Applying online fleet driver assessment to help identify, target and reduce occupational road safety risks

Dr Will Murray
Research Director, Interactive Driving Systems
Visiting Fellow, Loughborough University and Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety - Queensland

Introduction

This paper focuses on the application of online fleet driver assessment tools to help identify, target and reduce occupational road safety risks. It covers the principles of risk assessment, the uses of online tools, predictive validity analysis, intervention allocations and some suggested next steps.

Risk assessment

Driver risk assessment, monitoring and improvement is important to organisations requiring their people to travel - for a range of business, legal, financial and even societal reasons in the UK and globally. As a basic compliance-led start point in the UK, the soon to be re-launched Health & Safety Executive Guidance ‘INDG382 Driving at work: Managing work-related road safety’ says that: organisations need to risk assess the safety of their drivers, vehicle and journeys.

Essentially, risk assessment for any work-related driving activity should follow the same principles as those for any other work activity. It should identify and document the potential hazards, who might be harmed and reasonable measures to support your drivers to protect themselves from harm.

A range of approaches are available for driver risk assessment, including combinations of in-vehicle assessments, psychometric tests and online assessments. Each is important, depending on the nature of the work and operating environment. Over the over the last 10 or so years, however, a growing number of online programs have been developed promising many benefits – particularly around costs compared to face to face assessments, reduced ‘time off the tools’ for employees and lower
risks. Online tools allow everyone who drives on business, including car, van, occasional, two-wheeler, specialist, site vehicle and grey fleet drivers, to be included in a program that traditionally may have only catered for specialist commercial vehicle drivers.

With these developments in mind, the remainder of this article focuses on applying online fleet driver assessment to help identify, target and reduce occupational road safety risks.

**Online assessments**

Online assessment program require drivers to log onto a secure internet portal and answer a series of questions, which will then generate a ranking, more often than not based on red, amber and green traffic lights sometimes known as a RAG rating to symbolise high, medium and low risk drivers which can be utilised:

- Pre-employment as part of recruitment pre-screening, at interview, during induction and as part of the new employee training process.
- For current staff as part of the permit to drive process; for selecting instructors and assessors; to evaluate training needs and review the success of training; and for post-collision investigation purposes.
- In other ways such as to drive policy and process compliance; allocate company and hire cars; engage drivers in cash for car and own vehicle schemes; for high employee turnover operations; risk assessments for due diligence, insurance, underwriting and vehicle hire; as part of the business development process; and as a third party service to clients.

Depending on the background and origins of the online assessment supplier – typically in the driver training, vehicle leasing, insurance and behavioural sectors – the emphasis and content of the various assessment tools available will vary. Typically most of the available tools focus some attention on the exposure levels of the driver, the type of vehicle they drive and journeys they undertake, as well as testing combinations of their attitude, behaviour, knowledge and hazard perception. Interventions such as feedback, training, workshops or OneToOnes will then be allocated on the basis of the risks identified.

**RoadRISK assessment**

As an example, at Interactive Driving Systems our online risk assessment tool, which was first developed through trials undertaken at the University of Huddersfield in the UK in 1998, is known as RoadRISK. Through its Profile, Defensive Driving and Feedback modules, which take about an hour to complete in total, RoadRISK covers each driver’s personal exposure to risk, attitudes to safe driving and behaviour on the road. It has been evaluated in some detail through research undertaken at Edinburgh Napier and Loughborough universities based on large numbers of British Telecommunications (BT) drivers [1] and also through predictive validity analysis with many other organisations including most recently the likes of Wal-Mart ASDA, Roche Australia [2], E.ON and Nestlé.

**Predictive validity**

Figure 1 shows the relationship between the RoadRISK assessment outcomes and the average driver claim rate for a large company car and van fleet with about 4,000 drivers. Participants
identified as being at high risk on the assessment are the same drivers who have the highest collision rate. Although not perfect, this gives the organisation the opportunity to PREDICT who its most at-risk drivers are for targeting relevant next steps and interventions.

