Safety Culture Assessment in Small Organizations.

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Overview

- Safety culture
  - Origin
  - Importance
  - Nature
- Approaches to assessment
- Small organization assessment
- Conclusions

Safety culture

- Abstract concept that was created to describe a collective failure to implement know controls to prevent catastrophic events.

- Prior to the event people believed they were safe

- Safety was a priority for organization

- Useful in understanding low probability high consequence events (disasters and fatalities)
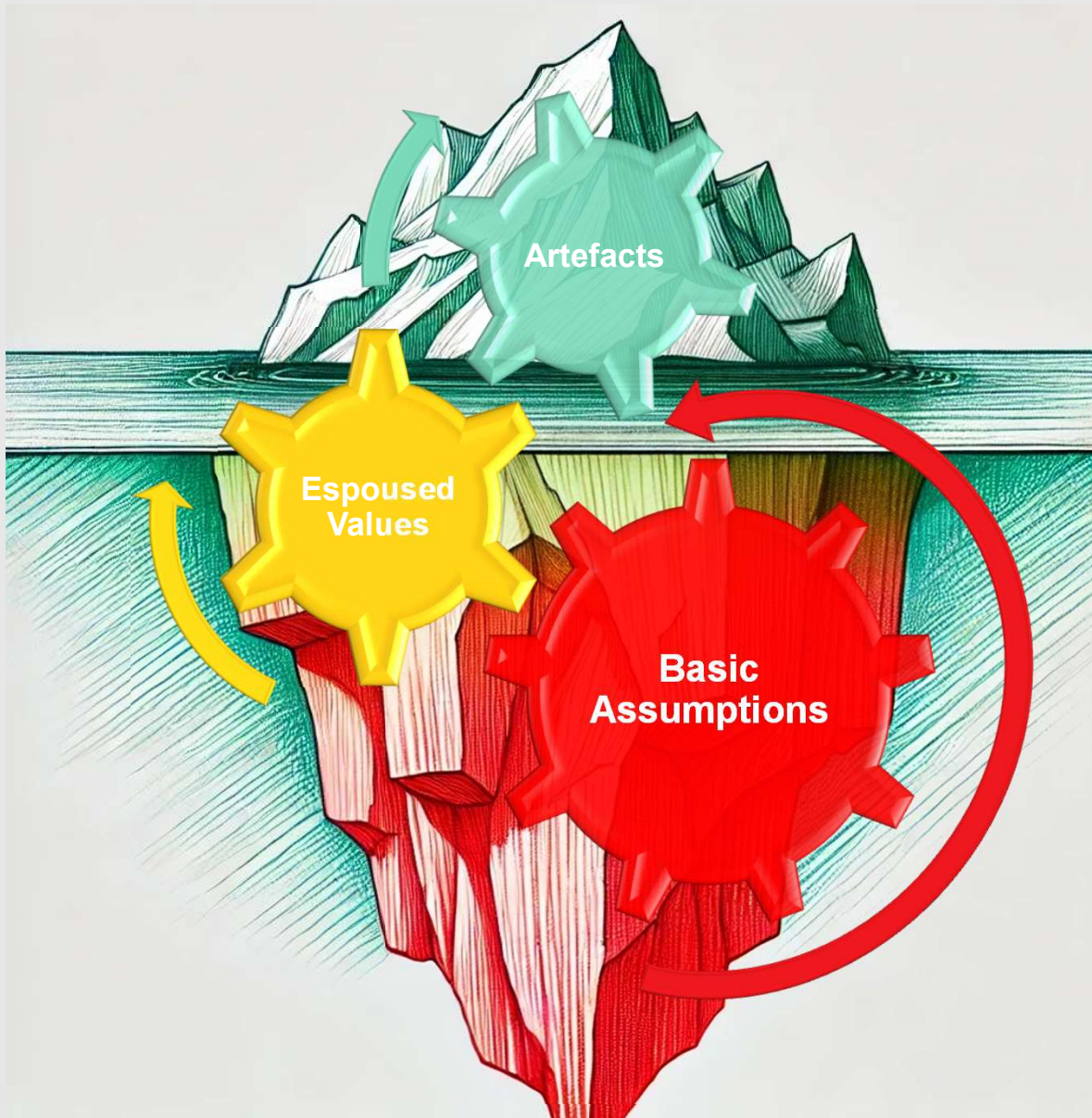
Nature of safety culture

