**Personality Styles Which Influence Organizational Safety**
Dr. Joshua H. Williams
Safety Performance Solutions

At-risk behaviors are a contributing factor with most organizational injuries (Geller, 1996). Unfortunately, many naturally occurring consequences (e.g., comfort, speed) are associated with safety short-cuts (e.g., failing to use a hoist, safety harness etc.) instead of safe work practices (Williams & Geller, 2000). The tendency toward risky behaviors has been frequently discussed within the context of the Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence (ABC) model (Geller et al., 2001). This model explains why workers take risks, and can be a powerful tool to design interventions to reverse this trend. A large body of research demonstrates the link between safety behaviors and safety performance. Unfortunately, there is less available information on the relationship between *personality factors* and organizational safety performance. Before addressing specific ways personality influences organizational safety, a brief sketch of personality research is provided.

## Personality: A Historical Perspective

Personality is defined as, "…a set of relatively enduring behavioral responses and internal predispositions that characterize how a person react to the environment" (Lefton, 1991, p. 424). Early personality research addressed various motivational drives which energize human behavior, including our search for: meaning in life (Jung), personal fulfillment (Rogers), self-actualization and self-transcendence (Maslow), and sex (Freud). More modern theories of personality (Allport, Cattell, and Eysenck) focused on specific "traits" that predict human behavior (e.g., self-assured, forthcoming, practical, apprehensive, tense etc.). In fact, researchers conducted decades of factor analytic research using thousands of personality characteristics to try and find "core" traits.

Five core traits, from a myriad of different researchers, were consistently found: 1) Surgency (Extraversion), 2) Agreeableness, 3) Conscientiousness, 4) Emotional Stability, and 5) Intellect (or "Openness to Experience" on other lists). Individuals score high or low (along a continuum) on each of these items. Some research suggests that these factors predict organizational performance (Barrick & Mount, YEAR). For example, someone high in intellect and emotional stability may be more likely to perform better on the job versus someone who is low on these "traits." As Goldberg (1993) asserts, "Evidence has been accruing about the utility of personality measures as predictors of diverse criteria…personality measures, when classified within the Big-Five domains, are systematically related to a variety of criteria of job performance" (p. 31).
**(Hogan: \*Personality impacts employee satisfaction, goal-setting, work motivation, leadership, employee reliability, and organizational climate.  However, the predictive validity of personality (with organizational performance) is low (Hogan, Barrick and Mount).**

However, others are less optimistic about the strength of correlations between personality factors and organizational performance (Tett et al, DATE). Regardless, personality factors are sometimes used for selection purposes in organizations, although other techniques (e.g., Assessment Centers) often have higher predictive validities in terms of organizational performance.

Although research on the "Big 5" is still conducted today, more personality research is conducted within the context of *the situation*. Walter Mischel introduced the concept of "self-regulation," in which people constantly (hundreds of times a day) adjust and adapt to dynamic environments. Clearly, human behavior is *not* consistent in every situation and across time. For example, our personality at work may be extremely different than at a football game or in a casino. Although certain traits surely exist within all of us, it may be more useful to examine personality *states* when addressing organizational change efforts.

Accordingly, a brief summary of personality factors that influence organizational safety behavior, performance, and culture is provided. These factors should be viewed as changing "states" rather than inborn, unchanging "traits."

## 1. Locus of Control (Personal Control)

One of the strongest predictors of human behavior is "Locus of Control," defined as "the extent to which individuals believe that they, or that external factors control their lives (Rotter, 1990)." A person who believes that success depends on hard work and dedication has an *internal locus of control*. Conversely, a person who believes that success depends on luck or the whims of others has an *external locus of control*. Research shows that people with an internal locus of control have higher academic achievement (Findley & Cooper, 1983), better responsiveness to psychotherapy (Kilmann et al., 1975), and are more likely to engage in prosocial health behaviors and dieting (Balch & Ross, 1975) than individuals with an external locus of control.

