

## Safety Corner

### What is Behavioural-Based Safety?

Accident statistics typically indicate that about 80% of accidents at workplace are attributed to improper human actions due to workers' at-risk behaviour. Hence, reducing unsafe and promoting safe behaviours at work have been a critical part of the safety management.

Behaviour-Based Safety (BBS) has rapidly become a popular approach applied in industry to reduce accidents and injuries at workplace by analysing factors that motivate and reinforce people's safe behaviour. Assuming behaviours can be observed and measured, it is then possible to identify work behaviours that are safe or involved unwarranted risk by observing workers performing a certain job or using a certain tool over a period of time.

Unfortunately, many traditional BBS programmes have not delivered on promises and organisations have often been left dissatisfied. Typical reasons for these ill-fated programmes are due to approaches that are with narrow scope, focused solely on behaviour change rather than concurrently addressing causes for at-risk behaviour and work culture, too generic instead of tailored to the specific organisational characteristics and culture, and/or poorly integrated with existing safety management systems. They also assume that if workers behave recklessly, it is because they choose to do so. These programmes then focus on changing individual behaviour without considering the necessary holistic changes to how workers are managed, motivated, rewarded, and their physical work environment, tools and equipment. These programmes result in treating the symptom only, without addressing the root causes of unsafe behaviour.

Recent BBS approaches suggest that at-risk working behaviour stems from workers' recognition that the convenience for unsafe behaviour often outweighs the burden for behaving safely. In other word, if they cut corners and can get away from it, they will cut corners. Thus, a successful BBS programme must ensure that safety is a value within organizations and address a number of factors affecting work behaviour such as the organisational environment, management attitude and commitment, the nature of the job or task, the sense of belonging and team working, and the personal attributes of the individual. Management must also recognise that BBS requires the direct practical and visible involvement of employees at all levels, and its implementation does require time and commitment, and in particular strong visible support from the top.

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