SAFETY CULTURE AMONG SUBCONTRACTORS IN THE DOMESTIC HOUSING CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Phil Wadick, Faculty of Education, Monash University

ABSTRACT
Research suggests that subcontracting precipitates negative occupational health and safety (OHS) outcomes. This article sketches a portrait of the safety culture of subcontractors who work in the domestic housing industry in Australia to better understand them and inform policy decisions. Ethnographic data was gathered from a short survey of 150 subcontractors, in depth interviews with 11 subcontractors from various trades, document analysis, OHS course evaluations, informal conversations and investigator diaries. Despite the high rates of injury and disease in the construction industry, construction workers want to be safe at work and they trust their own safety knowledge developed over years of involvement in the industry. They have a poor understanding and appreciation of OHS legal requirements and accept that construction work is dangerous. They tend to think of safety as common sense and often blame the injured worker for not being careful enough. Safe behaviours are constrained by a competitive industry that puts costs before safety. Enforcement strategies fail to take the culture of the industry into account and are being met with a form of passive resistance. Three main areas that subcontractors believe need addressing are the critically important role the builder plays in Organizing the construction process, the interdependence of the different trades, and manual handling. An attempt is made to deconstruct the elements that constitute subcontractor safety culture in an effort to determine possible purchase points that, if systematically addressed, may lead to OHS best practice, rather than minimum compliance.

Keywords: Subcontracting, Housing construction, Safety culture

INTRODUCTION
This paper presents an analysis of some aspects of a research project that explored attitudes to OHS held by subcontractors in the domestic building industry. It was conducted because a large amount of anecdotal evidence gathered by the researcher strongly suggested that there was a growing culture of resistance to modern OHS legislation among subcontractors in that industry. The discussion examines the OHS situation in the construction industry and the influence of workplace culture on safe working. The evidence suggests that improved OHS outcomes may be compromised if the cultural values, norms and social structure of the industry are either ignored or marginalised.

The ‘problem of subcontractors’ in house construction in Australia is then examined using an approach inspired by root cause analysis techniques. The author probes beyond the obvious by picking apart and identifying the factors that contribute to poor OHS practices of subcontractors identified in safety literature. Understanding the influences on subcontractors will help develop targeted intervention strategies to improve their OHS performance. Enforcement strategies that purely target behaviours will have limited long term effectiveness if they fail to address the reasons why those behaviours occur.

SETTING THE SCENE
Construction is a high-risk industry (Stromm, 2001) with a high incidence of workplace deaths, injuries and diseases (WorkCover NSW, 2001) and a poor safety record (Safe Work Australia, 2008). According to Worker’s Compensation statistics, the construction industry of NSW has the fourth highest incidence of employment injuries (ASCC, 2009) and the highest number of work-related fatalities (ASCC, 2009) of all industries in NSW. The incidence of injury in the construction
industry throughout Australia is 50% higher than the all industry rate (Breslin, 2004). Hence, OHS laws in Australia target the construction industry.

Subcontracting has become a major feature of the construction industry and Silberberg (Silberberg, 1991) asserts that subcontractors make up about 90% of workers in the domestic housing segment of the industry. There is mounting evidence that this shift to subcontracting is having negative health and safety effects on these types of workers (Quinlan, 2003). Monitoring and enforcement of OHS is more difficult at workplaces such as building sites that have multiple subcontractors, and it increases the risk of instances of ‘paper compliance’ escaping undetected (Quinlan, 2003: 6). Hence, management of subcontractors is a key feature in the success of any OHS management system in this industry (WorkCover NSW, 2001), yet subcontractors have received little OHS research despite their importance to the construction industry and the Australian economy (Mayhew et al., 1996).

Johnstone (1999) found that subcontractors who work in domestic housing had poor understanding and awareness of OHS requirements. The National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC) concluded that the domestic housing segment was not introducing OHS as effectively as other sectors of the industry (NOHSC, 1999). However, there appears to be very limited research targeting OHS in the domestic housing industry, which can mean poor policy (ACIL, 1996): ‘Redressing this situation should be a matter of priority’ (ACIL, 1996).

