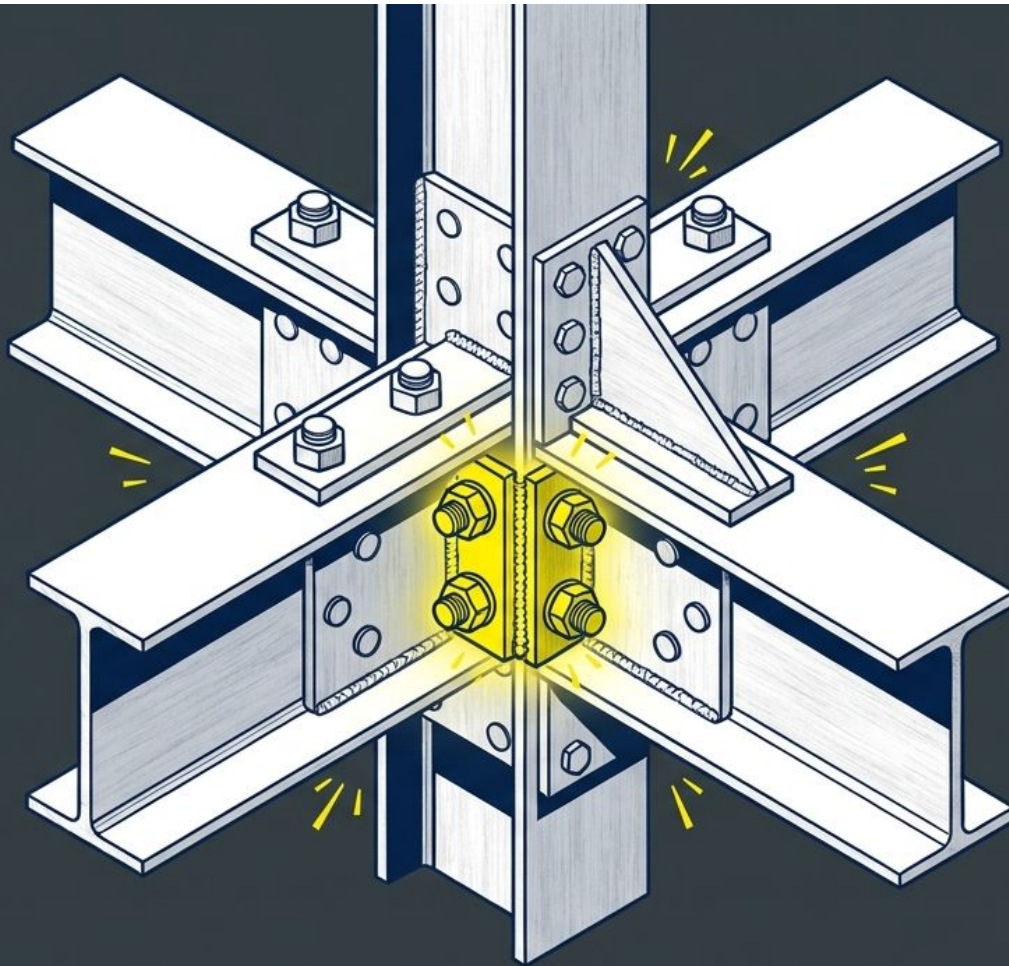


Fix the Work, Not the Worker.

Managing Psychosocial
Risk as an Occupational
Safety Duty.

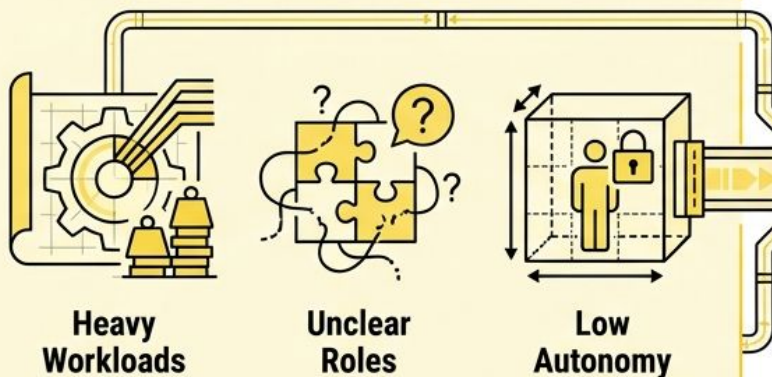
A paradigm shift from
individual wellness to
systemic work design.



Based on the Human Capital Leadership Review by Jonathan H. Westover, PhD.

