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Why don't you go for a walk at lunchtime when you know it's good for you?

Conroy C.¹, James P.², Weinberg A.³, Bendall, R.C.A.⁴

¹ c.conroy@salford.ac.uk ² p.james@salford.ac.uk ³ a.weinberg@salford.ac.uk ⁴ r.c.a.bendall@salford.ac.uk

Introduction

Health ecology, an emerging discipline, considers human health and well-being, including psychosocial issues such as perception of and attitudes towards well-being, in the context of human interaction with their environment (Bhasin, Shampa Nag, 2011).

Increasingly the workplace is seen as a setting in which to enhance well-being (Black, 2008). This has resulted in a cross-departmental government programme to improve the health and well-being of people of working age (DWP, DoH, 2008).

In June 2011 a small scale study, conducted during a University of Salford Vice-Chancellor's 'Thank You' campus event for staff, captured qualitative data on the perception of, and the motivating factors to engage with the natural environment around campus.

Methods

A short questionnaire, using Likert scales, was employed to obtain the participants' subjective opinion of their knowledge, experience, and awareness of risks associated with the natural environment and of the University's values to encourage engagement. Staff were asked if they wished to take part as they visited a display stand during the event.

Results

Twenty eight questionnaires were completed. The results demonstrated 'very good' or 'good' levels of knowledge of, and familiarity with, the natural environment (Fig. 1 and 2). Respondents reported 'positive' and 'very positive' past experiences of engagement with the natural environment, and associated risks were considered to be acceptable (Fig. 3 and 4). The values of the University were considered very important in encouraging engagement with the natural environment around campus, and some specific factors for further investigation were identified (Fig. 5 and 6).

Fig 1. Knowledge of the natural environment

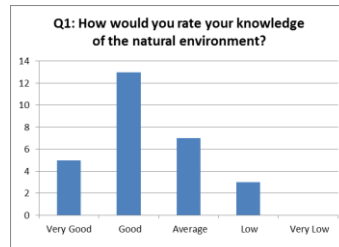


Fig 2. Familiarity with hazards of the natural environment

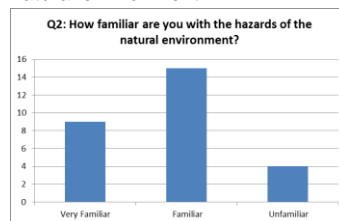


Fig 3. Past experiences of engagement with the natural environment



Fig 4. Risks of engagement with the natural environment

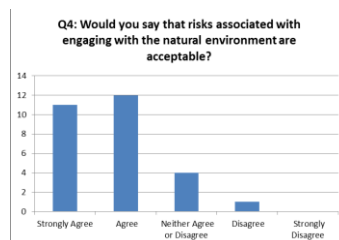


Fig 5. Values of the University to encourage engagement with the natural environment

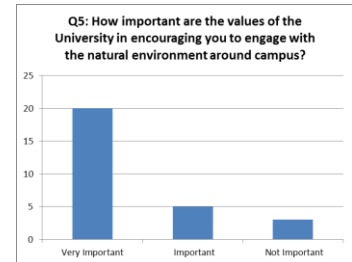
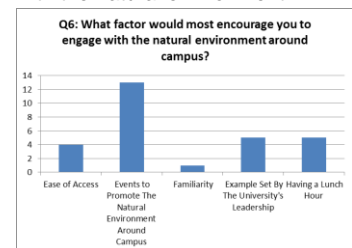


Fig 6. Factors to encourage engagement with the natural environment



Discussion

The results indicate that participants have positive experiences of engagement with the natural environment and that the risks are acceptable. Yet anecdotal evidence indicates there is little engagement with the campus environment by employees. The concept of organisational culture and climate is well recognised in the management of occupational safety and health and it is widely held that commitment of senior management is the key influence of an organisation's safety culture (Gadd & Collins 2002). The findings in figure 5 and 6 echo how important the demonstrative engagement of senior managers of the University is in the development of shared values which support engagement with the natural environment around campus. It is hoped to conduct a wider survey during 2011-12.

References

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