

Smashing the stigma in mental health – a strategic blueprint for change

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ABSTRACT:

The oil and gas industry is known for its strong commitment to safety which often focuses on process safety, physical safety and behaviour, with little attention to mental health.

Mental health is a growing issue. It impacts decision making, increases the likelihood of human error which can result in the loss of lives and environmental destruction. If not addressed properly, it can cause excessive stress, anxiety, depression, trauma or even suicide.

Mental health is one of the biggest risks to the oil and gas industry today. Research shows that one in five workers suffer from a mental health issue at some point in time during their lives. Experts believe these statistics are higher for workers in the oil and gas industry due to the nature of the work – long working hours, isolation, being away from friends and family, feeling under high pressure to avoid mistakes due to the potentially devastating consequences and being a male dominated industry.

Investment in mental health is currently often limited to Employee Assist Programs, R U OK days or wellbeing initiatives. What is needed is a total strategic and integrated approach which organisations can customise to their specific needs, distinct from a series of individual initiatives.

By learning from leading practices, other industries and extending experience from building effective safety cultures within the oil and gas industry to mental health, a total strategic approach is presented which will enable organisations build their own customised blueprint and smash the stigma surrounding mental health.

Keywords: workplace mental health, mental health blueprint, leadership capability, stigma, culture change, workplace safety, mental illness, prevention, management, cost–benefit, improved performance, absenteeism, presenteeism, performance management, human reliability, psychological safety.