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Australia's National Research Centre on AOD Workforce Development

Workforce Development 'TIPS'

Theory **I**nto **P**ractice **S**trategies

A Resource Kit for the
Alcohol and Other Drugs Field

14 WORKPLACE SUPPORT

Workforce Development 'TIPS'

Theory **I**nto **P**ractice **S**trategies

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WORKPLACE SUPPORT

ABOUT THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TIPS RESOURCE KIT

This Resource Kit aims to provide straightforward and practical guidance, tools and resources to support workforce development activities and initiatives in the Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) field.

The Resource Kit comprises 14 chapters: an introduction to workforce development and 13 workforce development topics relevant to the AOD field. Each chapter contains evidence-based strategies to address a particular workforce development issue, as well as resources and tools that can be used to implement the strategies. Each chapter can be treated as a stand alone section, however, as workforce development topics are inherently interrelated, links between chapters are identified throughout the Kit.

Workplace Support is the 14th chapter in the Resource Kit.

CHAPTER

Acknowledgements

WORKPLACE SUPPORT

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Overview

Workplace support refers to actions and work practices that are designed to facilitate workers' effectiveness and wellbeing.

Support has two key functions:

1. Ensure workers' wellbeing (social / emotional support)
2. Ensure workers are capable of effective performance (instrumental support).

Support can be provided by:

- The organisation
- Managers / supervisors
- Coworkers.

Social / emotional support refers to support that is focused on meeting workers' needs to feel valued, cared for, respected and liked.

Instrumental support refers to support that provides workers with practical assistance in terms of their roles, responsibilities and tasks.

Support strategies

Strategies to provide support include:

	Social / emotional support	Instrumental support
Organisation	• Ensuring fairness of treatment • Providing valued rewards • Ensuring supportive supervision	• Ensuring good job conditions (physical safety, job security, promotion paths, autonomy) • Addressing work overload • Addressing role ambiguity or conflict • Providing access to high quality resources and equipment
Managers / supervisors	• Channeling / facilitating organisational support • Providing positive social interaction (praise, encouragement, caring, respect) • Recognising and rewarding good work • Involving workers in decision-making	
Coworkers	• Providing positive social interaction (praise, encouragement, care, respect)	• Providing help and advice • Filling in when others are absent • Assisting with heavy workloads • Providing constructive feedback • Appreciation and recognition • Sharing duties and responsibilities

Social / emotional support needs to be managed carefully, particularly when demands and pressures are high and a worker is having difficulties. Effective support addresses the specific needs and circumstances of an individual worker or team. Therefore, like most workforce development initiatives, the most effective strategies to provide support are those that are developed in consultation and collaboration with the workers themselves.

Social / emotional support may actually increase stress when:

- Communication highlights and reinforces the problems and difficulties being experienced (e.g., coworkers talking about how stressful the work is without moving towards any practical resolution)
- Supervisors engage in contradictory behaviours by creating a stressful situation (e.g., setting high workloads, setting tight deadlines) and then attempting to provide emotional support.

Instrumental support is likely to be most beneficial to workers' performance and wellbeing when it is:

- Offered to (not imposed on) workers
- Arranged by negotiation with managers / supervisors
- Clear that workers actually require help and assistance.

The impact of organisational support extends beyond the immediate effect of ensuring that workers have the required resources, and that they are not experiencing high levels of stress or dissatisfaction.

The perception that an organisation values their contributions and wellbeing can have a powerful effect on workers' attachment and commitment to the organisation.

Introduction

A crucial, but often overlooked, element of workforce development that is highly relevant to the AOD field is workplace support. Work in the AOD field is often demanding, and issues related to stress, burnout and turnover are common. Support from supervisors, coworkers and the organisation as a whole has consistently been identified as an important factor that contributes to AOD workers' wellbeing and effectiveness. In this chapter we consider a range of strategies that can be used to develop and sustain a supportive workplace for AOD workers.

What is workplace support?

Workplace support refers to actions and work practices that are designed to facilitate workers' effectiveness and wellbeing.[1-3]

Support has two key functions. It can:[1]
- Ensure workers' wellbeing (social / emotional support)
- Enhance workers' capacity to perform effectively (instrumental support).

Support can be provided by:
- The organisation
- Managers / supervisors
- Coworkers.

IN PRACTICE

The challenges of the AOD working environment

Support is vital when dealing with challenging or distressing issues related to clients and their treatment. In particular, a critical incident involving an aggressive or violent client may shake even the most experienced worker, impacting on their work and wellbeing for some time. Just as in the counselling process, the opportunity to talk through one's feelings and reframe the issues whilst a fellow staff member actively listens can help to defuse tension and restore the worker's equilibrium.

However, it is also important to recognise that staff changes can also be a source of stress, and is a time when extra support may be valued and appreciated.

