

The Demand You Can Fix

Why Productivity Hindrances May Be the Most Influential Job Demand

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48%

of total psychosocial cost

27 days

lost a year, per employee

The Demand You Can Fix:

Why Productivity Hindrances May Be the Most Influential Job Demand

Nearly every organisation now tries to understand job demands. Most measure them as simply workload and general job demands. Far fewer break job demands into its emotional, cognitive, and physical dimensions, and fewer still measure the thing that makes all of them riskier.

Productivity hindrances are the friction in the work itself. Systems that don't do what people need. Poor communication channels. Difficult to explain processes. Ineffective and inefficient meetings. This is time and effort spent without return. And it does more than add to the load: when hindrances rise, workload, emotional demands and cognitive demands rise with them.

Mibo Lab has analysed productivity hindrances across several studies in seven sectors. This paper sets out what that data shows: including how widespread hindrances are, what they cost, what is actually blocking the work, and why hindrances travel so closely with work overload and the other demands.

We make the argument that if your goal is people working under demands without being harmed by them then best practice requires the measurement of all demand dimensions and hindrances are the most operationally addressable factor of all.

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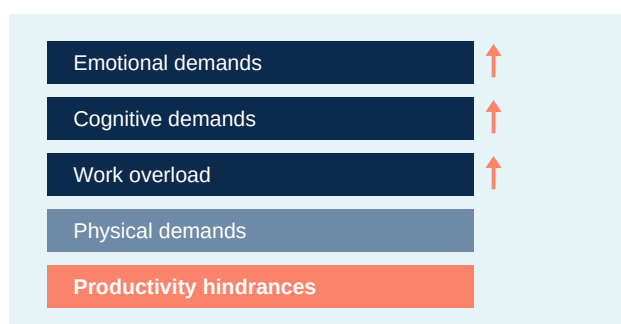
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The Blind Spot in Demand Measurement

Every organisation that takes psychosocial risk seriously tries to understand job demands. Many attempts, however, do a poor job of differentiating those demands...and so these attempts cannot tell which is the best lever to pull.

Job demands come in distinct forms. Emotional demands are not cognitive demands. Work overload is not physical demand. Each has different causes, different controls, and different protective factors that buffer it. And increasing three of the four is the factor that drives them upward: productivity hindrances, the friction in the processes, communication channels, meetings and systems that work runs through.

Five dimensions uncovers suitable levers.



Hindrances drive 3 of 4 demands higher.

The goal: reasonable demands, carried without harm

High demands are not necessarily a problem. Work that matters is often demanding. Where demands are unreasonably high, they should be reduced where possible. Where demands are high but reasonable, the goal is for people to carry them without being harmed.

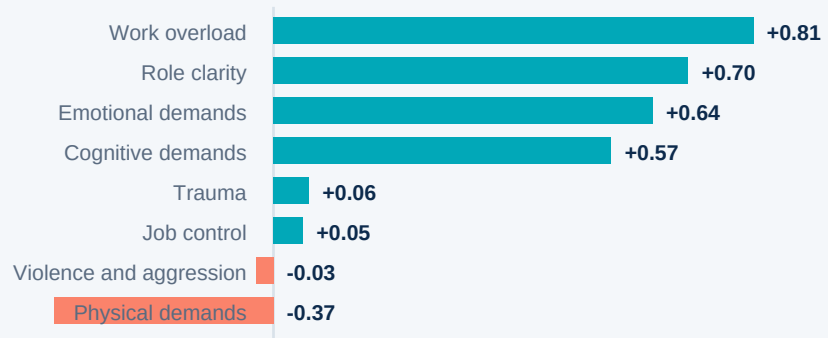
That distinction matters because narrow demand scores cannot tell you whether the problem is the volume of work or the type of demand.

Achieving healthy, sustainable performance means measuring specific demands alongside what can hinder people from managing them, acting on what you find, and measuring again to see whether it helped.

How Hindrances Relate to Other Factors

Based on the results of 34 organisations, productivity hindrance risk correlates strongly with work overload and role clarity risk, and moderately with emotional and cognitive demand risk. While they have virtually no correlation with other factor risk and a negative correlation with physical demand risk. This pattern gives insight into what hindrances are...

How hindrance risk relates to each other factor



Correlation between organisational hindrance risk and other factor risk.

