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Department of Defence

Workplace Culture and its impact on OHS performance

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HEALTH AND SAFETY**
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What this is NOT

- Not about Physical Injuries
- Not rigid statistical analyses
- Not death by PowerPoint !



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What I'll cover

- A series of vignettes from my experience in 25+ years of Occupational Medicine in multiple countries
- Practical examples of how Workplace Culture impacts on OHS performance
- Cross Cultural considerations



- Too many dull, statistically derived presentations
- My most successful presentation, Adelaide 2006
Drug and Alcohol Conference
- “To Pee or Not to Pee – that is the question”
- Enormous international response – and multiple requests for further presentations !!



- Australia (1980-86)
ALCOA, ICI (Orica), IBM
- Japan 1990
- China 1994
- Australia 2001
- Next time: Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia



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Australia 1980

ALCOA, Pinjarra, Western Australia

World's biggest Alumina refinery

Fatality – forklift driver

Corporate audit

Plant Manager demoted

Mandated C.O.R.E. training

Positive outcomes: enhanced OHS activities,
massive spending on prevention, emergency
response, medical treatment, rehabilitation

Culture permanently changed



ICI Australia, Botany, NSW

New Managing Director (from UK parent)

Appalled at OHS performance

100,000 hour No Lost Time party !

OHS first agenda item on EVERY management meeting

Mandatory OHS targets for ALL managers

Extraordinarily successful – but culture NOT permanently changed



ICI Australia (1985)

Sickness Absence

Chemical Plant Operators: 9.7 days/man/yr

Foremen: 2.1 days/man/yr

Why ?



Why ?

Demographically identical
Same workplace exposures

Foremen: Ex plant operators. Junior managers. No predefined sickness leave entitlement

Plant Operators: Award. 10 days/man/yr

Use or Lose ! Culture effect



IBM Australia (1986)

Unique culture

Highly educated, white collar, “driven”
workforce

Benefits program: up to 52 weeks Sick
Leave on full pay in any two year period

How much leave was taken ??



IBM Australia (1986)

4300 employees

50% had no recorded time off in previous
year

40% had 3 or fewer days off

< 1% had more than 14 days off work

Effect of Culture



National 5 Step Safety System – 25.5 million man hours without LTI

Many companies way above 5th Step !

2 of 3 IBM Japan plants > 60 million man hours

1 competitor (Hitachi) had > 100 M man hours

Extraordinary safety performance



Relatively few Health + Safety Officers
OHS part of Process Engineering

Culture – safety built in, not tacked on

BUT – not open to new (= foreign) ideas,
especially if not endorsed by MOL, MITI,
Industry Associations



Silane (SiH_4)

Explosive gas used in semiconductor manufacturing

French research (Air Liquide)

IBM US company adopted changes – storage 100 metres or underground blast proof bunkers

Japan – no space, legal constraints, no interest, more than 10 years safe operating



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Japan 1990

Heavy lobbying. Very unpopular !

Finally Yasu Plant manager convinced

20 engineers allocated, USD\$15 M

Solution: Bunker but with a blast release roof

6 weeks after completion, competitor had a
massive Silane explosion. Two people killed,
USD\$100M damage, plant out of operation for
6 months

We were heroes !



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China 1994

Shenzhen Joint Venture manufacturing facility with
China Great Wall Computer Corp (PLA)

Beautiful factory – except for the men’s toilets.
Deodorant chemicals (10 balls).

Official Opening President Jiang Zemin

Plant Manger debrief

Comments attributed to President !

Effects of culture -- never less than 30 balls in
urinals !



3rd PACRIM OH+S Conference, Cairns,
October 2001

9/11 in USA, Ansett Airlines collapse

Keynote Speaker: PROF Dennis ELSE,
Chair of NOHSC

Speech: “Working Safely while you Sleep”

Ethical Investing – including focusing on
companies’ OHS performance



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Guiding Philosophy

John Akers, former Chairman of IBM

Do what's right
Keep us out of trouble

ACM Angus Houston, CDF

People before Platforms



OH+S Leadership – from the Board and
the CEO -- is essential

Don't despair -- Cultural Change takes
Time

With time, even an egg can walk !



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