For example:
- Workers may be faced with a sense of loss when a valued staff member leaves or resigns
- A change in role or responsibilities (e.g., promotion or acting in a more senior position) may result in isolation from previous networks of support from coworkers
- A person who returns from maternity or parental leave has to cope with the transition back to work which may include new roles and responsibilities (or sharing these with the worker in "their" job).

Social / emotional support

Social / emotional support is focused on meeting workers' needs to feel valued, cared for, respected and liked.[1, 4]

Instrumental support

Support can also be considered in terms of the roles, responsibilities and tasks that workers perform. Instrumental support involves providing practical and concrete assistance with key tasks and responsibilities.[1, 4]

Table 1 below provides an overview of the types of social / emotional and instrumental support that can be offered by coworkers, supervisors and the organisation. A more detailed description of each of these elements is provided in the following section.

Table 1: Overview of types of support provided by organisations, supervisors and coworkers

	Social / emotional support	Instrumental support
Organisation	• Ensuring fairness of treatment[5] • Providing valued rewards[5] • Ensuring supportive supervision[5]	• Ensuring good job conditions (physical safety, job security, promotion paths, autonomy)[5]
Managers / supervisors	• Channeling / facilitating organisational support • Providing positive social interaction (praise, encouragement, caring, respect)[7, 8] • Recognising and reward good work[9] • Involving workers in decision-making[9]	• Addressing work overload[5] • Addressing role ambiguity or conflict[5] • Providing access to high quality resources and equipment[6]
Coworkers	• Providing positive social interaction (praise, encouragement, care, respect)[7, 8]	• Providing help and advice[10] • Filling in when others are absent[10] • Assisting with heavy workloads[10] • Providing constructive feedback[11] • Appreciation and recognition[11] • Sharing duties and responsibilities[11]

What types of support are most effective?

There is no set formula for determining the most effective combination of social / instrumental support from various sources (organisation, supervisor, coworker). The best strategy is to ensure that the support provided matches the particular needs and problems of the individual worker or team.

Strategies to provide support

Organisational support

Social / emotional support from the organisation addresses workers' perception that the organisation values their contribution and is concerned about their wellbeing at work.[2] Key types of instrumental support from organisations include managing common role stressors and ensuring access to adequate resources.

The impact of support on stress

The benefits of providing support are most often considered in relation to preventing or alleviating stress and burnout.

Providing support helps to address stress in three ways:[4, 12]

1. Enhancing coping capacity
Support has a direct impact on reducing negative perceptions of work demands (i.e., with support, work demands are perceived to be more manageable).

2. Reducing severity of stress
Support can reduce symptoms of stress (i.e., under demanding conditions less stress will be experienced).

3. Buffering the impact of work demands on stress
Support reduces the effect of stressful circumstances on workers' wellbeing (i.e., support acts as a buffer between work demands and psychological and physical health and wellbeing).

Organisations can use six strategies to support workers:[5]

Social / emotional support	1. Ensure fairness of treatment
	2. Provide valued rewards
	3. Provide supportive supervision / management.
Instrumental support	4. Ensure adequate job conditions
	5. Manage role stressors
	6. Ensure sufficient resources are available.

These six strategies are addressed more fully below.

For some organisations in the AOD sector it may not be possible to implement all of these strategies. In such situations, focus on the strategies that are achievable. For example, resources may be limited or job tenure uncertain. However, valued support can be offered in other ways (e.g., supervision practices).

1. Ensure fairness of treatment

Fairness of treatment refers to the fairness of procedures and decisions used to distribute resources amongst workers.[5] Fair procedures indicate the organisation is concerned about workers' welfare and values justice.[5] Fair treatment involves both formal rules and procedures, and the quality of interpersonal interaction and treatment between workers and the organisation.[5]

2. Provide valued rewards

Organisational rewards indicate that workers' contributions are valued and appreciated. Organisational rewards include:

- Recognition [5, 6]
- Promotion [5]
- Pay. [5, 13]

A range of financial and non-financial rewards can be used to support workers. In AOD organisations where financial resources are often limited, special consideration should be given to fully utilising non-financial rewards.

PRACTICAL TIP

What can managers and supervisors do to reward workers?

Developing a valued and effective reward system can be a challenge. Financial rewards are often not an option in the government and non-government sectors. Alternatives to financial rewards include:

- Public recognition of effort and contribution
- Opportunities to work on preferred activities (and / or a break from less desirable work)
- Time off or flexi-time
- Support for professional development activities (e.g., financial contribution, time off)
- Opportunities to act in higher duties
- Attendance at workshops / conferences.

Don't forget – you can also ask the "experts" – the workers themselves. Developing reward systems that are based on workers' needs and preferences is likely to be most effective. Remember – what one person may find rewarding and satisfying may not appeal to another.

3. Provide supportive management / supervision

Managers and supervisors are representatives of the organisation. Therefore, the extent to which a supervisor is perceived to value workers' contributions and wellbeing indicates the extent to which an organisation is supportive of workers.[5] Supportive supervisory practices are discussed in more detail below.

