



The role of positive safety observations in safety management

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Introduction and objectives

- Near miss reporting has become one important and concrete tool in occupational health and safety management and improvement at workplaces
- Much of the research has focused on the traditional approach to near misses
 - Event that did not result in harm or damage to anyone, although it has the potential to do so
- More proactive approaches are called for to supplement this traditional reactive approach, but the relevant studies are limited
- To contribute to this research, the aim of this study was to explore the role of positive safety observations in safety management in five Finnish organizations
 - The term “safety observation” is used to refer to the more proactive approach to near misses including unsafe acts and conditions
 - In addition, in many organizations, it is possible to make positive safety observations, which emphasize learning from normal and successes

Material and methods

- Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted in five case organizations
- Large-scale organizations representing different industries
 - Steel plant, R&D organization of an oil and gas production company, three business units of a passenger and freight traffic company, industrial scaffolding services company, and institution of higher education and research activities
- In total, 40 interviews were carried out with 64 interviewees
 - Personnel involved in various phases of the safety observation process
 - Remote, face-to-face, and hybrid interviews
 - Individual and group interviews
 - Average duration 50 minutes
- The interview data were transcribed, and thematic analysis was employed

Views and handling of positive safety observations

- Views of positive observations
 - It was possible to report positive safety observations in all the organizations
 - Nevertheless, the practice is new, not everyone knows it, and they are not reported much
 - Mainly viewed positively but there were also some critical views
- Handling and utilization of positive observations
 - Practices related to positive observations are not systematic
 - Positive feedback is shared to the relevant parties
 - Sometimes good practices are shared, and individual positive observations are raised and rewarded
 - Total numbers are followed
 - Positive observations are hardly visible to the employees

Types of positive safety observations

- Work done well or safely
- Flexibility in special situations
- Safe working environment
- Successes, good practices and measures
- Addressing unsafe actions
- Well-functioning safety management practices
- Proactive and self-initiative safety actions
- Good communication
- Others, e.g., quality related matters

Benefits of positive safety observations

- Positive safety observations
 - Provide **confirmatory information** that right things have been done about safety
 - Provide **learning opportunities** on good practices and successes, particularly if the information is shared outside the local work community
 - Create, develop, and maintain **good atmosphere** and motivate to maintain **good activities** through positive feedback
 - Bring a **positive viewpoint** to safety work by shifting the focus from mistakes to positive things and successes
 - Support transition from reactive to **proactive safety work**
 - Create **positive safety culture** by encouraging safe behaviors and activities
 - Show **caring and conformity** with organizational values

Conclusions

- Positive safety observations have potential to supplement traditional views on safety management
- Nevertheless, the practice, particularly the utilization of positive observations, is not yet well established
- This research provided examples of types and benefits of positive observations
 - This information can be used to guide personnel on what to report and suggest ways to use the information
- Further research providing operative-level practical approaches to the implementation of the Safety II approach to near misses is needed

Thank you!