METHODOLOGY

This research has been designed to increase understanding of construction industry safety. The literature review revealed that there has been very little research conducted to gain insight into how subcontractors understand OHS and what it means for them. The aim was to talk to and listen to subcontractors from the domestic housing industry with the objective of finding out what they think, feel and do about safety at work to deconstruct subcontractors’ subjective experiences and how they give meaning to their own situation. The desired outcome was to find some way of addressing the safety situation in the building industry. The main purpose of this study was exploratory. Therefore, it was thought best to use a qualitative theoretical framework on which to base the research methodology. The quantitative perspective may have difficulty in allowing for attitudes to be made explicit, especially in the absence of current substantive research that describes those attitudes.

The principle methodology employed for this research was ethnography. Ethnography is an act of sense making in which the researcher attempts to uncover multiple layers of meaning held by the group being studied (Barab et al., 2003), capture the personal experiences of participants and explore their complex social situations (Punch, 1994). The ethnographic approach allowed for the subjective understandings of the realities of the subcontractors to emerge, and for a cultural analysis to be applied to their words.

Somerville and Lloyd (2005) have suggested that ethnographic methods are extremely suitable for research into workplace cultures. In her study of learning safety in the mining industry she found that ‘cultural analysis can explain how worker subjectivities, including learning and practising safety, are constituted within these workplace cultures’ (Somerville and Lloyd, 2005). She believes that cultural analysis can help identify a ‘potential locus of change’ (Somerville and Lloyd, 2005) that one can use to mobilise workers to ‘intervene in their own workplace practices’ (Somerville and Lloyd, 2005). Eales and Spence (2005) suggest that the ability to identify and manage these ‘cultural levers’ will help facilitate ongoing change. It is proposed here that more effective intervention strategies can be developed by understanding exactly what the subcontractors perceive as their meaningful safety concerns.

The data was collected through a combination of a short oral survey of 158 subcontractors, participant observation, in depth semi structured interviews with 11 subcontractors from 6 different trades, document analysis, discussions in hundreds of OHS induction courses, course evaluations,
informal conversations with subcontractors over a 9 year period and investigator diaries. It was simultaneously and iteratively recorded, analysed and coded into emergent themes.

Reliability of results was enhanced through triangulation, and validity was strengthened by the author’s emic connection with the industry that made it difficult for the participants to mislead him, deceive him, or gloss over things. His working relationship of equality with many of the interviewees helped to address issues of power and perspective, which is essential when determining what version of culture is written (Barab et al, 2003: 3).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the paper is grounded in the data gathered for this research. Statements made represent perceptions enunciated by the research participants. A complex picture emerged of the subcontractors’ workplace culture, and in particular, their safety culture. Three macro themes were evident: the subcontractors’ need for independence and autonomy, their need and desire for personal safety, and their opinions of WorkCover’s enforcement strategies.

In response to the open-ended oral survey question ‘How did you learn to work safely?’, the most often cited response was ‘Common sense’ (25%), followed by ‘Mistakes over the years’ (13.3%), ‘Stories from others’ (13%), ‘Thinking ahead’ (12.6%), ‘From other jobs’ (10.7%) and ‘Watching others’ (9.5%). Low response rates were for ‘Use correct gear’ (1.9%), ‘OHS courses’ (1.3%) and ‘School’ (1.3%). Their learning was specific to the tasks they perform and the tools they use. It was not generic, but trade specific. That is, they have learned to work safely through involvement with their trade in the construction industry.

### Table 1. Responses to the question: ‘How did you learn to work safely?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Category</th>
<th>Percent of Responses</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common sense</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories from others</td>
<td>13.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistakes over the years</td>
<td>13.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking ahead</td>
<td>12.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From other jobs</td>
<td>10.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching others</td>
<td>9.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep eyes open</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use correct gear</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t like pain</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHS courses</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t get paid</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subcontractors place an enormous amount of trust in their own common sense to help inform their safety judgements and decisions. This trust in their own decision making is fundamental to their success as subcontractors because they are constantly required to make accurate practical judgements in the specific contexts of ever changing workplaces. It seems that common sense is related to reflective practice, and the decisions reached through common sense very often come from critical reflection. It is developed and informed through participation in the process of performing construction work, which means common sense is learned, is not fixed and is amenable to change as new circumstances challenge previously held conceptions. Locating the
exact sites for this learning is imperative if changes are sought to the way construction workers manage safety.