4. Ensure adequate job conditions

The quality of job conditions is a powerful indicator of organisational support for workers. Four job conditions that indicate organisational support are:

- Physical safety
- Job security [5]
- Autonomy [5, 13]
- Opportunities for advancement.[6]

Physical safety

An important form of organisational support in the AOD field is to ensure a safe and secure workplace. Worker safety is of paramount importance in any workplace and is particularly relevant for work with AOD clients. Given the high levels of anxiety associated with AOD use and related problems, and the potential for aggression when clients are intoxicated, a number of safety protocols must be observed. These may include:

- A barrier between clients and reception personnel (carefully designed so as not to be fortress-like, but nevertheless effective)
- The ability to view counselling rooms from an external position (e.g., observation holes in doors)
- Alarm buttons within reach of counsellors
- A requirement that other staff always be present in the building when counselling is occurring
- Training for staff in techniques to defuse aggression.

Job security

Job security is a particularly important indication of support in the current climate of rapid change and organisational downsizing.[5] However, many organisations in the AOD sector rely on short-term funding for particular positions or the whole organisation. This situation is clearly beyond the control of organisations and their managers. In these circumstances, a lack of job security is not likely to be perceived to indicate a lack of support from the organisation and its management.[5] However, job insecurity may still contribute to other undesirable outcomes such as increased risk of mental and physical health problems[14] and reduced job satisfaction.[15]

Autonomy

Providing workers with autonomy indicates a high degree of trust in workers' skills and capacity.[5]

Strategies to increase autonomy include:[16]

- Opportunities to participate in decision-making within the organisation (e.g., formulation / revision of policies and procedures)
- Increased control over scheduling of work
- Greater discretion concerning how tasks or activities are performed.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

The challenges of managing autonomy in the AOD field

Providing workers with increased autonomy regarding the way in which they organise and conduct their work has been shown to result in a number of benefits such as motivation, job satisfaction, and enhanced teamwork.[17-19]

However, providing workers with autonomy in the AOD sector (or wider health and human services fields) can be a challenge. Specific work practice and procedures may be required of workers due to legislation, funding requirements or evidence-based clinical guidelines and other protocols. Failure to adhere to particular work practices may represent a significant risk to clients' health and wellbeing or treatment efficacy.

It is important that workers have realistic expectations regarding the degree of autonomy available to them within their work practice. For example, limitations and boundaries on autonomy should be discussed in a realistic job preview provided to new recruits (see the Recruitment and Selection chapter).

Getting the balance right between autonomy and adherence to protocols and organisational procedures is an important challenge for management and workers.

Opportunities for advancement

Opportunities for promotion and advancement also indicate that an organisation values workers' contributions and interests. The importance of career paths and opportunities is a concern shared by employees across a range of sectors. Hewitt and Associates'[20] 2003 survey of nearly 28,000 employees in Australia highlighted the importance of opportunities for personal / professional development and career opportunities in relation to employees' commitment to an organisation.

However, organisations in the AOD sector are often required to rely on short-term funding related to specific projects (e.g., a research project) or outcomes (e.g., a specific client service). For people employed in the AOD sector, a working environment characterised by short-term contracts can present significant challenges to career planning and advancement.

Organisations in this situation can support workers' career development by providing continuous learning opportunities that enable workers to build a skill base that can be applied to a variety of work contexts.[21] Strategies for organisations to improve their workers' skill base and professional development include providing:[21]

- Challenging roles or projects
- Opportunities to work in diverse work roles
- Mentoring
- Training that provides general (i.e., transferable) skills, as well as specific skills
- Networking opportunities.

5. Manage role stressors

Three key role stressors impact on perceptions of organisational support:[5, 13]

1. Work overload (too many demands)
2. Role ambiguity (lack of clarity regarding key tasks, responsibilities and expectations)
3. Role conflict (contradictory or competing expectations and responsibilities).

Role stressors are likely to have the strongest impact on perceptions of support when they are perceived to be under the control of the organisation (i.e., internal rather than external forces are responsible for role stress).[5]

6. Ensure sufficient resources are available

Providing access to high quality resources is an important dimension of organisational support.[13] Resources are materials, procedures and opportunities that workers require to perform their job effectively and for ongoing professional development. For example, organisations can offer access to:[22]

- Quality education and professional development
- Resource materials (e.g., brief intervention kits and materials)
- Informational databases and professional journals
- Clinical practice guidelines
- Clinical supervision
- Mentoring.

It is also recommended that organisations implement systems where staff are regularly asked about their resource needs (e.g., during regular performance appraisals), and strategies are identified to meet resource requirements.

