Safety Culture in EMS: An Overview

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Safety Culture Defined

Organizational safety culture refers to the collective beliefs and perceptions of workers regarding the organization and safety of their workplace operations.

Zohar, 1980
Safety Culture Defined

- **Language & Metaphors**
- **Rituals & Convictions**
- **Core Beliefs & Rules**
- **Shared Meaning**
- **Attitudes**
- **Behaviors & Norms**

A frame of reference for employees & customers → Behavior

Guldenmund, 2000
History of Safety Culture

Adopted by aviation as part of safety improvement initiatives (Helmreich et al, 1986, 1993, 1998)

Numerous Studies of Safety Culture

Then adopted by medicine...
- Sexton et al., 2006
- Huang et al., 2007
- Modak et al., 2007
- Wisniewski et al., 2007
- Wagner et al., 2009
- Pringle et al., 2009
- Pronovost et al., 2008
- Singer et al., 2003
- Pronovost et al., 2003
- Pronovost et al., 2004
- Weingart et al., 2004
- Hartmann et al., 2008
- Singer et al., 2009
- France et al., 2010
- Chen & Li, 2010
- Sorra & Dyer, 2010
- And others....

>140 studies published since 1980

Halligan M, Zecevic A. 2011
Safety Culture: How is it Measured?

- Mostly by survey tools of front line workers

- Popular tools:
  - SAQ
  - AHRQ
  - SLOAPS
  - PSCHO
  - VHA PSCQ
  - HSOPS
  - CSS
  - SCS
  - MSSA
  - HTSSCS

Colla JB et al., 2005
Safety Culture in EMS

- ~6 studies to date that focus on EMS
- Key findings…

Wide variation across EMS systems | Safety culture scores linked to outcomes

Patterson PD, et al., 2010; Patterson PD, et al., 2010; Weaver MD, et al., 2012;
Why care about Safety Culture in EMS?

Our federal / national leaders care.

“A positive safety culture is expected to result in decreased risk, fewer errors, adverse events and other negative safety outcomes. 
....the goal is an EMS culture in which safety considerations permeate the full spectrum of activities of EMS leaders and practitioners everywhere, every day—by design, attitude and habit.”

Strategy for a National EMS Culture of Safety, 2013
Role of Leadership

Why is leadership important in safety culture?

....because leaders influence organizational culture
Leadership is KEY in Safety Culture

“Over and over again, we have observed process and QI efforts implemented but ultimately fail because the CEO did not lend support to the initiatives.”
Leadership is often disconnected

Study found a disconnect between leaders’ perceptions and perceptions among front line workers.

Perceptions of safety culture vary across the intensive care units of a single institution*

David T. Huang, MD, MPH; Gilles Clermont, MD, MSc; J. Bryan Sexton, PhD; Crystal A. Karlo, BSN, RN; Rachel G. Miller, MS; Lisa A. Weissfeld, PhD; Kathy M. Rowan, PhD; Derek C. Angus, MD, MPH

Why important?

A disconnect can create the “illusion of safety!"

Huang et al, 2007
Learning more about the role of leadership in safety culture
Deirdre McCaughey, PhD, MBA

The John Jones Scholar in Workers Compensation Research
Associate Professor, Healthcare Management,
The Pennsylvania State University

Presentation:
The Role of Leadership in EMS Safety Culture