Safety Program Focus Group

The Construction Advancement Foundation and the Northwest Indiana Business Roundtable

Moderated by James Arendas and Areef Kassam

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Participating Contractors: BMW Constructors Inc., The Pangere Corporation, Manta Industrial Services, Solid Platforms, Superior Construction Co., Inc.

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Purpose: The purpose of this study is to collect, record, and analyze qualitative data to provide feedback on the best safety programs from contractors that are members of the Construction Advancement Foundation in Portage, IN and Northwest Indiana Business Roundtable in LaPorte, IN.

Background Information: The Construction Advancement Foundation (CAF) is located in Portage, IN and represents Northwest Indiana union contractors. Its contributors work on a wide range of commercial, industrial and civil projects. The companies range in size from small to multi-national. The Northwest Indiana Business Roundtable (NWIBRT) member companies include local industry and other organizations that are users of the construction industry in Northwest Indiana. The local contractors and vendors make up the subscriber membership of NWIBRT.

Plan of Action: Our study follows the format of a single-category design by looking at individuals that have the best safety programs as members of the CAF and NWIBRT in the past year. This enabled the study to focus on comparing and contrasting the remarks based on the success of their programs as well as what led to their success. The study consisted of a focus group of five contractors.

The selection process of the focus group participants was based on the success rate of the eligible contractors' safety programs. The criteria used were contractors that were recently top winners of the NWIBRT safety awards. Due to the focus group being done voluntary by the members, there was no budget for this focus study. If there were any purchases, it was done through the personal finances of focus group team. Participants in the study were made aware that this study was voluntary as well as given all necessary information regarding the study so as there was no confusion.

The actual focus group was moderated by Mr. Arendas and assisted in moderation by Areef Kassam. During that time, Mr. Kassam created a computerized transcript that was then analyzed by all three group leaders. A coding system was put into place to help sort the information logically as well as make it easier to analyze. From this analysis a report was drafted and shown to the focus group participants.

Findings:
The findings of the focus group can be seen below. Some responses were answered in different sections of the focus group, so they were properly placed during analysis.

1. How do you get support for safety programs from top-management?

The participants agreed that their safety program policies were already in place, and they did not have to initiate the support from top-management. "The policy was in place, and I did not have to drive it," was the response of one of the participants. The participants also agreed that it really takes someone to get hurt before top-management commits. "It took fatalities to realize that management needed to offer help." Some of the participants indicated that top-management needs help defining what it takes for safety programs and how to implement them. One of the participants revealed that top-management within their company did not really understand what it took to be safe. The participant also

indicated that safety is run by the safety department, which is a separate entity within the company. "If everyone is overstretched, they cannot focus on safety."

2. What programs are most useful in reducing accidents?

All the participants agreed that orientation programs are just not enough in reducing accidents. The participants also agreed that the most useful programs are dependent upon the culture of the company. "The two go hand-in-hand." The participants offered a variety of programs that are useful in reducing accidents: Accountability-based, behavior-based, disciplinary, risk-assessment. All the participants agreed that it does not matter what program is implemented, but actually how it is implemented. "The culture of a company is like an umbrella, it does not matter what you put underneath, but how you put it together and implement it."

3. What new innovative programs have you implemented lately that caused a reduction in accidents?

All the participants indicated multiple innovative programs they have implemented lately that caused a reduction in accidents. Some of the participants use an incentive program where employees receive a reward, such as a gift card, for reporting or detecting a safety issue. One participant indicated they use a "Bend & Stretch" exercise technique, which will reduce strains and sprains. Some of the participants also use technological methods such as root-cause analysis, which feeds data into their program and gives the company an ability to learn from the existing data. All the participants are implementing a disclosure program, where everyone must report and inform everything to their supervisors about any safety problems and concerns. They all agreed that motivating the employees and getting them involved and active in the program is crucial. "Use whatever it takes to get them motivated."

4. How are safety rules and polices enforced?

The participants all indicated that safety rules and policies are enforced in a disciplinary manner by "writing up" the individual i.e. giving them a citation. The participants agreed that the supervisor is at the front line of disciplining. Supervisors must be disciplinary and properly educated and not have a "buddy-buddy" relationship with the employees. The participants also agreed that the employee must not be scared of losing their job because of the infringement of safety rules or policies because this will affect their job performance. The participants expressed the main concern of enforcing safety rules and policies should be to have the employees gain an understanding of what they did or did not do. This should be done through a conversation. All the participants agreed that the culture of the company personalizes how each company models the enforcement of safety rules and policies. One of the participants indicated they use a pro-active rather than re-active approach to enforcing safety rules and policies.

5. How do you plan for safety?

All the participants agreed that planning for safety must be a daily task and be talked about regularly. The participants agreed that planning for safety can be client-driven and communication between the clients should be continuous throughout the project, but they also agreed that the clients should not be the sole driver of the safety plan. According to the participants, clients lack the expertise needed to plan for safety. One of the participants indicated they use a risk-auditing system. By using this system it produces chi-square values, which are used to determine how hazard can happen and do some predications on what accidents can happen. The participants agreed that when planning methods for safety, everyone must be on the same page, especially because there are so many different methods.

6. What do you use as leading indicators to anticipate risks?

The participants all use different technological programs to develop leading indicators to anticipate risks. One of the participants indicated that they use a trend-analysis program, which develops a trend of potential risks. Another participant indicated that they use a risk-auditing system that develops correlations that will anticipate something happening. All the participants expressed they use a "near miss" ideology, which assess previous close accidents to help with future risks. One participant expressed that their company cannot get anyone to agree on what indicators are present and which ones to use. "I feel as if we are behind."

