

Case Study 23: Program Evaluation – by Industry Group

Keywords: Metrics / Program Implementation / Transit / Trucking / Safety Organizations / Other Organizations

Transit Safety Program Evaluation: Given the “total emersion” of transit authorities in safety, none of the interviewees were contemplating the possibility of terminating their current traffic safety program. They were only making incremental adjustments and/or conducting re-training/remedial training elements. The very idea of a separate safety program, separate from the business of the organization, is not really applicable to public transit authorities.

Metrics for Traffic Safety Program Success: Incidents, including preventable crashes, are meticulously monitored and tracked in the transit industry. Metrics are typically aggregate agency statistics (usually of “preventable crashes”) monitored over time, often along with benchmark statistics from the industry or peer agencies. However, these are most often used to adjust or refine safety programs. As a practical matter, the possibility of terminating a traffic safety program is not an option. This is because the safety programs are a condition of operations and because safety is so ubiquitous and pervasive. Safety is not perceived as a separate thing, apart from the business itself. Some transit authorities post company statistics as an incentive, to motivate if positive or admonish if not, but most importantly to demonstrate the importance of safety.

Trucking Safety Program Evaluation: Given the critical importance of safety in image as well as in fact, and the requirement of safety program/training completion as a condition of employment, the possibility of terminating a traffic safety program is not an option. Only incremental adjustments and/or re-training/remedial training elements are conducted.

Metrics for Program Success: Regulatory compliance and sound business practice require that incidents, including preventable crashes, be meticulously monitored and tracked in the trucking industry. Metrics often include near misses and behavioral infractions (called triggers in Smith System parlance). The line between individual performance (a human resources issue) and program evaluation (refine or refocus) is blurred and somewhat subjective. The two merge completely with re-training, which combines elements of both individual performance and program evaluation.

While all trucking companies are diligent with regard to safety and safety programs, some are aggressively pro-active, incorporating safety into the business plan as well as corporate culture. One interviewee holds weekly “vertical alliance”/“safety tailgates” (Monday) and face-to-face safety meetings quarterly. Monday meetings are preceded by Sunday videos to all employees with a quiz. In some companies, on-board cameras are combined with metrics.

Safety Organization Program Evaluation/Metrics: Although there is no consistent “current practice” vis-a-vis safety programs across safety organizations, there is a relatively consistent practice regarding the evaluation of the safety programs and other services these organizations

offer their members or constituents. All the safety organizations interviewed defined success in terms of coverage, whether materials distributed, seminars or classes attended, website hits, etc. Organizations with missions and goals that involved long term change monitored progress in that area, but this monitoring of “strategic progress” is not used to assess the performance of particular programs or initiatives. The one significant exception to this generalization is the state DOT. They tend to sponsor and promulgate programs that are driven by statistics (e.g., fatalities) and are therefore amenable to tracking those statistics in addition to dissemination/participation metrics. However, there is tacit recognition of the relative statistical insensitivity of these aggregate measures.

This approach to safety program evaluation and metrics relates to the role of research in the design of the programs. In the former case (program design) the predominant motivation appears to be demand. Any research involved in program design is primarily the research involved in defining the problem or issue behind the demand for intervention. In the latter case (program evaluation), what limited research there is appears to be almost exclusively related to the dissemination of information (market penetration) and surveys of member or client satisfaction.

Other Organizations Program Evaluation/Metrics: The situation with evaluation and associated metrics is more straight- forward for all four of the groups in this category, though different between groups. The hazardous environment group monitors everything (weather, time of day, site conditions, driver schedules, driver response, etc.), primarily for internal dissemination and tactical level response. The university shuttle and limo/tour bus groups monitor the more common parameters (driver behavior, vehicle conditions, braking, sharp turns, skipped stops, etc.) to document their performance, as well as for internal (remedial and corrective) use.

The limo/tour bus example incorporates an aggressive peer group review as well. The peer group functions as one of the safety program metrics, used as an assessment to indicate needed improvements and refinements. (Metrics are typically crashes per mileage or calendar period. Some of these companies are very small and serious incidents are rare, so the mere occurrence is the metric.) Industry group peers provide the basis for program assessment and evaluation. However, programs and program elements are assessed and adjusted based on trends and history (self-referential) and on peer group statistics (group/practice referential).

The small employer truckers do what is required by regulations. For all four groups, there is no explicit decision to retain or terminate the safety program. The existence of “the safety program” is a given. Evaluation decisions involve refinements or modifications to the program.