- Construct not an object
  - Helps us think about the nontangible aspects of safety
  - Represents shared values and norms
- Influences how group members think about risk and safety
  - What is the nature of safety
  - How is safety viewed (problem, process, business driver)
  - Who has agency and power
- Not directly observed but inferred from indicators
- High degree of variability

Love as a metaphor for safety culture

- Hard to describe, but you know it when you see it
- You cannot assess it directly
- It is not an object, but you may possess it
- It can be inferred from a range of indicators
  - What people say
    - How much do I love thy? let me count the ways
  - What people do
    - Romantic weekend away, getting married
- Large variability between people
- Easy to misinterpret indicators
- Changes more helpful than presence or absence of indicators

Culture Model

- **Artefacts:**

  Visible manifestations of safety culture such as behavior, documents, signs.

- **Espoused values:**

  Stated values, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs about safety. What people say is important.

- **Basic Assumptions:**

  Taken for granted beliefs about safety and the understanding of reality. These assumptions are the drivers of safety.

Assessment challenges

- Abstract construct, cannot measure, it is inferred from indicators
- Easy to misinterpret the data out of context
  - 75% agree leaders are committed to safety, expressed as 25% of managers are not committed
- Perceptions are not facts, so require interpretation
- Humble inquiry requires openness and self criticism
- Diverse range of approaches, some with questionable validity

Safety Culture Survey

Strengths

- Efficient for gathering large-scale (100+ employees), numerical data.

- Anonymity can encourage honest responses.

- Easy to compare and track over time to identify trends.

Limitations

- **Not a safety culture assessment**

- Limited in-depth understanding of context and motivation behind responses.

- Survey design may introduce bias or misinterpretation.

- Low response rates can affect the reliability of the data.

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Surveys plus
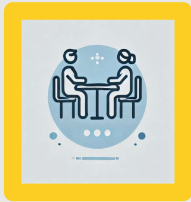# Focus Groups & Interviews

Strengths

- Uses multiple methods (surveys, interviews, focus groups)

- Provides in depth qualitative insights into employee perceptions about safety

- Identifies concerns and potential solutions
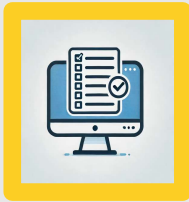
Limitations

