



Safety Leadership by Example

The Differential Effects of Transformational Leadership Facets on Employee Safety

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Overview

Transactional leadership aims to align the existing interests and preferences of team members and the organization of which they are a part; transformational leadership aims to instill team members with a compelling new vision wherein employees can work towards a unified purpose. Both have been associated with numerous positive safety outcomes, such as improved safety climate, increased safety behaviors, and decreased accidents and injuries. However, leadership is complex and multidimensional, and it is still unclear how these dimensions of leadership differentially relate to safety outcomes. The researchers surveyed 1,167 construction pipefitters and plumbers to link their perceptions of leadership with their assessment of safety culture and practices on the job. Although most facets of transactional or transformational leadership were related to at least one safety outcome, idealized influence – where members admire the qualities and imitate the actions of workplace leaders – accounted for the most variance.

Key Findings

- Taken together, the seven facets of leadership accounted for 40-45% of the variation in safety climate, 15-18% of safety compliance and participation behaviors, and 3-6% of the workplace injury and pain outcomes reported by mechanical apprentices and journeymen.
- Idealized influence, consisting of attributes (i.e. characteristics) and behaviors, consistently emerged as the most important leadership behaviors associated with workplace safety. Leaders acquire idealized influence when their employees admire their actions and integrity, and adopt them as role models.
- The most important leader behaviors for developing a positive safety climate, in rank order, were idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and contingent reward.
- Although leadership overall was a significant predictor of workplace pain and injuries, no single leadership behavior contributed significantly by itself. This suggests that although leaders may be able to engage in one behavior or another to promote safety climate and safety behaviors, ultimately, to reduce injuries, they have to be holistically good leaders.

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See abstract:

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0925753513001549>

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