Ownership of Safety Responsibilities is Associated with Work-Related Road Safety Practices

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ABSTRACT
Interviews and audits of organisational practices were conducted to explore ownership of work-related road safety (WRRS) responsibilities in two organisations. It was identified that organisational practices varied in relation to the position of the person primarily responsible for managing WRRS and that greater sharing of safety ownership responsibilities was associated with greater development of road safety practices. This paper suggests that advances in road safety may be achieved through increasing awareness of Workplace Health and Safety responsibilities and including managing road safety in job descriptions.

INTRODUCTION
Given that vehicle incidents continue to be the most common mechanism for Australian compensated fatalities [1] there is a need to understand how WRRS can be improved. Recent research [2] suggests that the success of safety initiatives within an organisation may be related to the level of ownership of safety management tasks by employees. This study explores whether organisational practices vary between organisations in relation to the position of the person primarily responsible for and the level of shared ownership of WRRS.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Two Australian organisations participated in this research. Organisation X operated a fleet in excess of 200 vehicles. Organisation Y operated a fleet in excess of 2,000 vehicles. Interviews were conducted with six employees from each of the organisations to explore road safety ownership. Audits involving reviewing organisational documents and interviewing three managers from each organisation were conducted to explore road safety practices.

RESULTS
Organisation X:
- Limited sharing of safety responsibilities between Fleet Manager, Risk Management Officer, Supervisor and Driver
- Fleet Manager primarily responsible for WRRS
- Acknowledged that additional support required

Organisation Y:
- Safety responsibilities shared between General Manager, Health and Safety Manager, Business Unit Manager, Fleet Technical Officer, Supervisor and Driver
- Health and Safety Manager primarily responsible for WRRS

DISCUSSION
Organisational practices varied in relation to the position of the person primarily responsible for managing WRRS. In Organisation X where the Fleet Manager was the primary safety owner, the organisation’s road safety practices were most developed in the areas of vehicle selection and monitoring incident data. This makes intuitive sense as these types of safety tasks align with the competencies and responsibilities required for a Fleet Manager. Greater sharing of safety responsibility ownership was associated with greater development of WRRS practices. It is suggested that the more advanced safety practices observed in Organisation Y could be explained by an effective integration of safety knowledge, skills and abilities from a range of employees gained through sharing the ownership of safety responsibilities.

As greater sharing of safety ownership was associated with greater development of WRRS practices, it is suggested that employees and managers should be educated about their Workplace Health and Safety responsibilities and that responsibility for WRRS management tasks should be explicitly stated in job descriptions. To guide organisations in formally distributing road safety responsibilities, future research should identify what safety management tasks must be performed competently by those occupying safety critical positions.

REFERENCES