NRSPP
NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY
PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

'Just culture' – The key to an effective safety culture

Organisational culture can be simply defined as 'the way things are done around here' – a strong 'safety culture' will value safe practices and ensure that they are sustained over time. Without this culture, the introduction of new safety policies or technologies will not lead to safe outcomes in the long term. Instead there will be an eventual drift towards the previous status quo as the safety outcomes are not entrenched into the organisation's being and actions.

Safety culture

The development and maintenance of the safe practices inherent in a 'safety culture' requires data because "you can't improve what you don't measure". Organisations must know how their policies, procedures and technologies are used by their employees and how these perform – What is the resulting safety outcome?

Data can be collected from employees directly, through audits or monitoring via technology. Employees may be concerned as to how management will use this data and this can result in 'push-back' as employees resist what they perceive as intrusion into their workplace. This may be seen through employee non-compliance leading to missing or misleading data, reduced productivity and lower morale.

Management must recognise that the key to the collection of data is 'just culture', one which recognises that mistakes happen but has zero tolerance for wilful error or gross negligence. Such an approach has become common in aviation and medical spheres and its lessons are directly applicable to ground transport.

Data

Employees are supportive of data collection when it is used in this manner. Accurate data helps employees tell the full story. Mistakes uncovered through the data are treated as an opportunity for management to better understand their employees work environments and provide them with the tools for a safer work environment. Accurate information is required for this process to occur, different approaches to its collection are seen in the following cases:

Bosch Australia has a 'no blame' attitude to hazard reporting, investigating hazards, near misses and actual incidents with the same process. Employees have both the experience and expectation that they will not be blamed for reporting hazards, their reports are followed up and changes made.

BlueScope Steel audits its despatch points to ensure compliance with its load restraint guidelines. These audits are not used to punish non-compliance but are instead to educate drivers about correct procedures. Targets for non-compliance are realistic in order to encourage the accurate reporting of failures. Consistent failure is met with penalties while high a high safety record is rewarded.

Busselton Freight Services uses on-road video and vehicle monitoring technology as part of its process to educate drivers about required practices. Drivers are shown video of their performance to acknowledge and reinforce positive behaviours and to highlight areas which require improvement.

Worley Parsons has taken a 'just culture' approach in the implementation of their road safety program, which is based around the five pillars of road safety: road safety management, safer roads and mobility, safer vehicles, safe road users and post-crash response. Paul Cook, Health, Safety and Environment Director for the Worley Parsons Group, spoke to this concept at a recent NRSPP webinar.

Where a 'just culture' exists, employees understand that when a workplace incident occurs, the data collected on the incident will be used as part of a process of improvement rather than punishment. Punishment plays no part in a typical 'just culture' reaction to a workplace incident:

1. What went wrong?

2. How did it go wrong?

3. What steps can we take to ensure this does not happen again?