- Only captures espoused values

- Results can appear like a long list of complaints

- Tendency for occupational safety concerns to dominate

- Do not consider why these perceptions exist

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Perception only assessment

Employee perceptions

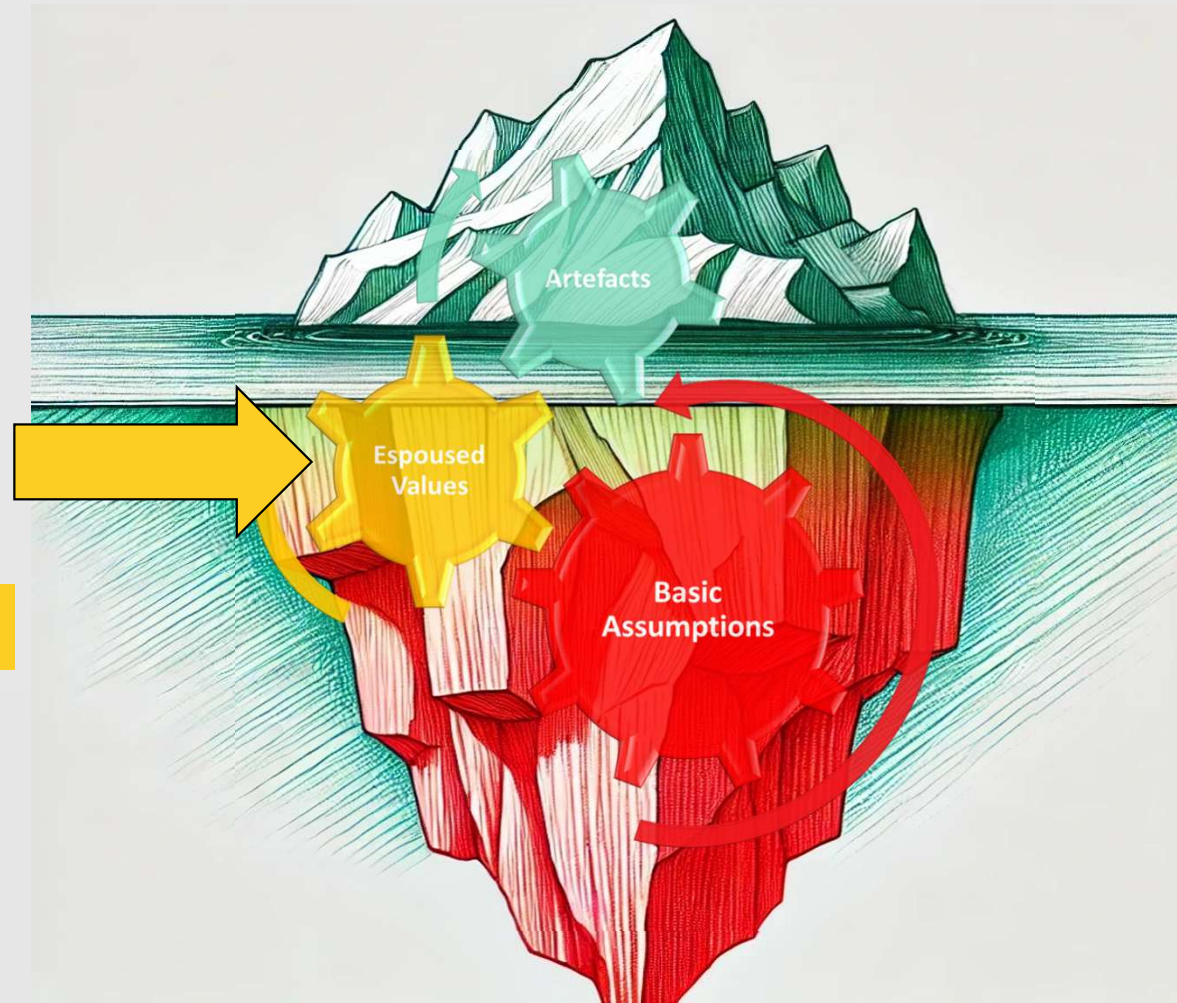**Interviews**

Surveys

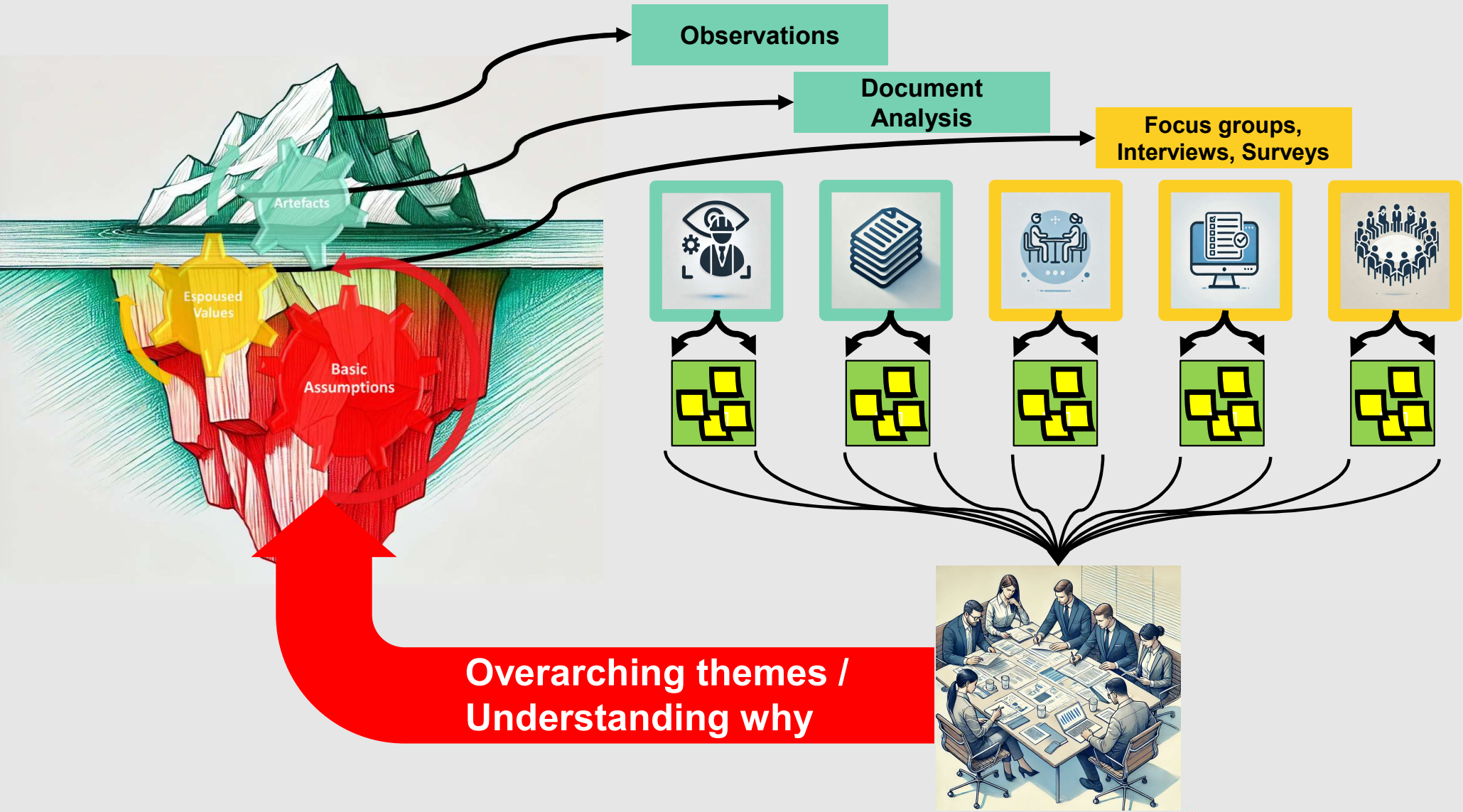**Focus groups**

*"Describing the water to a drowning man"*

Small company assessments

- Less complex to collect data
- Surveys of less value or not appropriate (under 50 employees)
- Document analysis and observation more important than perceptions
