

# Case Study: Workplace Stress

## **Peoplebank implements specific practices to deal with workplace stress**

Workplace stress is becoming recognised as a serious workplace risk for employees and organisations. So when it comes to managing workplace stress in a complex partnership such as that of a recruiter providing contracted staff at a client site, where the recruiter is not directly responsible for the contractors day-to-day activity, and doesn't see that individual every day, it presents a unique challenge.

As Australia's largest IT recruitment company, Peoplebank has thousands of IT contractors working on client projects every day and as such, recognises that contractor workplace stress is part of their business risk profile.

## **Recruiters, clients and contractors**

The contractor-recruiter-host or client employment model is very different to the traditional employer-employee model. The contractor may only work for the recruiter for short periods, they may only work at a client site for a short period, and the contractor may work for multiple recruiters. While the contracting scenario brings complexity when it comes to workplace stress, given that worker wellbeing is a shared responsibility between all three of these partners, the recruiter, as the employer, may need to adjust its practices, processes, and measures to deal with and manage workplace stress for this arrangement.

This issue is something that Peoplebank has considered over a period of time, according to the company's National Talent Manager, Andrew Rodger.

"We appreciate that we have less control of the contractor when they are working at a client site," said Mr Rodger.

"We never assume that the client will have a safe site, and we work with our client to ensure there are robust processes, systems and practices in place to keep our employees safe. This also goes for workplace stress, as we have noted growth in workplace stress in more recent years among our contractor base.

"During FY14, Peoplebank experienced a decline in workplace incidents in all except three categories. Of the three categories that had increased incidents, workplace stress was, as a percentage, the highest area where we saw an increase of claims," stated Mr Rodger.

"Albeit not large in terms of numbers, where all other categories of risk are decreasing, we were keen to focus on ways to mitigate [workplace stress] now and for future years. The other two categories that saw minor increases were ergonomics and slip/trip/fall."

## **Actions for recruiters**

When it comes to managing workplace stress risks, Peoplebank have adopted a number of different tactics.

'First is the delivery of a strong contractor induction for all the workers who will be working with on client sites, stated Mr Roger.

"To manage a risk as best you can, you need to have a system and processes and practices in place to deal with what you can control - we can control when we on-board someone as a contractor and we can control the content that is delivered.

Another tactic is to engage in a meaningful, open and ongoing dialogue with the host to ensure that all appropriate steps are taken to ensure worker safety. This communication is often the most vital step as it can prevent safety issues before they arise.

Peoplebank have also benefited from regular site visits, creating an avenue for contractors to raise issues in a timely manner to prevent them from becoming serious issues, and allows Peoplebank to 'check in on the contractor' – this is an important step in identifying possible workplace stress issues..

"What we try and do is first to educate the individuals about their obligations, check our client sites, establish a good working relationship with the client, and provide very clear and transparent information about how the contractor can seek assistance should they need it."

Specifically for workplace stress, Peoplebank provides information and education about workplace stress via our induction partner, WorkPro, to help the contractor identify stress, and openly offers contractors the opportunity to speak to an independent counsellor should workplace stress become an issue for them.

'Implementing a disciplined approach, and by getting the processes right, we believe we have been able to minimise the risks posed to our staff from workplace stress as far as reasonably practicable, but we will continue to monitor the situation and adapt accordingly'.

**DT:** Contractors face a range of challenges when working on site, with a shared responsibility between contractor, site and recruiter to ensure workers remain safe.