caring leadership meant that it was natural to leverage and emphasise existing programs that our people were familiar with [during the cyberattack].” – Karen Oldaker, Senior Executive Wellbeing & Community, Medibank.

Medibank also has a range of operational mechanisms including a business continuity plan, and the organisation regularly holds exercises so workers can understand the crisis management process and be prepared for what to expect. In addition, the organisation is dedicated to open and transparent leadership, via regular and well-established communication and consultation.

At an organisation level, Medibank was well equipped to support their people through what was a major disruption.



Key takeaways

Preparation

- Ensure regular communication mechanisms before a crisis, so these can be easily expanded when needed and workers are already familiar with where to get information and support.
- Maintain existing mental health and wellbeing resources that can be leveraged in a crisis (these do not necessarily need to be specific to cybercrime). COVID-19 and other recent disasters prepared Medibank well. They ensured some of the documents created during the cyber event could be used more broadly in terms of 'mental health during a crisis'.
- Include crises such as cyber events within your internal safety risk registers. Prepare for risks associated with occupational violence and aggression (for frontline teams) and vicarious trauma. Perhaps hold an internal crisis simulation exercise that focuses on a cyber event.
- Ensure you have robust processes for regular wellbeing conversations between workers and managers. A crisis should not be the first time you start talking about health and wellbeing in the workplace.

Putting it all together: How Medibank navigated a major cybercrime event in the Before, During and After phases

◉ During the event

Medibank worked quickly to offer a comprehensive support package to their workers (and customers) including immediate mental health crisis support.

An established health, safety and wellbeing crisis intervention process (previously used to support workers following bushfires and COVID-19) was used to identify impacted teams and adapt existing mental health and wellbeing tools and resources.

A worker cybercrime support plan was established based on 3 identified phases of crisis:

1. immediate response
2. management
3. recovery using a trauma-informed approach to care.

This approach identified existing tools and resources and new initiatives across the people, culture and sustainability functions (health safety and wellbeing, worker health management, training and development, people and culture).

The intranet and Yammer were existing key mechanisms for communication, so a dedicated cyber support page was quickly established on the Medibank intranet with information and links to resources, support and initiatives, and updated regularly. Medibank consistently referred workers back to this page and provided links to all their other services.

The key themes Medibank emphasised were:

- active communication with daily updates across a variety of forums
- connection and listening (within teams and the broader business, which included regular pulse surveys to gauge worker sentiment and enable feedback)
- support (ensuring everyone knew what was available and that there were no barriers to access; support was also tailored and specific to each business unit's needs)
- promotion of existing wellbeing resources and enhanced mental health supports
- worker safety initiatives to prevent and minimise physical or psychological harm
- appreciation and recognition for the work teams were doing, for example additional support for frontline teams, bonus 'Good Health Days' and other acknowledgements.

There were a series of new interventions, many of which leveraged Medibank's existing providers, partnerships and internal expertise:

- Leveraging their existing Employee Assistance Program, Medibank:
 - switched on crisis counselling, making a dedicated psychologist available for on-demand appointments for all workers during business hours (in addition to the usual process of booking for an appointment)
 - conducted 'wellbeing check-in calls' to at-risk groups including frontline teams
 - held roundtable, group sessions facilitated by a psychologist.

Other initiatives included:

- daily 10-minute meditation and mindfulness sessions (via Zoom)
- online learning modules specifically for frontline teams, covering difficult conversations during a crisis (2 parts): supporting your team during a crisis; and caring for yourself during a crisis
- webinars and live events on mental health
- information sessions for frontline leadership teams on trauma-informed care provided by a specialist trauma psychologist
- tailored approaches to managing fatigue and burnout for each business unit.

Putting it all together: How Medibank navigated a major cybercrime event in the Before, During and After phases

Key takeaways

Advice for others

- A key enabler in taking care of customers during a crisis is to ensure workers are well supported. This support includes identifying risks to health safety and wellbeing; putting harm prevention plans in place; ensuring adequate rest and recovery each day; and giving thanks and acknowledgement for their efforts.
- There is no one-size-fits-all model for mental health, so provide a variety of support mechanisms and services. Medibank's suite included a range of specialist psychological supports (individual on-demand sessions with a psychologist, group sessions, wellbeing check-in calls) in addition to information sessions and webinars, opportunities for meditation and mindfulness, and written information.
- The response from senior leaders in a crisis will set the tone for the organisation. Having senior leaders speak about their own mental health and wellbeing, actively encourage workers to engage in self-care and use the supports provided sends a clear and powerful message.
- Create a worker support squad with information flow to and from the crisis management team and operations.
- Identifying risk factors to health, safety and wellbeing and documenting controls and interventions as you go (that is, the number of training sessions delivered, attendance, etc.) proved essential in the review period.
- Communicating with honesty, vulnerability and genuine care set the tone for the organisation. In Medibank's case, communication from top management was personable, frequent and consistent, and helped create an environment of calm and caring leadership.
- Understand that different parts of the business are going through different phases of the crisis cycle at different times. While creating an enormous challenge, providing targeted supports at the right times can mean teams felt highly supported.



Putting it all together: How Medibank navigated a major cybercrime event in the Before, During and After phases

After the event

The impacts of a cybercrime or other unanticipated events can be far reaching, depending on the individual, their mental health and wellbeing, and their unique background and stressors (in this case, both scope and duration can be long). Organisations can foster a proactive approach to recovery while supporting their workers to manage long-term issues relating to the disruption.

Medibank's continued approach to supporting their workers includes:

- regular updates and communications via various mechanisms including follow-up team briefing sessions
- specialist resources and programs (for example, wellbeing webinars, meditation and mindfulness sessions, mental health in a crisis tip sheets) available in their comprehensive library of wellbeing resources, which people can continue to access
- regular pulse surveys, which ask specific questions relating to the attack and enable all workers to provide comments and feedback anonymously
- monitoring and supporting the safety, health and wellbeing of teams, and remaining committed to providing mental health and wellbeing information and support in the post-crisis (recovery) period.

While the impact of the event is arguably still being felt across the organisation, the dedicated focus on maintaining good mental health and wellbeing practices through the process will produce tangible benefits for workers and their families, as well as the long-term performance of teams.



Key takeaways

What worked well

- The group (optional) roundtable sessions facilitated by a psychologist offered regularly over a 3-month period proved very popular, with high levels of attendance by workers.
- The ability to create in-house bespoke training and education e-learning modules on trauma and wellbeing enabled Medibank to deliver highly specific and relevant content to people quickly.
- Having existing relationships with a variety of mental health providers enabled Medibank to leverage and expand these quickly in a crisis. Their wellbeing mantra is 'Feel Good, Your Way', so offering a wide range of different types of support was important so people could find what was right for them.
- Regular pulse checks using existing engagement survey providers helped Medibank understand how people were feeling. Questions were customised, specifically asking about health and wellbeing; safety, including the risk of occupational violence and aggression and fatigue; and worker advocacy.

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This resource was created as part of the National Workplace Initiative.



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