

# DANGEROUS PERSONALITIES MAKING WORK UNSAFE

Organisation psychology firm, SACS Consulting, have conducted research into the occupational health and safety behaviours of Australian workers.

The study, of more than 1400 professionals across all industries, found a strong correlation between an individual's measurable personality and values and the likelihood that they will be safe or unsafe at work.

Even though Australian workplaces have come a long way to improve their workplace safety, employers know that some of their employees add to the level of safety in the workplace and others detract from it. According to the study, the types of personality traits that are associated with better safety behaviours include: prudence, patience, fairness, diligence, social boldness and they tend to value security.

The SACS study found that some people still ignore OHS rules and act unsafely in the workplace, whereas others value their own safety and that of their colleagues so actively that they try to improve the safety of their workplace. Using personality and values testing, the study was able to predict whether an individual is more or less likely to be safe at work.

# WHICH INDUSTRIES HAVE SAFER PEOPLE?

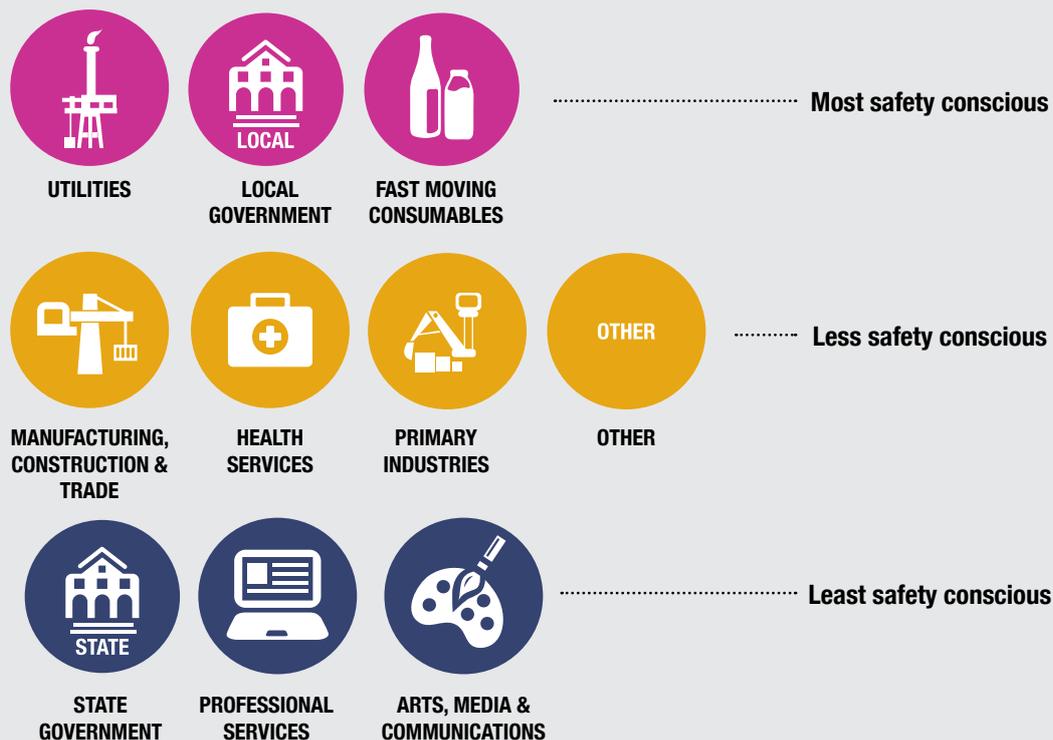
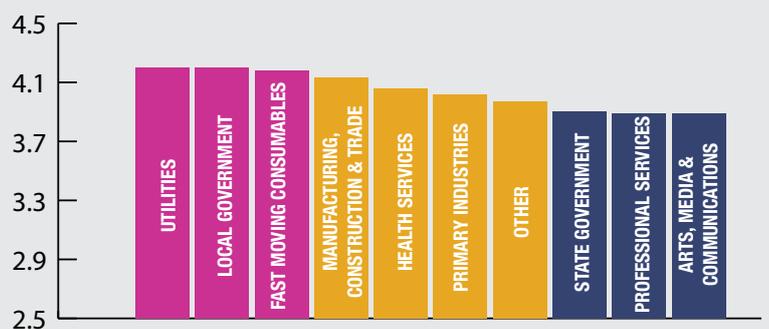
The study showed that workers in the **utilities, local government and FMCG** sectors tend to have higher overall safety behaviours.

Workers in these industries are more motivated to ensure safety at work, more likely to comply with OHS rules and to participate in improving safety at work. They also report a higher safety climate in their workplaces.

