**Draft Focus Group Questions**

**Needs Assessment Phase**

**September 2021**

We appreciate you for coming today and participating in the discussion about worker health. Your participation is voluntary, and we will maintain confidentiality of the information you have provided. I need to ask that the information shared by others in the focus group be kept in this discussion group. Please, do not share the information with other people outside of the group. The purpose of this focus group is to discuss your experiences in your work setting during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Let us review the consent form together. I will ask you to sign the form so that you can take part in the focus group.

[Review consent form]

Are there any questions we can answer? Okay, so we will start the focus group.

1. What are the goals for your company/workplace objectives for employee health?

Leave the same way you come in (or better)

Perform your job in the time you are here (ability)

Annual health screening – monitor if better or worse (mandatory)

* Breath test is coming back (not well liked)

1. Have you received training on how to be healthy in this work environment?

Yes vs don’t remember

Examples:

Safe & healthy

Hearing protection – ear plugs

Too quiet

OSHA training (lifting technique, machine safety)

Safety meetings – discuss trends that they have seen (weekly discussions)

1. Are you aware of the workers’ health policies?

Respiratory protection

Chemical hazards (OSHA)

No smoking on site

1. Who do you talk to about your health in the workplace?

Physical – [redacted name]

Safety – leaders (2-3 people)

Overall HSE (health, safety, environmental) – full time employee

1. Has there been a discussion about workers’ health during the pandemic?
   1. Has that changed in the last few months?

1st started – weekly safety meeting to go over protocol updates (masking, CDC guidelines)

Impromptu meetings if something changes (corporate) and discuss local roll-out

Need to wear masks/ social distancing/ vaccination – policy to get vaccinated (or terminated) but then rolled back because of pushback which led to a testing protocol instead; some people did quit; tracking was minimum (think it might be >=50%)

People had to report vaccination status – no incentives (you got to keep your job)

Masks – people didn’t like it (but frequent discussions) ; night shift & weekends were more lax about this requirement (supervisor checks: ignored or they put it on when a supervisor came by); all meetings ended with discussions of masks, vaccination & social distancing and people did not like it

It was difficult to not be able to interact well (masks, distancing, TEAMS for meeting, no travel)

Life not impacted except for mask was the only change; this differed because most other friends were working from home; 50/50 about being able to still come in to work vs having the option to work at home

On the other side, it took longer to come out of the pandemic (still wearing masks even though other companies might have dropped masking); thought there was over protection at this stage; frustrating to have to continually talk to employees about the policy still being to mask

CHANGE:

Masks off in Jan/Feb, and then things have gone quiet

COVID pay: paid time off is still in place and challenge/stressor is to figure out when people will come back; did they test negative yet? (10 day maximum paid leave)

1. What do you do at work that makes you less safe?
   1. Do you believe that you are exposed to respiratory diseases on a daily basis?

Irritants – yes (paper dust, plastic dust) but not infectious disease

Some activities require respirators – so activity and type of mask is determined by the activity

* 1. What do you do at work that impacts how close you are to other people at work?
  2. Can you socially distance in the workspace?

Yes

Feedback about social distancing – people didn’t believe they were at risk; if job was necessary, they may have to be close BUT being distant at lunch felt like a double standard

Lunch – 1 chair per table; still ate in a group (but at their own table)

Some tasks are harder than others

* 1. Other activities?

Most people are very safe; severe consequences for breaking safety protocols 🡪 give feedback if see it (it tends to be small, like not holding a stair rail)

Severe – walk someone out of building (give feedback that escalated to this level)

Life threatening: can be immediate termination, but basically they go through the steps

Mixed response to receiving feedback (generally OK) – “caring about the person” helps to receive feedback better

Ignoring feedback is more common when it is peer- vs manager-initiated

People who are upset with managers may mean that they go to someone else

WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?

We value production over safety – some employees say that

Never mandated vaccines – led to unnecessary frustration & discussion (especially because it never got fully implemented) – digging out of the lowered morale was problematic

Correlations between vitamin deficiencies & covid – it would have been nice to explore these as options for health and not just mask/vaccine/social distance

Central [redacted city]– instructions may not have been relevant…work from home was never an option at this site (the easy road)

* + Policy was developed by office people and not manufacturing, so there was a disconnect and workers were frustrated
  + They should have come down to see what it was really like in order to make policy that was relevant
  + Masks – wet & dirty (not actually protective); wear multiple days because they didn’t want to start (although provided for free)

Slow to end masking – it didn’t fit with where you will get sick (at work or elsewhere) and that disconnect made it difficult to try to enforce

Company is trying to make it OK to wear a mask, but there are lots of different opinions, which impacted people’s relationships 🡪 goal is open

Purpose/values/principles – believe in safety policies so it is usually easy to talk to people about problems, but masks went too long because it didn’t feel evidence-based so giving feedback was difficult to give to workers (placed supervisors in an uncomfortable position)

What people were doing outside of work and they brought covid to work – lots of discussion about this 🡪 created a lot of tension; made people feel guilty to say they had covid

Promoting a culture of not being on board with policy or of not working with employees 🡪 lose/lose

Manager still has to work from home vs being off sick (worker) so some time off

Wouldn’t test unless symptomatic vs high possibility of exposure; a lot of managers didn’t say they were sick or wouldn’t test because didn’t want to admit a “lapse” of safety; didn’t want people to know if they were sick

* + Loss of privacy if had to report was in violation of privacy; no other condition is regulated this way
  + Now people are getting sick with other respiratory conditions and it feels like it is “worse” no
  + If it wasn’t covid, they didn’t get PTO, so they come in to work anyway (better to be sick with covid)

Mental health counseling – lots of stress (EAP usage doubled during covid, and don’t know what was done out of pocket)

Corporate had some MH coping sessions – but not well received and it made people angry and they didn’t attend; also not relevant (like setting up your work from home office) 🡪 tone deaf

Biggest divide was corporate to plant; once at plant the policies were different (tone, implementation of policy); lots of people expressed frustration

Modification of corporate policy when possible, but a lot was not negotiable – locally, they made sure they had numbers & evidence to back up the policies they were implementing (this is quite different site than many other [company] sites; this year they got approval to do more local implementation)

Travel – many international visitor; wanted to manage locally

Workers asking questions and managers may not have had answers – that was frustrating

Vaccination – outside of work, no restrictions; but at work still have to wear a mask 🡪 how did this impact respect? (demoralizing)

Lack of recognition or incentives for the work that they did to keep manufacturing going open; work from home got $1500 to set up office, but manufacturing got $500; they didn’t receive money for vaccination at [company]; make it positive rather than negative (too much was negative); especially frustrating when the company made lots of money

Management didn’t get recognition that the communication task was also hard for managers 🡪 more support would have been appreciated

No consideration for exceptions (even those that are warranted) – especially vaccination reasons

PROBLEM when policies were changing daily/weekly – lots of advice to wait until the deadline (because it might change anyway)

1. What do you think would make you safer at work?

Standards, PPE, training on how to be safe

Everyone has a roll to report safety concerns – culture

1. Anything else that you would like to share with us?

More here about what to do differently

Thank you for your participation in this focus group! We really appreciate the information you have provided us.