

# The Impact of Training Supervisors on Return to Work Outcomes

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**Return to Work Matters**  
THE RESOURCE FOR RETURN TO WORK PROFESSIONALS

# Today

- The impact of training supervisors on return to work outcomes
- What supervisors want and need in terms of training
- The key areas of training that make a difference
- The time and resources required to train supervisors

# Why are supervisors important

- A supervisor's role is to develop employees and monitor their performance.
- This puts the supervisor in a pivotal position to observe changes in behaviour and the emergence of problems
- Early recognition of problems, intervention and support during the early stages of treatment are keys to achieving effective results.



# Why are supervisors important

- Supervisor behaviour affects employee behaviour – reciprocity
- Supervisors can influence workers
- Eg Dutch example, supervisor and employee work out return to work program, help available if needed
- Supervisors know the duties
- They influence coworkers



# The current situation

Significant percent report negativity about dealing with return to work:

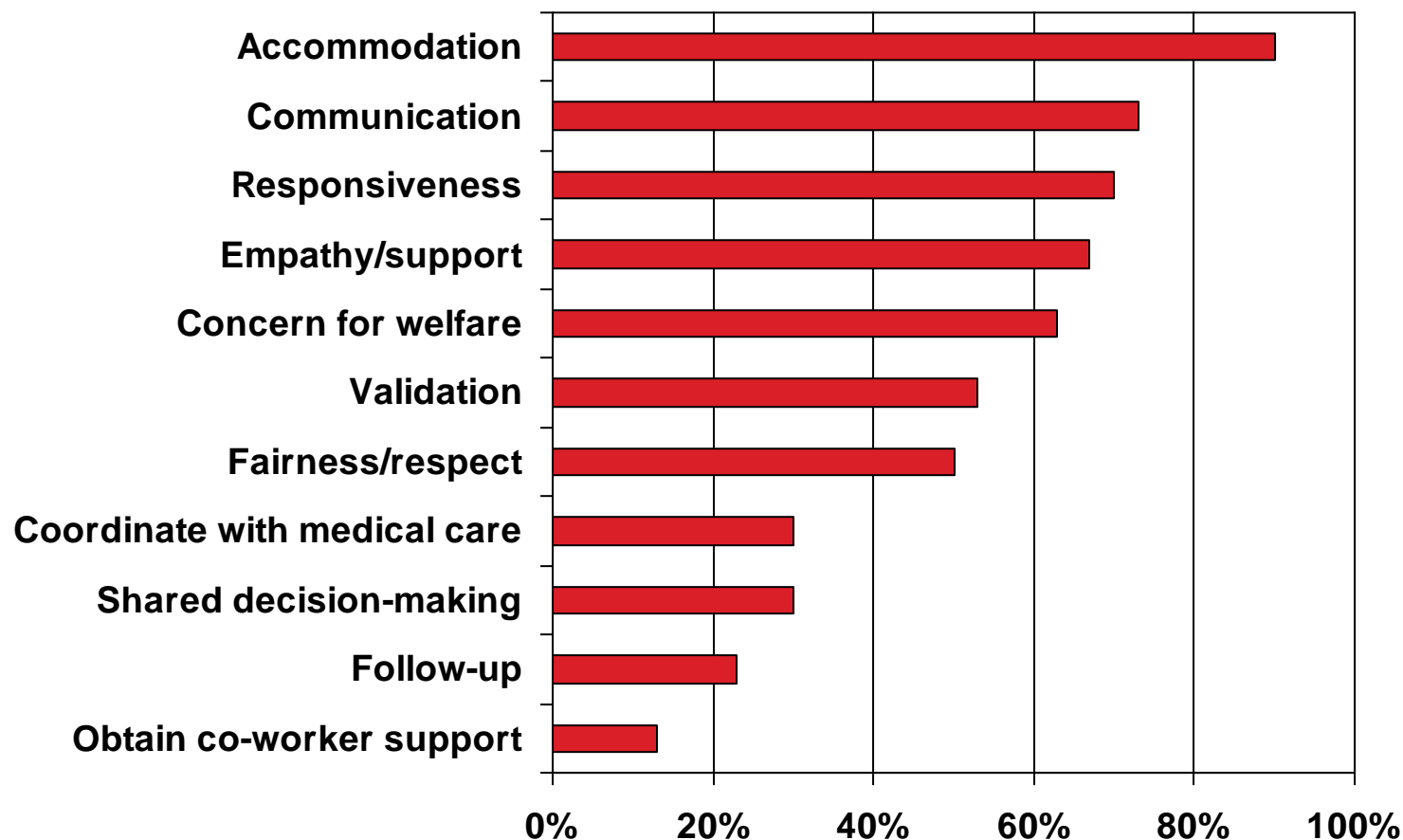
- Uncertain of how they are handling the situation
- Uncertain of how to communicate about personal issues with the employee
- Frustrated at trying to balance employee needs with time pressures and management expectations.
- Helpless and confused
- Angry or frustrated

