Tribes and infrastructure: Safely empowering organizational growth

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Sustained Safety Excellence

A s organizations expand their workforces, it's crucial to assess how the culture and resources that underpin safe work are evolving. Let's call these elements tribes and infrastructure for the purpose of this article. It's essential for organizations to proactively evaluate their growth plans against two key considerations. First, is the culture sufficiently robust to assimilate new members into the accepted ways of work? Second, are our resources and processes agile enough to provide the increasing safeguards needed to manage the potential rise in risks and errors?

Influence of tribes

Tribes, or subcultures, are small groups that naturally form within organizations and wield significant influence over safety culture and employee conduct. These tribes develop their own norms, values and communication channels which can either strengthen or undermine safety efforts within the organization.

Implications for safety

Tribes strongly influence members, especially new ones. Few newcomers want to

go against the group for fear of being ostracized. A tribe emphasizing shortcuts and risk-taking may increase the likelihood of safety incidents. In contrast, a tribe that prioritizes safety by upholding safety standards and holds each other accountable for following protocols can foster a culture where employees feel comfortable performing the work safely and speaking up about their safety concerns within the organization.

Communication

Tribes often establish their own communication networks, which may not always align with the organization's official channels. However, the power of effective communication within tribes cannot be overstated. It's crucial to disseminate safety information and ensure that all employees are well-informed about potential risks, safety protocols and experience stories that promote the concept of psychological safety. This empowers employees to contribute to a safer work environment and enhances the safety culture.

Infrastructure developments and advancements

While tribes are a powerful tool, they can be outgrown by a significant increase in headcount. When this occurs, investing in improving the robustness of the infrastructure is essential for maintaining a culture of safety excellence. A well-maintained physical environment, advanced safety technologies, continuous value alignment and effective resource allocation ensure the backbone of a safe work environment. As the tribe grows, the infrastructure must develop in response to guarantee the support of seamless communication and collaboration among employees to foster transparency, mutual support and collective problem solving.

Safety technologies and tools that empower employees to work safely and efficiently are advancing yearly. Through enhancements in PPE, digital safety monitoring systems, AI, discoveries in neuroscience and resources dedicated to auditing, inspecting, educating and coaching, collaborative efforts on the jobsite or in the field can create the capacity for safe growth.

By understanding the influence of behavior and communication, and investing in robust infrastructure, organizations can create a workplace where safety is

prioritized, employees are protected from harm and a strong safety culture thrives. Embracing the power of tribes and infrastructure is critical to promoting a culture of safety excellence and securing the well-being of all employees.

Growth is a target for most organizations. Can your organization utilize existing social groups to orient new members to the expected work practices? And is your safety infrastructure robust and agile enough to grow safely?

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