Grouping these organisations into thirds by their hindrance risk score shows what changes in work overload, as well as cognitive and emotional demands, as friction rises.



Work overload risk more than doubles between the lowest and highest third. Cognitive and emotional demand risk also climbs steadily. Every step up in friction moves the demand picture in the same direction.

Key Takeaway

As productivity friction increases, so does the overall demand placed on people. Organisations with higher hindrance risk experience substantially higher work overload, alongside steadily higher cognitive and emotional demands. This suggests that reducing unnecessary friction can be an important first step in making demanding work more manageable.

How Big the Problem Is

Mibo Lab analysed 39 organisations with 12,657 respondents across seven sectors.

62.4%

of the assessed workforce exposed to at least 30min per day of productivity hindrances

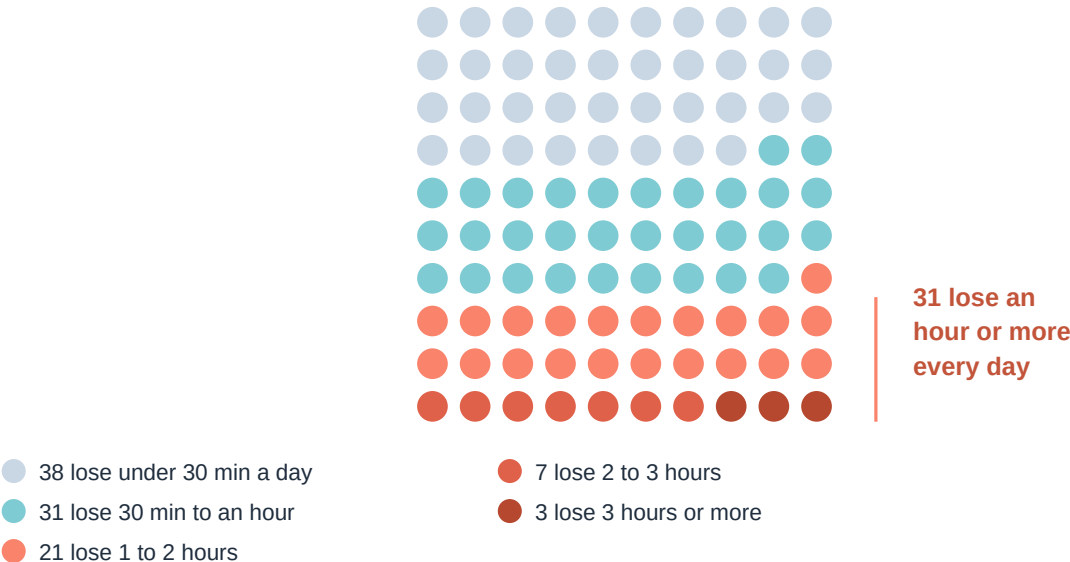
0.93 hrs

average time lost per person per working day

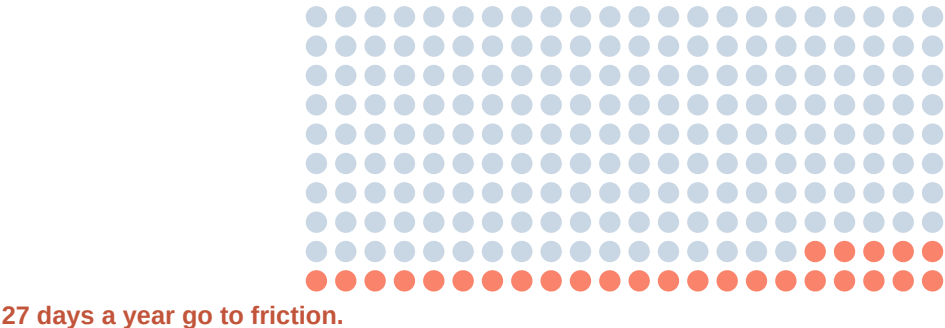
27 days

the annual equivalent, per employee, at 220 working days

Of every 100 people



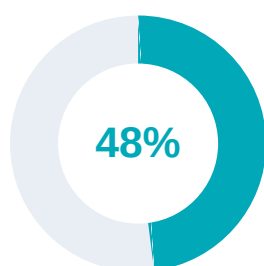
Of every 220 working days, per employee



What It Costs

Mibo models the cost of the psychosocial environment by combining reported impact on work outcomes with organisational salary bands. It covers job stress related absence, job stress presenteeism, intent to leave, and the productivity lost to hindrances. The figures below relate directly to assessed time lost to hindrances.