Appropriate information informs their common sense. Subcontractors are intelligent, motivated, industrious and innovative people. If they know something is going to hurt them they will mostly try to devise a practical and effective method of either eliminating the hazard, or minimising the harm it can cause. They consider this as ‘using your common sense’. It may indicate that appropriate, relevant, timely and context specific information will help them make safety related judgements.

Throughout the history of the building industry, safety has been part of and integrated into subcontractors’ core business activities, but not necessarily enunciated or defined anywhere. Safety knowledge is often tacit knowledge and is learned as part of learning how to perform the job properly. Most of the safety learning that subcontractors value has occurred informally as part of performing construction work. Their safety behaviour is a result of heuristically making iterative judgements about the hazards and risks they face. Historically, the construction workers have defined this process for themselves and have developed a culture that integrates safety and work. Now, government has legislated what risks are permissible and what risks are not.

Subcontractors have a deep respect and trust for the safety knowledge gained from years of practice, and a distrust of safety courses that attempt to privilege paper/procedural knowledge over practical, embedded and embodied safety knowledge. They rely on this personally created safety knowledge and distrust the paperwork knowledge of WorkCover, which is often perceived as irrelevant, costly and ineffective. WorkCover inspectors are perceived as authoritarian, dogmatic, petty and unfair. It is thought that they are more interested in fining people than creating a safer workplace. The resulting situation is that enforcement strategies are tending to not necessarily produce safer workplaces, as was intended, but paperwork compliance: that is, minimum compliance rather than best practice.

Most subcontractors feel that the hazards and risks they face are mostly predictable within their own trade, yet many concede that the interrelationships between the trades often pose safety concerns. The construction of a house means more than each subcontractor performing their own work skilfully – it requires all trades to work together cooperatively throughout the whole life cycle of the project. However, the structure of the industry favours a culture of independence and individual resourcefulness at the expense of interdependence and consideration for others. Many subcontractors are in such a hurry to get in, finish, and get out, that they may not consider other people who depend on them. If subcontractors are not genuinely thoughtful of others on site they may leave invisible dangers for unsuspecting workers. The findings demonstrate that OHS is often compromised by the thoughtlessness of some people for others on building sites. Examples include the plumbers use temporary taps that hurt the tiler; the carpenters leave loose floor boards for the unsuspecting person to fall through; people leave their mess for others to either clean up or trip on; the builder leaves piles of dirt for the brickie to stumble over.

A very strong theme that emerged from the data was the central role that the builder plays in helping to create a safer workplace. A safe construction site is one in which the builder is well organised, plans ahead, and communicates effectively with all parties. It is the builder who is the one constant throughout the construction process and it is he (or she) who has the power and position to foster positive interfacing between trades who rely on each other but who often are not on site with each other.

The people who constitute the construction industry culture share some common perceptions of risk. They believe that construction sites are safe for them, but not for outsiders like owner builders, women or children, who do not understand the construction site. They are unanimous about not liking the paperwork requirements that are reifying OHS. They seem to perceive financial risk as more important than personal safety. They all accept that building work degrades the body, but continue with it because it pays the bills. They often view the financial risks represented by WorkCover’s enforcement as more hazardous than continuing with their present work procedures. Their reluctance to spend money on OHS is related to the fact that they have very tight profit
Subcontractors’ subjectivities and actions are constituted within and influenced by the ‘latent conditions’ (Reason, 1997) created by the history and culture of the industry that favours costs and production over worker safety.

There are many hazards in the building industry that are not prescriptively addressed by legislation and enforcement and which are often seen by the subcontractors as more important to them. For example, manual handling injuries constitute about 55% of all compensable injuries in the construction industry (WorkCover NSW, 1998) but enforcement strategies do not address the large amount of manual handling in the industry.

Manual handling is a major cause for concern because it is an intrinsic part of work as a subcontractor. Mayhew et al (1996) found that not only did self employed subcontractors take less time off work if injured, about half of all subcontractor builders interviewed had chronic back pain and few worked in the industry after aged 50. James et al (1992 in Mayhew et al, 1996) found that injured self employed workers frequently tried to ‘soldier on’, particularly after cuts, abrasions, sprains or strains, which contributed to a greater incidence of chronic disability among self employed workers and earlier retirement. All of the interviewees in this current research project who were over 40 years old have some kind of chronic injury from excessive and/or repetitive manual handling activities, and 6 of the 11 interviewees are trying to find a new career because this job is killing me. The fact that there is very little room for vertical career advancement (Mayhew et al, 1996) means that they must face the unrelenting hard physical labour for their whole working life and this necessarily degrades the body.

