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Achieving Effective Road Safety Initiatives: A New Application of the Stage of Change Model

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ABSTRACT: Interviews were conducted with managers and employees from two organizations to explore the utility of the Stages of Change model as a framework for explaining perceived effectiveness of work-related road safety initiatives. Perceptions pertaining to initiative effectiveness were found to vary in relation to the stage of change. This paper suggests how practitioners can apply the stages of change framework to tailor safety initiatives to most effectively meet client needs and improve work-related road safety.

KEYWORDS: Stages of change, work-related road safety, health and safety initiative.

INTRODUCTION

The Stages of Change model [1] is a behaviour change model that offers a framework for understanding variations in readiness for change. The model suggests that individuals require different types of support based on their position within the change process as they pass through the cyclical phases of pre-contemplation (not thinking of changing one's behaviour), contemplation (seriously considering changing one's behaviour in the near future), preparation (making plans and intending to change one's behaviour in the very near future), action (engaged in changing one's behaviour) and maintenance (working to consolidate gains from one's changed behaviour and prevent relapse). In recent years the model has been applied in the areas of ergonomics and health promotion as a framework for assessing attitudes and beliefs and assisting in recognising individual and organisational readiness to change [2]. This study expands upon health research by exploring the utility of the Stages of Change model in a road safety context, as a framework for explaining perceived effectiveness of work-related road safety initiatives.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Two Australian organisations participated in this research. Organisation A operated a fleet in excess of 200 vehicles. Organisation B operated a fleet in excess of 5,000 vehicles. Interviews were conducted with five employees from each of the organisations. A representative selection of participants was determined by the employer. Based on adaptations from previous research [2] a semi-structured interview schedule was developed. Participants were asked questions to determine their stage of change in relation to managing work-related road safety risks and their perceived effectiveness of any organisational safety initiatives.

RESULTS

In Organisation A, although managers were operating within the preparation stage (*"on my 'to do' list is writing a fleet policy"*) and action stage (*"we have 4-wheel drive classes"*), employees were operating in the pre-contemplation stage (*"I*

haven't had any damage to the car. So I can't see any way of improving what I do"). Managers and employees agreed that current initiatives were not sufficient however managers generally believed that current initiatives were effective. A lack of understanding was identified as a barrier to managing risks. This was illustrated through comments including *"people have to be aware of the need for change"* and *"why do you want to make the people do that? That's extra work"*. By comparison in Organisation B, both managers and employees were operating in the maintenance stage. They reported that many safety initiatives were continuing to be implemented and expressed views including *"I think it's just a matter of improving on what we've already got"*. Overall managers and employees perceived the organisations current safety initiatives including ongoing advice and practical information to be effective. However it was identified that production and safety requirements can conflict (*"changes will be to not drive as long or far, but increased work loads always conflict"*) and that limited advice was provided on how to juggle the conflicting requirements.

DISCUSSION

Perceptions pertaining to initiative effectiveness were found to vary in relation to an individual's stage of change, with appropriately matched initiatives being perceived most favourably. It is suggested that organisations may be able to reduce resistance to change and accelerate employee movement towards the action and maintenance stage of work-related road safety behaviours by adopting a stage-matched approach to road safety initiatives. To transition employees from the pre-contemplation stage, awareness raising initiatives should highlight that unsafe driving behaviours need to be addressed. Initiatives targeting the contemplation stage should provide educational material designed to reinforce motivation to drive safely and outline what is involved in adopting safer driving behaviours. Initiatives targeting the preparation stage should provide practical support in learning new skills, resolve barriers to change and goal set safe behaviours. Initiatives targeting the action stage should provide ongoing advice, feedback and skills training. Initiatives targeting the maintenance stage should provide ongoing advice, feedback and training and monitor employees for signs of relapses.

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