

# Workplace systems for return to work

Introducing the updated handbook

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**Return to Work Matters**

THE RESOURCE FOR RETURN TO WORK PROFESSIONALS

# Today we'll cover

Why workplace systems matter

What's in the handbook

Injury reporting and the day-one advantage

Engaging supervisors

Engaging senior management

Psychosocial safety climate and culture

Where to from here

# Why this matters

*Systems are the quiet scaffolding of good return to work. When they work, cases run smoothly; when they don't, everyone ends up firefighting.*

# Six reasons good systems matter

1. Better outcomes — faster recovery, less disability
2. Cost savings — shorter claims, lower premiums
3. Job satisfaction — clearer work for those managing RTW
4. Streamlined processes — less bureaucracy, fewer disputes
5. Healthier culture — trust and cooperation build up
6. Legislative compliance — psychosocial hazard obligations



# The core philosophy: A partnership approach

	Organisation A: Adversarial Approach	Organisation B: Partnership Approach
Initial Reaction	Suspicion & frustration. Claims are viewed as a cost to be minimised.	Support & trust. Claims are viewed as a health issue to be managed.
Employee Perception	"The organisation is out to protect profits". Workers feel the need to defend themselves.	"The organisation protects people". Workers feel listened to and supported.
Supervisor Action	Passive. "It's the coordinator's job". Delays in providing duties.	Active. Daily catch-ups. Supervisor understands the condition and progress.
Result	High dispute rates, legal involvement, longer durations. 	Lower claim rates, rapid progress, high trust. 

*"The alternative to a shared approach is an approach based on mistrust and suspicion.*

*A shared approach only works in an environment of mutual trust"*



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# The legislative shift



Psychosocial hazard regulations now apply across Australia



Duties extend through claim lodgement and return to work



Common RTW hazards: poor communication, unsuitable duties, lack of support



Systems are the practical answer — they prevent the hazards from arising

# What's in the handbook

*Thirteen chapters covering the components of a mature return to work system.*

# Handbook at a glance

1. The importance of effective RTW systems
2. The partnership approach to injury management
3. Case managing injury, illness and RTW
4. Early psychosocial screening and matched care
5. RTW coordinator competencies
6. Assessing the current RTW system
7. Injury reporting systems
8. Working with healthcare providers
9. Integrating psychosocial safety
10. Getting the team onside
11. Communicating with healthcare providers
12. Policies and procedures


# Injury reporting and the day-one advantage

*The reporting system sets the tone for everything that follows. It's the cheapest, highest-leverage change most employers can make.*


# Why reporting is the lynchpin

Respond early, respond well

Employer response on day one shapes whether case is partnership or other



Prompt reporting enables early intervention, appropriate care, and accurate data



Benchmark: 95% of cases reported within 24 hours



Day-one actions set the entire trajectory

# Eight must-haves of a reporting system



**Digital (Web/App)**  
Fast dissemination, but risks feeling impersonal.

**Verbal (Supervisor)**  
High personal touch, but reliant on supervisor competence.

**Dedicated Hotline**  
The 'Best of Both Worlds'. Balances data collection with human support.

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Easy to use

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Personable

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Avoids delays

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Elicits the right information

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Shares information with the right people

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Fosters employee satisfaction

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Triggers early rehabilitation

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Captures cost centre allocation

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# Choosing a reporting approach

## Six common options:

- Verbal to supervisor
- Internet/intranet
- Paper forms
- Fax (yes, still)
- Chain of command
- Dedicated hotline

## What matters:

- Fits your workforce's realities
- Balances efficiency with the human touch
- Consistently applied
- Everyone knows how to use it



# Engaging senior and line management

# Senior managers - The financial case

## Direct costs

- Workers' compensation premiums
- Medical expenses
- Wage replacement
- Legal and administrative costs

## Indirect costs

- Lost productivity
- Overtime and temporary staff
- Training replacements
- Turnover and morale
- Corporate image

Indirect costs are typically **4 to 10 times** higher than direct costs

# The internal team: Leadership roles

## Supervisors: The day-to-day owners



- Influence is second only to the worker.
- **Responsibilities:** Early response, identifying duties, daily contact.
- **Action:** Empowered to make accommodations without delay.

## Senior management: The tone setters



- **Responsibilities:** Culture, resourcing, leading by example.
- **Action:** Discuss disability management at executive meetings.

**Takeaway:** A shared approach only works in an environment of mutual trust.

# The worker: Active participation of the worker



**The reciprocal deal:**  
Participation is easier  
when the worker feels  
supported rather than  
judged

# Why supervisors matter



First point of contact when injury occurs



Main source of day-to-day support during RTW



Shape workplace attitudes through what they model



Often the determining factor in complex cases

# Four pillars of supervisor engagement

Support — recognised role, allocated time, access to specialists

Training — RTW principles, communication, job analysis, mental health

Guidance for complex cases — escalation, case management backup

Empowerment — involve in policy, recognise performance, invite feedback

# Presenting the case to senior management

1

Use concrete numbers — your organisation's own data where possible

2

Lead with the multiplier — indirect costs are 4 to 10 times direct

3

Show long-term cumulative savings, not just year one

4

Benchmark against industry peers

5

Use case studies from comparable organisations

6

Frame as risk mitigation, not just cost reduction

# Psychosocial safety climate and culture

*Systems produce behaviours; behaviours shape culture; culture determines whether your systems actually work.*

# Implementing psychosocial support: Challenges & solutions

## Integration strategies

### Staff training & support

Overcome knowledge gaps. Partner with experts. Create decision-support tools.