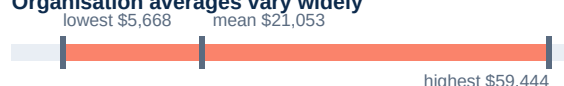
Share of total psychosocial cost



Productivity hindrances is the largest single component in 38 of 39 organisations.

Cost of hindrances per employee

Organisation averages vary widely



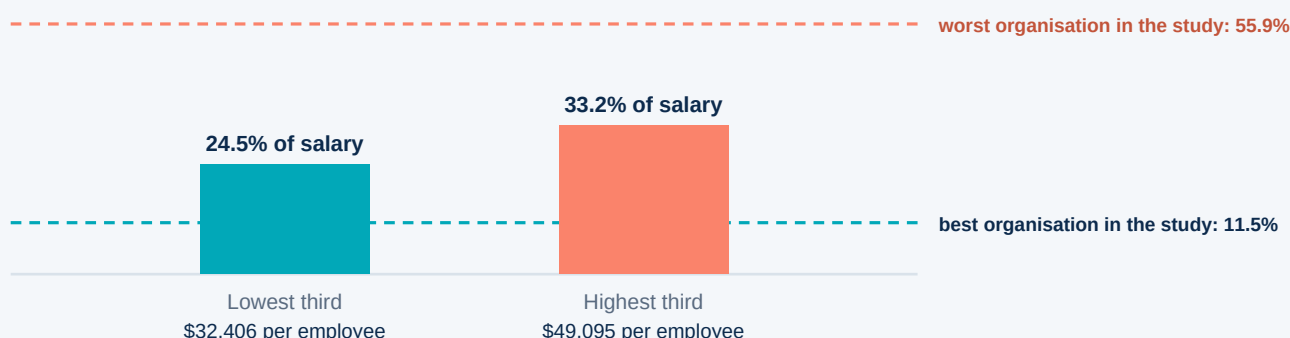
Among 39 organisations, the average loses \$21,053 per employee to hindrances.

As a share of salary: 13.5% on average, 26.5% at the highest.

Productivity hindrances are the largest single component of psychosocial cost in 38 of the 39 records analysed. Across the whole study they account for \$305.8 million of \$607.9 million in modelled psychosocial cost (an average of 13.5% total salary share).

Cost rises steeply with hindrance severity

Splitting the organisations into thirds by hindrance risk score, the third with the highest risk score loses a third of its salary to the psychosocial environment, against a quarter in the lowest third. The best organisation in the study loses 11.5% of salary; the worst loses more than 55.9%.

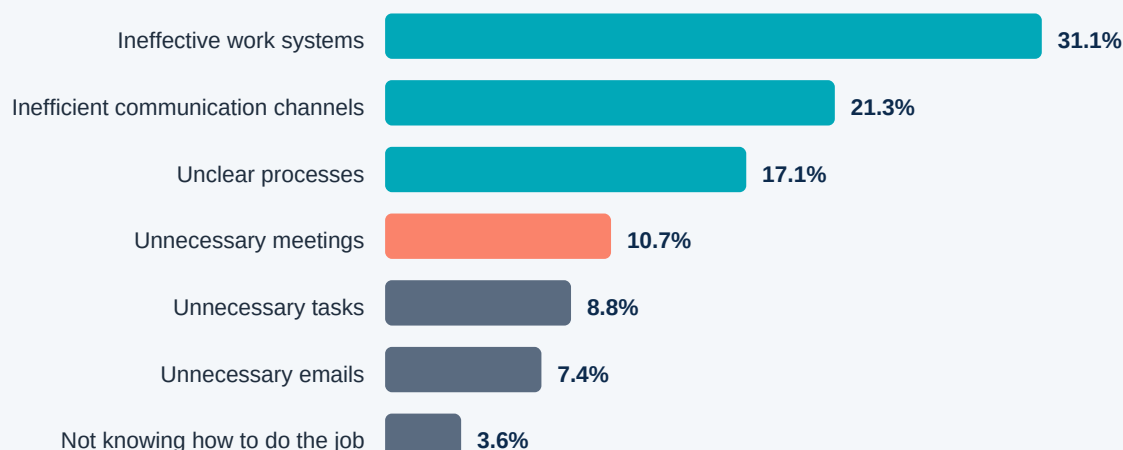


Key Takeaway

Productivity hindrances are directly costing the average organisation 13.5% of salary in unproductive time (this doesn't include secondary costs such as increased job stress presenteeism). Hindrance risk score is also a good predictor of total cost of the psychosocial environment.