7. Do you use a safety committee?

Some of the participants expressed that their company uses safety committees on several levels and they function as a separate entity. One participant indicated that having safety committees on several levels can overuse the process. They also indicated that there is no standing committee and no hierarchical structure within the different committees. One of the participants said that their company gave up on safety committees. They just develop them when needed for a specific task. The participant indicated that they are task-oriented in nature.

8. How do you get employees invested in safety?

One of the participants expressed that one has to get employees really engaged. The participant indicated that safety on the job must be understood by the employees in that it affects everyone, including their families. Another participant indicated that everyone in the company socializes together, and it is like a community where everyone takes a genuine interest with the people around them. The participant also indicated that the clients drive the program. All the participants agreed that everyone must have a genuine interest in the people around them including upper-management.

9. Why is your safety program successful?

One of the participants indicated that their safety program is successful because there is a lot of communication. The participant also indicated that if it is not successful they will not be in business. Another participant expressed that having a commitment is key and

getting the right people to run everything is also key. The people hired should have experience in the field. "Have people out there that know the field." One participant said the success of a safety program is dependent upon the culture built with the company. The participant also indicated that it is because his company is pro-active and not scared to stop and regroup with their safety program and be innovative and look to develop something new. Another participant expressed that their program is successful because everyone buys-in.

Interpretations:

Based on the participants' responses as seen in the findings section, we interpreted the data to better show exactly what makes up a successful safety program.

1. How do you get support for safety programs from top-management?

In order for adequate support for safety programs from top-management, safety must be an integral part of the company and not function as a separate entity. It is imperative that top-management has the knowledge and implementation skills of what it takes in offering effective and efficient support for safety programs. Support for safety must be a strong and continuous commitment from top-management and not be dependent upon an incident occurring.

2. What programs are most useful in reducing accidents?

The culture of the company guides what type of program to use. There are multiple approaches and methods that work at reducing accidents. There is no perfect program nor is one program better than another.   It really is contingent upon the make-up of the organization. The significance and usefulness of a program are dependent upon how well they are implemented in relationship with the specific culture of the company. Hence the programs that are useful in reducing accidents which are dependent upon how well it is implemented.

3. What new innovative programs have you implemented lately that caused a reduction in accidents?

Regardless of how innovative the program, they must involve the employee. The employee is the key factor in a successful new program. The employees must be on board and support the program for it to be successful. Without the employees being actively involved and motivated, regardless if technological methods used, it will not be successful. All programs innovative or not are dependent on the employees of the company.

4. How are safety rules and polices enforced?

The culture of the company dictates which direction to take the safety rules and policies and how to enforce them, but there are some common themes found in the enforcement of the rules and policies. The supervisor has the main responsibility of enforcing the safety rules and policies, but they must be properly educated and able to enforce discipline. They also must have a distinguished line between friend and supervisor when

interacting with their employees. In order for rules and policies to be effectively enforced, employees must be disciplined and reprimanded accordingly. They should, however, not be scared about losing their job but rather gain an understanding of what happened, what they did wrong, and how to rectify the problem all through an open-conversation.

5. How do you plan for safety?

Technological programs used seem to offer the most reliable and enriched background for safety planning. When planning for safety is client-driven, there can be a lack of expertise needed to implement an effective and efficient plan for safety. Planning for safety must involve everyone because the plan affects everyone. The arena for planning for safety must be open for daily discussions where everyone can communicate and help develop the plan. When there are various methods and views involved in planning for safety, everyone must have a consensus and have the same vision in order to adequately assess the safety aspect of the company. Many of the problems and barriers that arise within planning for safety can be solved by just having an open discussion between all parties.

6. What do you use as leading indicators to anticipate risks?

Technological methods seem to offer the most help and clarity in developing leading indicators. There also must be a consensus within the company on which indicators to use in order to adequately asses risks. Everyone must be on the same page when it comes to developing indicators in order to effectively analysis the indicators and use them to anticipate risks.

7. Do you use a safety committee?

Safety programs are usually present on several levels, but are not a given within a company. Having safety committees on several levels can be a barrier in the effective running of a safety program. It can offer a lot of red tape and be a barrier in coming to a consensus upon decision making.

8. How do you get employees invested in safety?

Everyone must have a passionate and genuine interest in the people around them on the job site from upper management to the employees. The employees must have a consistent remembrance of their family at home when approaching safety in that their actions and commitment affect not only their fellow workers but also their family at home. Without having an interest in the people around them and remembering their families, employees will not be fully invested in the safety program of the company. A genuine interest in people must be at the foundation for employees being invested in safety.

9. Why is your safety program successful?

A safety program must be successful in order for a company to stay in business. The success of a safety program affects the company directly. Communication within the company allows for a successful program because everyone can be involved. There must be a strong commitment from upper-management, and the people running everything must have the adequate expertise to actually understand what their employees are experiencing. A safety program must always be innovative and the people running the program must be humble enough to stop and reconstruct a new program if something is not running properly.

Conclusion: It seems that there is no one set model for developing a successful safety program. Looking at the findings, it seems that the most important things that must be kept in mind are culture, communication, and upper management. Each organization is different, thus any given safety model will not necessarily work in that environment. The organizational culture coupled with the people working there must be at the forefront when considering the direction of the safety program. It is also imperative that there be lots of input from everyone in the program with open lines of communication. Finally, a safety program will never be able to get underway unless there is the support and direction from upper management.

Each person had their own take on safety as well as their own methods of doing things. The defining characteristic of each of these contractors, however, was that they were not afraid to be innovative as well as know when to step back and regroup. They were invested in their programs, but knew when to be objective with what was going on. It may take several tries in several different outfits before a successful safety program emerges. It needs to be kept at the back of one's mind at all times that if safety is not taken seriously, there will be negative results, and no one will be in business still with negative results.