

RESEARCH BRIEF

Attitudes towards risk taking and rule breaking in Australian workplaces

The Study

Risk taking and rule breaking in the workplace has been identified as an area of interest in The Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-22 under the action area of Leadership and Culture: *Health and safety is given priority in all work processes and decisions.*

This research brief reports on the attitudes of Australian workers towards risk taking and rule breaking in the workplace as measured by the Perceptions of Work Health and Safety (WHS) Survey 2012-13 using questions from internationally validated research.

Sample

The survey includes responses from 1052 employers, 520 sole traders, 1311 workers and 669 Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs). The data were weighted to produce national estimates of the number of businesses and workers in Australia that hold particular attitudes and perceptions about work health and safety.

Main findings

Risk Taking

Figure 1 shows that 15% of workers and 11% of sole traders agreed that they accept risk taking at work. This was higher than the proportion of employers and HSRs (4% each).

When examining acceptance of risk taking by business size, sole traders were generally more accepting of risk taking in the workplace compared to employers in small, medium and large businesses.

Figure 1: Attitudes toward risk taking by worker type



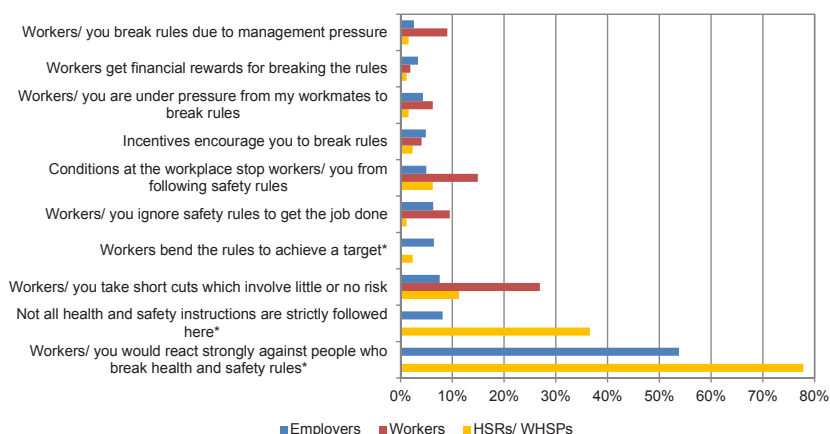
Labourers had comparatively high levels of acceptance of risk taking in the workplace. At the detailed occupation level, it was found that a number of Labourer occupations agreed that they accept risk taking at work.

Almost forty percent of employers operating in the Transport, postal & warehousing industry acknowledged that their workplace does not suit those worried about being injured. Despite this, Transport, postal & warehousing employers were more accepting of risk taking at work compared to other industries.

Rule Breaking

Figure 2 shows that just over one quarter of workers agreed that they take short cuts that involve little or no risk, which was higher than HSRs and employers (11% and 8%, respectively). Ten percent of workers agreed that they ignore safety rules to get the job done while 15% agreed that conditions at the workplace stop them from working safely.

Figure 2: Attitudes toward rule breaking by worker type**



* Not asked of workers

** Rule breaking questions were not included in the WHS Perceptions survey for sole traders

Labourers were also much more accepting of rule breaking in the workplace compared to other occupations. A number of Labourer occupations contributed to this level of acceptance.

In comparison to employers in other industries those operating in Transport, postal & warehousing had a much higher level of agreement with rule breaking questions. Around one third of these employers agreed that conditions in the workplace stop workers from following safety rules and workers ignore safety rules to get the job done.

A more detailed report on these findings is available at www.swa.gov.au.