What Is Actually Blocking the Work

Reporting that people lose an average one hour a day is useful. Knowing what they lose it to is what makes the finding actionable. In the Mibo PRPA, everyone who reports losing more than half an hour a day is asked a single follow up question: what is your biggest barrier? Also, you have the option of adding hindrance options that are specific to your business. Across 39 organisations, here are the results:



Share of 7,878 barrier selections across 39 organisations.

69.5%

of everything people name is a systems, process or communication hindrance. This family is the majority in 38 of 39 organisations.

3.6%

name not knowing how to do the job. Ineffective work systems is named 8.6 times more often. This is not a training problem.

The cost sits where the volume sits

Barrier	Share	Ranked first in	Cost per employee
Ineffective work systems	31.1%	26 of 39	\$5,199
Inefficient communication channels	21.3%	8 of 39	\$3,263
Unclear processes	17.1%	4 of 39	\$2,843
Unnecessary meetings	10.7%	2 of 39	\$1,936
Unnecessary tasks	8.8%	none	\$1,274
Unnecessary emails	7.4%	none	\$1,365
Not knowing how to do the job	3.6%	none	\$1,038

The top three barriers account for 69.5% of selections and \$11,305 per employee per year.

Key Takeaway

The friction people report is overwhelmingly structural. It sits in systems, in how information moves, and in whether the steps of the work are clear. These are things an organisation can redesign without adding a single person or removing a single task.

The Hindrance That Does the Most Harm

Mibo Lab tested each of the seven barriers against time lost, cost, and work overload risk. Ineffective work systems stood out as both the most reported barrier and the most damaging, making it the clearest place to focus.

Ineffective work systems: the hindrance that causes the most harm

Comparing organisations above the median on this hindrance with those below it:

Measure	Below median	Above median	Difference
Psychosocial cost per employee	\$30,300	\$50,195	\$19,895 higher
Work overload risk score	15.3	23.9	56% higher
Burnout risk	19.1%	23.9%	25% higher

Mibo Lab, 34 organisations with 30 or more respondents. Median split comparisons between organisations.

Ineffective work systems is both the most reported barrier and the most consequential. Where it leads, psychosocial cost, work overload risk and burnout are all meaningfully higher, making it the single highest-leverage barrier to address.

Key Takeaway

When ineffective work systems leads your barrier data, that is where consultation and control design should start. Fixing broken systems delivers the clearest reduction in cost and risk of any lever available. Remember, you have the option of including specific work systems to your Mibo PRPA survey for even more detailed data.

Hindrance Relationship To Work Outcomes

Productivity hindrances are more than an efficiency issue. The data shows a clear relationship between organisational hindrance risk and the human outcomes that matter most to workplace health and performance.

Outcome	Relationship with hindrance risk
Burnout risk	+0.71
Currently burned out	+0.64
Job stress presenteeism	+0.58
Job stress turnover risk	+0.44
Job stress absenteeism	+0.40
Total cost as a share of salary	+0.68

Correlation between organisational hindrance risk and each outcome. Mibo Lab, 34 organisations.

The pattern is consistent: as productivity hindrances increase, so do burnout, job stress presenteeism, job stress turnover, job stress absenteeism and overall cost.

The strongest relationships are with burnout risk (+0.71) and total cost as a share of salary (+0.68), showing that the friction people experience in getting their work done is closely connected to both employee wellbeing and organisational performance.

And here is how organisations in the bottom third for hindrance risk compare to those in the highest third...

