



What's Below the Surface: Understanding Psychosocial Hazards in Practice

Key insights for leaders, HR professionals, and safety practitioners.

This session brought together psychosocial safety specialists from Humn and Sonder to cut through the noise on what psychosocial risk really means and what leaders, HR professionals, and safety practitioners are expected to do about it. Below are the essential takeaways.

01 THE CORE INSIGHT

The safest-looking workplaces are often the riskiest.

Psychosocial safety is about exposure to harm not sentiment, culture scores, or how people say they feel. Hazards exist even when no one complains. The traditional reliance on engagement surveys falls short because they measure satisfaction and advocacy rather than workload exposure, system constraints, or unsafe leadership behaviour.

Engagement surveys DO measure

- Satisfaction
- Advocacy
- Commitment

They do NOT reliably measure

- Workload exposure
- System constraints
- Unsafe leadership behaviour

02 BEWARE IMPLEMENTATION THEATRE

Training programs with no change to underlying workload

Surveys conducted but not actioned

Policies that sit untouched on the intranet

'Respect campaigns' with no consequences attached

EAP promotion used as a primary control rather than a last resort

Leadership programs disconnected from how work is actually designed

Many organisations are doing something but activity is not the same as risk reduction. Watch for these patterns.



03 WHEN REGULATORS STEP IN — RECENT CASES

Dept. of Defence — Dec 2025

First Commonwealth employer convicted for failing to manage psychosocial risk. A RAAF technician took his own life after four performance management plans in six months - supervisors were never trained to recognise the process itself as a hazard. Fined \$188,000 + adverse publicity order.

"The policies existed. The risks were known. A document in a folder is not a control."

University of Technology Sydney — Sep 2025

SafeWork NSW issued a prohibition notice halting a restructure affecting 800 staff — one day's notice before the organisation's own psychosocial risk assessment had been considered. UTS reversed the majority of planned redundancies. No fine, but an estimated \$3–4M/month in frozen costs, Senate inquiry, and public union action.

"Consultation is not a formality. Under WHS law, it is a duty."

NSW Dept. of Education — 2026

Two improvement notices upheld after a misconduct investigation ran for over ten months. Commissioner confirmed: a misconduct investigation is itself a psychosocial hazard. At the time, 606 active investigations were on foot — 46 running for more than two years.

"The duty to manage risk doesn't disappear because an investigation is justified."

04 WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

Psychosocial risk is an enterprise safety risk not a wellbeing initiative.

Boards need risk intelligence not just culture or engagement metrics.

Leaders own work design as a risk decision - hazard elimination starts with how work is structured.

Controls must fix the work, not the worker - EAP, mindfulness, and resilience training are not controls.

Evidence must withstand regulatory and legal scrutiny - documentation and defensibility matter.

05 IF YOU DID THREE THINGS THIS WEEK

1 Identify your top 3 psychosocial hazards

Not survey themes - actual hazards: workload, role conflict, low job control, poor change management. Name them specifically.

2 Map your current controls

For each hazard, ask: what actually reduces exposure? Not what policy says - what is happening in practice? Gaps here are your risk.

3 Test one system-level change

Not another initiative. Pick one job design, process, or structural change that reduces the hazard at source and pilot it.

Everything in this session pointed to one conclusion: you need evidence, not impressions. The Humn IQ™ platform gives you the diagnostic rigour to identify, assess, and act on psychosocial risk - with tools built specifically for Australian workplaces and WHS obligations.

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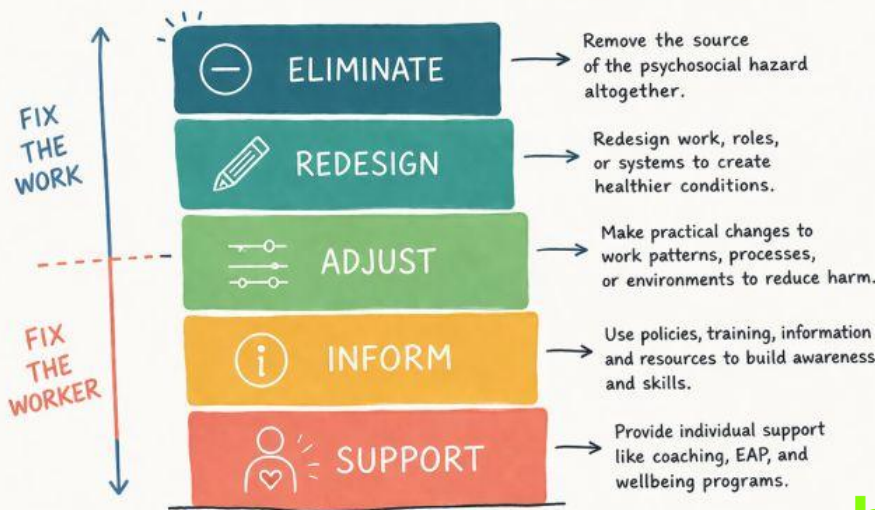
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