Durkheim and the Sociology of Industrial Safety
Sociological theory = Management principles
Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) – The “George Washington” of Sociology
Durkheim’s Sociological Focus: Optimal Group Functioning
All groups have:

- Norms
- Values
- Beliefs
- Sanctions
Norms:
• Social Agreements about what is expected (the rules)
• Not like handshakes or contracts
• Taken for granted, “everyone knows” expectations
Values:

- Social agreements about what is preferred
Beliefs:

- Social agreements about what is true
Sanctions:

• Social agreements about how to enforce norms, values, and beliefs
• Both rewards and punishments
• Ranges from pat on the back, dirty looks, reprimands, death penalty
The Origins of dysfunction:
• When one or more element is out of step with at least one other element
Anomie – Durkheim’s term for “social chaos” of contradictory elements
Lack of synchronization creates anomie

- Scale from low to high
- Episodic, chronic, severe, etc.
Case studies: anomie in military operations

• Ultimately, military units are workplaces

• Military dysfunction and industrial disasters share characteristics
Abu Ghraib
Testimony of supply officer
• Lack of basic supplies (blankets, generators, clean water, food, toilet paper, ammunition)
Baghdad Canal Killings

- Understaffed
- Soldiers (workers) working outside of competency
- “Catch and release”
- PTSD, mTBI, sleep deprivation
Anomie creates deviance: Stress, murder, suicide, sickness (sick leave), accidents, equipment abuse, poor record keeping
Anomie

• In military, suicide is at an all time high
• In oil industry, more than 30 accidents/week off Louisiana
Anomie (continued)

• In financial industry, Wells Fargo

• In higher education, nearly 40% of first year students do not return
Solution: synchronize elements
Solutions

- Train managers to recognize anomie
- Continuous effort towards synchronization of elements
- Research to develop managerial techniques and measuring instruments for anomie
References:


https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/oilgaswelldrilling/

Images:
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/24/Emile_Durkheim.jpg