THINKING OUTSIDE THE RISK

Identifying Barriers and Promoting Insights in Workplace Injury Prevention

Jennifer Walinga, PhD

Royal Roads University

BACKGROUND

- Previous study on barriers and solutions to return to work (06-07)
- Problem solving barriers to workplace safety implementation (08-09)

"injuries occur not because best practice is unavailable or misunderstood, but because a barrier interferes with implementation"

WE KNOW BETTER…
BUT STILL TAKE THE RISK

- Identify barriers to safe practice implementation
- Problem solve barriers using insight problem solving intervention
- Target all levels of two municipal organizations
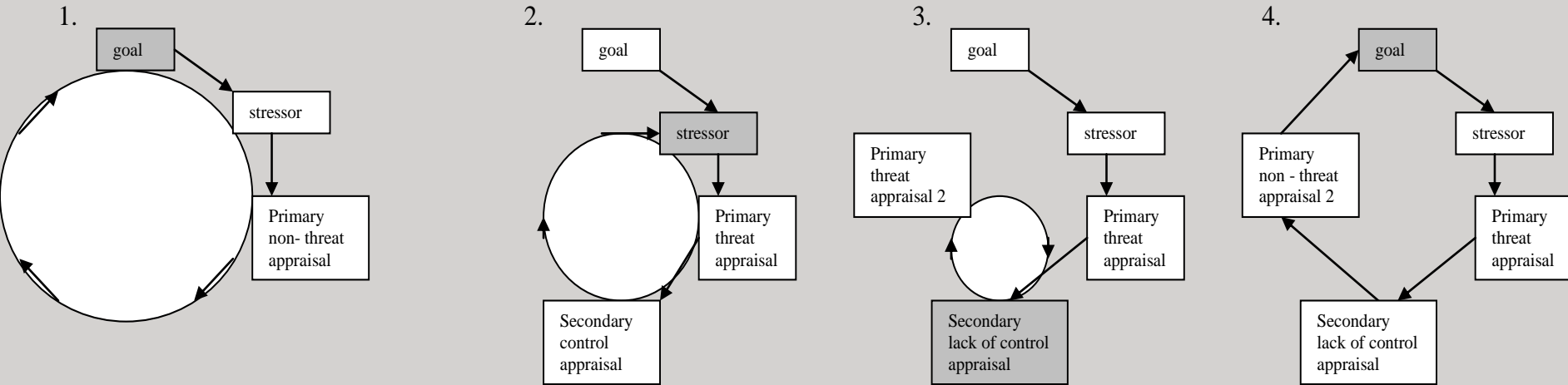- Focus on two departments within two organizations

PROBLEM SOLVING APPROACH

Barrier Controlling Focused

Values Building 'Integrated' Focus

Conceptual Model for Goal focus, Barrier Focus, Integrated Focus: The Roles of Appraisal, Focus, and Perceived Control

District of Saanich

Building Services / Maintenance

City of Victoria

Garbage Collection / Solid Waste

Research Questions:
1. What makes workers risk injury despite their knowledge of safety? What are some of the risks workers find themselves taking?
2. What gets in the way of safe practice? What are the biggest barriers? Where do these barriers come from?
3. What problems do these barriers create? What strategies do you use now? What further problems do these create?
4. What are the core challenges? How might we resolve these core challenges to safe practice despite existing barriers?
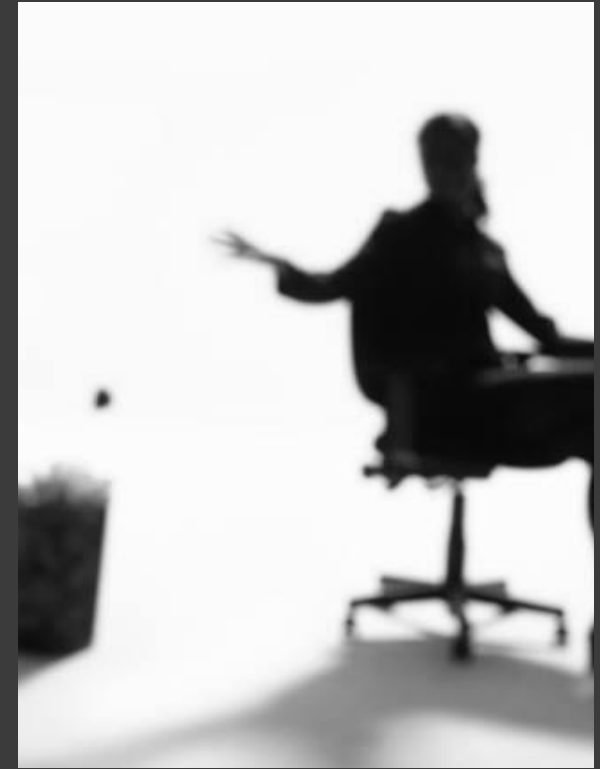
Bldg Services Workers
$n = 40$
and Garbage Collectors
$n = 59$

