Not all compliance is safe, and not all non-compliance is unsafe!

Rather than thinking about compliance as being a two sided coin (follow or break rules), compliance should really be thought about in terms of HOW and WHY someone complies.

Researchers at The University of Western Australia (UWA) have developed a framework, which describes four different types of compliance and non-compliance behaviours.

The 4 Compliance Behaviours

**Deep Compliance**
- I think carefully before taking each step and focus on completing the task properly.

**Adaptive Compliance**
- When I believe the procedure is not appropriate, I use my experience and knowledge to modify the procedure to complete the task properly.

**Surface Compliance**
- I concentrate on following the procedure rather than how to do the task properly.

**Non Compliance**
- I turn a blind eye to what is required and just do the task as I like.

When someone complies...
- They can choose to engage properly in the procedure to the best of their ability, investing effort into making sure tasks are completed in a safe manner.
  - DEEP COMPLIANCE

When someone does not comply...
- They may not comply completely with the procedure because their experience and knowledge tells them the procedure is not appropriate for the situation. They then modify the procedure to make sure that the task can be completed in the safest manner possible.
  - ADAPTIVE COMPLIANCE

- They can choose to only invest the minimum amount of effort to superficially perform what a procedure tells them to do. Adopting a mindless and automatic approach undermines safety.
  - SURFACE COMPLIANCE

- They can disregard procedures and rules completely and perform the task in whichever manner they please. They ignore safety altogether as a goal.
  - NON COMPLIANCE
The Industry Study

Researchers from the Centre for Safety collaborated with industry partners to investigate DEEP COMPLIANCE and SURFACE COMPLIANCE.

Their aim was to uncover why people engage in either deep or surface compliance, and whether these two types of compliance affect safety outcomes.

Who? 159 full-time employees from industries such as medicine, manufacturing, transportation and construction.

1. How often they engaged in the 4 compliance behaviours

2. Motivation to comply
   - Internal Motivation (compliance is a choice made freely by the employee because they value safety inherently)
   - Controlled Motivation (compliance is perceived as being forced and pressured by external factors)

3. Safety climate
   - Management commitment to safety (showing genuine concern for and prioritising safety)
   - Perceived personal cost of non compliance (e.g. criticism and punishment)

4. Safety outcomes
   - The number of accidents and near-misses the employees experienced.

What was found?

Management commitment to safety promoted internal motivation in their employees, which led to more deep compliance. Deep compliance was found to predict improved safety outcomes.

Punishments such as criticism were found to promote controlled motivation, which led to more surface compliance. Surface compliance did not relate to any safety outcomes.

Compliance is not a black and white picture.

This industry study suggests that while employees can engage in different types of compliance, not all types have positive effects on safety outcomes. Employees can comply just to avoid punishment, instead of complying to complete tasks properly in a safe manner. Furthermore, only deep compliance leads to improved safety outcomes.

Organisations should encourage their employees to engage in deep compliance, as opposed to surface compliance.

While sanctions are still important, they do not necessarily create deep compliance. If leaders and management show a genuine valuing of and commitment to safety, then their employees are more likely to be motivated internally to engage in deep compliance.

What next?

Building on from this investigation into deep compliance and surface compliance, Centre for Safety researchers are currently investigating with industry partners all four compliance behaviours and their link to safety outcomes.

For more info, visit: centreforsafety.com.au

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