## OVERALL SAFETY BY INDUSTRY

**State government** employees tend to be less safety conscious and compliant than local government.

This may be explained by a higher prevalence of office jobs in state government, which like **professional services, arts and media communications**, are less concerned with safety compared with other industries. **Many local government roles**, like utilities and manufacturing, involve physical labour and onsite jobs that tend to attract more safety consciousness.





The SACS study shows that the industry outlier is **health and community services**, including aged and disability care, which has only a median safety consciousness yet the highest number of injuries.

Similarly, the latest data available from Safe Work Australia tracks the numbers of injury in various industries supporting this finding.

**Of the 120,155 serious workers compensation claims in 2011-12, the highest number of claims were made by workers in health and**

**community services at 19,060 claims.** This was an average of 50 claims for compensation for work-related injury or illness made by workers each day.

- The highest incidence of claims was in agriculture and the second highest in transport and storage with 8450 claims
- 16,670 claims were made by manufacturing workers
- 4330 claims were made by government workers.

## COSTS OF SAFETY INCIDENTS ARE INCREASING

While numbers of injuries have modestly declined over the past decade, the costs of workers compensation claims have increased dramatically.

Employers in Australia spend upwards of \$7billion on workers compensation per year and the overall cost of workplace injuries and illnesses was estimated by Safe Work Australia at more than \$60 billion in 2008-09, which equates to almost 5% of GDP.

In particular, workplace stress and bullying claims and costs have sky-rocketed. Employers often struggle to prevent and manage these types of subjective OHS risks at work. SACS research has uncovered a new insight into this problem by identifying which types of workers are more likely to have interpersonal conflicts at work.

### MYTH BUSTED:

The workplace stereotype that women are 'catty' while men are easier to get along with has been busted by SACS research. Men are more likely to bully or harass people at work, and women are likely to help others in personal difficulty and be nicer to colleagues.

Overall, men are more likely to do bad things to colleagues and women are more likely to do bad things to the organisation they work for.

With stress and bullying incorporated into OHS legislation, employers should be just as concerned about preventing these types of psychological harms as physical ones.



Men more likely to do bad things to colleagues



Women more likely to harm the organisation

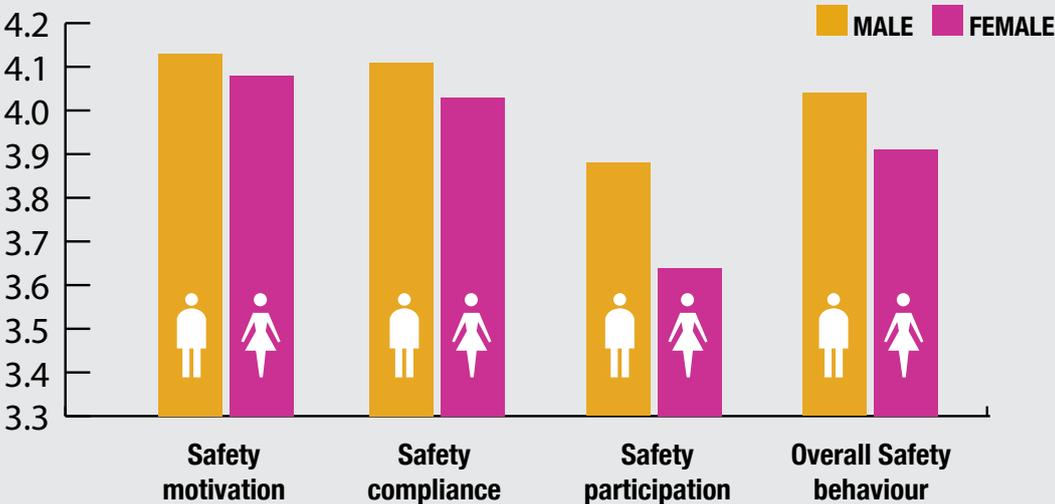
# SO WHO IS SAFER AT WORK?

## ARE MEN OR WOMEN SAFER AT WORK?

On every safety behaviour and across all industries, men are more diligent and committed than women to being safe at work.

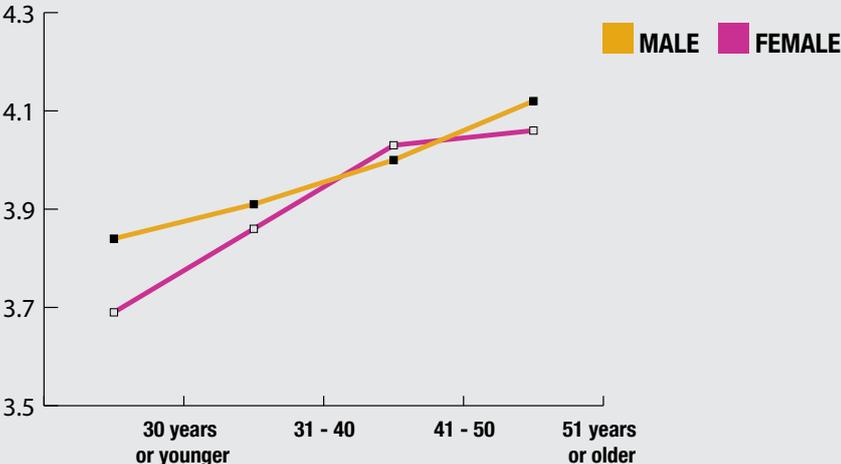
Women are less likely to participate in OHS practices and are more likely to disobey their organisation's rules.