The psychological effects of perceived organisational support

The impact of organisational support extends beyond the immediate effect of ensuring that workers have the required resources, and that they are not experiencing high levels of stress or dissatisfaction. The perception that an organisation values their contributions and wellbeing can have a powerful effect on workers' attachment and commitment to the organisation.[2, 5]

Organisational support fulfils three important psychological needs:[2, 5]

1. A fair and equitable exchange between workers and the organisation

2. Social and emotional validation

3. Expectancy that performance will be recognised and rewarded.

1. Fair and equitable exchange

Most people expect a fair and equitable exchange between themselves and an organisation. Workers provide time, effort and skill to the organisation. In return, the organisation provides fair remuneration and other valued benefits (e.g., autonomy, social support).[5, 23, 24]

2. Social and emotional validation

The experience of care, respect and approval from organisations can fulfil important socio-emotional needs of workers.

3. Performance-reward expectancies

The belief that good performance will be recognised and rewarded is an important foundation for motivation and satisfaction at work.

Through these three mechanisms, high levels of perceived organisational support are likely to enhance workers' identification with, and commitment to, the organisation and its goals.[5] Other benefits of high perceived organisational support include increased job involvement, reduced stress and lower turnover intentions.[5]

As the latter are known to be important issues within AOD organisations, providing organisational support can be especially useful in assisting the retention of valued staff.

Managerial / supervisor support

Support from managers and supervisors is particularly important. This is due to their status in the organisation and capacity to influence working conditions.[25, 26] Many of the strategies discussed in regard to organisational support can also be used by supervisors.

Social / emotional support

Supervisors can:

*   Ensure fairness of treatment
*   Provide valued rewards
*   Ensure adequate job conditions (e.g., job security, promotion paths, autonomy)
*   Provide social and emotional support (e.g., socialising, helping to alleviate stressful situations, addressing negative feelings, sharing feelings / emotions)[7-9]
*   Ensure private and public recognition of good work[9]
*   Facilitate opportunities for workers to participate in decision-making (e.g., asking for ideas or opinions, acting on workers' ideas).[9]

Instrumental support

Supervisors can:

- Manage role stressors (workload, role ambiguity, role conflict)
- Ensure sufficient resources are available
- Provide effective performance monitoring (e.g., maintaining regular contact, providing constructive positive feedback, timely monitoring, reacting to problems with understanding and help).[9]

Negative behaviours that detract from supervisory support include:

- Poor problem-solving (e.g., avoiding solving problems, creating problems)[9]
- Ineffective performance monitoring (e.g., overly frequent monitoring, lack of understanding of worker's capacities, providing nonconstructive negative feedback, spending too long checking on progress (e.g., long team meetings), lack of interest in workers' ideas or work)[9]
- Inappropriate or unclear roles and objectives (e.g., creating time pressure, inappropriate / unfair assignment of tasks, frequently changing assignments or objectives, providing instructions that conflict with other management directions).[9]

Coworker support

Coworkers are an important source of social / emotional and instrumental support. The opportunity to interact with coworkers as part of daily work, during breaks and after work hours forms the foundation of social / emotional support.[27, 28]

PRACTICAL TIP

Organisational strategies for increasing coworker support

There is a variety of strategies that organisations can use to enhance support amongst workers, including:

- Offering professional development and education that enhances communication between workers[22]
- Supervisor encouragement of informal mentoring[22]
- Establishing informal forums where workers can talk about work practice (e.g., lunchtime meetings)[22]
- Establishing informal internet networks between workers from different AOD organisations and human service agencies[22]
- Arranging formal scheduled support sessions with coworkers and / or managers and supervisors. Scheduled sessions are one strategy to ensure that workers have the opportunity to access support, guidance and direction – especially from supervisors[29]
- Establishing goal setting programs within work groups or teams. Shared goals encourage helping behaviours, support and encouragement amongst group members.[30]

Coworkers can provide instrumental support by:

- Providing help and advice[10]
- Filling in when others are absent[10]
- Proving assistance to alleviate workload[10]
- Providing constructive feedback[11]
- Providing appreciation and recognition[11]
- Sharing duties and responsibilities.[11]

Troubleshooting – what types of social support to offer and when?

There are many types of support that can be offered from different sources (organisation, supervisors, and coworkers). Careful thought is required to ensure that the type of support offered will have a significant and positive impact on workers' effectiveness and wellbeing.

Social / emotional support: Avoiding stress-enhancing effects

Under some circumstances offering social / emotional support may have a negative impact. When demands and pressures are high and a worker is having difficulties, social / emotional support needs to be managed carefully.

Social / emotional support may increase stress when:

- Communication between coworkers highlights or reinforces the experience of problems and difficulties (e.g., talking about how stressful the work is without moving towards a practical resolution)[25, 26, 31]
- Supervisors engage in contradictory behaviours by creating a stressful situation (e.g., setting high workloads, setting tight deadlines) and then offering emotional support.[32]

Instrumental support: The importance of choice

Under most circumstances, offering practical advice and assistance with key tasks and responsibilities will benefit workers' performance and wellbeing (i.e., reduce stress). However, the positive impact of instrumental support may be influenced by the way in which it is offered.