# The current situation cont'd

- Fearful or uncomfortable about handling personal problems in the workplace
- Guilt
- Fear confrontation, criticism or losing control
- They are taking on other people's problems as their own
- The degree of personal emotions involved



# Employee expectations



Shaw, Robertson et al., J Occup Rehabil  
2003;13:129-142

# Supervisors' concept of their role

- Complete injury report (90%)
- Assess validity of claim (65%)
- Protect company (53%)
- Communicate with worker (41%)
- Include worker in process (30%)



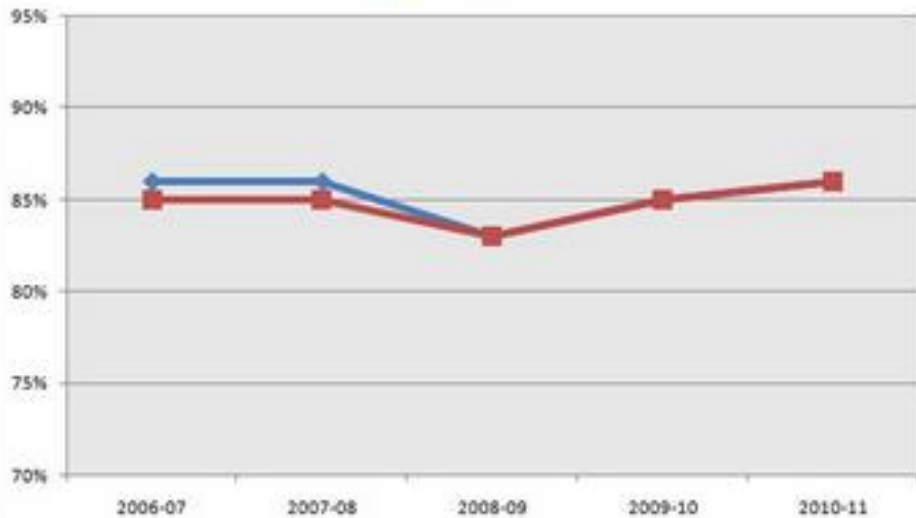
# Return to work monitor 2012

- 16% of injured workers said their supervisor made return to work harder
- Workers who said someone had made it harder to RTW were less likely to sustain RTW