Workers who participated in this research do not respect OHS legislation that does not address things that matter to them. The technical approach taken by enforcement agencies alienates many small businesses and can be a barrier to their participation in OHS best practice initiatives (Caple, 2005). They are suspicious of rules that do not seem to help their lot, and they wonder how legislation is going to reduce the amount of manual handling they perform that is ruining their bodies. They believe that many of the rules do not actually address their real safety concerns, such as repetitive movements, constant manual handling, poor organisation of the construction process, poor coordination and communication between trades, unclear areas of responsibility, and the noisy/dusty working environment.

OHS is becoming a sphere of tension that is at the intersection of subjectivities, power, and the production of knowledge. The subcontractors’ self concept of being a competent worker is threatened by WorkCover’s disempowering enforcement strategies that devalue their knowledge born of practice. Many workers in the building industry feel as though WorkCover would have a better chance of creating a change in both behaviours and attitudes if they took on more of an educative role rather than the strict disciplinarian role that now seems to be their reputation. A common theme to appear is the opinion that WorkCover inspectors are behaving like Gestapo, or, as some have put it frustrated would-be police. They are out to really get people and not there to help. Perceptions are that enforcement strategies are putting people off side and giving safety a bad name. They feel that it would work much better if the inspectors were not so authoritarian, and came on site to talk to people. Subcontractors feel that they would be able to negotiate an OHS compliant workplace if they were treated with respect, consulted, and their knowledge, opinions and experiences validated.

SUBCONTRACTOR SAFETY CULTURE
In the following sections the author has used a system of root cause analysis to help deconstruct the safety culture of subcontractors in an effort to understand both their meta narrative and micro concerns. It is only by understanding these that they can be adequately addressed. The ensuing discussion is informed by ongoing qualitative research conducted by the author. Where possible it is supported by literature. However, owing to the dearth of literature exploring subcontractor safety culture some of the points raised may appear novel and unsubstantiated. This is to be expected when forging new knowledge and provides suggestions for further research.
The construction site

Construction sites are the environment in which subcontractors work, they belong to this cultural space and place (Wadick, 2007). They are dusty, noisy and messy; the ground is often uneven, with trenches, piles of dirt and material offcuts around the site; there is often poor access such as long muddy driveways on a hill; people frequently work outdoors in the elements; much work is performed on temporary surfaces and it is not always easy to distinguish between precarious and safe (Bentley et al., 2004). Construction sites continuously change so it is difficult to predict what it will be like at any point in the future.

Work methods

Most subcontractors are specialist trades people who perform a limited range of activities. Construction work is usually heavy and repetitive; people use their body to use tools to dig, cut, grind, nail, screw, place, fix, apply, climb, and so on. They rarely use paper (Wadick, 2005) – most writing performed on construction sites is rough sketching and calculations done with a builder’s pencil on disposable surfaces such as a timber/plaster offcut or a scrap of cardboard torn from a packaging box. These are dispensed with after use. Written safe work method statements (swms) are regarded as an unhelpful burden on their limited resources, as they do not easily allow for constant problem solving in unique situations. Safe working is further compromised because OHS is not always a high priority when planning a job, but is seen as an add-on cost that impinges on their already slim profit margins (Hager et al., 2001).

The subcontracting system

Subcontracting is favoured in the house building industry because it offers builders flexibility and cost efficiencies (Ireland, 1988). However, its very nature poses challenges for OHS management. At its core are the competitive tendering process and the piecework nature in which subcontractors get paid for how much they produce, which encourages them to take shortcuts (Breslin, 2004). Compounding this is the fact that subcontractors receive no workers compensation coverage, no holiday or sick pay and no superannuation; they must pay for insurances such as accident, public and products liability, and workers compensation for their own employees. They also provide at least one vehicle and all the tools of their trade; very often they even supply the materials to be installed in the construction process; they must pay for all the training they and their employees undertake. No workers compensation, paid holidays or sick leave means that they take few breaks and often work with injuries that other employees would normally get paid recuperation time for, while there are very few ‘light duties’ for the injured building worker to perform under any rehabilitation programme. There is very little opportunity for career advancement, which means they labour for their whole working life; they often change careers by age 50 due to their body wearing out. With no other qualifications, they usually must accept a job with lower wages, although with better working conditions that may help their body recover. It is hard to find reliable data on the extent of injuries and diseases among subcontractors because there is no systematic method for collecting and/or collating such information: there are no official injury or incident reporting mechanisms (Mitchell and Boufous, 2005). We simply don’t know the extent of the problem and its costs to them, their families and society.