Instrumental support that is imposed may be a source of stress and frustration. Imposing, rather than offering support may be interpreted as a sign of inferior or incompetent performance.[33, 34] This threat to self-esteem may result in a negative reaction to receiving instrumental support (e.g., increased stress).[34]

Instrumental support is likely to be most beneficial to workers' performance and wellbeing when it is:[32]

- Offered to (not imposed on) workers
- Arranged by negotiation between supervisors / managers and the worker
- Clear that workers actually require help and assistance.

Using workplace support to address workforce development challenges

Worker wellbeing (stress, burnout and job satisfaction)

Ensuring workers receive adequate support is a key strategy to prevent stress and burnout, and also to alleviate the intensity of stress and assist workers to cope with work demands.[4, 12]

Similarly, the link between job satisfaction and support from supervisors and the organisation is well established.[35-37] Furthermore, there is some evidence to suggest that support from immediate supervisors is more strongly related to job satisfaction compared to support from less immediate supervisors, such as unit supervisors.[36]

Worker performance

The benefits of instrumental support for performance are self evident. Social / emotional support can also benefit performance via the prevention or reduction of stress.[4, 12] Support offered by supervisors and the organisation can have a significant effect on workers' motivation to achieve high quality performance. Organisational and supervisory support fulfils important psychological needs (e.g., fairness, social / emotional validation, performance-reward expectancies).[2, 5] It also demonstrates a commitment to workers' wellbeing, which is likely to encourage workers to reciprocate with positive contributions to the organisation.[5]

Retention

The perception that an organisation values workers' contributions and wellbeing can have a powerful effect on workers' attachment and commitment to the organisation.[2, 5] Workers who perceive an organisation to be supportive of their wellbeing and effectiveness are more likely to reciprocate with loyalty to the organisation (i.e., desire to stay with the organisation).[5]

Organisational change

Support from supervisors, managers and other leaders in the organisation is crucial for effective organisational change.[38, 39] Supportive supervisors, managers and coworkers can enhance workers' readiness and motivation for change, and their capacity to adapt to new work practices.[39-44]

Summary

A supportive workplace is highly valued by workers, and makes a significant contribution to their wellbeing and effectiveness. Good workplace support is particularly important in the AOD sector where demands and pressures are often high. This chapter has identified a range of strategies that can be used to provide support. Effective support addresses the particular needs and circumstances of an individual worker or team. Therefore, like most workforce development initiatives, the most effective strategies to provide support are those that are developed in consultation and collaboration with the workers themselves.

Resources to promote effective workplace support

This chapter includes the following resources and tools for offering effective workplace support:

- Checklist for offering effective workplace support
- Case study of a workplace support program targeting social support and organisational climate
- Survey instruments to assess key workplace support processes
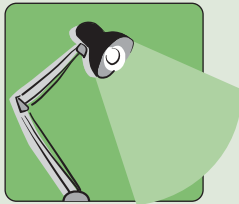- Recommended readings.

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Checklist

for offering effective workplace support

Case Study

A workplace support program to target social support and organisational climate

Survey Instruments

to assess key workplace support processes

Recommended Readings

Checklist For Offering Effective Workplace Support

These points provide a guide to the basics involved in offering effective support. Not all of these points will be relevant for all situations.

Deciding what types of support to offer

1. Have workers been consulted in regard to the types of support they require? ☐

Organisational support

2. Are organisational policies and procedures based on principles of justice and fairness? ☐

3. Are rewards provided for good performance? ☐
   For example:
   • Public recognition of effort and contribution
   • Opportunities to work on preferred activities (and / or a break from less desirable work)
   • Time off or flexi-time
   • Support for professional development activities (e.g., financial contribution, time off)
   • Opportunities to act in higher duties
   • Attendance at workshops / conferences.

4. Are interactions with supervisors and managers positive and supportive? ☐

5. Are the job conditions adequate? ☐
   • Has the physical safety of all employees been ensured?
   • Have workers been offered an appropriate level of job security?
   • Do workers have appropriate levels of autonomy?
   • Do all workers have appropriate opportunities for job advancement?

6. Are strategies in place to support workers' career and professional development? ☐
   For example:
   • Opportunities to work on challenging roles or projects
   • Opportunities to work in diverse work roles
   • Provision of mentoring
   • Training that provides general (i.e., transferable) skills, as well as specific skills
   • Networking opportunities.

7. Are role stressors managed effectively?
   - Do workers have realistic and reasonable workloads?
   - Are workers' roles and responsibilities clear and unambiguous?
   - Are strategies in place to address conflicting or contradictory roles and expectations?

8. Are sufficient resources available?
   For example:
   - Quality education and professional development
   - Resource materials (e.g., brief intervention kits and materials)
   - Informational databases and professional journals
   - Clinical practice guidelines.

Manager / supervisor support

9. Do managers / supervisors provide an appropriate level of support to workers?
   - Are workers treated fairly?
   - Are they provided with adequate rewards?
   - Do they seek to ensure adequate job conditions (security, promotion, autonomy)?
   - Do they provide social and emotional support?
   - Do they provide private and public recognition of good work?
   - Are workers offered sufficient opportunity to participate in decision-making?