- Focus on how common small company challenges are described / recognized
- Understand how culture is influencing risk

Comprehensive assessment in a small company
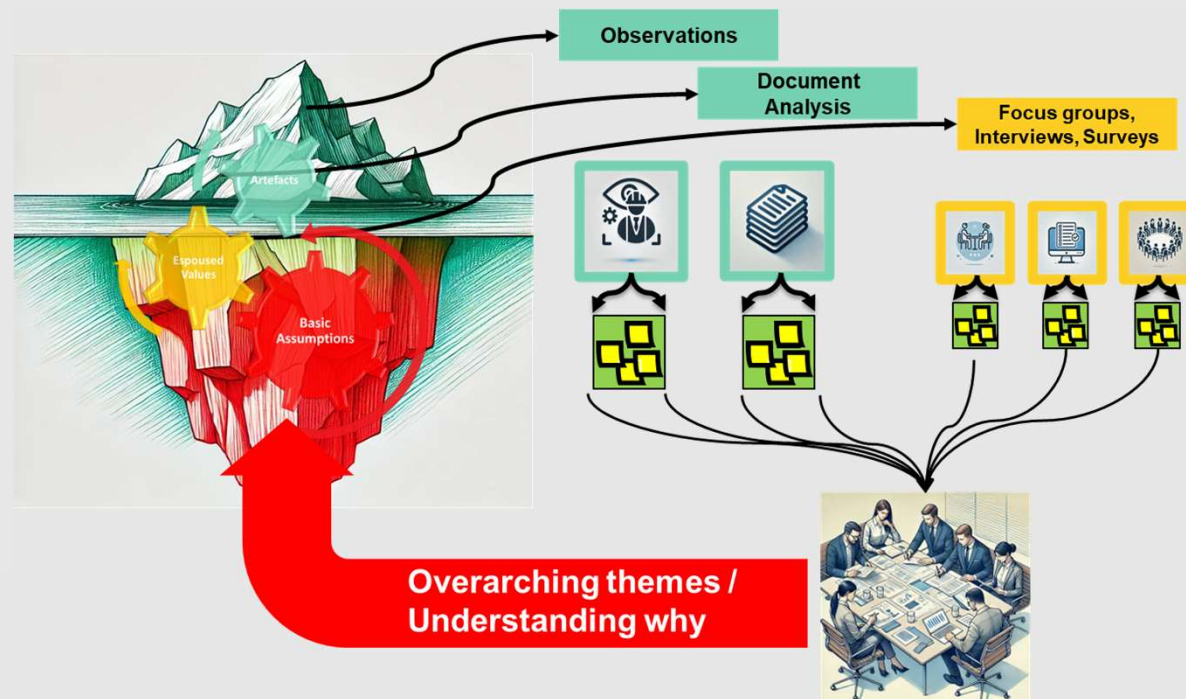
Conclusions

- Safety culture is an important construct, but not an object

- Avoid simplistic approaches
  - Beware of delusion of objectivity
  - Develop sophisticated understanding

- Small companies need different mix of data collection methods, but same objective

- Assessments should produce insight, not a good-bad classification

Thank you

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