Engaging with workers-
Understanding how people make sense of risk

Presenter: David Whitefield

4 November 2015
David Whitefield, Director of People and Risk runs his own consultancy business working with clients who want to focus on the human side of safety, primarily through the application of social psychological principles.

His current work is built on more than 20 years of experience in the safety industry across a wide range of roles and organisations, as well as tertiary qualifications in behavioural science, OHS, and social psychology.
The Plan

Context
(my biases/ worldviews about safety, risk & people)

Content
(how people tick)
Risk (and learning) is a social process
Human (not behaviour) focused
Wicked problems

Tackle not Solve

Rittel & Conklin
Context - Risk as uncertainty

“The effect of uncertainty on objectives”
Context – Balance & Trade-Offs

Place

Process

People

Knowledge/Understanding?
Resources?
Energy?
Procedures are a mean about which people deviate.

Violations are a characteristic of safe systems (which have procedures); they do not exist in activities that have no legislative framework and no rules.

Procedures that are poorly designed and too demanding automatically create violations.

Amalberti
Should we (as an industry) be interested in how people make sense of risk and uncertainty?

Should we be fascinated about how people manage to operate safely nearly all the time, where we see people as the source of safety not the problem to be fixed?

Assuming we are interested, what influences the way people think about risk?

What role does culture and leadership play?

Again, assuming we are interested, how do I find out how others are thinking about risk (their sensemaking)?
Conscious & Unconscious Thinking – Two Systems (really a spectrum)

**SLOW**
- Conscious
- Analytical
- Rational
- Systematic
- Optimizing
- Calculating
  - 16-40bps

**FAST**
- Unconscious
- Automaticity
- aRational
- Efficient
- Satisficing
- Adequate
  - 10B bps

Do you believe me?
 Which system made that decision?
 Which one does most of the work?
 Which one makes sense of risk (sensemaking)?
 Where do safety procedures and systems sit?
 Where do biases and heuristics sit?
 Which one can be primed?
 Which one is influenced by culture and leadership?

Daniel Kahneman
Let’s have a quick look at your unconscious doing some work...

Don’t worry, it will be fine...

No really...
37 + 55
63 + 14
Pick a card
Concentrate....
We are always trying to make sense of our world

Our sensemaking is done mostly in our fast system

Our fast system is efficient and (as the name suggests) fast

It is also fallible, biased, uses heuristics, and can be primed
Biases & Heuristics

Optimism, Hindsight, Conformity, Change (blindness), Bystander Effect, Affect, Sunk cost, Attribution Error, Availability, Confirmation, Flooding... 200+

LTIFR

AS/NZS4801

6 x 6 = ??
Priming

Success: 80% 4 out of 5
Failure: 20% 1 out of 5
Won’t fail: 80% 4 out of 5
Won’t succeed: 20% 1 out of 5

Speed: Smash- 65.7  Hit- 54.
Glass?: Smash- 16/34 Hit- 7/43

(actually cognitive dissonance)
Engagement - Leadership - Culture

Language
What is said

Priming & Framing

Discourse (power)
What is not said

Follower / Following
Biases / Heuristics / Auto-pilot / Sensemaking

Leader / Leading
Influencer not Hero

Risk
Judgement under uncertainty

Vision

Clarity

Telling Vs Tell me about
Whatever it takes
I / You / We
Life Saving Rules
Absolutes (binary)
Complacency & Common sense
What went wrong Vs what’s the story

Where is this heading?
(Trajectory)

Are values aligned?
(Ethics)

Dr Rob Long
Engagement-Leadership-Culture

**Follower / Following**
Biases / Heuristics / Auto-pilot / Sensemaking

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**Risk**
Judgement under uncertainty

**Vision**

**Clarity**

- Artifacts
- Espoused beliefs/values
- Underlying assumptions

**Are values aligned?**

**Where is this heading?**
(Trajectory)

Dr Rob Long

MSD Webinar 2015
We have little to no awareness of most of our thinking (sorry…)

We are biased, use heuristics (but that’s OK)

We can be primed by language, artifacts and our environment (so nothing is neutral, everything has meaning)

Leadership and culture influence (all the time, no matter what you do)

There is always a trade-off or compromise

Content:
Risk is social (human focused safety)
Safety is a wicked problem (tackle not solve)
Risk is about uncertainty (not a number)
Still need to manage risks and have systems

Risk is social (human focused safety)
Safety is a wicked problem (tackle not solve)
Risk is about uncertainty (not a number)
Still need to manage risks and have systems
What would it be like living in a world filled with uncertainty and greyness?

What would it be like if we saw people as the source of safety rather than a problem to be fixed or controlled.

How would I engage with people if I knew that nothing is neutral and everything matters?

How would I approach people and what sort of questions would I ask?

Be curious not judgemental

Observe, listen, question, talk, connect

Seek to understanding how people make sense of risk
Questions?

or email Dave directly on the details below

dave@peopleandrisk.com
www.peopleandrisk.com
Visit the WorkSafe Website for more resources

www.worksafe.qld.gov.au
Upcoming MSDs Webinars

10 November
Sharon Vandermaat – City of Gold Coast Council and PErforM Program

11 November
Dr Jodi Oakman - The link between MSDs and psychosocial risk factors

17 November
Juliet Maynard - CSR Manual Handling Project