Supervisors /Managers
$n = 21$

Administrators/Executives
$n = 4$

$N = 124$

METHOD AND DATA ANALYSIS

- Action Research Design
- Focus groups and interviews with workers, managers, supervisors, directors, administrators
- Identify and explore barriers as a means to revealing individual and organizational goals and values, and generate integrated solutions
- Content analysis, coding according to problem solving conceptual framework, theming, inter-rater validation 98%

Results: Buildings and Maintenance Workers:

What makes workers risk injury despite their knowledge of safety? What are some of the risks workers find themselves taking?

- Time…rushing – wanting to get the job done fast because that makes you feel like you are doing a better job
- Working in tight spots
- The biggest challenge is something like weight. Certain garbage cans are filled with soil/dirt and end up heavier than 50 pounds,
- Having to do something out of the ordinary.
- Some of the places you are walking are really awkward …the physical barriers
- You just think, oh I can handle it…I have experience with this kind of thing…
- Safety takes longer which makes you feel like you have to rush to accomplish it all
- Urgency of requests – everyone wants their request filled 'right now'
- The buildings are unsafe but we can't change them because they are heritage
- Restraints from other depts – can't lock that door because the public needs access, but the worker is going to get hurt if we don't work on this

Buildings and Maintenance Workers:
What gets in the way of safe practice? What
are the biggest barriers? Where do these
barriers come from?

- We don't want to ask for help
- People don't understand
- Competing interests between departments
- Safety takes time.
- We also don't claim injuries because WCB is a pain to deal with
- looking like you 'can't handle it
- The job needs to get done
- We are doing more with less
- There is a lack of trust
- Sometimes a mgr wants it done his way, they can't think of new technology, new methods
- Timing of jobs – shift work, fatigue, illness
- Sometimes the safety equipment itself gets in the way…
- Few opportunities to problem solve, make decisions,
- Turn over
- Some people are not outspoken enough to stand up for themselves

Buildings and Maintenance Workers:
What problems do these barriers create? What strategies do you use now?
What further problems do these create?

If I'm being questioned all the time, it impacts my work environment

• We stop caring

• I feel like I am not taken seriously.

• If we try to solve it on our own we get in trouble for that too

• We come up with a solution (like lowering the garbage bins to reduce the awkward height) but that has implications for parking and the collection service…

• Not being able to make decisions undermines confidence, slows the process

• We end up defending ourselves rather than building respect and doing good work

• People think we are their slaves, that hurts morale, which makes us care less about safety or try harder to 'do more'

• We look bad if we don't do it, increases pressure, tension, we end up 'ranting' and garnering even less respect

Building Maintenance Workers:

What are the core challenges? How might we resolve these core challenges to safe practice despite existing barriers?

The core challenge is…

How do we build respect and understanding for the work we do so that we can work safely?

- Build our problem solving skills and confidence to make effective decisions through training
- Work 'with' people to get the job done efficiently and effectively - Coach clients on proper process for making a request
- Build our reputation – don't defend it
- Develop a system or set of criteria for prioritizing tasks
- Make visible how the system works and how much time each task takes to do safely
- Hire supervisors who can see that s/he needs to work *with* us to get the job done
- Provide orientation for new workers to help them 'stand up for selves' and explain how the job works
- Develop communication systems between workers and supervisors
- Celebrate our own contributions and role in the organization
- Make our successes visible to ourselves
- Train the 'client' in how to use the email system and how it feeds into performance review, budgeting, resource allocation etc...
- Make prioritization scale more visual i.e. 'high priority i.e. Flood or disaster (immediate) – med priority i.e. Temperature or obstacle (1 day) – low priority i.e. Minor inconvenience (2 days)

Supervisors Building Maintenance:
What makes workers risk injury despite their knowledge of safety?