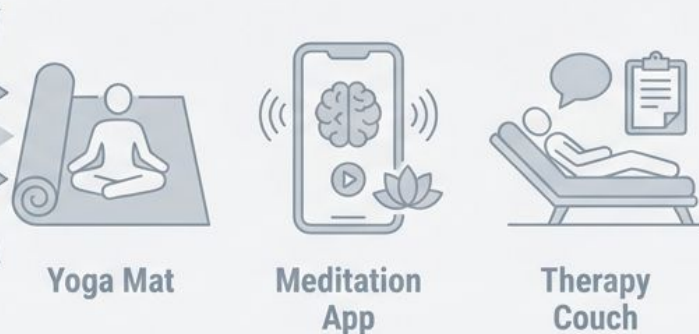
Moving from Symptom Treatment to Source Control

Upstream (Producing the Harm)



The structural design of the work itself.
This is where psychosocial hazards originate.

Downstream (Treating Symptoms)



Where organizations spend their money helping
people cope with conditions they continue to produce.

A study of 46,336 UK workers found that participants in individual-level interventions (resilience training, mindfulness apps) appeared no better off than colleagues who did not participate. If the work is making people unwell, **we must fix the work.**

The Global Scale of Psychosocial Hazards

EU-OSHA OSH Pulse 2025 Data



44%

Exposed to severe time pressure or work overload (The #1 reported hazard).



34%

Report a lack of reward (pay, recognition, career) for their effort.



29%

29%

Report stress, depression, or anxiety caused or worsened by work.

12 billion working days lost annually to depression and anxiety.
Estimated economic drain: \$1 Trillion in lost productivity.

The Hidden Costs of Poor Work Design

Productivity

**£24
Billion**

Lost annually to presenteeism (working while unwell) in the UK alone. Resource deficits suppress discretionary effort.

Absence

**x5x
Longer**

Mental health claims take nearly five times longer to resolve and recover from than physical injuries.

Legal/Reputation

Case File

Regulators now prosecute poor work design as a literal safety breach.

- **Coroners Court Victoria** fined **A\$379,157** for unaddressed high workloads.
- **Dept. of Defence** fined **A\$188,000** following a death due to an unmanaged performance process.

The Science of Strain: A Mathematical Imbalance

Job Demands

High Workload &
Time Pressure

High Emotional/
Cognitive Effort

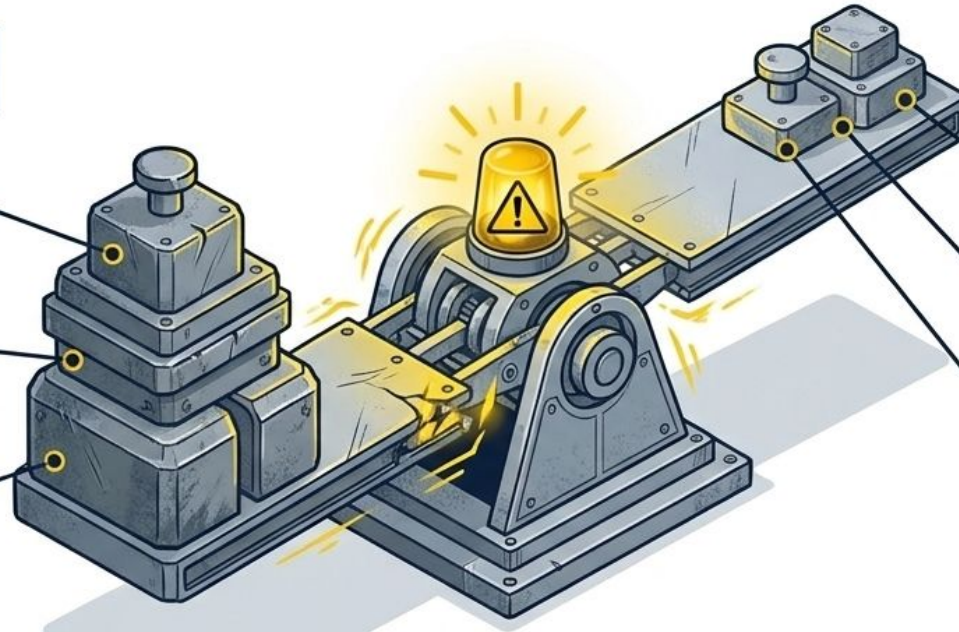
Constant
Organizational
Change

Job Resources

Decision Control
(Autonomy)

Meaningful
Reward

Supervisor &
Peer Support



Synthesizing the Karasek, Siegrist, and JD-R models reveals a simple truth:
Strain is not a personal failure. When structural demands chronically outrun the resources
provided to meet them, systemic breakdown (burnout) is inevitable.

Redefining Burnout

DICTIONARY

Burn-out is an occupational phenomenon rather than a medical condition... resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.