Many different subcontractors are involved in the building of a house and research has identified at least three widespread implications for health and safety:

1. There is poor communication between the trades which means subcontractors often leave unsuspected hazards for the tradespeople following on from them (Bentley et al., 2004).
2. There are few structured systems for OHS consultation and people are often tarnished with the label ‘whinger’ if they speak up or make suggestions (Wadick, 2005).
3. The builder has enormous power and influence over the construction process, and the leadership and people management skills of the builder can be the difference between a safe and unsafe workplace (Biggs et al., 2005, Wadick, 2007, Biggs et al., 2006).

In fact, subcontractors are the last in a long chain of circumstances and events over which they have very little control (Williams et al., 2005). They do not feel cared for, so why should they care (Geller, 1994, Sirotan et al., 2005): just make as much money in as little time as possible and move to the next job.
People/construction personnel
The builder is the glue that holds together this fragmented and sometimes chaotic process (Hager et al., 2002). However, the builder is not always present, and even when he is, may lack in the soft people skills to make it cohesive (Wadick, 2005). Builders are specialists at process control, but not communication, consultation, conflict resolution, negotiation, and listening – they pay more attention to getting the job done rather than worker safety. The subcontractor is essentially a disposable item, and they will be dispensed with if they complain (Wadick, 2005).

Time/cost pressures and discontinuous activities tend to make the needs of the tradespeople following each trade in the construction process invisible. Therefore many subcontractors take a self-preservation approach and do the minimum amount of work to satisfy the job requirements. This can mean that, for example, the plasterers don’t mark the plasterboard where the electrician has left a bracket for the power point or light switch so the electrician has difficulty locating these. This creates animosity and spirals into a situation where subcontractors often do not look after anyone’s interests except their own (Wadick, 2007). The builder has the power (but perhaps not the skills) to ameliorate this: if he cares for them, they are more likely to care for others; if he seems not to care for them by screwing their price down to a bare survival minimum, they don’t have time to care for anyone else, and it is very difficult to quantify ‘caring’ in financial terms.

Workplace culture and safety culture
It is difficult to separate out the safety culture from the workplace culture as they are historically integrated. It has always been a male dominated masculine culture of toughness, risk taking and ‘can do’ attitude (Hayes, 2002, Agapiou, 2002). Being a good tradesperson is synonymous with knowing how to use your tools properly and safely, and how to be careful in such a dangerous industry (Wadick, 2007). If you get hurt, it is your own fault (Wadick, 2007), and everyone knows their body is deteriorating because of their job. It is a practical industry with relatively no history of the written word (ACIL, 1996): it is based on doing and not writing about doing. The construction industry has a high percentage of people with poor literacy skills (Construction Training Australia, 2001, Kelly and Searle, 2000), who are successful if they possess good trade skills. Even though much of the work is repetitive, most subcontractors are fiercely independent business managers who constantly make decisions that affect the success of their business. They carefully balance the tension between costs, production and their safety (Hager et al., 2001) – they see safety as largely common sense and rely on not being hurt, because an injured worker cannot earn money. Many resist modern safety rules because they do not perceive them to be making their life better, just more complex. Safety has been given a bad name by all the negative rumours that are now restorying OHS. Safety is now the demon that will punish you if you are caught (Biggs et al., 2006), and the worst thing is that the rules of engagement are not always clearly understood (Wadick, 2005).

Equipment and Materials
Subcontractors use tools, equipment and materials with their bodies all of the time they are at work. Many of these things are heavy, awkward, toxic or with poor ergonomic design. They are put in and taken out of vehicles, moved and carried around the site, up/down ladders or scaffold, and gradually wear the body out. Many subcontractors do not even know what poisons they are exposed to in the materials they or other workers on site use: they will often prejudice perceived quality of the product over their own health and safety as they will pay a bit extra for quality, but not for safety (Wadick, 2005).