This finding was also reflected in SACS Consulting's previous study on [counter-productive workplace behaviours](#) which found that women are more likely to disobey company rules.



## ARE YOUNGER OR OLDER EMPLOYEES SAFER AT WORK?

The study found that overall, older workers 45+ tend to display more safety-conscious attitude and more diligent safety behaviours than younger workers.



# ABOUT THE STUDY

SACS undertook a survey of more than 1400 employees in a range of different organisations and employment sectors.

In an anonymous questionnaire respondents were asked about their attitude and behaviour when it comes to OHS and safety in the workplace.

In addition, the same respondents completed a personality questionnaire – the HEXACO – and the Schwartz Personal Values Questionnaire.

## WHAT DID THE STUDY DO?

Respondents' self-reported levels of safety behaviour were then correlated with individual personality and values assessments to identify whether there is a relationship between peoples' personality attributes and the values they hold and their approach to safety in the workplace.

The study found that there is a statistically significant correlation between personality and values on the one hand and safety at work on the other.

This correlation was so significant that it can be used to predict the overall safety behaviours of people according to their personality and values with 37% accuracy. A percentage accuracy which is considered high in the organisational psychology community where, in comparison, a job interview is likely to achieve only 10-25% accuracy.

For employers who are concerned about the safety of their workforce or whose workplaces may have higher OHS risks this research provides a method to screen out riskier employees.

Employers could incorporate personality and values assessment into their recruitment processes to test the likely safety disposition of their workforce. By hiring employees that are by nature (or 'fundamentally') more safety conscious, employers can potentially reduce risks and improve their organisation's overall safety environment.

**SACS found that an employees' approach to workplace safety can be predicted based on their personality and value.**

# HOW ARE SAFETY BEHAVIOURS DEFINED?

The SACS study used the following criteria published by Mark Griffin and Andrew Neal in *The Journal of Applied Psychology* (2006:91(4); 946) to assess safety behaviour among workers:

## Safety climate: .....

1. Management places a strong emphasis on workplace health and safety
2. Safety is given a high priority by management
3. Management considers safety to be important

**Are you part of a workplace that values safety?**

## Safety motivation: .....

1. I feel that it is worthwhile to put in effort to maintain or improve my personal safety
2. I feel that it is important to maintain safety at all times
3. I believe that it is important to reduce the risk of accidents and incidents in the workplace

**How important is making the workplace safer to you?**

## Safety compliance: .....

1. I use all the necessary safety equipment to do my job
2. I use the correct safety procedures for carrying out my job
3. I ensure the highest levels of safety when I carry out my job

**Do you obey the safety rules at work?**

## Safety participation: .....

1. I promote the safety program within the organization
2. I put in extra effort to improve the safety of the workplace
3. I voluntarily carry out tasks or activities that help to improve workplace safety

**How much are you involved in making the workplace safer?**

# EMPLOYERS CAN USE THESE FINDINGS TO IMPROVE THEIR WORKPLACE PRODUCTIVITY AND CULTURE

Australian workplaces have come a long way on safety at work in recent decades but the emphasis has been on minimising safety risks at the worksite and drilling employees on OHS procedures.

What the SACS study has shown is that employers can now minimise the safety risks that employees bring to the workplace.

For employers concerned about OHS and are keen to reduce workers compensation costs, time lost to injury and associated productivity costs, screening their staff may be a shortcut to achieving better safety outcomes.

This can be done by screening and assessing potential employees, which many employers do to get insights into other aspects of their staff, but screening can now be done to determine how safety conscious or OHS committed individuals are from the outset. This will allow employers to select the right people for their workplace or to modify roles and responsibilities to better fit the characteristics of their staff.

Employers that are not screening for personality and values may be putting their employees and their workplace at unnecessary risk.

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## ABOUT SACS

SACS Consulting is an organisational psychology consulting firm which is heavily involved in executive recruitment and psychological assessment. SACS has hundreds of clients to whom they provide psychological assessment services in a range of different organisational sectors and at different levels of seniority, from the most senior positions to volume positions such as call centre operators.

<http://www.sacsconsult.com.au/>



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