

# Onsite safety a state of mind



Link: An individual's personality plays an important role in their attitude towards safety, according to SACS' Andrew Marty (inset).

BY JENNIFER PETERSON-WARD

A new survey undertaken by human resources consulting firm SACS Consulting has found a strong correlation between an individual's personality and values and the likelihood they will act safely at work.

More than 1400 employees from a wide range of industries participated in SACS' survey. Each person completed an anonymous questionnaire about their attitudes and behaviour in relation to safety in the workplace, as well as detailed questionnaires designed to assess their personality and personal values set.

The results were correlated to identify whether there was a relationship between people's personality attributes and the values they held and their approach to safety in the workplace.

Based on the findings, SACS researchers concluded it was possible to predict the overall safety behaviours of people according to their personalities and values with 37 per cent accuracy. This percentage accuracy was considered high in the organisational psychology community where, in comparison, a job interview is likely to achieve up to 25 per cent accuracy.

According to survey results, the types of personality traits associated with better safety behaviours included prudence, patience, fairness, diligence, social boldness and valuing security.

SACS Consulting Managing Director Andrew Marty said the survey results showed workers in industries that involved physical labour and onsite jobs such as mining, manufacturing and utilities, tended to have higher overall safety behaviours when compared with other industries.

"What we saw was the more dangerous an industry was, the more safety conscious [workers] tended to be," he said.

Additionally, the survey revealed on every safety behaviour and across all industries, men were more diligent and committed than women to being safe at work.

Mr Marty partially attributed this inconsistency to the fact different safety messages appealed to different genders. Using the mining industry as an example, he said employers needed to be aware that male-centric safety messages often did not appeal to female workers.

"There is an opportunity for the sector to use messages that would work better for women and you would have less injuries amongst women," he said.

Mr Marty said employers should consider incorporating personality and values assessments into their recruitment process to test how safety conscious prospective employees were before hiring them.

"One of the reasons psychological assessment is growing extremely rapidly across the world is that you can tell whether a person is going to be a dangerous person before they are hired," he said.

"You can predict how likely it is someone will undertake counterproductive work measures - bullying, harassment, those kinds of things - by virtue of their personality and values set.

"We already have a number of organisations who have availed themselves of the opportunity to predict whether people are likely to be safe or unsafe employees before they hire them."

Similarly, Mr Marty said employers who were concerned about the safety of their existing workforce could use the screening method to aid long-term planning and employee deployment.

"If organisations have concerns about the safety records in a particular work unit, they can profile the people based on their personality and values set and it might give them an insight into why that unsafe behaviour is happening," he said.

"One of the things we know is that if you have a group of people doing similar things, then the likelihood is really strong they will feed off each other and mutually support unsafe behaviour.

"If you look at the cost of an injury, the cost of a bullying complaint, the cost of the collateral damage of what happens to employees around people when these things happen, I think there is an enormous argument for this kind of psychological assessment."

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