I asked 30,000 people in the nuclear industry about safety culture

This is what I learned
Who did we ask?

- >30,000 people
- U.S. based organizations
- All had nuclear operations
- Hazardous work with serious consequences
- Craft workers, technicians, professionals, support personnel, production workers, supervisors and managers
How did we ask?

• Surveys - 21,000 participants
• Focus groups – 1,022 participants
• Interviews - 140 executives and managers
Why did we ask?

There is a relationship between perception and performance. Great leaders are always seeking to improve the performance of their organization.
Leadership Matters

Management systems, decision-making, and leadership behavior (75%)

Personal accountability for safety (14%)

Communication and reporting of safety concerns (6%)

Everything else (5%)
Mind the gap
Dimensions of a Respectful Work Environment

- Make a Difference
- Be Respected
- A Sense of Stability
- Fairness
- Be Recognized as an Individual
The Blue Cube

Work to see me as an individual. Get to know my unique talents that make me who I am. Acknowledge my contributions.

Be Recognized as an Individual
“Management does not consider us experts. They take recommendations from people that have no practical experience in the field. They should trust our training, knowledge, and experience. We might actually know something.”
Here’s the data

Statement 18: Our leaders are commonly seen in our work areas observing, coaching, and reinforcing safety expectations.

- **44.9%** Strongly Agree or Agree
- **30.1%** Neither Agree nor Disagree
- **25%** Disagree or Strongly Disagree
The workforce is saying to management. I don’t know you. You don’t know me. I never see you except when something bad happens. How could you possibly know what contribution I am making to the organization?
Be Respected
Make me a part of the conversation. Inform me of changes before they are implemented. Ask for my input. I may have ideas to make things better.
“People in this group are not treated with respect. My manager has a ‘Napoleon syndrome’ and will tell you, ‘If you don’t like it here, McDonald’s is hiring.’ We’re treated like children.”
Here’s the data

Statement 24: Everyone in my working group is treated with respect.

77.6% Strongly Agree or Agree

10.6% Neither Agree nor Disagree

11.8% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
What I learned

The workforce is saying to management: at least ask us what we think. Don’t make big changes that affect us without getting some input from us. And, if you say you want us to ask questions you have to mean it. Don’t get angry and defensive when we question something. We really are just trying to make things better.
The Blue Cube

A Sense of Stability
Help create an environment where I know what to expect even when we’re continually surrounded by change. ©
“They had an informational meeting to allay our fears about the changes and it was supposed to be positive. People were there to answer questions, but none of the questions were ever answered. People left those meetings in shock.”
Here’s the data

Statement 38: We plan, control and execute work activities so that safety is the overriding priority.

75.4% Strongly Agree or Agree
15.8% Neither Agree nor Disagree
8.8% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
What I learned

The workforce is saying to management: We all know and expect change to occur but it is difficult for some of us. Just keep us informed and tell us the truth. Don’t say one thing when you mean something else.
The Blue Cube

Fairness

In order for me to have a sense of fairness, explain to me the reasons behind decisions.
“There isn’t a lot of communication from upper management to us. They want you to know certain things, but they don’t tell you all of it.”
Here’s the data

Statement 9: I get timely information about decisions that affect my work.

57.7% Strongly Agree or Agree

22.6% Neither Agree nor Disagree

19.7% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
What I learned

The workforce is saying to management: If you explain to me the reasons why decisions are made the way they are, I can accept that. I may not agree with the decision but at least I understand why you did what you did.
The Blue Cube

Make a Difference
I want to be part of the solution. Nobody wakes up with the thought, “Today, I just want to be average.” Help me succeed.
“If you want to do something different, broaden your horizons, management’s open to that. I see them putting people in positions to allow them to grow. If you go in and say you are interested in something they work to make it happen.”
Here’s the data

Statement 27: We learn from other organizations so we can continuously improve knowledge, skills, and safety performance.

- 68.8% Strongly Agree or Agree
- 22.2% Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 9% Disagree or Strongly Disagree
What I learned

The workforce is saying to management: If I understand the bigger picture and see how I fit in, I will be more engaged and contribute more to the team. If you keep me in the dark, I will do my job, but nothing more.
Conclusion

- Management systems, decision-making, and behavior is the dominant factor in determining safety culture.

- There is a gap between the perceptions of management and the workforce.

- Managers can close the gap by practicing the principles described on the Blue Cube.
Acknowledgments

ORAU Colleagues
• Darren Smith, PhD
• Davyda Hammond, PhD
• Matthew Shaffer, PhD
• Ashley Golden, PhD
• Sara Howard, MPH
Contact Information

Jeffrey R. Miller, PhD, CIH, CSP
Jeff.miller@orau.org
Office: (865) 576-7912
Mobile: (865) 440-6337

www.orau.org