

A solo dynamic

MANY of the safety risks faced by lone workers or frontline staff can be assessed and controlled with formal assessments and robust management. But when workers interact with customers or the general public away from a corporate base, situations that have not been covered may develop.

One practical tool is dynamic risk assessment (DRA). There are lots of interpretations of DRA and how it works. There is also much discussion about how much companies should rely on it, and even whether it should be used at all.

DRA should never be used as a substitute for formal risk assessments and safe systems of work nor as a way to shift the responsibility onto the lone/frontline worker.

Nevertheless, it would be hard for workers to avoid using DRA; we all use it on a daily basis, crossing the road or pulling out at a junction in a car.

Lots of people employ the same kind of evaluations on a routine basis in the workplace, using their personal judgment, combined with experience, to evaluate risk. Organisations can help workers to use DRA in a positive and effective way by building on the skills they already have in assessing the potential of violence or aggression when they are away from immediate support.

Boosting confidence

A systematic approach to DRA will provide a process for those workers who:

- may not assess situations well
- might ignore the potential impact and decide to take the risk anyway.

DRA is not always intuitive, so we need to ensure that individuals understand and buy into the process. But lone workers will already have experience of situations with varying risk levels; we can build on these experiences and empower individuals to use them in a more structured way.

There may be many reasons that staff — even when they can foresee a situation arising — ignore the potential impact and continue with the task at hand. Sometimes it can be connected with their personal tolerance of risk (risk appetite), but on other occasions it may be more to do with the pressure associated with the job.

These pressures can be self-imposed: “I should be able to cope with this”; “It’s just part of the job”, or prompted by the organisation’s ethos: “If you don’t do it someone else will have to”; “It’s frowned on if you make a fuss”.

To achieve buy-in to the process, it is important for organisations to support workers’ decisions and continue to provide those formal assessments and safe systems of work. This will help prevent workers feeling that they are taking on too much responsibility.

So how can you make DRAs an effective tool for people to use and integrate them into your risk management systems?

The first step is to remember that a DRA is simply a tool. However when embedded as part of working practices, it is a powerful tool that can:

- enable people to recognise and assess what they see, hear and feel



Nicole Vazquez outlines a tested method for dynamic risk assessment by lone workers



- encourage ownership and involvement in managing personal safety
- provide a means of articulating and communicating concerns
- empower staff to take proactive moves to protect their own safety
- bridge the gap between static risk assessment and what is happening "in the moment".

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust has adopted a very simple model, which has been taught successfully to many lone workers and frontline staff. It encompasses situational and behavioural awareness and is especially well suited to assessing personal safety risks. The feedback on the model has been excellent; many organisations have trained workers and adopted the process as part of their control measures.

Workers can use the strategy before an encounter and can continue using it for the duration of any interaction. Focusing on the three elements of people, environment and task, PET analysis offers a structure to help identify some of the factors and level of potential risk.

PET care

PET analysis consists of the following elements:

- **People:** This asks workers to consider what they already know about the people they are coming into contact with, along with behavioural awareness of how individuals are acting at any moment during the interaction. They are also asked to include themselves in the assessment.
 - What do I know about this person/people (strangers/well known)?
 - What mood are they likely to be in?
 - Am I working on my own?
 - Do they have any history of aggression?
 - What is their body language and tone of voice telling me?
 - Is their behaviour changing unexpectedly?
 - How confident and competent do I feel?
- **Environment:** workers should consider the environment they will be working in and use their situational awareness to continue to assess their surroundings.
 - What about the environment could make me more vulnerable?
 - What could be used as a weapon against me?
 - Can I get out if I need to?
 - Whose territory is this (and how will this affect the dynamics)?

- Am I isolated from my colleagues?
- **Task:** assessing the task they are carrying out will really help lone workers identify triggers that may increase the likelihood of aggression.
 - What am I doing that could create a prompt for aggression?
 - Am I asking difficult questions/delivering bad news?
 - Am I enforcing rules or asking the person to do something they will object to?
 - Am I carrying/handling cash or valuables?
 - Am I invading their space?
 - Am I assessing for provision or denial of a service?

The PET evaluation can give workers a format to identify and assess their concerns. It also helps them articulate and report their concerns to their managers.

Having conversations about why an employee abandoned a meeting or failed to enforce a rule is much easier if both the manager and the worker are talking the same language.

The worker can explain their concerns and the manager can then look at what steps can be taken to manage the risk, using the findings of the workers' PET analysis. Managers, and line

PET analysis helps lone workers articulate their concerns and report them to managers

managers in particular, play an important part when embedding DRAs in a team's working practices.

To ensure workers feel empowered to not only use, but also act on their DRAs, there are some simple steps that need to be followed. Managers need to lead by example, demonstrating their commitment to the process. They should talk openly about the risk lone workers may face and support them in decisions they make based on their DRAs.

With the right supporting framework, structured DRAs make it easier for the worker to recall and report in a clear way why they took particular actions.

Finally, when workers do report concerns, it offers a constructive way for organisations to manage the risks that workers may face, learning from their experiences and embedding DRAs as a productive part of the organisation's risk management system. ■

■ Nicole Vazquez is a training consultant for the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, www.suzylamplugh.org