

Leading the Way in Health and Safety Performance

Client: Chamber of Mines of South Africa

The Challenge:

The Chamber of Mines of South Africa wanted to significantly improve the industry's occupational health and safety (OH&S) performance. More than two decades of prior investment and effort into technology transfer in the workplace had not produced satisfactory results in that it was not used, safety performance did not improve, or safety performance declined. Yet, leaders remained convinced that technology transfer was the optimum means for improving OH&S performance.

The Solution:

Decision Partners conducted one-on-one, mental models interviews with senior industry managers throughout the South African mining industry to identify barriers and aids to industry-wide adoption of occupational health and safety technology and best practices. The research confirmed that the most significant challenge was not failure to identify or develop technologies or best practices, but in achieving their adoption.

The research also revealed that the focal point for achieving adoption by mine employees at all levels was overcoming resistance to change by workers who did not readily see the benefits of change. The primary challenge at the leadership level was to get "buy-in" in order to get the capital funding and resources required to implement the technology or best practice. For both leaders and workers, the research results indicated that the challenge of achieving widespread adoption of OH&S technologies and best practices was fundamentally a behavioural one.

We focused on development of leadership behaviour strategies and plans, as well as behavioural communications strategies and plans, derived from applied behavioural science and risk communication science. The results of our research were used to design the behavioural and decision making aspects of an industry initiative – called the "Adoption System" – a state-of-the-science approach for achieving systematic adoption of innovative technology.

The Results:

In its pilot year, the Adoption System demonstrated significant OH&S improvements to the South African mining industry in three key areas:

- noise induced hearing loss (NIHL),
- elimination of dust related respiratory disease
- reduction of injury from falling rock

Key to the system is the use of the 10-step Adoption Planning Process for systematically achieving adoption of technology and best practice which Decision Partners developed specifically for the mining industry in South Africa. Decision Partners' Strategic Risk Communications played a prominent role in enabling the adoption of technology and best practice within the Adoption Planning Process and the Adoption System overall.

The Chamber of Mines of South Africa and the industry itself are both in the early stages of being recognized throughout mining worldwide as having successfully formulated and undertaken the first true breakthrough in innovation in OH&S practice in more than two decades using this science-based process and approach. The Adoption System is being recognized as a breakthrough innovation that is an unprecedented development and unique advancement in methods of improving OH&S performance.