A decade of research collaboration on safety climate at Texas A&M University

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Over the past decade, faculty in the Department of Psychology who specialize in industrial-organizational (IO) psychology have collaborated with the Mary Kay O’Connor Process Safety Center on the topic of safety climate. In this paper and presentation, we will review the strides made in safety climate research over the last decade, focusing in particular on the work produced at Texas A&M University. The goals of this retrospective are: (a) to bring MKOPSC symposium attendees up-to-date on the state-of-the-science for safety climate

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1 Industrial-organizational (IO) psychology is the scientific study of how people act in the workplace, how they create workplace processes and products, and how workplace experiences affect people’s well-being. Our professional society, the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP; www.siop.org), uses the tagline “science for a smarter workplace.” IO psychologists attempt to improve workplaces in order to improve people’s well-being and organizational success. Both are important to IO psychologists as these are intertwined and mutually reinforcing—a successful organization can hire and pay more people and give them positive workplace experiences; workers whose well-being is respected and supported by organizations can help organizations be more successful.

2 Organizational scientists distinguish between culture and climate. Ostroff, Kinicki, and Muhammad (2012) define climate as employee perceptions of the organizational expectations about workplace behaviors, norms, and attitudes, whereas culture is the shared motives, identities, and values that arise from employees’ common experiences. When discussing the differences between climate and culture, Ostroff et al. noted, “Whereas climate is about experiential descriptions of perceptions of what happens, culture helps define why these things happen” (p. 566, emphasis added). Typically, when laypeople use the term “culture,” they are encompassing both culture and climate from organizational science. Here, we use the term “climate” to be consistent with organizational science practices and because the methods we use in our research are consistent with the best practices for assessing climate.
research, (b) to demonstrate the value of MKOPSC’s investment in social science research, and (c) to encourage continued collaboration between social scientists and engineers in improving safety climate.