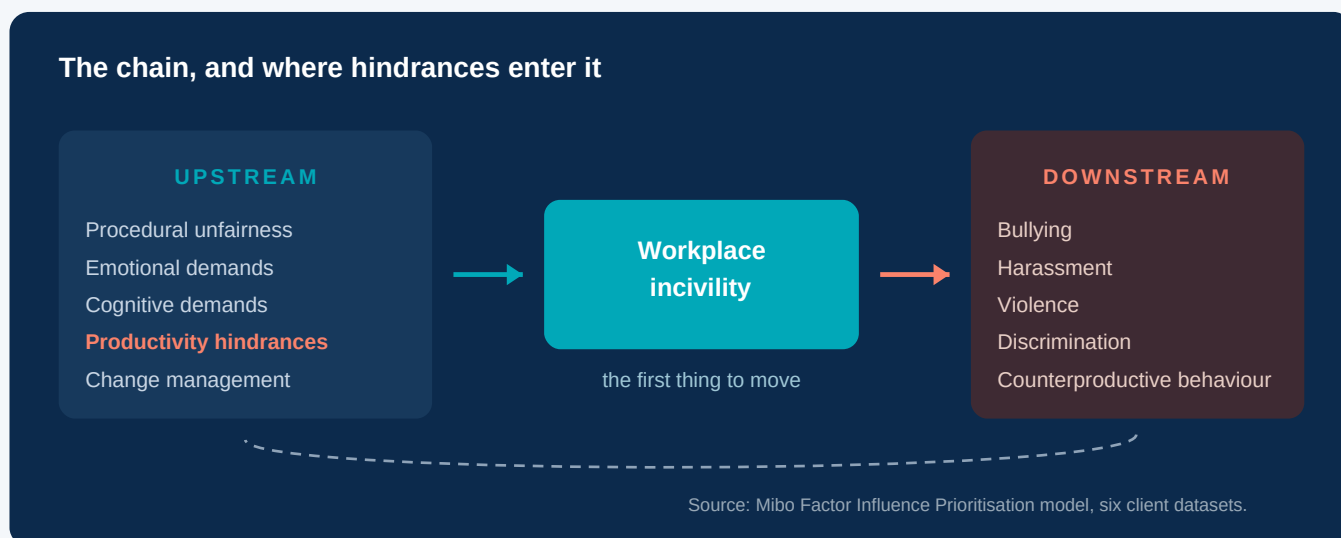
Measure	Lowest third	Highest third
Burnout risk	16.8%	28.1%
Currently burned out	6.4%	11.9%
Frequent job stress presenteeism	14.4%	21.3%
Job stress absenteeism	19.0%	25.3%
Job stress turnover at risk	11.3%	16.7%
Total cost as share of salary	24.5%	33.2%
Psychosocial balance (RPR)	0.47	-0.08

Key Takeaway

Productivity hindrance exposure and risk are much more than a cost tracker. They are also powerful upstream indicators and influencers of downstream work outcomes.

How Hindrances Influence Harmful Behaviour

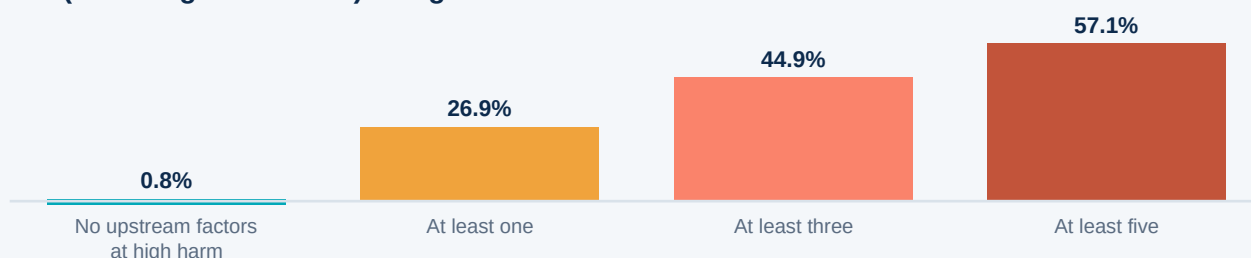
Psychosocial factors interrelate. Mibo's Factor Influence Prioritisation model mapped how they influence each other, using causal machine learning on more than two million data points. In that map, hindrances sit upstream, among the conditions that shape what happens downstream.