### Appoint champions

Address resistance. Use champions to advocate and share success stories.



### Involve IT specialists

System integration. Ensure privacy compliance and data security.



### Policy & KPIs

Sustainability. Embed in policy and track metrics to prevent regression.



Integration  
Hub

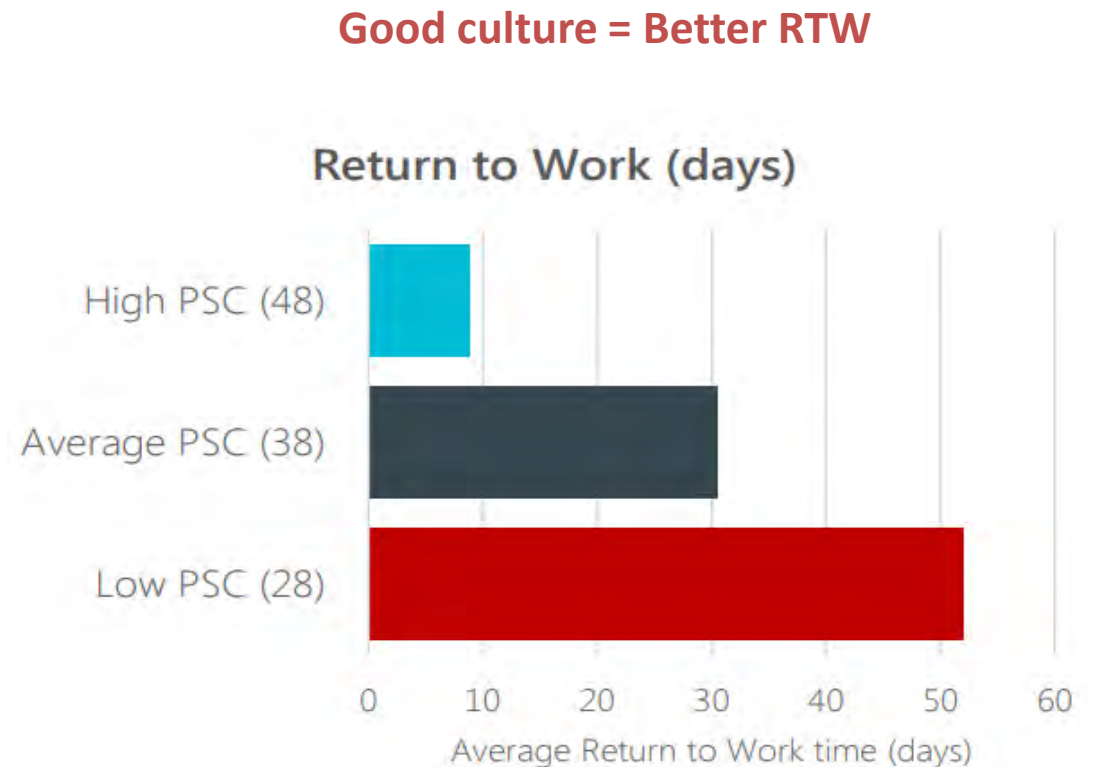
# Psychosocial safety climate (PSC)

A measure of how seriously the organisation takes worker psychological health

Strong PSC correlates with:

- Higher return to work rates
- Lower turnover
- Higher productivity and engagement
- Lower sickness absence
- Better mental health and job satisfaction

Low-PSC workplaces lose significantly more days per claim



# Results of investing in employee health and well-being

Measure	Awarding Body	Period Covered	Performance Data	Comparison
CHAA (Corporate Health Achievement Award)	American College of Occ and Env Medicine (ACOEM)	1999–2012	<b>78.72%</b> cumulative return	S&P 500: <b>-0.77%</b>
HERO Corporate Health Scorecard	Health Enhancement Resource Organisation (HERO)	6 years (not specified)	<b>235%</b> appreciation	S&P 500: <b>159%</b>
C. Everett Koop National Health Award	The Health Project	2000–2014	<b>2.35 to 1</b> stock outperformance ratio	S&P 500 Index
Gallup Great Workplace Award	Gallup Organisation	Not specified	<b>115%</b> growth in earnings per share (EPS)	Competitors: <b>27%</b> growth in EPS
Health Advantage Appreciation Fund (HAAF)	Proprietary stock fund based on company culture of health	2009–2018	<b>264%</b> return on equity	S&P 500: <b>243%</b> return on equity (2% per year outperformance)