10. Do supervisors exhibit effective management practices?
    For example:
    - Problem-solving strategies?
    - Performance monitoring strategies?
    - Providing appropriate and clear roles and objectives?

Coworker support

11. Are workers provided with opportunities to interact at work?
    - As part of their work practice?
    - In a non-work social context?

CHECKLIST

A Workplace Support Program to Target Social Support and Organisational Climate

Overview

This case study examines strategies for improving workplace support for human service workers. A Caregiver Support Program (CSP) targeting frontline workers and managers was implemented in group homes for developmentally disabled or mentally ill clients in Michigan, United States. The program aimed to improve workplace support for workers, including workers at risk of turnover.

The CSP aimed to improve workers' coping abilities and wellbeing by addressing:

- Individual workers' coping resources
- Work teams' coping resources
- Workers' capacity to apply coping resources to job demands.

Strategy

Administrators from 55 non-profit agencies volunteered to recruit group homes from their respective agencies to participate in the study. In order to determine the benefit of the CSP, half of the group homes in each agency were randomly selected to participate in CSP and the other half did not participate (i.e., served as a control group). For homes selected for the program, the group home manager and one member of staff were invited to attend training.

The CSP involved six 4-hour training sessions over nine weeks (the first three sessions were held weekly and the latter three were held fortnightly). Training was conducted in groups (each group comprising one or two workers from 10 group homes) and facilitated by two trainers.

Participating workers were expected to transfer training to their coworkers by:

- Discussing training with coworkers
- Planning and conducting in-house training based on the CSP
- Using the group problem-solving strategy in staff meetings
- Modelling behaviours and skills learnt in the CSP.

The CSP targeted two sources of workplace support:

1. **Social support** – workers' capacity to use existing social relationships as a source of support
2. **Organisational climate** – creating an environment that encourages workers' involvement in, and influence over, workplace decisions.

1. Social support

To improve workers' capacity to use their existing social relationships as a source of support, CSP participants:

- Examined how social relationships could facilitate problem-solving and decrease work-related stress
- Recorded existing social support networks

- Evaluated strengths and weaknesses of existing networks
- Developed social support skills (e.g., resolving disputes, giving constructive feedback, and seeking help).

Participant involvement was a key feature of the CSP. Rather than instructing participants on what to do, trainers facilitated brainstorming sessions with participants on workplace support strategies with which they had experienced success.

2. Organisational climate

To promote workers' involvement in organisational decision-making processes, CSP trainers:

- Facilitated discussion of advantages and disadvantages of promoting workers' involvement in decisions (e.g., policy determination, client treatment)
- Highlighted advantages of workers' involvement in decisions
- Presented a group problem-solving strategy that could be applied to the workplace
- Observed participants practising the strategy to resolve problems (e.g., prioritising problems, establishing "action plans")
- Encouraged participants to use the strategy in their workplaces on an ongoing basis.

Evaluation

To evaluate the outcomes of the CSP, information was collected from workers (from both group homes selected for the CSP and the control group) via surveys one month prior to and five weeks after the training.

Outcomes

The CSP resulted in a number of positive outcomes for workers and the organisations that participated in the program, including improved:

- Social support: Supportive feedback and supervisor support increased
- Organisational support: Work team climate improved for workers, including workers at risk of turnover
- Coping ability: Confidence in coping ability increased
- Psychological wellbeing: For workers at risk of turnover, the CSP prevented declines in wellbeing (e.g., depressive symptoms).

Conclusion

For workers at risk of turnover the CSP increased the work team climate and their individual psychological wellbeing. Workers participating in the training reported increased feedback and supervisor support, as well as increased confidence in their coping abilities. This program highlights the importance of four key strategies to support retention of valued workers:

1. Improvement of the supervisor-worker relationship
2. Providing opportunities for increased involvement in problem-solving and decision-making
3. Enhancing workers' coping capacities, and
4. Improving social supports within the workplace.

Source: Heaney, C.A., Price, R.H. & Rafferty, J. (1995). Increasing coping resources at work: A field experiment to increase social support, improve work team functioning and enhance employee mental health. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 16,* 335-352.

Assessing Key Workplace Support Processes

Introduction

A set of scales are provided below that can be used to benchmark and assess key workplace support processes. The scales address:

- Organisational Support
  - Workplace Support
  - Organisational Resources
  - Workplace Conditions
  - Opportunity for Input
  - Staffing Resource
- Supervisory Support
- Coworker Support

The scales provided here are relatively generic instruments that can be applied to workplace support processes in a range of AOD organisations. The scales may need to be adapted to suit the particular circumstances of your organisation or team. For example, some of the scales address AOD related work practices. These scales can be adapted to refer to a specific work practice that is of most relevance (e.g., providing brief interventions, conducting counselling, providing referrals).

> These scales are not designed to be diagnostic instruments. Rather, they can be used as tools to benchmark and monitor change, and to identify particular issues that may require attention.