Training
Subcontractors place an extremely low priority on off-the-job training (ACIL, 1996), as it is perceived to be a cost rather than investment. Anything they need to learn they’d rather learn on the job from other trusted workers (Wadick, 2007). Builders and supervisors have very little training in people skills, which is not really considered as one of their core competencies. OHS training is generally perceived as a waste of time and money as it doesn’t address their real concerns (Wadick, 2005).
OHS knowledge
Subcontractors are happy to have safer workplaces. However, they are unhappy if they have to pay for safety from their slim profit margins (Hager et al., 2000). They complain that OHS compliance costs them more but they can’t charge more (e.g. compulsory training, PPE, harnesses, scaffolding, tagging electrical equipment, & paperwork), and it often makes the job slower. They believe that OHS legislation does not address their main concerns of the interrelationships between the trades, the poor organisational skills of the builder, and the constant and repetitive manual handling (Wadick, 2005). There is also confusion over what is actually required by OHS legislation. They are confused because legislation espouses a performance approach based on risk management, but WorkCover inspectors often take a prescriptive and random/inconsistent approach that depends on the mood of the inspector (Wadick, 2005). Not knowing what the rules are creates a deep sense of insecurity and dissatisfaction, and feeds into the negative storying of OHS. There is also a lack of trust in the voluminous Codes of Practice that do not clarify how to behave safely in each circumstance, and are perceived to deny the realities of construction work.

RECOMMENDATIONS
It is believed by the author that the following recommendations may be possible to implement in the current state of subcontracting in the domestic house building industry. These are organised in relation to the previous categories used for the root cause analysis of the subcontractor safety culture.

Recommendations:
1. Integrate OHS at the design stage of every building and at every step along the way; this will help with many things, including manual handling because materials will be delivered where and when they are needed to prevent double or even triple handling. (Construction site and equipment/materials).
2. Provide free training for subcontractors in the skills of filling out paperwork such as safe work method statements, and allow this to attract professional development points. (Work methods and training).
3. Facilitate inter-trade site meetings with action plans and follow up to clarify what they need to work safely. (Personnel and subcontracting system)
4. Ensure that all quotations for work include how the people are going to work safely. This will include how they perceive that they will be effected by other trades. (Subcontracting system).
5. Create a broader workers compensation system that includes subcontractors. This will have the dual advantage of giving subcontractors paid and managed recuperation time for injuries and allow for the collection of meaningful injury statistics that can inform planning. It will also allow for a system to be developed that will help retrain workers whose body won’t permit them to stay in the industry. (Subcontracting system).
6. Provide free training for builders in people skills such as communication/consultation, conflict resolution, negotiation and leadership. Ensure this is a key component of all building courses. (People and construction personnel).
7. Pressure toolmakers to design safer tools that are more ergonomic, less noisy and lightweight. (Materials and equipment).
8. Substitute the number of toxic chemicals in construction products with harmless ones. Educate people who use toxic products of their dangers and methods of safe use. (Materials and equipment).
9. Assess how OHS is included in all trade and building courses to ensure it is core, not just add on. (Training).
10. Reinvigorate the apprenticeship system to increase funding to help small businesses train apprentices. This will have the dual advantages of securing the future skill needs of the country and providing help for the overstretched workers. (Training).
11. Train WorkCover inspectors in people and education skills so that they can visit sites as educators more than enforcers. (OHS knowledge).
12. Create and circulate a detailed list of the prescriptive aspects of OHS legislation as applied by inspectors. This will help the subcontractors at least define the goals and will squash the negative OHS rumours. *(OHS knowledge)*

**CONCLUSION**

This paper has discussed a research project that deconstructed subcontractors and working safely in the building industry. It was found that the construction workplace culture influences the work practices of the subcontractors who work in the industry. Subcontractors want to be safe at work, but working safely is compromised by such competing forces as time/money pressures, the nature of the work, the power and position of the builder, and the interrelationships between the trades. OHS reform will not create a best practice safety culture unless it addresses these cultural imperatives of the industry.

A system of root cause analysis helped describe subcontractor safety culture in terms of seven categories: the construction site, work methods, the subcontracting system, people/construction personnel, workplace and safety culture, equipment and materials, training, and OHS legislation. Recommendations were offered that may help improve the safety culture of subcontractors and these were referenced to the seven categories.

**REFERENCES**


