

TARGET INTERVENTIONS FOR A SAFER WORKPLACE.

EVIDENCE SHOWS THAT GENERIC SAFETY PROGRAMMES AREN'T THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY OF IMPROVING SAFETY IN ORGANISATIONS BECAUSE THEY LACK A RESEARCH BASE AND EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT.

Well-considered research and organisational assessment is necessary to illuminate the important issues and areas to focus on, and stakeholder engagement is essential to enhance intervention quality and commitment.

Case studies show that targeted, tailor-made training interventions lead to improved safety performance for organisations. Moreover, targeted interventions not only improve safety but generally have positive spin-offs for other areas of an organisation.

A safety assessment is the first stage to designing a targeted safety intervention. The reasons for incidents in the workplace are a complex interplay of factors that may include individual or team processes, resource availability and management priorities.

Although accidents are rarely caused solely by an individual's action, 80-90 percent are likely to include a human factor to some degree -- if a scaffold collapses and someone is injured, was it a faulty scaffold or was something overlooked by the person erecting the scaffold?

Although safety assessment needs to take account of the physical environment, risks and hazards, policies and procedures, the commonality between these factors is human – the willingness and ability of employees to behave safely.

One way to assess the human factors that impact on safety is the Individual Safety Attributes Test (ISAT), which measures the leading characteristics of safety behaviour – diligence and conscientiousness, ability to cope with work pressure, personal responsibility for self and others' safety, communicating safety information openly and constructively and confidence in delivery of safety information.

Several case studies illustrate how ISAT assessments allowed organisations to identify and target interventions at the actual problems to deliver improvements in safety performance.

An Australian energy utility company with over 2,000 employees or contractors working regionally had a high incident rate among linesmen, and the organisation wanted a "quick fix" generic training programme to teach people how to operate safely.

More than 200 employees sat the ISAT pre- and post-training to gain a snapshot of existing awareness of safety behaviour and gauge the effectiveness of the training programme.

Pre-intervention testing found that less than half the employees performed at a likely competence or above on resisting social pressure in order to perform safely, providing timely solutions to problems, weighing rule compliance over personal relations and widely disseminating safety information.

However, what was astonishing was that the ISAT results were similar after the generic training programme, indicating that the intervention did little to bring about changes in safety behaviour or sustained change.

Yet, when the ISAT results were analysed in detail, the team results showed a strong correlation with team safety performance. On the basis of the ISAT results alone, the organisation was able to identify the teams most at risk of incidents and the associated safety behaviour, and subsequently focus on the challenges and issues for the team.

The use of leadership and team coaching focused on specific issues can also lead to significant reductions in lost time injury severity and frequency.

A mining operation employing over 400 people wanted to implement a culture where health and safety was paramount and characterised by a culture whereby employees made responsible decisions for themselves and could get the job done without being bogged down with paperwork and policies.

The ISAT assessment conducted on all employees identified the supervisors as having specific development needs around adhering to guidelines, the need to place safety over performance demands, providing timely suggestions and the wide dissemination of safety information.

A desire for rapid results saw a three-month targeted intervention initiated that focused on both individual and team coaching. Individual coaching provided supervisors with training on effective leadership styles and open consultative communication and feedback. Team training was designed around workshop sessions, action programmes, ongoing accountability and specific employee-led safety initiatives presented back to management.

This approach, characterised by all levels of a team working together on a shared basis, proved invaluable to bringing about a new approach to safety. The net result was not only great improvement in lost-time injury

rates but also a basis for improved teamwork and communications across the organisation.

Locally, PeopleCentric has worked with an electricity network provider to identify a range of individual and team development needs to improve safety behaviour. The ISAT was completed by a group within the organisation following switching incidents with the potential for very serious consequences.

The results identified a disjunction between how field staff and office controllers viewed safety behaviour. There was a clear need for one of the groups to have more targeted development, and for the entire group to have training around engaging in safety discussions and sharing information.

As a result the entire team had individual development planning sessions and a customised training series on communication styles, how to assert oneself positively, how to provide feedback and how to remain focused on the job at hand in the face of other performance demands and distractions. Improved skills in communication, feedback and focus are likely to be employed outside safety situations and to the benefit of the organisation overall.

These cases illustrate the importance of research and assessment as the basis of designing targeted interventions, and the need for employees to be actively engaged in training and development.

Targeted interventions have greater impact on safety performance than generic offerings. The requirement is to understand the problem before implementing any type of broad-ranging solution, as it may be that a more narrowly focused, and potentially more cost-effective approach, will lead to better outcomes.

PeopleCentric™

+64 9 963 5020

www.peoplecentric.co.nz

WORKPLACE SAFETY.