

The Careful Workplace

From vision to reality

Revisiting the intent and status of the National Standard on
Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace

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The Standard and “The Careful Workplace”

The Standard expresses and tries to give shape to a vision of “The Careful Workplace”

“The Careful Workplace is one that conserves individual, social and economic capital by allowing no reasonably foreseeable mental or physical harm to workers.” (Shain 2016)

The Standard is framed in the context of OHS
But it's *voluntary*

More specificallythe Vision of the Standard is:

A workplace in which every practical effort is made to prevent *negligent, reckless and intentional harm* to the mental health of workers

Prevention of *negligence* in this context calls for employers to exert every practical effort to avoid *reasonably foreseeable harm* to workers' mental health

Prevention of reasonably foreseeable harm to employees' mental health is in essence the basic requirement of the Standard

The harm envisioned is not of a trivial nature. It refers to significant damage that incapacitates a worker in the short or long run

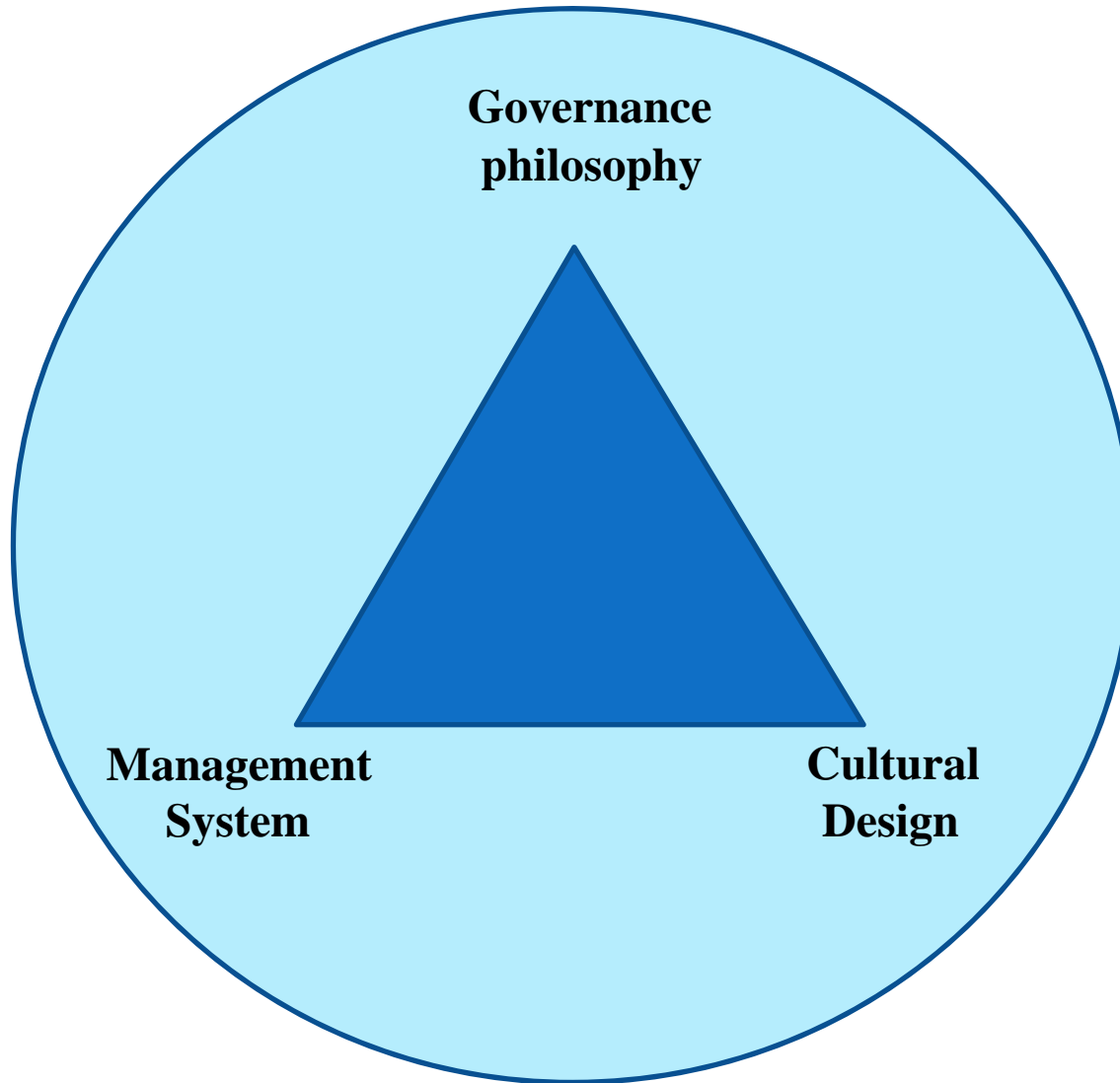
This type of harm is “mental injury”

