



Dynamic and Psychosocial Risks in Work

The EU Programme

Part of the EU was about workers and dynamic risks and to implement a way to improve workers' critical appraisal and thinking skills with dynamic risks.

Critical Appraisal (Does This Still Make Sense): is about pausing to ask, "Does this rule, process, or layout still work in real life?" It's checking whether our assumptions match reality.

Critical Thinking (Thinking Through Choices and Consequences): is what workers do when they weigh up their options: "If I do this, what could go wrong? If I wait, what happens next? What's the safest choice in this situation?"

The Tools

Two tools were used:

The **4Ds**: which helped workers explore situations that felt Dumb, Dangerous, Difficult, or Different.

STKY (Stuff That Can Kill You): which helped identify moments where real risk was in work.

The 4Ds Safety Talks

Workers, H&S Reps and Leaders can be curious and use the card below to learn about the rubs and frictions in normal work and the gap between Work As Imagined (**WAI**) and Work As Done (**WAD**).

When doing this work, what do you find

Dumb <i>What does not make sense or frustrates you?</i>	Dangerous <i>What is risky or challenging?</i>
Difficult <i>What makes it difficult or demanding?</i>	Different <i>What is changing or surprising?</i>

STKY Tool

The STKY tool is a conversation guide that helps frontline workers reflect on high-risk situations about things that didn't make sense, were unexpected, difficult, or potentially harmful. It captures how often these situations occur, where pressure to perform comes from, how safety rules are used, not used or changed, and how leadership responds. The tool supports learning-focused discussions, like high job demands, low not blame, and highlights system conditions in work that impact safety.

Enforceable Undertaking

This case study on dynamic risk is part of an enforceable undertaking (**EU**) between EnviroNZ and WorkSafe NZ initiated in November 2022 as the result of a fatal accident in March 2020.

The full report and resources can be read here:
<https://hoptool.com/environzeutools>

Dynamic/Psychosocial Risk

Dynamic risks are not always the same in normal work. They become present when:

- Something is different from usual.
- Work needs to be done quickly under pressure.
- Unexpected or surprising situations happen.

Psychosocial risks are factors in the design of work and WAD, like high job demands, low support, poor communication, that impacts a workers mental health.

EU CASE STUDY - WORKER ENGAGEMENT - STKY CONVERSATIONS

What We Did - STKY Talks

During the EU programme, workers engaged in STKY conversations. The four dynamic risk categories identified were:

- **Physical and Mechanical:**

Themes included, struck by pressurised doors, engulfed by ejecting waste, and interactions with vehicles and pedestrians on tipping platforms. Machine rollovers on uneven ground, being close to moving plant in tight areas, and trailer instability with unloading or tipping.

- **Energy/Environmental:**

Heat stress from wearing PPE in high temperatures, electrical risks with faulty vehicles or infrastructure, biological dangers from contact with waste, sharps, or sewage. Gas build-up in areas and fire hazards from materials like lithium batteries that spontaneously combust.

- **Transport and Traffic:** On-road risks like driver fatigue, public aggression, and unreliable vehicles. Off-road risks like soft edges, poor visibility, and conditions on unsealed roads. Poor trailer and load management.

- **Human & System Interface:**

Pressure to bypass/skip safety systems with time constraints. Unclear signage and communication between drivers/workers, casual or lone workers, and frustration, aggression, violence from the public.

And the main strategies that workers used to keep safe were:

- Physical controls (barriers etc)
- Following processes (when known and useful)
- Communication
- Situation awareness
- Team/Leadership support
- Personal judgment and initiative

We also found that appetite for risk changed, such as:

- **Workers avoided risk:** when empowered by managers, proactive team communications and visible separation between people and plant.
- **Workers took risk:** when rules or processes were impractical or missing and public/driver behaviour created pressure.
- **Workers managed risk:** when the system and rules were relevant and workable.

What Did We Learn

- There are psychosocial risk element to dynamic risks and workers risk perception and judgment are influenced by psychosocial risks.
- Pressure to perform drives risky decisions, and it comes from many directions.
- Rules and system often don't match the reality of work.
- Emotional and psychosocial risks are real and widespread and often go unnoticed or unspoken and absorbed by workers.

What can PCBU's do

Bring the STKY Lens into work:

Ask workers: "What's the Stuff That can Kill You here?" Then ask: How do you stay safe?, What gets in the way?, What would you change?

Build Understanding Through Storytelling:

Use the 4Ds to understand work and when psychosocial risk is present in work.

Create Safer Pressure Zones:

If pressure to perform is pushing people into risky territory, step back and ask: What's driving the rush?, Where is pressure coming from, managers, customers, co-workers?, How can we remove or reduce that pressure? The small changes matter, even building short pauses to talk and connect during the workday helps.

Support versus Surveillance :

Openly thank people who speak up, respond with action and feedback, share what changed because of their input.

Add Pastoral Care Tools, Get Your HSRs Involved:

Some small but powerful actions, such as check-in questions at the start of the day ("How are you feeling today?"), training in de-escalation for dealing with the public and drivers, daily debriefs on situations that arose with frustration or anger. Letting workers know: "it's okay to not be okay", and there's someone to talk to.