What the model attributes to hindrances

- 4th** of all upstream drivers of harmful workplace behaviour, behind procedural unfairness, emotional demands and cognitive demands
- 5.5%** of the influence on counterproductive workplace behaviour, within demand load's total share of about 30%
- 4.3%** of the influence on change risk.
- 46.4%** of bullying incidence and 35.1% of harassment incidence is explained by six upstream factors, hindrances among them

Likelihood of reporting high harm from bullying or harassment according to number of upstream factors (including hindrances) at high harm



Likelihood of reporting high or very high harm from bullying or harassment. Productivity hindrances is one of the accumulating upstream factors. Mibo PRPA data.

Key Takeaway

Hindrances raise job demands and reduce perceived support and work environment resources. Under these conditions incivility rises, and sustained incivility is where bullying and harassment exposure grows. Acting on friction is acting on the conditions that reduce harmful behaviour.

Sector Patterns

Mibo Lab also reviewed 39 organisations exploring sector patterns. Here are the results:

Sector	Orgs	Hrs lost per day	Lose 1hr+	Cost per employee
Public Sector and Government	7	1.04	37.3%	\$15,515
Commercial and Professional Services	7	0.97	33.9%	\$21,547
Resources, Energy and Infrastructure	10	0.97	32.7%	\$20,041
Health, Care and Social Services	6	0.78	23.5%	\$8,563
Transport, Logistics and Industrial	6	0.73	21.0%	\$11,242

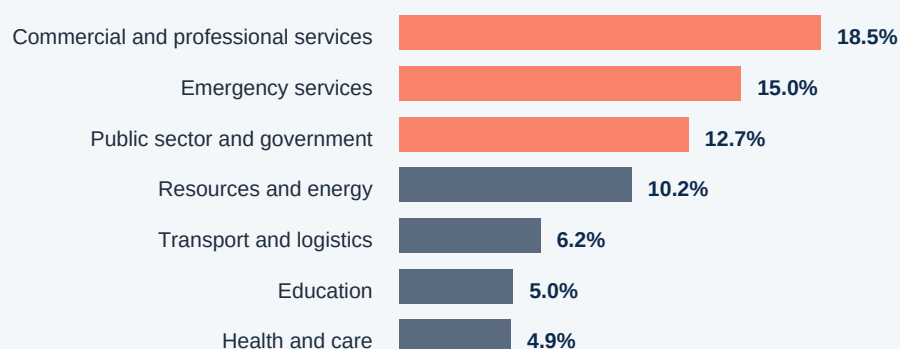
Sectors with fewer than five organisations are excluded from publication.

Where Productivity Hindrances Hit Hardest

Government carries the most friction, recording the highest time lost of any publishable sector. Productivity hindrances appear particularly pronounced in office-heavy sectors where desk-based work can create significant hindrance.

Do hindrance types vary across sectors

Ineffective work systems is the most common hindrance in every one of the seven sectors measured, making it the most consistent result in the sector specific review. Of all hindrances, meetings show the greatest variation between sectors in how often they are identified as the biggest hindrance.



Meetings as a share of all barrier selections across 39 organisations.

Key Takeaway

Office-heavy sectors appear most vulnerable to productivity hindrances. And while ineffective work systems are the most common across sectors, meetings are more variable depending on sector.

Assess, Explore, Control, Review

We want people being able to work under reasonable demands without being harmed by them. To continually improve, assess productivity hindrances alongside every dimension of demand, explore the details of the results, act on the system of work, and review control effectiveness to find out how well they worked.

Step one: Assess

1

Ask everyone

How much time do you lose being unproductive each day because of unclear processes, not knowing how to do tasks, inefficient communication channels, ineffective systems, or unnecessary emails, meetings or tasks? Standard options can be changed or added to before launch so they name the systems your people would recognise.

2

Trigger the follow up

Anyone losing more than 30 minutes a day is asked which barrier is the biggest.

3

Review exposure and risk, for hindrances, emotional, cognitive, and workload demands.

Exposure tells you how much people are exposed to the factor. Risk tells you how much it is impacting them. Read both, including the risk distribution analysis which gives insight into the distribution of group results.

Step two: Explore

Hindrance quantitative results tell you how much and a general sense of what is causing the friction, along with the harm it is causing. Qualitative consultation, which can run inside the platform through a qualitative chatbot or survey, or face to face through interviews and focus groups, led by your own people or by external consultants, gives insight into the details and relevant controls.