From vision to reality

Realization of this vision requires:

1. Assertive governance philosophy
2. Psychologically safe system of work
3. Psychologically safe culture of work

Key Elements of the Standard



4 Basic understandings/assumptions of the Standard

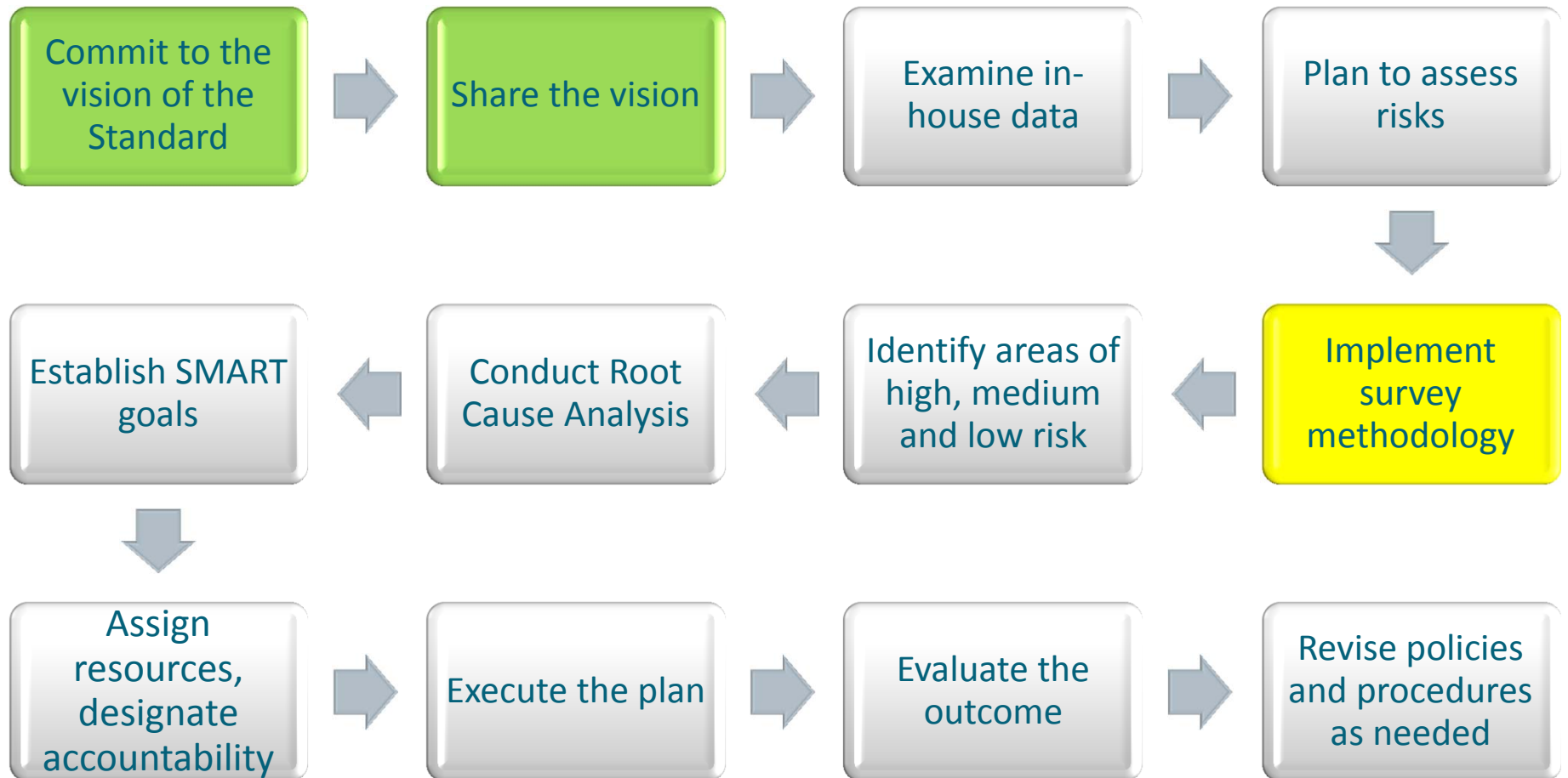
1. Mental health is strongly influenced by the way we behave toward one another at work. We have a shared duty to prevent harm to one another's mental health
2. The Standard identifies certain human needs that can and must be met at work in order to support mental health and to not put it at risk
3. The most basic of these needs (after physical safety) are for fairness (or justice) and dignity (or self worth). The climate in which these needs are most likely to be met is one of "*carefulness*"
4. When these very basic needs are *not* met, over time their frustration can turn into risks to health, productivity and corporate liability.