Fabius R, Phares S. Companies That Promote a Culture of Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Outperform in the Marketplace. J Occup Environ Med. 2021 Jun 1;63(6):456-461

# Three return to work culture models

Give, give, give — excessive accommodation breeds complacency and resentment

Give and take — balanced support with clear expectations of workers

Take, take, take — excessive demand breeds burnout, turnover and mistrust

Best practice sits firmly in the middle — partnership, not paternalism

# Warning signs — is your culture healthy?

- Employees avoid reporting, or report late
- Graduated return to work progresses slowly
- Claim rates higher than expected
- Significant proportion on long-term restricted duties
- More than 5% of claims under investigation
- Consistent resistance from treating doctors
- Low scores on psychosocial safety climate measures

# Where to from here

- Assess your current reporting system against the eight must-haves
- Audit supervisor support, training and guidance — ask supervisors what they need
- Build the financial case for your organisation using your own claim data
- Measure psychosocial safety climate if you haven't already
- Pick one thing — don't try to fix everything at once



## **Worker surveys**

The 'user experience'.  
Map the system at 1  
week, 1 month and 3  
months.



## **Informal audits**

Analyse trends. Identify  
financial costs and  
psychosocial 'hotspots'  
by department.



## **Existing channels**

Leverage Toolbox talks  
and staff surveys for  
informal feedback.

# Assessing system effectiveness



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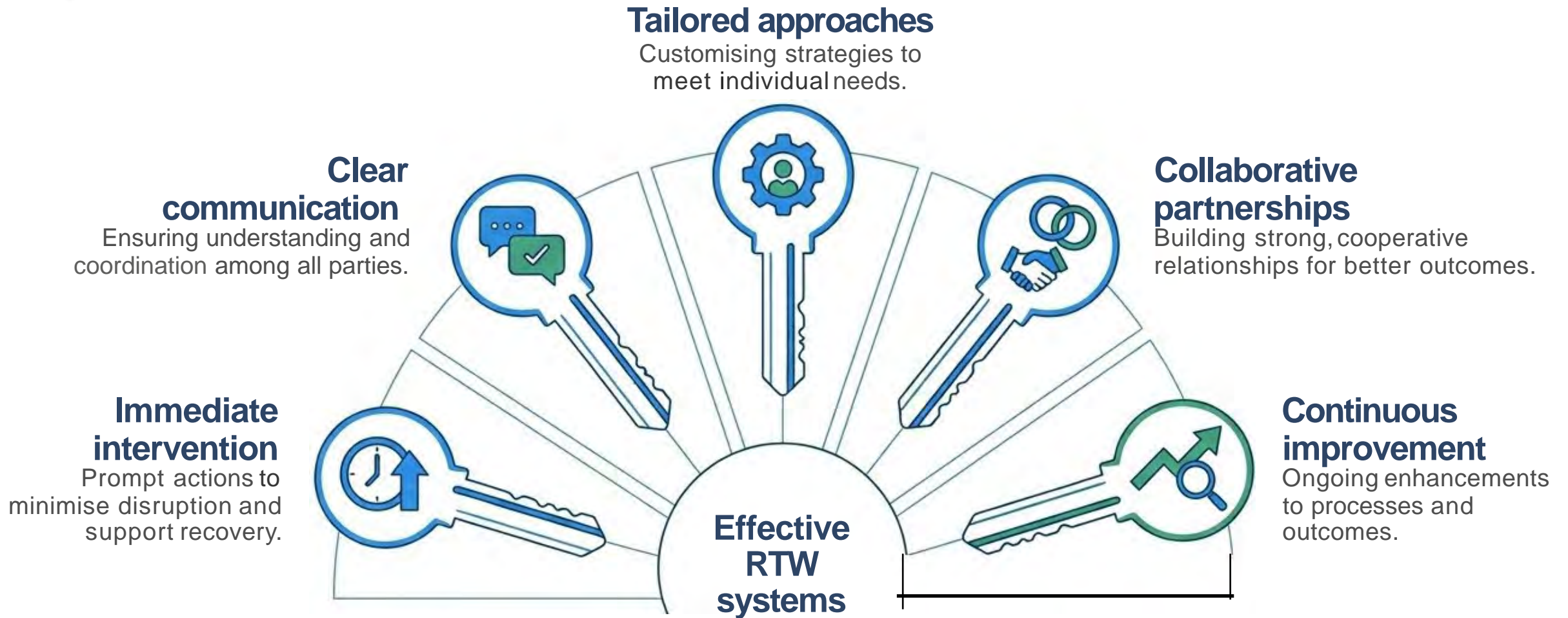


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and staff surveys for  
informal feedback.



# Summary: The systematic blueprint



# Conclusion: The human element of systems

A robust system is not just a set of policies; it is a network of relationships. Successful RTW management is an ongoing process of learning, adapting, and improving.

"A shared approach only works in an environment of mutual trust".



# Access the handbook

Part of RTWMatters.org membership

We will forward a link available for one month

**Questions** — over to you