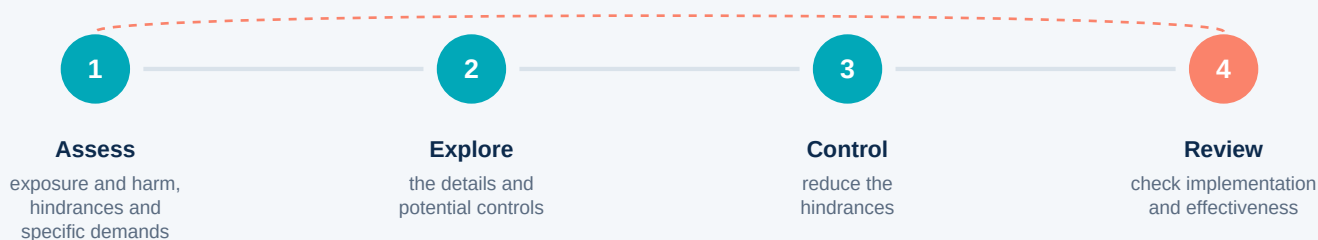
Step three: Control

Controls for hindrances are changes to the system of work. For example, improve the named system. Clarify the process and remove redundant steps. Settle who can make the decision or improve communication channels. Record each control and associated actions with an accountable owner and review date.

Step four: Review

Before judging control effectiveness, check control implementation with the group it was built for. Has it been implemented as planned. Is it still in place and actually being used. Has enough time passed to judge it. Only when these conditions have been suitably met should we ask: How effective has it been?

One loop, run continuously



Conclusion

Many organisations now measure workload and general job demands. Fewer measure specific demands, and fewer still measure productivity hindrances.

Mibo data shows that the average person loses close to an hour a day to productivity hindrances, equivalent to around 27 working days a year. When modelled against salary, hindrances are the largest single component of psychosocial financial cost.

Almost 70% of the biggest hindrances reported are related to systems, processes or communication. Ineffective work systems are the most common hindrance across every sector measured and are also most closely linked to cost, workload risk and burnout. Hindrance risk also closely tracks presenteeism and turnover. As friction increases, work overload risk more than doubles, while cognitive and emotional demands also rise.

This points to a practical priority: reduce hindrances first where possible. If demands are still causing harm after the friction has been reduced, then the demands themselves should be addressed where reasonable.

That is why productivity hindrances are one of the most important factors... and why, when demands are causing harm, reducing the friction around the work can be the first place to act.

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Introducing Mibo

Mibo is a next generation Psychosocial Risk Management technology platform helping organisations embrace a rigorous approach to creating supportive psychosocial work environments.

Our solution combines the Psychosocial Risk and Protection Assessment (PRPA), industry leading analysis and reporting, an advanced Control Measure Module system, and the leveraging of emerging technologies to enhance capability, efficiency and precision in managing psychosocial risks.

Discover more about Mibo's approach to Psychosocial Risk and Protection Management.

mibowork.com.au

Measure

Validated assessment of risk and protection across 24 psychosocial factors, independently evaluated by the Griffith University RISE Research Centre.

Analyse

Factor influence analysis that identifies the small number of high leverage priorities driving your environment.

Act

A living psychosocial risk register linking hazards, controls, owners and review cycles into a defensible governance trail.

Review

Control effectiveness checks and pulse re-measurement to confirm what worked and what needs changing.

References

Mibo Lab research

- Mibo Lab Client Data Repository. 39 organisations, 12,657 respondents, seven sectors. Analysis September 2026.
- Mibo Factor Influence Prioritisation model. Causal machine learning across six client datasets and more than two million assessment data points.
- Mibo Lab work design and financial pathway study. 13 organisations, 9,240 employees, seven independent statistical methods.
- Mibo Lab Incivility financial study. 37 organisations.
- Mibo PRPA cost analytics. More than two million data points across Australian organisations.

Method note

Cost figures are modelled from assessed impact on work outcomes and organisational salary bands. Where the paper cites 34 organisations, the analysis uses the subset of the 39 with at least 30 respondents, so that organisation level correlations and tercile comparisons rest on stable samples; scale, cost and barrier figures use the full repository. Directional and causal statements in this paper rest on the Factor Influence Prioritisation model and are attributed to it where they appear.