Important note about scoring

Calculating a final score

The scales provided here can be scored in two different ways:

1. Total scale score (mean or average score)
Obtain a total score for the scale by adding the score for each item and dividing by the total number of items. For example, on a scale with four items an individual's total scale score may be 2 (3 + 2 + 2 + 1 = 8; divided by 4 = 2).

2. Individual item scores
It may also be useful to examine responses to each item. You may wish to examine the average score for all respondents for a particular item. This provides a more in-depth analysis of respondents' views. For example, it may be useful to know that, on average, respondents scored a '4' ("agree") with the item "*I am satisfied with my working conditions*".

Reverse scoring negatively worded items

The survey scales provided here contain positively and negatively worded items.

- An example of a positively worded item is: *"Staff are always kept well informed"*
- An example of a negatively worded item is: *"Novel treatment ideas by staff are discouraged".*

When scoring negatively worded items, it is necessary to use reverse-scoring to make the meaning of the item consistent with other items within the scale. For example, on a measure of job satisfaction higher scores indicate stronger job satisfaction. All items on this scale are scored so that a higher number indicates more job satisfaction.

An example of a negatively worded item is provided below (Q.1). Stronger agreement with this item indicates lower levels of satisfaction. Reverse scoring the item is necessary to ensure all scores on the scale have the same meaning (i.e., higher scores indicate greater satisfaction).

Example:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Q1. My pay and other benefits are inadequate	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Q2. I am satisfied with my working conditions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Note: Reverse score question 1.

Negatively worded questions are indicated by the statement "Note: Reverse score question #" placed at the end of the scale. This statement is provided for scoring purposes only – it should not be included in the version of the survey to which workers respond.

Responses to the negatively worded scale item (question 1) would be reverse-scored as follows:

Response scale	Original scores	Reversed scores
Strongly Disagree	1	5
Disagree	2	4
Undecided	3	3
Agree	4	2
Strongly Agree	5	1

The survey scales

Organisational Support

1. Workplace Support

Workplace support refers to the provision of formal policies and procedures, advice, guidance and resources that are required for workers to perform their job effectively. This survey instrument refers to actions and work practices that facilitate workers' effectiveness and wellbeing. It can be used to gauge workers' perceptions of the overall level of organisational support available to them.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. The organisation I work for supports staff efforts to respond to alcohol and other drug (AOD) related issues.	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
2. This organisation has policies and procedures that support AOD related work.	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
3. Staff have access to the tools/resources needed to respond to AOD related issues (eg. standard questionnaires, quit kits, referral information).	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
4. Informal supervision (e.g., encouragement, guidance) is provided amongst staff on AOD related issues.	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
5. Staff have access to a supervisor with expertise in AOD related issues.	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

Source: Adapted from Addy, D., Skinner, N., Shoobridge, J., Freeman, T., Roche, A.M., Pidd, K., & Watts, S. (2004). *The Work Practice Questionnaire: A Training Evaluation Measurement Tool for the Alcohol and Other Drugs Field.* National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA), Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia.

2. Organisational Resources

In addition to the psychological climate that envelops an organisation, facilities and equipment also are important considerations for determining organisational behaviour. Access to high quality resources is an important dimension of organisational support. This survey instrument refers to the adequacy of office and physical spaces.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. Your offices and equipment are adequate.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Facilities here are adequate for conducting group counselling.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Offices here allow the privacy needed for individual counselling.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. This program provides a comfortable reception/ waiting area for clients.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Source: Adapted from the Texas Christian University Survey of Organizational Functioning (Program Staff Version). Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, Institute of Behavioral Research. Available: www.ibr.tcu.edu/resources/rc-orgfunc.html. Downloaded 24th February 2005.

3. Workplace Conditions

The following survey instrument refers to the adequacy of workplace conditions. These are the "basics" of a healthy and efficient working environment, including considerations such as the physical work setting, adequacy of job security and pay.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. In my workplace staff are encouraged to take their allocated breaks.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. In my workplace, things are quite disorganised.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. In my workplace, the physical working conditions are good.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. I have my own allocated "space" in my work environment.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. I am satisfied with my level of job security.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. I am satisfied with my level of pay.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Note: Reverse score question 2.

Source: Adapted from Addy, D., Skinner, N., Shoobridge, J., Freeman, T., Roche, A.M., Pidd, K., & Watts, S. (2004). *The Work Practice Questionnaire: A Training Evaluation Measurement Tool for the Alcohol and Other Drugs Field.* National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA), Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia.

4. Opportunity for Input

This scale assesses the extent to which an organisation is receptive to staff suggestions and provides opportunities for participation in decision-making. It can be a useful tool to assess the extent to which the organisation offers occasions for workers to express their views and opinions.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. This organisation is receptive to staff ideas and suggestions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Forums are available in this organisation where I can express my views and opinions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. As a staff member I can participate in the internal governance of the organisation (e.g., practice and policy committees, working committees).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Source: Adapted from Addy, D., Skinner, N., Shoobridge, J., Freeman, T., Roche, A.M., Pidd, K., & Watts, S. (2004). *The Work Practice Questionnaire: A Training Evaluation Measurement Tool for the Alcohol and Other Drugs Field.* National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA), Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia.

