Saftey Culture and Safety Climate in Construction: A Review of Current Literature

Understanding Safety Culture and Safety Climate in Construction: Existing Evidence and a Path Forward, Literature Review Summary for Safety Culture/Climate Workshop


Key Findings

- The two terms are distinct but are related. Safety “culture” reflects the organization’s core values and assumptions about safety (espoused, a fixed state, qualitative), while safety “climate” refers to the shared perceptions about safety among a homogeneous group on site at a given point in time (enacted, variable, quantitative).
- Time and cost often dictate what can be feasibly measured. Workplace surveys are more frequently used to measure safety climate rather than conducting in-depth interviews, observation, or other ethnographic methods to measure safety culture.
- Safety climate survey data can provide insight into the underlying safety culture, particularly when results show different perceptions about site safety among various groups. Research suggests some safety climate measures can predict safety outcomes.
- Typical leading indicators (or factors) of safety climate that can be measured include supervisory leadership, safety aligned with production, management commitment, employee empowerment and involvement, accountability, communication, training, owner/client involvement.
- Construction organizations of all sizes can improve factors that strengthen safety climate and culture, although small contractors with fewer resources may need different paths. Innovative efforts such as green building practices, prevention through design, and safety prequalification programs may leverage gains.
- Trade cultures are strong, developed over time, and need to be engaged in safety culture change efforts.