Exploring and Measuring “Safety Culture” in an Organization

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SAFETY CULTURE

Definition (per USDOT):

- An organization’s *shared* values, actions, and behaviors that
  - “demonstrate a commitment to safety over competing goals and demands”

- The “*shared*” interact with the organization’s structures and control systems
- To create the set of choices that play out as the actions/behaviors that determine the safety related results within the organization

- View the term organization very broadly
SAFETY CULTURE

WHO is doing this sharing?

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Where does the idea that a group of people share the same values, beliefs, actions, and behaviors about safety come from?

- In the workplace where industrial safety is in play, there are at least 4 different groups potentially involved ... management, supervision, work group, and the set of individuals

- For traffic safety in general society, there are many groups involved such as truckers, commuters, kids, housewives, old folks like me, tourists, etc ....
SAFETY CULTURE

- Ideally, all 4 workplace groups share the same culture
- The literature and our experience are clear: this is rare, and frequently there are subcultures of safety within the 4 groups
- The literature also shows that the greater the difference between groups, the worse the safety record---differences in values and beliefs create emotional tension – this is just like in a marriage—the less aligned the two people’s values and beliefs the more the tension and more likely the split
SAFETY CULTURE

- The literature and experience also show that it is common for different locations within an organization to have different “safety cultures”

- Since the “safety culture” includes the values, actions, and behaviors that demonstrate an individual or group’s commitment to safety,

- it is often true that different aspects of an individual’s or group’s work will have a similar level of commitment to safety
  - For example in the case of an individual or group, the “safety culture” around their work and their driving are likely to be similar because their underlying emotions which drive their behaviors are the same for both activities
Safety Culture

- For traffic safety in general society, there are more groups with different interests so the likelihood of shared values is very small.
- So when we measure “safety culture” what are we measuring?
Safety Culture

- When we use a questionnaire to ask about drinking & driving, or speeding while driving, or any other aspect of driving, and we get percentages of people who feel different ways, how do we effectively use that information to solve the problem??
Safety Culture

- Are we really surprised when our questionnaire results tell us that people who say they are comfortable driving after drinking are more likely to drink and drive than people who say they are not comfortable with it?
- What do we do with that information?
- Isn’t it more important to try to find out why these people feel it is ok to drink and drive?
Are we looking to change behavior with respect to these values? What does it take to get a person to CHOOSE to change their behavior?

Usually, it means – what’s in it for me? But how can we know what has value to them and how can we influence how they see the value?
Safety Culture

- When we know WHY they feel ok with something dangerous, how do we approach them

Are they rational or emotional in their decision making

Unless we understand their choice making, we can’t change it
Devil is in the detail

- Consider distracted driving

- Is it about texting while driving?---yes but!
- What about eating, lighting a cigarette, adjusting the radio, feeling the time pressure to get to work, thinking about the fight with a significant other that happened before getting into the car, getting angry at the guy who just cut in front of me, etc.

- Is the real question, why do people choose to be distracted while driving?
Safety Culture

- In workplace safety, people have been searching for the “silver bullet” for a long time. And It does not exist
- There is no “silver bullet” for traffic safety either
SAFETY CULTURE

- Our project is evaluating the “safety culture” at the WVDOT-DOH as it relates to both aspects of safety – driving safety and work safety.

- As a result of this project, we expect that:
  - we will be able to describe the current state of the WVDOT-DOH safety culture, and
  - be able to describe the cultural differences in the approach to safety from the 4 groups, and
  - To show how these differences are affecting safety and productivity in the organization.
SAFETY CULTURE

- Depending on the data, we hope to be able to suggest some ways that a cultural change can reduce the frequency of accidents and injuries, reduce their associated cost, and in some cases improve productivity.

- NOTE—we have no implementation authority, and we are not sure how willing the supervision/management is to make changes to their approach to safety and productivity.
SAFETY CULTURE

- The plan/hope is that the WVDOT-DOH can change its culture to make it safer in both driving and working.
- The state agency is being asked to show it is “walking the walk” and that their success can...
- If appropriate media are used, be used to influence the WV public at large to improve their “safety culture” (their safety related driving and safety related behaviors).
Evaluation/measurement Approach

- Analyze and summarize WVDOT-DOH driving and job related accident, injury, and illness data as it relates to their current “safety culture”
Evaluation/measurement Approach

- Conduct interviews with a sample of employees in each district and headquarters
  - sample will include people at various levels and job tasks within the organization
  - This should help us determine how employees perceive driving and workplace safety and how they fit it into their lives and ultimately the WVDOT-DOH culture
  - This will provide a detailed picture of how “safety” fits into the organization
Evaluation/measurement Approach

- Conduct an employee perception survey to be completed by as many employees as are willing, to get the broadest possible, but less detailed, picture of the “safety culture”

- Compare the interview results with the questionnaire results
Evaluation/measurement Approach

- Analyze the interview and survey results and prepare an initial report to discuss with designated WVDOT-DOH personnel
- (Preliminary data shows wide differences in the ways that management, supervision, and labor view the “safety culture” in the organization)
- Use the report and discussion to prepare a list of areas where change could be made to improve the “safety culture” and reduce accident and injuries along with their cost
Project Completion

- In the report, provide a description of the strengths and weaknesses of the WVDOT-DOH “safety culture”
- Prepare a Safety Culture Action Plan (SCAP) which can be used to begin improving safety in the organization
- Present the “safety culture” description and SCAP to WVDOT-DOH management (and whomever else management designates) so they can take action