In the domain of safety, Geller (2001) has extensive studies "personal control" (analogous to locus of control) and has demonstrated that it predicts helping behavior. STUDIES

## 2. Self-Efficacy

Also, Albert Bandura introduced "self-efficacy" which is defined as "…a person's belief about whether he or she can successfully engage in and execute a specific behavior" (p. 450). Self-efficacy also determines how long a person will persevere in the face of obstacles.

Again, Geller addresses self-efficacy, or self-effectiveness.    STUDIES

Other employees can influence our sense of self-efficacy by providing positive and personal recognition for proactive safety efforts. Unfortunately with safety, employees may go for extended periods of time without hearing *one-on-one* praise for their safety behaviors, activities, and achievements. Safety professionals enhance employees' feelings of personal competence by more frequently noticing and then praising individuals' safe work practices and offering respectful correcting feedback when at-risk behaviors are observed (Williams, Professional Safety Article).

Also, employees who are engaged in numerous, challenging tasks generally have a stronger sense of self-efficacy than those who are don't feel challenged. Safety professionals should design safety initiatives to encourage active employee participation.

### 3. Optimism

To improve optimism, use surprise awards for participation in safety efforts. The rewards should have a safety message and should be for proactive efforts (Geller, 1996). Safety awards that are viewed as challenging and not available to everyone may be viewed as more valuable. In one example, a company gave out embroidered golf shirts to employees who had been especially active in their behavioral observation and feedback process. The shirts were a surprise to the employees who had no idea they were coming. Unlike other incentives which may have less value (trinkets) or become institutionalized long-term (entitlement), the golf shirts were seen by the recipients as a legitimate "thank you" for their efforts. This prompts future involvement in safety issues with these employees.

### 4. Self-esteem

When we talk about optimizing safety culture, it is imperative to realize that our primary motivational style (i.e., carrot vs. whip) has lasting implications for the safety culture (Williams, 2002). Leaders who control employees with punitive measures and fear-inducting tactics will likely get employee compliance. At least when that leader is visible. When s/he is not "on the floor" the compliant behaviors will likely disappear. In fact, employees may do the opposite of what they are told to exert "countercontrol" (or psychological reactance, Geller, 1996).

In some cases, employees have actually pushed out the lenses on their safety glasses after being mandated to ALWAYS wear them (the rule said nothing about wearing "intact" safety glasses). Most of us react negatively to punitive styles of safety leadership (Williams, 2002). Also, the safety culture as a whole is damaged with negative leadership tactics. If you've ever tried to implement a safety initiative and heard employees say something like, "And I remember 20 years ago they tried the same thing" or "Nothing's changed here in the last 25 years" there is a problem with the safety culture. The point is, when employees are treated poorly by excessive use of "the whip" they will reciprocate with a bad attitude that may last their entire career. This, in turn, affects other employees, and the probability of successfully introducing new safety ideas is greatly diminished.

Conversely, soliciting *one-on-one* input from employees, and effectively responding to that input is a great way to motivate safety efforts. Experienced hourly employees usually have a number of creative, practical ideas to improve safety. Unfortunately, they may not say anything because: a) they are angry about past leadership practices and no longer care, b) no one asks for their opinion, or c) nothing is ever done about safety suggestions. So, they become apathetic. On the other hand, some organizations do a great job of soliciting employee input and acting on legitimate concerns that are expressed. Not surprisingly, these companies have a more employee involvement for safety.

Finally, effective safety leaders provide genuine, positive recognition for employees who work safely. Positive recognition is a powerful, and positive, tool to motivate safety because it invokes reciprocity principle -- Treat me right and I'll do the same for you. A supervisor sees an employee stacking pallets too high in the warehouse. The supervisor may observe the employee and simply ignore him/her. What message does this convey? Safety is not important. Or, the supervisor may stop the employee and chew him/her out. This might be understandable given how seriously someone could be hurt by a falling pallet. However, the employee may feel persecuted because: a) everyone else does the same thing, or b) there's not

enough room to put the pallets anywhere else. Finally, the supervisor might stop the employee and ask him/her why they are stacking the pallets so high. Through the course of discussion, the supervisor may find out that the unwritten norm is to stack the pallets very high and that some retraining is needed for forktruck operators. Or, the supervisor and employee may find a way to free up some space which would make it easier to have pallets stacked at the appropriate height. The point is, the *first* response should be problem solving, not punishing or ignoring.

