

Assessing and Improving Safety Culture in Outdoor Programs

AORE Association Chat, April 19, 2022

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<http://www.viristar.com>

viristar.com/safety-culture-aore



Culture





Culture

What is Culture?

An integrated pattern of individual and organizational **behavior**, based on shared **beliefs and values**

Behavior Springs from Beliefs and Values



Actions--like leaves and stems, visible

Values and **beliefs**--like soil and roots, invisible

Safety Culture

What is *Safety Culture*?

The influence of organizational culture on safety

Specifically: the values, beliefs, and behaviors that affect the extent to which safety is emphasized over competing goals



Safety Culture

What is *Safety Culture*?

An organization has many safety cultures: in different departments, hierarchy levels, demographic groups

Safety Culture Risks in Outdoor Programs

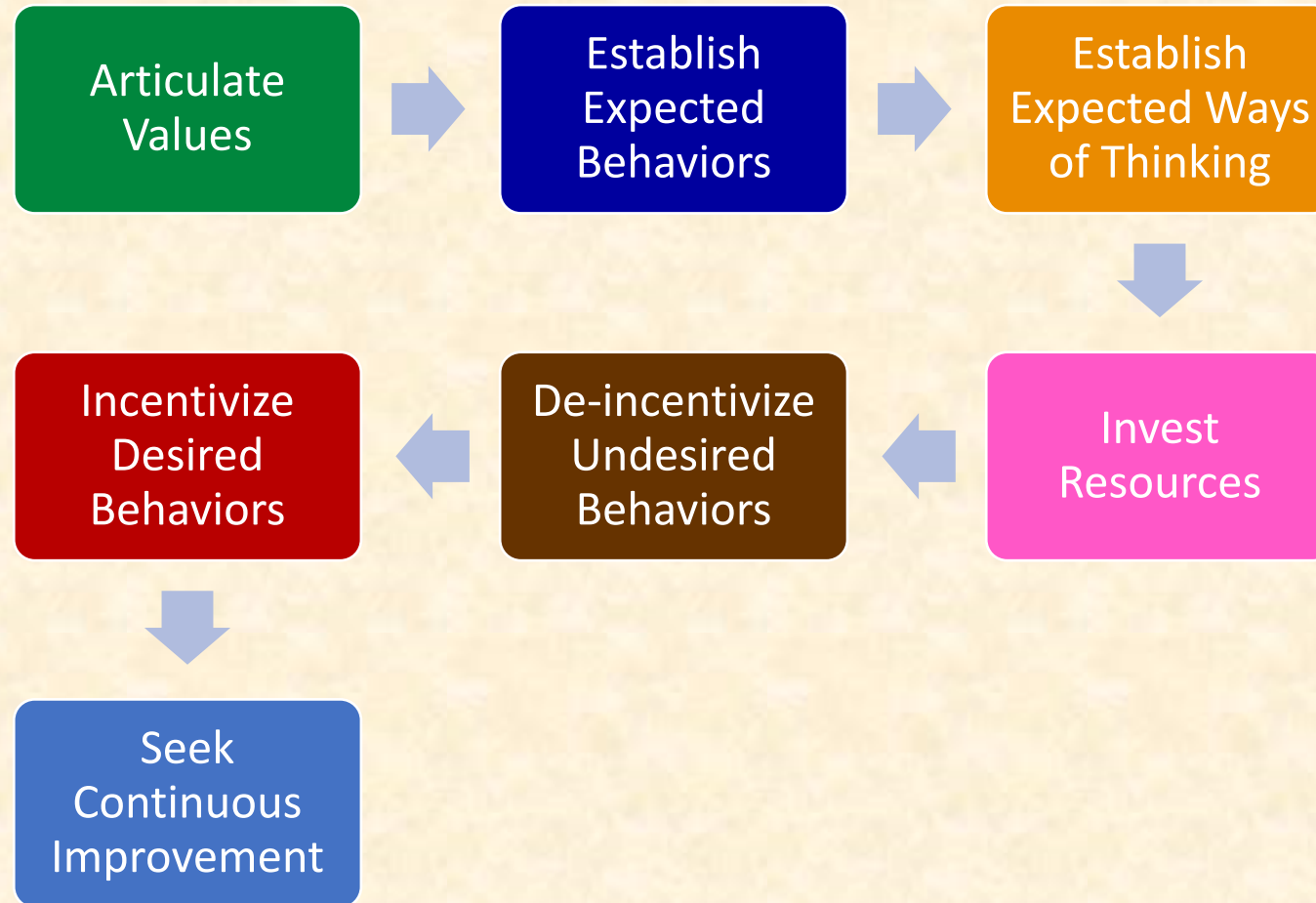
- Risk is an essential element of outdoor programs
- Activity leaders may seek personal challenge and risk, endangering participants
- Young adult (staff) brains reward risk-taking

Fostering a Culture of Safety

Shift behaviors, by shifting beliefs and values

This is a change management process

Shifting Culture



Shifting Culture

Articulate Values

- Message from top leadership
- Incorporated into official plans, documents

Establish Expected Behaviors

- Policies and procedures
- Systems and structures
- Balance of rules-based and managed safety

Establish Expected Ways of Thinking

- Systems thinking

Shifting Culture

Invest Resources

- Time and attention
- Funding
- Equipment
- Staff

De-incentivize Undesired Behaviors

- Negative consequences
- Role modeling

Incentivize Desired Behaviors

- Positive consequences
- Social norms marketing

Shifting Culture

Seek Continuous Improvement

- Plan-Do-Check-Act management method

Just Culture

When an error occurs:

- Don't automatically blame the person
- Look for the underlying systems that led to the error

Focus is on *what went wrong*, not *who caused the problem*

This empowers people to report incidents, and helps the organization resolve the underlying safety issues





Summary

- The organization's culture of safety has a significant impact on safety outcomes
- Culture is beliefs and values, which shape behavior
- Safety culture ensures safety is appropriately prioritized, among other competing, legitimate goals
- Fostering a culture of safety is an organizational change management process with several steps
- Just culture improves safety outcomes by focusing on incident causes rather than automatically blaming a person

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