PUBLIC LECTURE

Virtual vs Real Safety: are your efforts really effective?

Bob Cummins

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"A lot of safety paperwork, like checklists are only filled in to please the safety person. Reasons given are often - "it's legislation; it's best practice; we'll need it if we have an accident."

A lot of daily checklists have checks that don't need to be checked every day, and aren't checked every day yet the box is ticked.

We are creating compliant box tickers that give the illusion that everything is ok.

Deep down we know this but we all still play the game. burying our head in the sand as it's easier.

It's a farce, it really is and not in the dramatic buffoonery sense, more so in the absurdity, mockery, travesty, sham, pretense, masquerade, charade kind of way...

Furthermore, we convince ourselves through folk law and gossip that such daily checks are indeed legislative requirements. It's what's required under such and such... Fallacious tosh usually.

Check number 139 - is the seat-belt working correctly? Yes or No

The following happens...

Yes (I'm pretty sure it's working, it was yesterday and the day before and John would have told me if it wasn't)

No (damn, the seat-belt is bust, but if I tick no, I'll not be able to work, I'll tick yes and call it in later.

Actually, the No example doesn't happen as the check isn't actually done in most cases as a daily check. It'll be done in the van, from memory.

And let's not discuss the pointlessness of the daily risk assessment that sites HSG47 as a control measure for digging operations that day...

We've convinced ourselves that it's ok, the safety guy sees it as 'good practice' and 'compliance' the worker gets a well done from the safety guy and thus the behaviour of entering pointless words on the form is conditioned. Everyone is happy.

Until...

We are really good at defending the shit that we have created. We are not good at creating checksheets that actually add value. This isn't a complex system issue, it's pretty straight forward but does take guts and effort to stand against the flow and create things that actually work.

Imagine a checklist that actually added value to the user. Or, a checklist that was at least practical.

We could imagine this, it's how we create great things, human imagination.

Get imagining what added value checklists would look like, prototype, test and really improve safety."

THE AUTHOR

Bob Cummins. Bob started his career in construction in 1989. He left 'normal' work in 2011 in pursuit of making a difference after discovering behavioural science during his senior leadership positions in project management, health and safety and engineering.

Bob founded Sodak limited, a behavioural design agency based in Edinburgh, Scotland. Sodak's aim is to help people in business make safer, happier, less wasteful workplaces through behavioural design. He's the author of *Behavioural Science for Business Health and Self* and he's an advisor to the Cambridge Center for Behavioural Studies in North America. Sodak works with businesses in Europe, Canada and the US.