Finally, when employees are asked "When was the last time you were complimented for working safe?," many will respond "I can't remember" or "Never." Normally, employees get pats on the back for production, not safety. Effective safety leaders praise employees for safe work behaviors because it makes the employee feel valued, and increases the chance s/he will operate safely in the future. Thus, the power of authority can be used to great effect if we choose the right approach to motivating employees.

## 5. Belonging

Pharmaceutical companies make enormous profits off drugs that reduce social anxiety. So, why do we get so nervous in certain social situations (e.g., cocktail party)? The answer is we have an enormous desire to be liked and accepted by others. This includes the approval of friends, family, bosses and even perfect strangers. We want to be liked by others and feel like we "belong."

## 6. Empathy

Goleman

## 7. Delayed Gratification

## 8. Pro-Social Orientation

## 9. Emotional Flexibility

## 10. Self-awareness

Cognitive dissonance occurs when beliefs and behaviors are incongruous (Festinger, 1957). We are motivated to eliminate this discord by changing behaviors to match beliefs (or vice versa). This allows us to avoid feeling hypocritical, and may also help us process information more rapidly because thoughts/behaviors become habitual. Encouraging safety responsibility in employees may lead to safer work practices for the organization (e.g., I perceive myself as a safe worker therefore I work safely on the job). Also, influencing safety behaviors through peer feedback may influence employees' self perceptions (e.g., I performed this task safely so I must be a safe worker).

Soliciting employee input is a way to spur employee involvement. To do this, safety leaders should have more one-on-one discussions with respected hourly employees to get their support for safety initiatives. Similar to a grass roots political campaign, individual interactions are needed to "sell" safety ideas as well as get the "commitment" of employees to participate. When an employee gives his/her commitment, they will feel hypocritical if they don't follow through on their responsibility.

## 11. Mood regulation

**11b. self awareness**

Marketers consistently use the phrase, "New and Improved," to try and sell products. This is not done arbitrarily. Most of us respond favorably to new things and experiences, from cars to computers to relationships. The antithesis of novelty is habituation. Habituation is functional because it frees up our cognitive resources when completing numerous complex tasks. For instance, when we first learn to drive a car we are acutely aware of other motorists, our speed, remembering to signal etc. However, with time we become habituated to driving and may be thinking about a million other things (e.g., work, money issues, our kids etc.) *except driving*. This is habituation.

The problem with habituation is that we stop noticing or appreciating relevant stimuli around us. When we try to "rekindle the romance" in a relationship, we are fighting habituation. In organizations, safety training, signs, meetings, and initiatives may become stale because of repetition and a lack of variety. To keep safety efforts "fresh," it is useful to bring in guest speakers, have employees design their own safety initiatives, replace old safety signs that have been around for years, and actively pursue new ways to get safety messages across. Otherwise, safety efforts become "the same old thing" because of habituation and a lack of novelty.

**12. Self-motivation**

Four self-motivation styles, adopted from Murray's *needs theory* (Saal & Knight, 1988), are relevant for understanding the self-motivation of safety leaders.

➢ Need for Affiliation (nAFF). Leaders high in nAFF are motivated by group cohesion and healthy interpersonal relationships. They often attend to the emotional needs of others and have a strong desire to be liked by individuals in their cohort.

➢ Need for Achievement (nACH). People with a high nACH take responsibility for solving problems, are often competitive, and are extremely concerned with successfully completing their tasks.

➢ Need to Avoid Failure (nAF). Unlike nACH individuals, those high in nAF typically avoid challenging tasks and are drawn to tasks that are very simple to ensure success, or so difficult that failure can be blamed on the nature of the task, not personal skill.

➢ Need for Power (nPOW). People high in nPOW are highly motivated to exert influence over their environment. This category is broken down into the need for *personal power* (i.e., controlling others is an end in and of itself) and the need for *institutional power* (controlling others for the good of the institution).

