



Best Practice Quick Guide

Risk Perception Management

Risk perception, or the ability to determine risk, is strongly tied to how individuals behave in the workplace and how they manage their personal safety. Members of the Campbell Institute lead the way in raising risk perception among their employees by implementing practices based on practical research findings.

Moving the needle on compliance

Research has shown that workers employed by an organization with a positive safety culture – an environment with high emphasis on safe work procedures and commitment to employee health and safety – were less likely to take risks than workers employed by an organization without a positive safety culture (Fleming & Buchan, 2002). In a related research study, Garcia et al. (2004) found that workers exposed themselves to more risks and were less likely to comply with safety rules when they rated the safety climate of their organization poorly.

An example of a positive safety culture can be found at the Dow Chemical Company, which has a Corporate Risk Management group to identify and manage unforeseen risks. This group and other company-wide programs like its “Drive to Zero” campaign communicate to employees that safety is a corporate value, encouraging workers to be more risk aware and less risk tolerant (Dow Chemical, 2010).

What makes up a positive safety culture?

Communication of safety is instrumental to a positive safety culture, as seen at the Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company (GPIC). All GPIC employees have direct access to a company intranet with standard operating procedures, standing instructions and minutes from shift talks. Incident information is routinely shared on bulletin boards and through GPIC’s “Safety Matters” newsletter. Having access to this information conveys the message that working safely is within an individual’s control and that the company is committed to safety (GPIC, 2008).

Safety leadership, or the approach to safety among an organization’s managers and supervisors, can have a significant effect on the perception of safety and risk among employees. When management clearly demonstrates commitment to safety, employee perception of the safety management system is positively influenced, resulting in less risk-taking behavior and a reduction of injury rates (O’Toole, 2002).

Usrey (2012) of Predictive Solutions, a Campbell Institute member, adds that leadership must be present within a non-punitive culture of safety in order to experience better safety outcomes. Negative pressure from leadership can result in employees continuing to allow others (and themselves) to take risks in the workplace.

Finally, increased employee engagement and an individual’s connectedness to the employer have a positive influence on risk perception. Employee engagement

through volunteer or safety programs tends to raise risk awareness and reduce risk-taking in the workplace. Being able to participate in hazard identification and contribute to workplace safety improvement builds affiliation with an organization and leads to safer work practices (Clarke & Ward, 2006; Neal et al., 2000).

Two examples of this concept come from DuPont and Firmenich. In a case study, DuPont (2005) found that involving employees in auditing sessions increased their risk awareness and emphasized workers’ role in keeping workplaces safe. Firmenich facilities involve employees and line management in risk assessments to identify hazards and properly assess risk according to the hierarchy of controls. This training ensures that high risks are given top priority and that corrective actions are implemented quickly (Firmenich, 2012).

The organizations featured here draw attention to some best practices in managing worker safety through increased risk perception. For more information on risk perception and examples of Campbell Institute Member practices, visit www.thecampbellinstitute.org.

Takeaways:

- Risk perception has a strong correlation to how employees manage their safety and behave in the workplace.
- Workers at companies with a positive safety culture are less likely to take risks.
- Communication, strong safety leadership and increased employee engagement all contribute to a positive safety culture.
- Employees are more likely to comply if they feel “in the know” and involved in their organization.

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