Assess and Address

The Standard -

- Describes in detail a management system directed at assessing and addressing situations in the workplace that could foreseeably give rise to mental injury
- Broadly outlines a psychologically safe culture but doesn't explain how to get there

Navigating the Standard's System: a 12 step simplified model



The Purpose of Assessment in the Standard

- to identify *work situations or environments* that have an elevated risk of causing or contributing to reasonably foreseeable mental injuries (at branch, department, unit or team levels) *e.g. “the 10 early indicators”*

Assessment of this type connects directly to the *vision* of the Standard where the basic duty of care (if you choose to accept it) is prevention of *negligent* (aka “*reasonably foreseeable*”) mental injury

Conduct with *reasonably foreseeable potential* for mental injury when it's allowed to continue (mostly negligent, sometimes reckless): *cumulative effect* applies.....

“10 early indicators”

1. Expecting too much of workers with no heed to the consequences
2. Withholding discretion over how work is done where no business rationale exists or is explained
3. Refusing to acknowledge contributions or to assign credit
4. Demonstrating bias in distribution of work or rewards
5. Failure to provide timely and relevant information
6. Refusing to allow sufficient participation in decisions
7. Withholding psychological support or material resources to get the job done (where such exist)
8. Ignoring the basic needs of workers for fair play/due process
9. Failing to identify and correct mentally abusive situations
10. Failing to accommodate the needs of the mentally ill/injured

Conduct with *high potential* for mental injury

1. abusing a person loudly, usually when others are present
2. repeated threats of dismissal or other punishment for no reason
3. driving a person too hard knowing it is likely to cause burnout
4. constant ridicule and put downs
5. leaving offensive messages on email or the telephone
6. sabotaging a person's work, for example, by deliberately withholding or supplying incorrect information, hiding documents or equipment, not passing on messages and getting a person into trouble in other ways
7. maliciously excluding and isolating a person from workplace activities
8. persistent and unjustified criticisms, often about petty, irrelevant or insignificant matters
9. humiliating a person through gestures, sarcasm, criticism and insults, often in front of customers, management or other workers
10. spreading gossip or false, malicious rumours about a person with an intent to cause the person harm.

Shifting culture

Culture = “A set of values, meanings, understandings and practices shared by a stable group or community”

Language is the main vehicle for expressing these values, meanings and understandings.

“Language is conduct”

- So developing and using a shared language is Job #1 in changing culture

The Basic Language of Carefulness

Carefulness: making every reasonable effort to be **aware** of how our conduct affects others, and to **understand** some basic things about their rights, needs and interests. Carefulness reflects an attitude of vigilance and a desire to be aware of the consequences of our acts and omissions.

Carelessness: not caring whether or how our conduct or that of people for whom we are responsible affects others, operating as though relationships at work don't matter. Carelessness reflects an attitude of indifference toward how we affect others and toward the consequences of our acts and omissions.

The Essence of Carefulness is Fairness

Fairness is the perception that our basic needs, interests and rights are being recognized and accommodated up to a reasonable standard (by others in our circle of influence)

The sense that promises are being kept

Progress Report: how close has the Standard brought us to The Careful Workplace?

- Implementation, alignment or adaptation.....
- The social agenda
- The economic agenda

Good news, bad news

The case for regulation

Centres around the facts that

- the voluntary assessment of psychosocial risks is inconsistent with the social and economic seriousness and impact of mental injuries in the workplace
- The Standard is simply not being adopted as intended in too many workplaces