

# Whose Safety and Wellbeing?

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# Introduction

- 2 Industry-University Workshops were organised
- Interviews covered 5 types of organisation:
  - institutional
  - client bodies
  - main contractors
  - subcontractors
  - self-employed operatives
- The interviews were conducted with:
  - senior management
  - head office and site management, including OHSW managers
  - operatives

# Introduction

- There have been lots of successes over the last two decades
- There are two fundamental problems with the way we currently manage H&S and Wellbeing
  1. H&S is perceived as a function primarily related to operations, especially site activities
  2. Both H&S and Wellbeing are not intrinsic parts of the development and management of strategy, business models and organisational behaviour in the firm

# Introduction

- Yet, the business model of construction firms is broken
- Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing (OHSW) is primarily driven by
  - compliance with legislation, particularly corporate manslaughter
  - the prevailing contractor business model rather than intrinsic care for worker

# The Firm

- Top down business models and compliance as firm drivers



# Definitions of Wellbeing

- The lack of an agreed definition is a problem for:
  - practice, including measurement and benchmarking
  - implementation processes

*Treat people how you want them to treat yourself.*

*We just want people to feel that when they come to the office, we are there to make them well, to feel loved and to feel being looked after.*

*I think wellbeing is about getting these basics right... it's that caring and listening, all these soft skills that we don't talk about.*

# Definitions of Wellbeing

- Some respondents raised concerns that interventions are invasive and socially intrusive
- A site manager suggested that construction needs its own specific definition – would this help or even reduce standards?
- Some issues – gender, faith, language – received little attention
- Practitioners will be wise not to prematurely establish measures for wellbeing

# Lack of a Holistic View on OHSW

- There was a lack of alignment between H&S, wellbeing initiatives and practices – respondents talked about site work for H&S, yet office work for wellbeing
- Is it desirable to impose H&S policies on the supply chain?

*As a public organisation, we need to make sure that our supply chain is acting and behaving in the right way.* Client Representative

→ Increased costs and failure to embed practices



# Drivers

- H&S is largely driven by procedures within a transactional cost-driven industry
  - Managers focus on cost at a strategic level of operations – this shapes projects
  - Managers focus upon safety at the tactical level – within the framework of the shaped projects

*If it is valued at management level and endorsed and pushed, then the supervisors and engineers will then push it onwards.* Managing Director of an International Contractor

# Measurement as a Strategic Tool

- Too many fad initiatives that fade – not real remedies
- Less strategic attention is given to breaking through the barriers of firm business models
- Organisational change, such as shortening working hours, could dramatically impact worker wellbeing, reduce fatigue, and time away from home

# Measurement & Procurement in the Supply Chain

- Clients and contractors currently have largely static procurement practices for qualification and tendering
- A proactive role could be taken to drive improvements by adopting dynamic procurement models, as seen in many other industries
  - Suppliers have to demonstrate rates of improvement, rather than meeting minimum thresholds
  - In construction, the static picture prevails

# Measurement & Procurement in the Supply Chain

- Leading infrastructure clients see main contractors ‘cut and paste’ the same ‘improvements’ across successive bid documents – they are not called to account to demonstrate ongoing improvement
- It is in the interests of clients and contractors to transform these practices; there was a reluctance to intervene in this way in the supply chains, despite willingly imposing H&S policies on supply chain members

# Measurement and Wellbeing

- Wellbeing measures can be inaccurate, having unintended consequences
  - Surrogate measures produce anomalies, e.g. counting mental health first aiders to measure engagement
  - Measuring drug use on site induces problems, e.g. measuring cannabis use is easy, yet is driving operatives towards using harder drugs, such as cocaine
- We don't know if the measures used are helpful...:

*The only answer is we finished on time*

# Management and Measurement

- Is management being measured and held to account in the firm?
- There are anomalies and contradictions between what senior management allow, even encourage for commercial reasons, and OHSW: staff working long hours, doing long commutes, working away from home during the week
- These practices are without commercial support given the failing contractor business model

# Weak Systems



# Weak Systems

- H&S prescriptions are strong in many organisations, yet the systems are weak
  - Poor cross-functional integration: “silo working”
  - Strong safety management systems for communicating information
  - Converting H&S information into usable knowledge is weak



# Weak Systems

- Hinted at, yet less well articulated by the interviewees, are the weak firm-project systems
  - Programme management is poorly developed among contractors (in contrast to some clients) to coordinate capability development and activities across projects
  - Too much is left to individual responsibility: from project and construction managers to site supervisors
  - The consequence: H&S remains something of a “bolt on extra” in thinking, decision-making and action

# Weak Systems

- Many site supervisors, junior site managers and operatives want less top-down prescription
- Operatives want their experience and knowledge used – develop bottom-up learning from operatives and supervisors to incorporate into nuanced and context specific prescriptions
- Break through the “one size fits all” prescription

# Operations and Site

- The bottom up perception



# Operations

- A number of operatives stated that financial criteria for the firms remain the top priority
  - Contrasts with the espoused values and rhetoric about safety being a top priority for firms
  - Raises the question as to what is the real management concern for H&S: to what extent profit, to what extent people?
- No respondent identified strategic OHSW investment – limited investment was identified around initiatives, which were isolated or one offs

# Whose Safety and Wellbeing?

- Confusion exists on sites about requirements
  - Top-down initiatives are implemented inconsistently
  - Fads soon fade or disappear, e.g. health food initiatives
  - Initiatives can conflict with other procedures, e.g. videos of guidance for use on site, yet smart phones and tablets use being confined to designated areas away from operations

# Whose Safety and Wellbeing?

- Many prescriptions, initiatives, and procedures are developed by ‘university’ educated office staff, who have little or no understanding of how operations are or can be conducted safely on site
- Some prescriptions and procedures can make certain activities more dangerous, e.g. goggles restrict vision for important cutting tasks
- Experience and knowledge of operatives is largely ignored

# Mental Health, Safety and Wellbeing

- Some of the issues raised by respondents include:
  - Working to tight deadlines causes stress and the long working hours expected in the industry make matters worse – mentioned by office and site workers
  - Fatigue leads to poor decision-making yet people want to do a good job, so this induces worry and anxiety – mentioned by managers working in offices
  - Working away from home during the week causes family stress and difficulties in sustaining relationships – mentioned by office and site workers

# Training

- Training is generally appreciated and H&S was recognised as an important part of training:

*The company invested a lot in my trainings through years, they've kept me employed all that time. I have got lots of experience now, met many interesting people. This is a good company to work for.*



# Training, Induction and Language

- Training, induction and language barriers prevail
  - In two of the organisations it was stated that if operatives arrive on site and do not understand English, they are not allowed to work on the site
  - Yet when there is a group of specialist operatives that do not speak the language, they are allowed to work
  - The justification was that interpreters are provided, yet are often unavailable

# Conclusion

- OHSW is not 'owned' by firm in the sense it is truly embedded in strategies and business models – response mode around compliance prevails
- OHSW is not owned by office staff and operatives on site
  - Business models and commercial criteria dominate
  - Operatives are not listened to nor are prescriptions contextualized to task and context – one size fits all prevails

# The End

*Thank you*