Site Worker Perceptions of Safety Culture on Site

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Introduction – Culture Change

- **In the construction industry cultural and behavioural change is the objective of many management initiatives to improve safety performance.**

- **Construction site workers' perspectives on how safety culture should be changed may be based on views that contradict current management practice (as well as the literature informing current practice).**

- **A training solution is often sought.**

- **Large scale quality training is very time consuming and expensive especially if it is not targeting the areas which are essential in improving performance.**

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Project Goals

- **To identify strategies to achieve cost efficient and informed training to build a positive site safety culture.**

- **To identify, from a site based workers' perspective, the key positions and actions required to drive a positive site safety culture.**

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Method

- **11 construction companies were approached to administer surveys to their construction site workers and sub-contractors.**

- **Short open response survey.**

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Survey

- **Demographics – job, location, industry experience.**

- **"Which three position holders within the construction industry have the most impact or effect on how safe your workplace is?"**

- **"For these roles / positions, what are the sort of skills & knowledge they should have and what things should they do?"**

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Results

- **107 responses (a response rate of 36%).**
- **Demographics:**

- **Average time in industry was 15.8 years.**

- **81% of participants were not sub-contractors and only 5% were employed through a labour hire company.**

- **Respondents came from a wide range of job categories– most frequent were:**
  - **Labourers**
  - **Plumbers &**
  - **Carpenters**

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Results – Top Positions

- **The three most important positions (safety critical position holders) for driving site safety were:**

- **1. Site OHS Advisor**
- **2. Foreman / Supervisor**
- **3. Union Representative / Steward, but;**
- **surprisingly, workers also nominated themselves as having a critical role in making sites safer.**
- **in other words, they identified 'ownership' as a crucial element of safety performance.**

Results – Bottom Positions

- **The three least important positions for driving site safety were:**
- **Senior Management 2%**
- **Management 2%**
- **Engineer 2%**
- **Leading Hand 2%**
- **Bosses 2%**
- **Government Inspectors 1%**

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Results – Key Activities

- **To drive a successful safety culture, the key activities and characteristics that these 'safety critical positions' should do and have were:**

  - **OHS Training & Education**
  - **Enforcement & Inspection**
  - **Communication skills, and:**
  - **Industry Experience**

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Results – Key Activities-Education

- **OH&S Training & Education for the three top safety critical position holders were identified as the most critical attributes, because;**

- **"training and education provides a greater understanding of the reasons for conducting certain OH&S activities"**

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Results –Key Knowledge

- **It was emphasised by the respondents that safety critical position holders must be able to identify and adequately manage hazards and risks. For example:**

- **[A Foreman should]: "Know how to identify unsafe situations. Should be competent in making all areas safe."**

- **[A Foreman should have]: "Good knowledge of what is safe & what is not."   And further,**

- **[A Worker should]: "Read & understand the reason behind a SWMS and know to look ahead to see a problem before it becomes a safety issue."**

Discussion

- **Based on these results construction companies seeking cultural change should seek to develop, train and educate the three identified positions so that they:**

- **Have the ability, education, capacity and a range of experience in identifying and managing hazards and risks meaningfully and pro-actively.**

- **Regularly and effectively inspect and enforce safety.**

- **Communicate and consult routinely and effectively, and;**

- **The views and active participation of site workers should be encouraged and developed.**

Discussion

- **Senior management requires greater awareness of how essential the three identified position holders are in 'driving' safety culture on site in order to improve safety performance;**

- **Although additional research is required, these findings indicate that companies seeking to improve site safety culture should focus on developing and supporting people in key positions and site workers with both training and education.**

Conclusion

- **This project has identified which position holders are "Essential Cultural Messengers" and the characteristics, education and actions these position holders should have to drive a positive site safety culture.**

- **By focusing on key positions it should be possible to develop more specific and better targeted training based on adult education principles.**

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