— World Health Organization, ICD-11

The Executive Takeaway:

Burnout is explicitly defined as a failure of stress management by the workplace, not a failure of personal character or resilience. It is an operational failure.



Paradigm Shift: From Wellness to Safety

	Wellness	Safety
Target Focus	The individual worker's mind and habits.	The structural environment and work design.
Timing of Intervention	Downstream (Coping, resilience, therapy).	Upstream (Workload limits, process redesign, controls).
Corporate Framing	An HR perk or optional employee benefit.	A mandatory, legally enforceable operational duty.
Success Metric	App usage rates and program attendance.	Measurable reduction in identified hazard exposure.

The Hierarchy of Psychosocial Controls

Regulators place the burden of proof here. The following five responses focus on these structural controls—where actual leverage exists.

Primary: **Eliminate or Reduce at Source**

Work design, adjusting staffing to demand, increasing autonomy, structural communication norms.

Secondary: **Detect and Respond Early**

Manager training, peer support systems, workload monitoring.

Tertiary: **Support and Recover**

EAPs, trauma therapy, return-to-work accommodations.

Response 1: Systematic Risk Assessment



The Trap:

Treating the engagement survey as the intervention. Measuring well-being symptoms without changing the environment yields zero return.

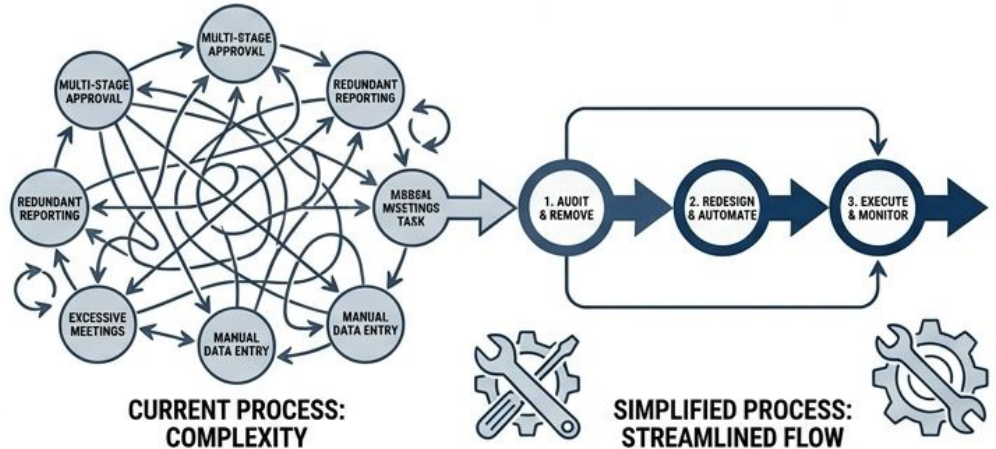


The Blueprint for Action:

- **Measure Conditions, Not Just Symptoms:** Survey for excessive demands, low control, and role ambiguity.
- **Consult the Exposed:** Use structured worker participation to design the controls.
- **Close the Loop:** Link every identified hazard to a specific operational control with a designated owner and deadline.

Response 2: Workload & Working-Time Redesign

If the primary hazard is “too much work for the time available”, change the ratio.



The Evidence:

- **UK 4-Day Week Pilot:** 61 organizations reduced hours by 20% via process redesign. Result: 71% lower burnout, zero loss in productivity.
- **Iceland Trials:** Reorganized shifts and removed unnecessary tasks for 2,500 workers, improving well-being with revenue-neutral results.

The Blueprint for Action:

Audit demand vs. capacity at the team level. Remove low-value meetings, reports, and duplicated approvals before asking employees to work faster or compressing their schedules.

Response 3: Job Control & Supervisor Support

High worker control buffers high job demands.



Presence-Based Management

Focuses on visibility, fixed schedules, and monitoring.



Results-Based Management

Focuses on outputs, autonomy, and schedule discretion.

The Evidence (STAR Trials): Trials in a US IT firm proved that increasing employee control over schedules and training supervisors to support personal lives significantly reduced burnout.

The Blueprint for Action:

- **Shift the Default:** Give teams discretion over scheduling, location, and methods.
- **Train Supervisors:** Replace presence-based monitoring with clear, output-focused expectations.

Response 4: Protected Recovery & Communication

Recovery is a **biological necessity**. Unbounded digital work makes effort-reward imbalance chronic.



Engineering Controls (The Evidence):

- **Orange (France):** Formalized a 'Right to Disconnect' union agreement for 96,000 employees.
- **Volkswagen:** Restricted email servers to stop routing messages to off-shift employees 30 minutes after shifts end.