Effective leaders are typically high in the need for affiliation, achievement, and institutional power, and lower in the need for personal power and the need to avoid failure. IOP research demonstrates that many effective leaders are especially high in the need for *institutional power* (McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982). Employees are likely

to understand that safety professionals with a high need for institutional power have the greater good of the organization in mind in developing safety rules and regulations, implementing new safety initiatives, providing safety education and training, and even spearheading disciplinary procedures.

## 13. Self-Monitoring

Conformity relates to our need to fit in and be accepted. Looking back at photo albums and the number of odd hairstyles and clothes we wore demonstrates the power of social conformity. Also, the power of brand affiliation in our consumption driven society (e.g., Nike, Mercedes) also reflects conformity. We want to buy, wear, and drive products that are valued by society. With this in mind, when safety professionals get the buy-in and involvement of informal social leaders with safety efforts, it is likely that other employees will follow suit and get involved.

## 14. Impression management

## 15. Conflict Resolution

Organizational conflicts are often caused by tension between people with different objectives and personality styles. For safety, conflicts occur when: the majority of safety feedback is negative, new ideas for safety are not solicited from hourly employees, incident analyses (injury investigations) are highly punitive, and when there is little communication and interaction between managers and employees.

When addressing another's safety concern, our approach impacts the likelihood that the conflict will be successfully resolved. Ineffective conflict management tactics include: dominating (command and control compliance) and withdrawing (avoid safety concerns and problems; Murphy, 1994). More effective strategies include: compromise ("How can we resolve our difference of opinion?"), accommodation ("how can I help you?") and collaboration ("How can we solve this problem together?"). To use these tactics, it is important to ask questions to understand others' concerns, actively listen to employees' feedback, and commit to making improvements in a timely fashion. This is especially true with safety issues, as employees may perceive a lack of follow-up with safety concerns as an indicator that management doesn't care about them.

Unfortunately, there is a large separation between employees in management in many organizations. This may be best seen in the company's cafeteria. In many organizations, managers and employees don't sit together, talk to each other, or even make eye contact at lunch. How are managers supposed to introduce and/or support new safety initiatives when they aren't talking to employees (and vice-versa). Sending out emails, making group announcements, and posting information in newsletters is great. But it doesn't replace one-on-one interactions. So, the first step in getting support for safety may be a little ingratiation. Taking off the "manager hat" and talking with employees, especially beyond work issues, goes along way to reducing the organizational barriers which prevent real progress.

## 16. Attitudes
Poor attitudes often result when optimal conflict resolution strategies aren't used. Unfortunately, negative attitudes on the job often: a) last for years, and b) are spread to others. Employee attitudes can be classified into three categories (adapted from Murphy, 1994): *Complainers*, *Sideline Spectators*, and *Champions*.

➢ *Complainers* usually voice safety concerns to express displeasure, not make improvements. They regularly find fault with the organization and other employees. Complainers typically believe: others cause their problems, there's always something wrong, change is inherently bad, and people don't have control over their lives. This leads to feelings of anger, resentment, doubt, frustration, and fear.

➢ *Sideline Spectators* seldom discuss safety concerns, as they perceive that their actions will have little or no consequence on the organization as a whole. As a result, they seldom get involved in safety efforts or initiatives. Sideline Spectators typically believe: other people will solve important problems, change is unnecessary, most situations are "no big deal," and that people have minimum control over their lives. As a result, Sideline Spectators often feel tired, uninspired, detached, unemotional, and indifferent.

➢ *Champions* express safety concerns constructively and work effectively with others to make improvements. They have a positive outlook toward fellow employees and the organization as a whole. Champions usually believe: there's good in most situations, problems create opportunities for change, change is a sign of growth, and people control their own lives. This leads to feelings of confidence, happiness, contentment, and optimism.

When an organization has numerous Champions within all levels of the organization, the organizational safety culture is usually healthy. However, when Sideline Spectators and (especially) Complainers dominate all organizational levels, the organizational culture will be negative and unhealthy. Improving attitudes is challenging but possible within an organization. To try and help move people from Complainers to Champions, the following guidelines should be followed:
➢ Teach and demonstrate respect, even when it's not reciprocated.
➢ Own up to past organizational mistakes and look to the future to make improvements.
➢ Treat mistakes as learning opportunities, not occasions to punish.
➢ Solicit input from employees about safety concerns and respond to them in a timely manner.
➢ Create opportunities for employees to get involved in and manage safety initiatives.
➢ Encourage discussions between and within organizational levels. Increase the frequency and quality of one-on-one discussions.