Figure 1. Predictive validity analysis for RoadRISK assessment

To give an indication of how online risk assessments have traditionally worked:

1. The ‘RoadRISK: Driver Profile’ is a 49 question review of each participant’s personal risk exposure, the vehicle they drive and the journeys they make. As well as good practice, it also helps meet health and safety requirements for risk assessment in line with the HSE guidance mentioned above.
2. ‘RoadRISK: Defensive Driving’ is a 45 question assessment of participant attitude, behaviour, knowledge of the Highway Code and hazard perception on the road.
3. On completion, ‘RoadRISK: Driver Feedback’ reviews participant responses, providing good practice guidance and details of the next steps required as well as completion certificates.

Allocation of relevant driver safety improvement interventions

From such web-based driver assessment, outcomes data feeds into an online management information system, and recommendations for interventions - such as those shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Indicative risk based driver improvement interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>% of drivers</th>
<th>Typical interventions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At high risk</td>
<td>2 - 20</td>
<td>RoadRISK Profile and Defensive driving feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mandatory computer based training (CBT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mandatory OneToOne with manager</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mandatory group-based session</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In-vehicle session if required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Relevant CBTs and communications as required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At medium risk</td>
<td>40 - 70</td>
<td>Profile and RoadRISK feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mandatory CBT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>OneToOne with manager if required</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Relevant CBTs and communications as required</td>
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<tr>
<td>At low risk</td>
<td>10 - 50</td>
<td>Profile and RoadRISK feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Relevant CBTs and communications as required</td>
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</table>
Over the last 10 years, this approach has stood the test of time, and brought many positive benefits for the fleet industry. BT is a very good example, with its online RoadRISK assessment and engagement process touching over 80,000 employees since first being piloted in 2001. As its compliance has increased and programs have become more robust year on year, so BT’s overall claim rate and costs have significantly reduced as can be seen in the following regression analysis (Figure 2).

![Figure 2. BT RoadRISK versus claims rate regression analysis](image)

Like many other similar organisations, BT has very successfully used its risk assessment program to drive organisational policy and process by working with its line managers and drivers to promote compliance, targeted interventions on the basis of risk and hence safer travel [3].

**Conclusion and next steps**

Online driver risk assessment is only one part of a wider motor risk management system focusing on policy, compliance, leadership, mobility management, driver wellbeing, vehicle management, collision management and stakeholder engagement. It is, however, in many cases the glue that binds all these areas together.

Driver risk assessment, monitoring and improvement has many uses and benefits for organisations requiring their people to travel, and is evolving in several ways including focusing more on policy compliance and driver commitment, as well as through increasingly sophisticated online coaching modules for drivers and managers.

With technology and data converging, online risk assessment results are also being securely integrated with information from other sources such as collisions and claims, license checks, in-vehicle telemetry systems, fuel, tyres, observed violations, tachographs and training to provide an overall picture of each driver, and the organisations, risks from which highly cost effective driver and manager level interventions, such as coaching and OneToOnes, can be developed on the basis of need.

As well as some peace of mind with regards to meeting the requirements of documents such as the UK HSE’s ‘Driving at work: Managing work-related road safety’ guidance INDG382 and other basic legal requirements such as the Highway Code or Rules of the road, if used well online
programs offer many other opportunities to drive road safety a long way down the road to compliance and beyond.

When reviewing the market for online driver risk assessment tools, it is advisable to look around, and discuss the options with your insurer, vehicle leasing and driver training suppliers. Most good suppliers will also: offer dedicated support; assist with business cases; supply details of their research and predictive validity analysis; be willing to set up detailed pilot studies; provide excellent references, case studies and benchmarks; and, have the capability to integrate the types of external data described.

References


www.virtualriskmanager.net/validation provides more detail about validation studies for online driver risk assessment tools.