The Blueprint for Action:

Do not rely on individual restraint. Use technology as a control (e.g., delaying after-hours emails) and establish explicit organizational norms for when responses are actually required.

Response 5: Safety-Style Governance

Psychosocial risk must sit on the exact same governance agenda as physical safety, with named executive ownership.



The Blueprint for Action:

Accountability

Require board-level reporting on leading psychosocial indicators, not just lagging absence data.

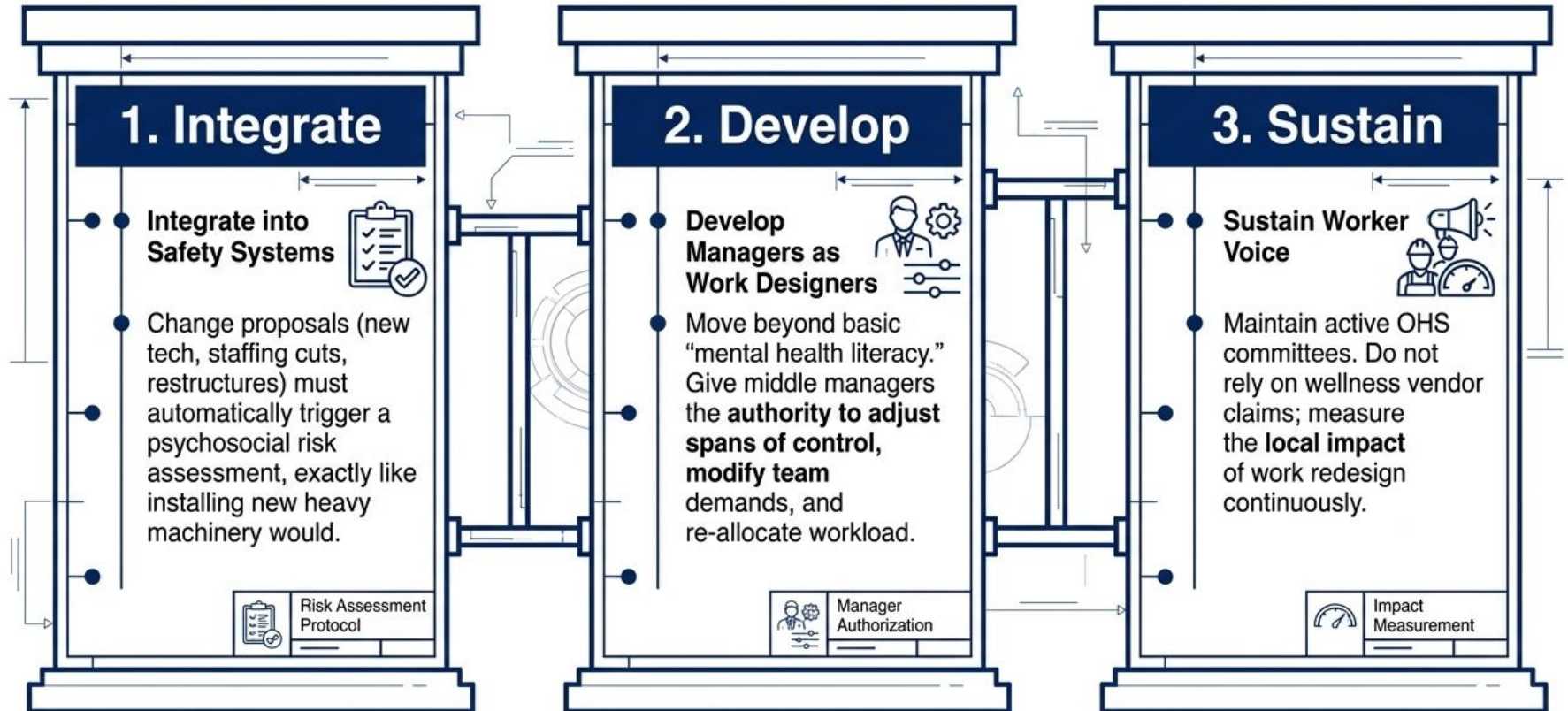
Safe Performance Management

Treat performance improvement plans (PIPs) and restructurings as high-risk activities requiring welfare checks.

Secondary Support

Implement structured peer reflection forums for emotionally demanding roles to process the human side of work.

Building Long-Term Organizational Capability



You would not accept a physical hazard that harmed 30% of your workforce. Do not accept the psychosocial equivalent.

Changing the conditions of work is harder than offering a wellness app—but it is the only place true leverage exists.

The Mandate:

1. Start with structural hazards, not individual symptoms.
2. Apply the hierarchy of controls.
3. Govern work design like physical safety.