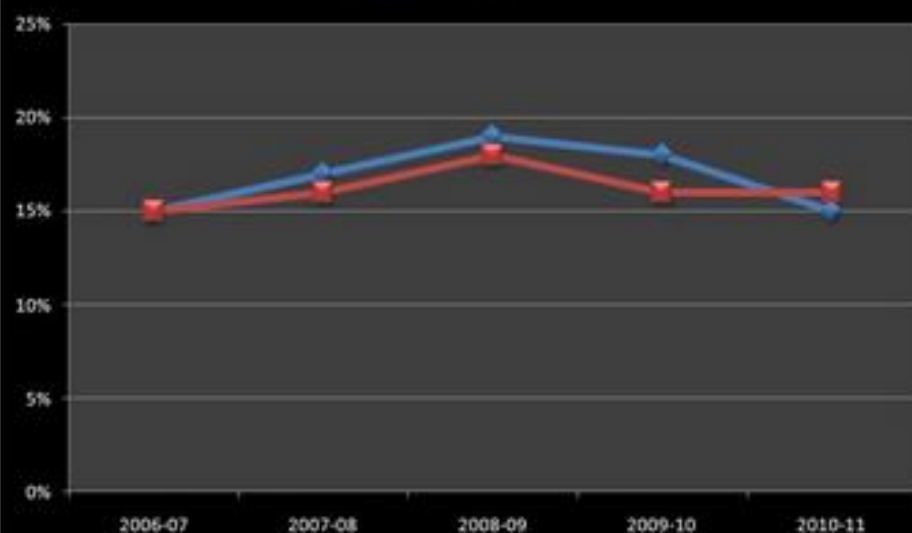
### RTW Rate- NSW

NSW National



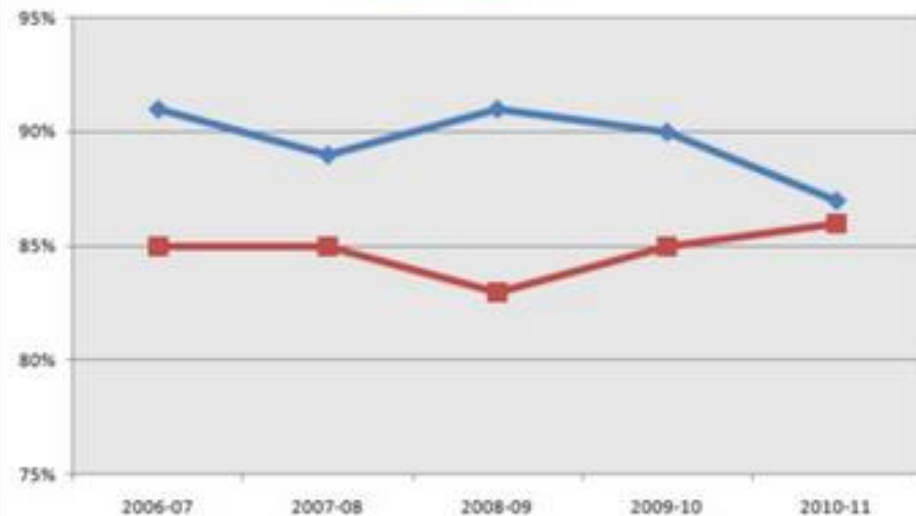
### Employer made RTW harder - NSW

NSW National



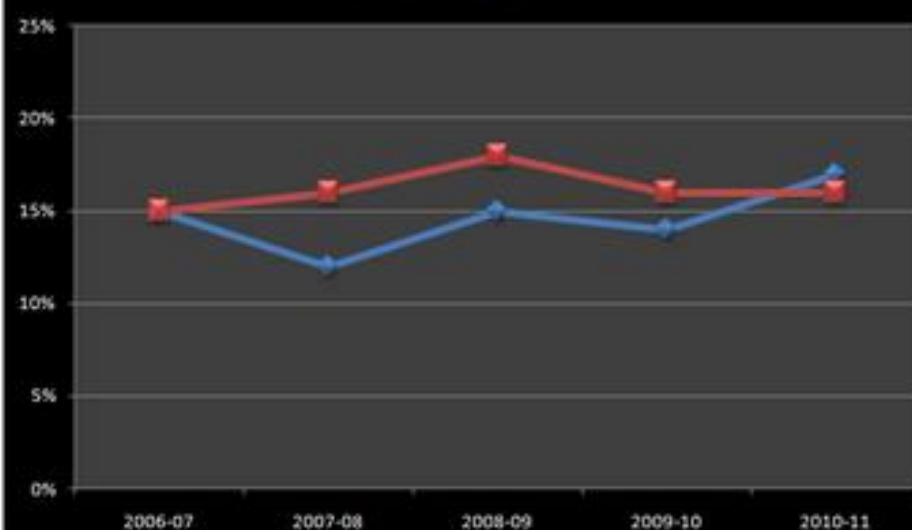
### RTW Rate- TAS

TAS National



### Employer made RTW harder - TAS

TAS National



# Research

- Educating supervisors and managers
- Is one of the seven workplace based interventions that makes a difference
- 47% reduction in new claims and an 18% reduction in active lost-time claims
- Versus 27% and 7%, respectively, in the control group.

IWH

Shaw, W. S., M. M. Robertson, et al. (2006).  
"A controlled case study of supervisor training to optimize response to injury in the food processing industry."

Work 26(2): 107-14.

# Trained supervisors

- Report greater job satisfaction
- Have less claims in their area
- Have less claims where the employee is off work

# Training supervisors

- Survey of 344 return to work professionals
- Almost all say supervisors should be trained
- Yet how often are they?

Supervisor Competencies for Supporting Return to Work: A Mixed-Methods Study.

**Johnston V**, Way K, Long MH, Wyatt M, Gibson L, Shaw WS.

J Occup Rehabil. 2014 Apr 9

# Benefits for the supervisor

- Increased chance of meeting targets
- Promotes an increased sense of team
- Able to promote a supportive and positive culture
- Early intervention prevents bigger long term problems
- (A problem claim can take up hours of a supervisor's time each week)
- Greater confidence in the rehabilitation process
- Increased likelihood of positive performance review meetings with increased productivity
- Enhanced and demonstrated leadership role within the company
- Increased confidence and problem solving skills



# When to train

- Assess cost benefit
- Value of training limited in
  - Low claim situation
  - High supervisor turnover
- Important with
  - High claim rates – department or organisation
  - Poor return to work rates
  - High claim / premium level



# How to train

- Formal training session – two hours to one day
- Through cases and mentoring
- Engage their managers
  - What they need to expect of supervisors
  - Managers call the worker
- Set expectations



# What works in supervisor training

- Understanding musculoskeletal (MS) pain and discomfort
- Communication with workers about pain and injury
- The difficult case
- Problem solving using ergonomic principles
- Workforce reintegration
- Problem solving

*People not process*

Disability management training for supervisors: a pilot intervention program.

McLellan RK, Pransky G, Shaw WS.

J Occup Rehabil. 2001 Mar;11(1):33-41.



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# Mental health vs physical

- Difficult for supervisors to deal with mental ill-health conditions
- Unsure of boundaries
- Tend to avoid difficult conversations
- The longer the discussion is left, the harder it gets

# Resources

- Injury managers focused on supporting line managers, mentoring versus 'doing'
- Formal training program
  - In person
  - eLearning
- Hard look at the costs
- Engagement of senior managers

# Summary

- Supervisors are important in return to work
- Relatively untapped potential for improvement in RTW
- Takes time
- Benefits for supervisors, and organisation
- Need senior management commitment