How to manage change and disruption

Many workplaces can be affected by change, such as modifying processes or technology, and disruption, such as extreme weather events.

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Mentally healthy workplaces

Managing change and disruption

Key takeaways

- Poorly managed change can affect the mental health of everyone in an organisation.
- Your organisation can support workers before, during and after a change.
- There are actions you can take at the organisation level and the team level.
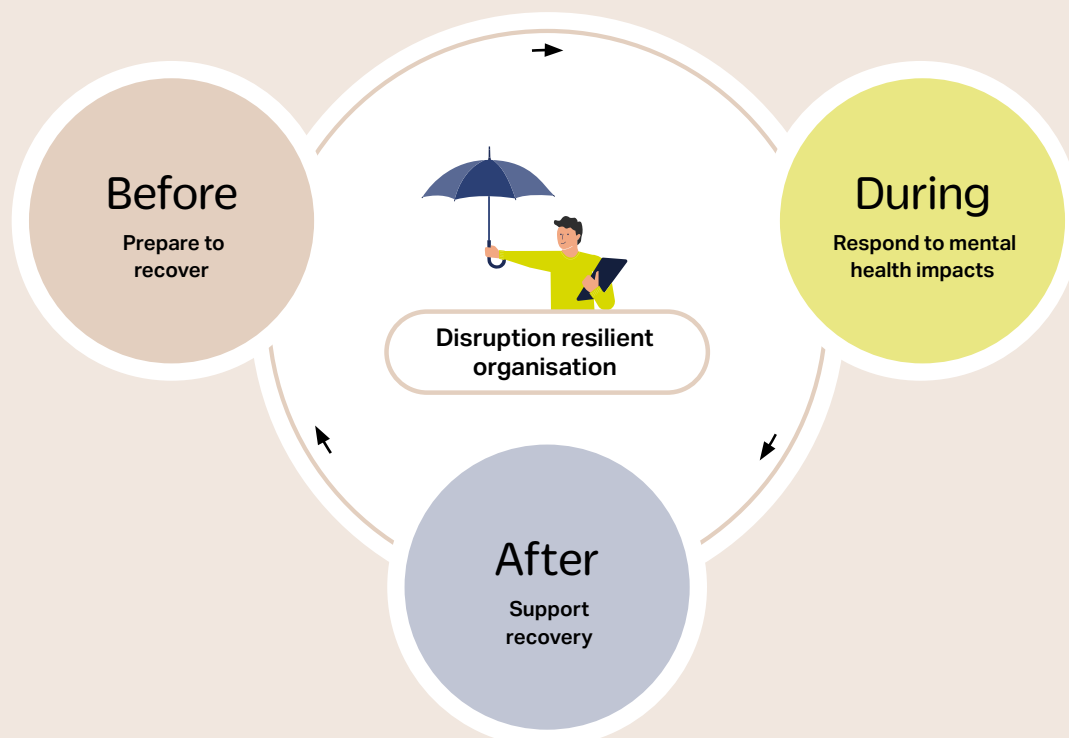
Poorly managed change can affect the mental health of everyone in an organisation.

It can erode motivation, increase dissatisfaction and disengagement, and even reduce people's commitment. Managing change effectively supports people's mental health and overall wellbeing, which in turn improves organisational performance. The underlined complete guide outlines what you can do at both an organisational and team level.

Change in the workplace is a process that makes something different, such as modifying processes, structures, technology or strategy.

Disruption is a type of change that permanently impacts how things are done. Often a disruption is unexpected, resulting from circumstances external to the organisation.

Organisations can support workers through the 3 phases of the change and disruption cycle:

Before
Prepare to recover

During
Respond to mental health impacts

After
Support recovery

Disruption resilient organisation

The Before phase:
Prepare to recover

This phase is about preparing to recover. Put the foundations in place so you are not thinking about mental health for the first time mid-crisis.

At an organisational level:

- Anticipate key change and disruption events, and put in place plans that align with the characteristics of the predicted events (e.g. actions to address psychosocial hazards that may arise).
- Create mental health and disruption-specific policies, and align other policies where you can.
- Build the capability of your leaders and workers so they have skills in problem solving, self-management and working with people.

At a team level:

- Get to know your people so you notice when someone is not coping and you can respond appropriately.
- Nurture a culture of open communication so people can share ideas and concerns.

The During phase:
Respond to mental health impacts

This phase is about supporting people's mental health during the immediate impacts of change and disruption. All change requires good communication, and leaders must be alert to how their team is coping. Some events may also require specific trauma-informed actions and the support of mental health professionals.

At an organisational level:

- Implement plans that were created in the Before phase.
- Use 2-way communication channels to provide relevant information and updates, ensuring messages are simple, credible, consistent and timely.
- Support leaders with the tools and resources they need to protect and promote the mental health of their team members.

At a leader level:

- Look after your own mental health and practise good self-care.
- Remain as calm as possible when communicating with your team by prioritising positive coping strategies.
- Model the behaviours for promoting mental health that are expected from the team.

At a team level:

- Make sure people's basic safety needs are met.
- Use changes in the behaviour and appearance of team members as a prompt to begin check-in conversations with workers.
- Raise awareness about the supports available to people, remove barriers and allow time so people can access them as needed.
- Cascade organisation-wide messages to team members using the tools and prompts provided.

The After phase:
Support recovery

This phase is about supporting recovery wherever people are at in terms of their mental health.

At an organisational level:

- Take stock of where you are in relation to the change plans and identify any new or ongoing psychological hazards.
- Make sure workers understand how any change impacts their day-to-day work.
- Consider flexible work practices and provide autonomy where possible.
- Consult with leaders and workers to implement 'lessons learned' from the disruption event.

At a team level:

- Keep 2-way communication channels open and effective.
- Make sure people are aware of the support available to them.
- Use rituals to acknowledge feelings of loss about the way things used to be (e.g. run an activity where people 'say goodbye' to the old way of working).
- Actively encourage and model self-care.

If you or someone you know needs support, our **urgent help page** lists support services you can reach out to now. In an emergency, please call 000.

Mentally Healthy Workplaces