- Near misses = negative reinforcement
- 'just not thinking'
- It takes 6 times for a person to really get it, we can't follow up that often
- The culture and beliefs of the organization – service, get the job done no matter what
- Entitlement, we deserve to make a claim
- Don't see consequences, not personalized so not relevant
- They feel like they can't get out of this environment and so they play up the injury as a solution.
- The biggest problem is that those who are taking advantage of the system, end up taking opportunities away from those devoted staff who are working hard

Supervisors

What are the biggest barriers?

- Workers are so spread out
- Follow up,
- Training one off's
- can't always keep up

- no time
- seems endless and reactive rather than planned and strategic
- Right now some of the 'follow up' also feels like 'let's just get through it', going through the motions.
- Follow up doesn't solve the problem either..
- So many of the injuries are small and inconsequential, avoid claiming them, too much communication, takes time…
- it is not enough
- we don't get a chance to 'refresh' the learning
- Turnover, changing conditions, complexities, changing routines
- The organization's efforts to 'accommodate' end up enabling the minority who take advantage of the system

Supervisors
What problems do these barriers create? What strategies do you use now? What further problems do these create?

- Injury impacts health of worker
- interrupts work
- impacts other staff, reputation, morale
- communicates negative msgs
- 'we can never feel like we are doing enough' this is discouraging, disheartening
- it erodes our sense of purpose and success as supervisors
- I feel so powerless, I feel so disrespected
- It looks like we are not accountable, responsible, credible as an organization because we are not doing anything about these abusers
- Everything bogs down.
- We lose the positive energy, rifts are created, polarization, resentment

- 10% of people end up costing 70% of disability costs. People who were willing to go the extra mile, to be motivated, to have integrity, are now asking themselves 'why bother?'
- This attitude or carelessness OR taking advantage then impacts the general pride of ownership that is usually typical here
- I can't investigate. I tried and I got called on a harassment charge!
- Ultimately, we are moving toward privatization if we lose the municipality. That would be a real shame. We would lose the camaraderie, the work would not get done
- we end up beating up all that is good in the org,
- We would end up with unaffordable recreation and we can just imagine where that then goes
- it cracks the foundation of the community
- Everyone starts to feel 'removed from responsibility' for the organization, the goals

Supervisors
What are the core challenges? How might we resolve these core challenges to safe practice despite existing barriers?

The core challenge is...
How do we link our sense of purpose and success to safety?

Solutions:

• reward the performance of safe and responsible employees, identify the benefits to them

• make it more attractive to contribute to the system, give back to the org rather than take from it; encourage the safe people

• Focus on wellness; We need celebration, a committee, workshops, recreation; we need an employee council on wellness to start

• Offer free access to rec centres

• Offer incentives for healthy practice

• We need workers to take responsibility, we can focus on helping them do that. That can be our purpose.

• see the success factors in being safe,

• we can focus on engaging leaders to do the refreshing, reminding, follow up,

• We can help them to be proud of their record not just for being safe, but for their attention to it, their focus on it, their ability to remind and refresh regularly, to keep 'learning' safe ways to do things

Administrators
What makes workers risk
    injury
despite their knowledge of
safety? What are some of the
risks workers find themselves
taking?

•Job is repetitive, need to escape,
or find greater purpose
•a general lack of individual care,
about safety procedures, and about
personal safety
•this desire to 'show off', to
establish one's ability, strength,
competence
•There is a pressure in the
municipal vision to 'serve'

Administrators
What gets in the way of safe
practice? What are the biggest
barriers? Where do these
   barriers
come from?

- Wanting to differentiate themselves from other services
- Limited resources to train, follow up,
- Supervisors afraid to enforce safety, need to protect team culture, relationships
- The union expectations, the collective agreement, entitlement
- Inconsistent monitoring of safe practice because afraid to rock the boat or be too dictatorial with team
- people will take risks to 'get the job done quickly and go the extra mile'

Administrators
What problems do these barriers create? What strategies do you use now? What further problems do these create?

