

Learning from ‘Work-as’ Done in Performing Arts



THE CHALLENGE

There will always be gaps between the system and practices. Modern safety thinking recommends firstly understanding this gap as some types of variation are helpful whereas others can increase risk.

Our client sought to learn from ‘work as done’ and contrast this with the formalised practices and systems in place. Through understanding the whole event production process, we offered insights into the broader work system.

THE CONTEXT

Rather than zeroing in on variations in practice and focusing on behaviour, we helped our client take a deeper approach by examining the end-to-end process of event production and how safety is created (and challenged).

Our client wished to understand the basis for recent near-miss events that went beyond the immediate contributing factors, and instead **identified upstream decisions that flow down the line.**

APPROACH

The review included: desktop review of safety management system documents (to identify work as imagined), focus group 'insight sessions' with various event crews, a short 'pulse' validation survey to confirm themes, and 1:1 interviews with management.

Through analysing the data, we identified **several key themes that underpinned our recommendations.**

As the saying goes, perception is reality. When it comes to safety, workforce perceptions of management's commitment matter a lot.

Management's safety commitment must be visible to the frontline, and through regular communication and engagement, including feedback on decision-making, legacy mindsets can be challenged.

Fatigue can be an insidious problem for organisations, especially where erratic shifts, a casualised workforce, and labour shortages are present.

To manage fatigue effectively, move beyond ‘hours of work’ analysis and shift length limits, and instead examine its complex causes: rostering practices, sales pressure, client demands, and last-minute changes.

Leadership can be distributed and organic, but only in teams settings where there is a high level of capability and roles/responsibilities are clearly defined.

The nature of events production means that senior staff are looked to as informal leaders; equip and empower them to be successful through role-specific training backed up by documented and communicated safety responsibilities.

In the entertainment business, the ‘show must go on’. But at what cost? Event sales and pressures, including last minute changes by clients, flow down and are inherited by technical teams tasked with delivery.

Identifying ‘safety in design’ considerations is vital for risks to be identified proactively throughout event production, and ensures safety is treated as a joint responsibility.

Our client has developed a deep understanding of the context in which work (and safety) takes place.

Through an empowering consultation process, the experiences of the frontline have been made visible to top management.

A systems approach to safety discovery unveils the bigger picture and sheds light on blind spots.

