



Achieving WHS Targets

Management by Walking Around (MWBA) has been in use for about 44 years. You probably have some knowledge or familiarity with this informal style of management. Various studies since its inception have validated its use and confirmed its value. You can even find its actions in the *WHS Consultation, Co-operation, and Co-ordination Code of Practice*.

This article considers the approach and actions of Management by Walking Around and how those actions align with, and can be used to help achieve WHS targets and compliance with WHS legislative requirements for effective WHS consultation and communication.

Management By Walking Around (MWBA)

The earliest known use of MBWA was at Hewlett Packard where it was used from 1973. It apparently stemmed from the values promoted by Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard, of deep respect for people and recognition that they naturally have a desire to do a good job. So Managers were encouraged to leave their desk and make themselves accessible by walking around and building relationships with their staff and understanding their work.

The core actions of MWBA that align with WHS consultation and communication with workers are:

- Do whatever is needed to build trust and good relationships with every worker
- Regularly talk face-to-face with every worker on an informal basis
- Demonstrate genuine interest in them and their work
- Share good news, information, goals and objectives and brighten their outlook
- Invite their ideas, knowledge, views, information and good news
- Listen to and be responsive to their problems and concerns and take effective action about that
- Do a sample of their job to obtain hands-on understanding of what they do and the problems they encounter
- Look for what they are doing right and validate that
- Give on-the-spot help when needed
- Provide them with opportunities to contribute to and be involved in the organisation achieving its targets
- Don't criticise wrong actions but get the supervisor or manager to take corrective action

WHS Act and Consultation Code of Practice

There is a distinct similarity between the actions of MWBA and the effective consultation actions required by the WHS Act and the *WHS Consultation, Co-operation, and Co-ordination Code of Practice*.

Section 48 of the WHS Act tells us “consultation requires that:

- relevant work health and safety information is shared with workers
- workers are given a reasonable opportunity to express their views and to raise health or safety issues
- workers are given a reasonable opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process relating to the health and safety matter
- the views of workers are taken into account, and
- workers are advised of the outcome of any consultation in a timely manner”

The Code of Practice tells us at page 7:

“Consultation is a two-way process between you and your workers where you:

- *talk* to each other about health and safety matters
- *listen* to their concerns and raise your concerns
- *seek and share* views and information, and
- *consider* what your workers say before you make decisions.”

“Management commitment and open communication between managers and workers is important in achieving effective consultation. Your workers are more likely to engage in consultation when their knowledge and ideas are actively sought and any concerns about health and safety are taken seriously. Consultation does not mean telling your workers about a health and safety decision or action after it has been taken. Workers should be encouraged to:

- ask questions about health and safety
- raise concerns and report problems
- make safety recommendations
- be part of the problem solving process.

You must share relevant information with workers and their health and safety representatives about matters that may affect their health and safety. This information should be provided early on so that workers and health and safety representatives have enough time to consider the matters, discuss them and then provide feedback to you.”

Conclusion

A PCBU is accountable for what they do to satisfy the WHS Act and WHS Regulations, and Codes of Practice. Obviously a PCBU does not have to comply with the MWBA. However it can be seen from the above that if Managers, Supervisors, HSRs, and Health & Safety Committee members did the MWBA actions within the context of their role and responsibilities then achievement of effective consultation and WHS targets would be distinctly enhanced.

Note

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