## 17. Communication Styles
Workplace attitudes have an enormous influence on (and are influenced by) employees' *communication styles*. Unfortunately, communication between employees within and across organizational levels is sometimes difficult, negative, or non-existent. This may occur because people have differing communication styles. Employees may invoke one of the following four

styles of communication (adapted from Murphy, 1994): Sheriff, Salesperson, Diplomat, Investigator (see **Figure 1**).

➤ *Sheriffs* are task oriented. Their strengths include being decisive, direct, practical, and closure-oriented. However, they are often impatient, overly independent, combative, insensitive, and domineering. Bobby Knight is an example of a sheriff.

➤ The *Salesperson* is outgoing and friendly. His/her strengths include being enthusiastic, approachable, open, and inclusive of others. However, the Salesperson is often overly sensitive, unprepared, disorganized, and inattentive to details. Ronald Reagan might be an example of a Salesperson.

➤ *Diplomats* are supportive and patient. Their strengths include being consistent, easy going, responsive to others, and effective listeners. However, they are typically passive, indecisive, slow to change, and avoiding of confrontation. Jimmy Carter might be described as a Diplomat.

➤ *Investigators* are analytical and detail oriented. They are generally prepared, systematic, and accurate. However, they can also be inflexible, overly cautious, insensitive, overly critical and may have unrealistic standards. The fictional character, Nurse Ratchet, might be described as an Investigator.

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Conflicts arise when people are insensitive to others who have different communication styles than their own. For instance, a detail oriented Investigator interacting with a Salesperson might be biased to notice his/her lack of preparation instead of recognizing his/her enthusiasm and openness. Also, the decisive, task-oriented Sheriff might get impatient with the "slow to change" Diplomat, instead of acknowledging his/her patience and supportiveness.

To overcome these barriers, the following suggestions are put forward:
➤ Recognize limitations of your preferred communication style
➤ Accept diverse communication styles in others.
➤ Different social situations may require different communication styles
➤ Develop a pattern of communication that incorporates the strengths of all four communication styles

Regardless of communication style, effective safety leaders provide high quality recognition to work groups as well as individuals. This involves sincere, personal praise with pro-social behaviors, as well as non-threatening corrective feedback when job behaviors are less than ideal. Effective communication also involves active listening, where leaders genuinely empathize with employees' concerns, issues, and feelings.

**Conclusion**

Influencing personality states will improve organizational (safety) culture.

**GOLEMAN'S KEY STATES**
**Emotional intelligence is defined as "being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one's moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to empathize and to hope (p. 34)."**

- **Goleman insists these states can be trained (see Salavoy and Gardner's Interpersonal IQ).**
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1. *Self awareness*- **Awareness of one's emotions…R.E.T. helps.**
2. *Managing emotions*- **Anger is dangerous (energizing and therefore reinforcing), Solutions= Time outs and distractions (women=sweet food, men = sex)**
3. *Motivating yourself*- **Marshmallow test, good moods = more flexible and complex thinking = greater analytic ability, HOPE predicts grades better than SAT, Optimism and Self-Efficacy are key.**
4. *Recognizing emotions in others*- **sensitivity to social cues. Criminals = poor impulse control and rationalizations, or cold manipulation/lack of empathy (slowed heart rate during brutal crimes). Introduce the Self-Monitoring scale here and explain it.**
5. **Handling relationships- Includes good Impression Management.**

**GARDNER'S KEY STATES**

**Interpersonal IQ**
1. **Organizing Groups- Initiating Structure and Social Coordination**
2. **Negotiating Solutions- Mediating conflict through prevention and de-escalation**
3. **Personal Connections- Empathy for smooth social encounters and behavioral flexibility**
4. **Social Analysis- Detecting and having insight into others' feelings, motives, concerns….enhances intimacy and rapport**

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