•leads to lost time as others must fill the gaps left behind
•a domino effect or a 'transfer' of costs associated with risk taking
•sometimes when a worker takes responsibility and solves a problem, it falls flat.
•Worker actions sometimes lead to conflict in messaging and a slap on the wrist
•Nobody responsible, too much local control but also not enough local control on other things

Administrators:
What are the core challenges?
How might we resolve these core challenges to safe practice despite existing barriers?

The core challenge is....
How do we build a culture in which our organizational goals link to and highlight the value of safety?

- **Solutions:**
- more specific training in 'problem solving'
- Learn how to problem solve in a way that is consistent with the org's messaging, competencies, values and vision.
- to establish what these critical measures of org performance actually are. Including 'health, safe practice, communication skills, organizational alignment…'
- develop mechanisms by which the workers can learn from one another and share strategies and solutions.
- communication planning
- Our culture needs to reflect expectations that it is 'our' organization and these are 'our' safety practices

Garbage Collectors

What are the core challenges? How might we resolve these core challenges to safe practice despite existing barriers?

Core Challenges:
1. Consideration from homeowners
2. Safety
3. To be unique, and provide 'the best' service

public relations...

Solutions:
- We need to work with the retailers to ensure that cans meet standards
- We need to develop relationships and 'bring a human face to the garbage collection service' 'face to face' contact - one person at a time
- A better system for buying tickets – grocery store?
- A regular route, with at least 2 steady guys
- We need to inform and educate the public, we could use the Saanich News to inform the public - We need to *be* the educators
- The public needs to see our point of view, make an effort to make it 'presentable' , see the benefits to safety
- Learn our limits
- We need to show respect (i.e. windy days, return lid; help the elderly)
- We need to manage our routes, really focus on changing attitudes – create a more thorough follow up system from dedicated clerk(s) (like Victoria)
- Polite requests for help to the public
- 90% are cooperative, focus on them, get them to abide and be the role models for the street...speak for us...
- A new strategy that is different from a sticker
- Develop our communication skills
- The garbage collector needs to bring issues to the attention of the supervisor, clerk, etc.
- Some collectors could mentor others on how to manage a route and how to lift properly, there are many tricks, it's not about strength
- Work more as a team on the crew – ask for help

Supervisors

What are the core challenges? How might we resolve these core challenges to safe practice despite existing barriers?

Core Challenge:
How to serve the public in a way that serves the health of the collectors? How to serve the health of the collectors in a way that serves the public?

Solutions:
•to take responsibility, we can focus on helping them do that. That can be our purpose.
•Our purpose can be more about helping people to see the success factors in being safe, we can focus on engaging leaders to do the refreshing, reminding, follow up,
•We can spend energy on engaging workers, looking for the leaders to take on that role rather than on trying to do the follow up all by ourselves (which is impossible)
•We can help them to be proud of their record not just for being safe, but for their attention to it, their focus on it, their ability to remind and refresh regularly, to keep 'learning' safe ways to do things

Solutions:

•deal with it by leaving them a message or going and confronting them verbally to try and rectify a problem

•I actually left the homeowner with a copy of the rules and regulations and bylaws, circled it, stickered it. They phoned in. The clerk verified the bylaws.

•We need a bit more of a better avenue between the guys and the homeowners/residents. A lot of it is communication.

•A campaign that highlights the safety record of the municipality and the community benefits and tax savings this generates for the homeowner

•reward the performance of great employees and identify the benefits to them

•make it more attractive to contribute to the system, give back to the org rather than take from it; encourage the safe people

•we try really hard to hire the right people off the street-you can get a guy in who looks out of shape but if he's done heavy lifting, he's probably not going to get injured -you are trying to look for jobs that they have used both their upper and lower body.

•Help them realize how good they've got it -If you have been out and about in other aspects in the workforce, you can appreciate what you have here. I am from the prairies, and I worked for 10-12 years out there for 10 hours a day in the freezing cold, the scorching heat. We don't have it so bad. If you haven't been out in the world, you don't realize how good you have it. Train the guys to use their common sense and work it out individually-i t comes back to the guy

•Help the guys be aware that when they get older they are breaking down and to be aware of when they retire what kind of life are they going to have

•run our own orientation – specific and individualized

•Teach them to manage their time, if you get out 45 minutes beforehand you can get a great deal done. If you wait…you are stuck right in there with the traffic.

