Improving Traffic Safety Culture Through California's SHSP

SafeTREC-UCTC Seminar

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Outline of today's talk

- Introduction to "traffic safety culture" (TSC).

- Examples of past efforts to change TSC.

- Overview of the efforts of the Strategic Highway Safety Plan to explore potential applications of TSC.

- Discussion.

What do we mean by "Traffic Safety Culture?"

- Culture is one potential explanation for the following deceptively simple question:
  - Why, given the same circumstances, might two people make different choices?

- Based on AAA Foundation's *Improving Traffic Safety Culture* (2007), and other works, we might think of culture as:
  - Beliefs and attitudes, norms and laws, stories and symbols, objects and technologies, habits and styles, all of which guide everyday behavior.

Some implications

- Culture is *dynamic*, and so potentially changeable (rather than being totally stable or static).

- Culture expresses itself in different ways (attitudes, technologies, stories, laws, etc.), each of which might be potentially changeable.

- A change in one part of culture (e.g., law) may affect another part of culture (e.g., attitudes).

Further implications

- Culture exists at different "levels":
  - Individuals (e.g., beliefs and attitudes, habits and practices).
  - Communities (e.g., norms, stories and symbols)
  - Organizations (e.g., structures of incentives; processes and procedures).
  - Society (e.g., formal laws, enforcement regimes).

- These are not the only "levels" – they are meant simply as suggestions to get us thinking.

However…

- Culture is an inherently problematic concept: we "know" (or think we know) that it matters, but we must also acknowledge that culture is:

  - Difficult to define (cf. all of the various definitions one might find when starting a literature review on this subject).

  - Difficult to conceptualize (especially at a supra-individual level)

  - Difficult to transfer concepts across disciplinary boundaries (e.g., from anthropology and sociology to, say, public health, engineering, criminology, and cognitive psychology)

  - Difficult to change.

Changing the culture: possible, but not easy!

- Impaired driving (for instance, driving under the influence of alcohol) was illegal for many years <u>before</u> it became socially unacceptable, not to mention politically feasible to police rigorously.

- MADD led the efforts to shift beliefs and attitudes about drunk driving. Results:

  - Currently 4/5 (79%) of Californians believe that people who drink and drive are a very serious threat to safety.

  - This led to more popular support for laws (and enforcement practices) that surveil and punish drunk driving more rigorously.

Past and current examples, cont.

- Seatbelt use as a primary infraction. Results:

  - Currently, only 1/5 (21%) of Californians believe that it is acceptable to drive without a seatbelt.

- BUT:

  - Currently, almost half (46%) of Californians believe that it is acceptable to talk on a cell phone while driving, and

  - About 2/5 (41%) believe that it is acceptable to drive 15 mph over the speed limit on a freeway.

Speaking of speed.

There is perhaps no better (if tragic) example of the power of stories and symbols than the <u>Fast and Furious</u> franchise.

Background on the SHSP Traffic Safety Culture Task force

- First, what is the SHSP?

    - In compliance with FHWA requirements, each state develops a "strategic highway safety plan."

    - In California, this includes stakeholders from:

        - All the major transportation-related and public health agencies (Executive and Steering Committees), plus

        - Agency staff, interest groups, and interested members of the public (17 Challenge Areas, which report to the Steering Committee).

SHSP TSC Task Force cont.

- What are the SHSP Challenge Areas, and what do they do?

  - They are 17 subcommittees, charged with identifying actions for the purpose of saving lives, preventing injuries, and improving traffic safety.

  - Each subcommittee identifies "action items" which are then taken up by one (or more) agencies within state government. Examples include:

    - Action 1.5: Institute programs that provide intense monitoring of "worst of the worst" repeat DUI offenders.

    - Action 9.9: Implement and widely disseminate older driver safety and mobility programs of partner organizations.

    - Action 16.1: Implement the Allied Agencies Collision Reporting-SWITRS.

SHSP TSC Task Force cont.

- The TSC Task Force was convened in the spring of 2012.
  - Includes members who are currently active in other SHSP activities.
- Produced (August 2012) a draft set of recommendations:
  - Strategies consistent with current efforts in five (5) challenge areas, as well as
  - Data-collection methods that could be used to measure change over time in traffic safety culture.
- Those recommendations were – and remain – a kind of "demonstration project" of the conceptual feasibility of this type of approach to traffic safety.
- Co-leads: Holly Sisneros (CDPH) and Bayliss Camp (DMV)

Current Activities of the SHSP TSC Task Force

- The Steering Committee of the SHSP has indicated interest in seeing:
  - What culture-oriented action items would look like;
  - Also, what data-collection efforts might look like.
- The Task Force has therefore committed to working with:
    - Challenge Area 1 (Reduce Impaired Driving Fatalities), and
    - Challenge Area 10 (Reducing Speeding and Aggressive Driving)

    to develop sample action items and data-collection methods.

    Also, to develop action items that address "general" traffic safety culture change.

Some examples of "General" Culture Change Draft Action Items

- AI #1-4: Identify model municipal ordinances that fit specified criteria of improving safe road usage. Prioritize these ordinances according to utility in improving safe road usage. Promote those model ordinances that appear to have the greatest demonstrated utility. Document change in traffic safety outcomes among those municipalities that adopt identified ordinances.

- AI #5: Develop a method of measuring traffic safety culture through a survey of the road user population of California.

Some examples of "General" Culture Change Draft Action Items

- AI #6: Assess the feasibility of instituting a model congratulations letter (or license notation, or vehicle decal), for use in a pilot program to acknowledge safe, observant road usage.

- AI #7: Develop and disseminate a social media campaign or game linked to real time driving data that could both help people monitor their driving habits and encourage friendly competition toward higher driving scores (obtained through better driving).

Intended outcome of TSC Task Force Efforts

- Provide a "proof of concept" that specific action items that address traffic safety culture change can be identified.

- California SHSP is currently undergoing reorganization (subsequent to MAP-21 – the "Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act", the funding and authorization bill for FHWA). Therefore, it is somewhat unclear how the efforts of the TSC Task Force will best support a reorganized California SHSP.

- That said, there appears to be strong interest among many members of the SHSP Steering Committee, as well as among the various Challenge Areas, in seeing where TSC efforts might lead.

That's all

Questions?

For questions on this presentation, or for any other enquiries regarding California DMV Research & Development:

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For a broader list of references, please contact DMV Research and Development: bayliss.camp@dmv.ca.gov, or (916) 657-7032