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5. Staffing Resources

This survey instrument focuses on the number and quality of staff members available to do the work required by the agency. Staff patterns, training, and other staff resource factors are important dimensions of workplace support.

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. There are enough counsellors here to meet current client needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. A larger support staff is needed to help meet program needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Frequent staff turnover is a problem for this program.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Counsellors here are able to spend enough time with clients.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Support staff here have the skills they need to do their jobs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Clinical staff here are well-trained.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Note: Reverse score questions 2 and 3.

Source: Adapted from the Texas Christian University Survey of Organizational Functioning (Program Staff Version). Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, Institute of Behavioral Research.
Available: www.ibr.tcu.edu/resources/rc-orgfunc.html. Downloaded 24th February 2005.

6. Supervisor Support

The scale below assesses workers' perceptions of access to, and quality of, supervisory support. The scale assesses the quality of supervision in general as well as the quality of supervision related to AOD work practices. The wording of the scale can be adapted to refer to specific AOD issues (e.g., conducting brief interventions for alcohol use).

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. Staff have access to a supervisor with expertise in *alcohol and other drug related issues.*	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
2. Formal supervision (e.g., guidance, mentoring) is provided to staff on *alcohol and other drug related issues.*	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
3. Supervisors engage in constructive feedback with staff.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
4. Most of the time, supervisors provide adequate support when problems arise.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
5. In general, supervisors encourage staff to find positive solutions when problems arise.	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Italicised sections can be replaced with specific drug and alcohol work practices.
For example:

- Staff have access to a supervisor with expertise in *the provision of methadone maintenance treatment*
- Formal supervision is provided to staff on *the practice of brief interventions for alcohol consumption.*

Source: Adapted from Addy, D., Skinner, N., Shoobridge, J., Freeman, T., Roche, A.M., Pidd, K., & Watts, S. (2004). *The Work Practice Questionnaire: A Training Evaluation Measurement Tool for the Alcohol and Other Drugs Field.* National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA), Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia.

7. Coworker Support

This scale assesses workers' perception of the support, advice and guidance available from colleagues. It is a useful tool to assess the extent to which workers support and help one another in their work practice. The wording of the scale can be adapted to refer to specific AOD issues (e.g., providing naltrexone treatment, conducting brief interventions for alcohol use).

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
1. I have the opportunity (formally or informally) to discuss and receive feedback about my work performance with other staff.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. I receive support from the people I work closely with about the work I do concerning *alcohol and other drug related issues.*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. My colleagues encourage me to *intervene in alcohol and other drug related issues.*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Encouragement and support is commonly provided amongst the people I work closely with.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. I feel comfortable to ask for help or support from my colleagues or peers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. If I needed to, it would be easy to find someone to give me advice on responses to *alcohol and other drug related issues* relevant to my workplace.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Italicised sections can be replaced with specific drug and alcohol work practices. For example:

- I receive support from the people I work closely with about the work I do on *providing methadone maintenance treatment*
- My colleagues encourage me to *conduct brief interventions for alcohol consumption.*

Source: Adapted from Addy, D., Skinner, N., Shoobridge, J., Freeman, T., Roche, A.M., Pidd, K., & Watts, S. (2004). *The Work Practice Questionnaire: A Training Evaluation Measurement Tool for the Alcohol and Other Drugs Field.* National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA), Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia.

Rhoades, L., & Eisenberger, R. (2002). Perceived organizational support: A review of the literature. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87,* 698-714.

This article explores the factors that alter workers' perceptions of levels of organisational support. A review of literature in the area highlights four dimensions of organisational support: fairness, supervisor support, organisational rewards, and favourable job conditions. This article is most useful for readers interested in workforce development theory and research.

Beehr, T.A. (1995). Treating occupational stress. In T.A. Beehr (Ed.), *Psychological stress in the workplace* (pp. 153-181). London: Routledge.

This book chapter examines the importance of social support in the treatment of work-related stress. A comprehensive review of relevant theory is conducted explaining social support and its various forms, as well as the direct and interactive effects of social support on various aspects of job stress. The chapter also summarises a model of the relationship between social support and occupational stress along with providing useful recommendations for future research directions. This chapter is most useful for readers interested in workforce development theory and research.

Beehr, T.A., & McGrath, J.E. (1992). Social support, occupational stress and anxiety. *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping, 5,* 7-19.

This paper explores the relationship between anxiety, job stress and social support. A model is outlined regarding the role of support in alleviating anxiety in stressful or non-stressful working environments. Important gaps in research are also highlighted including the necessity for research exploring (a) the causal relationships between these variables, (b) possible theory driven approaches, and (c) the nature of cross-cultural differences. This paper is most useful for readers interested in workforce development theory and research.