'A new way of looking at garbage'
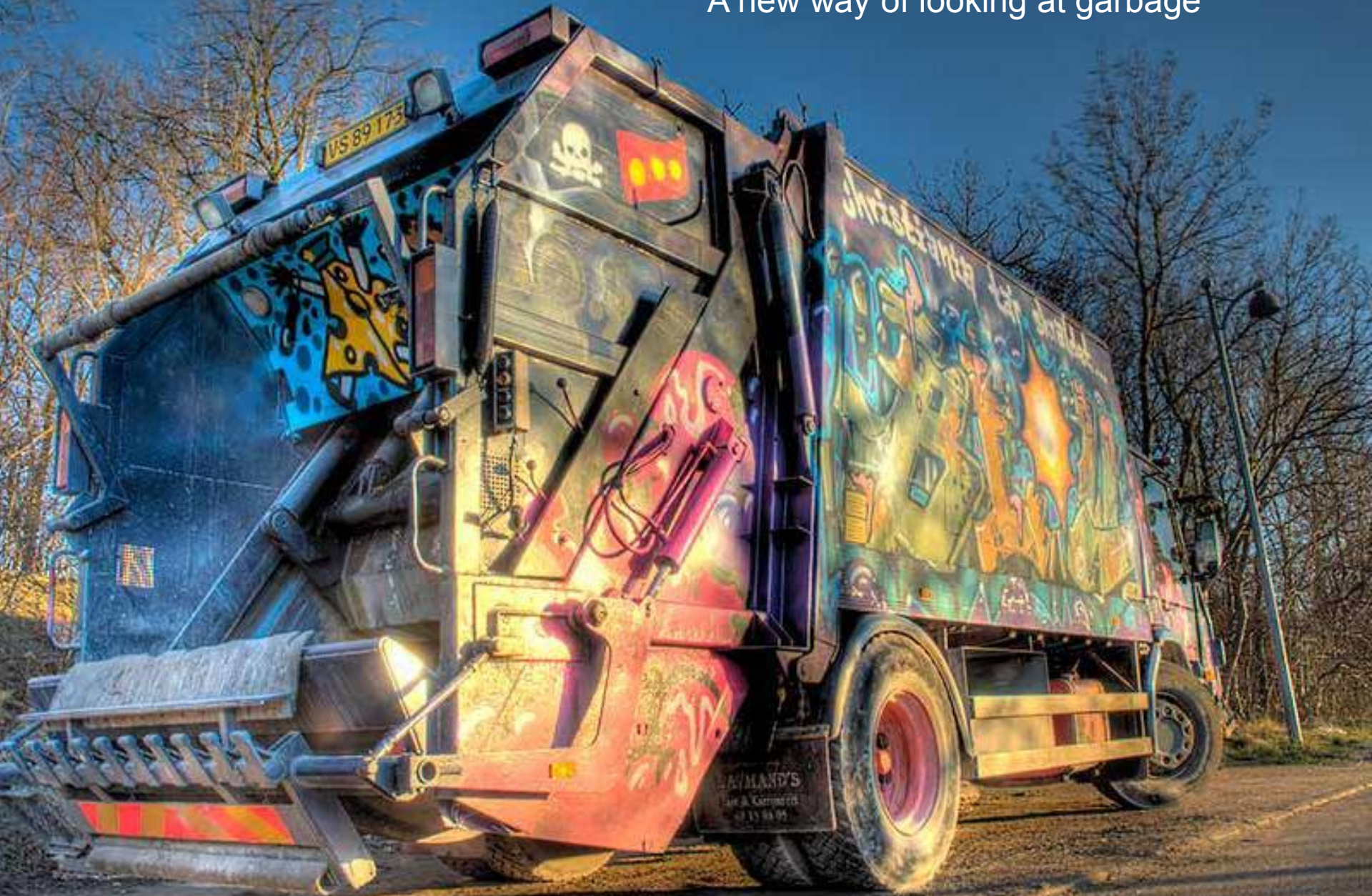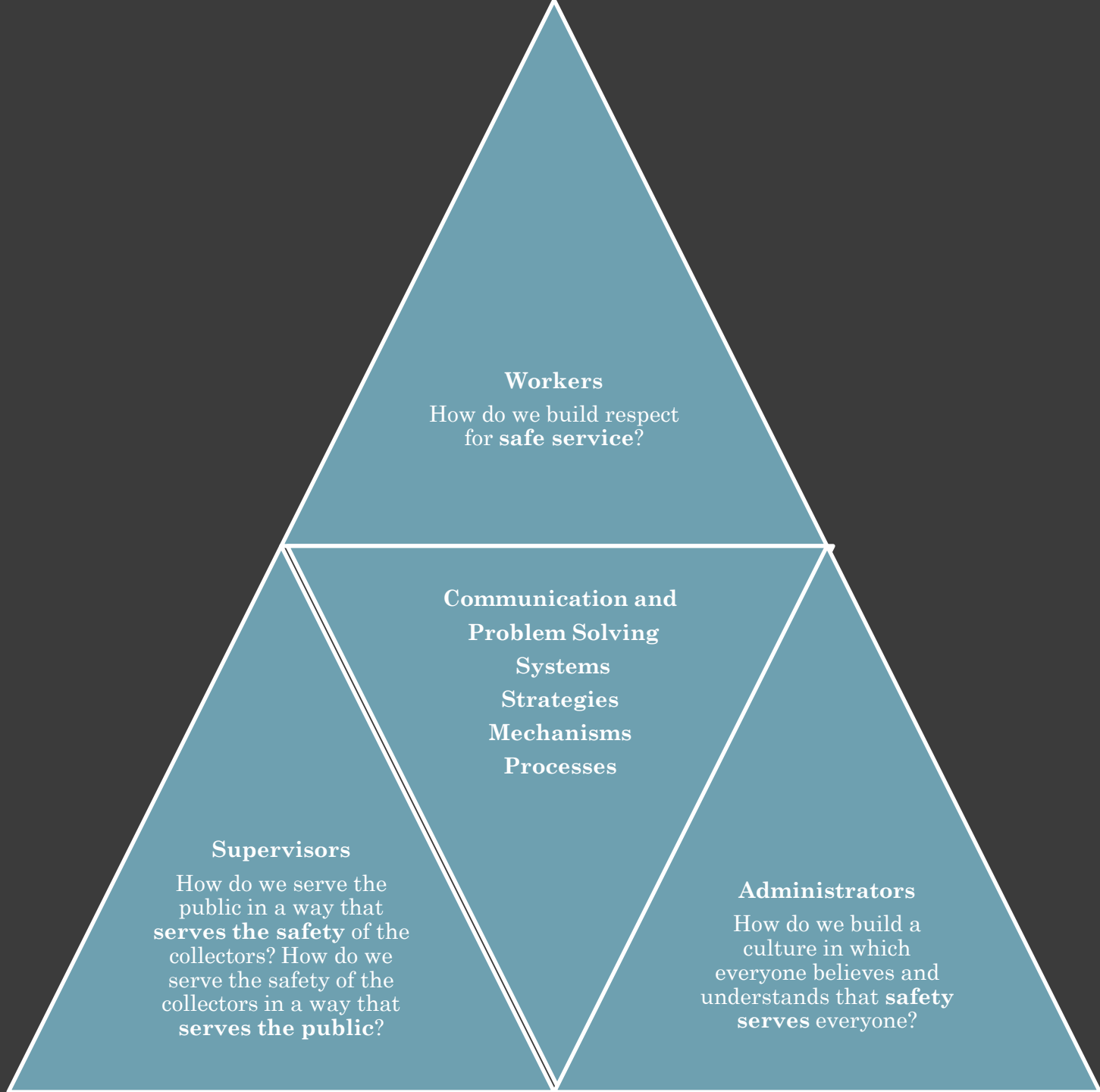
Workers

How do we build respect for **safe service**?

Communication and Problem Solving Systems Strategies Mechanisms Processes

Supervisors

How do we serve the public in a way that **serves the safety** of the collectors? How do we serve the safety of the collectors in a way that **serves the public**?

Administrators

How do we build a culture in which everyone believes and understands that **safety serves** everyone?

Supervisors:
How do we serve the public in a way that serves the **safety** of the workers? How do we serve the safety of the workers in a way that serves the **public**?

Further research:

•What communication frameworks, processes, mechanisms, systems and techniques might shift culture and facilitate the implementation of the proposed solutions?

•What are the barriers to implementation of proposed solutions?

•What is the impact of a integrative problem solving skills training program on quantitative measures of performance, culture, morale, and health?

THANK YOU!

Dr. Jennifer Walinga

Jennifer.walinga@royalroads.ca