

# Research Frontiers in TOTAL WORKER HEALTH: Harvard School of Public Health Center for Work, Health and Wellbeing

Glorian Sorensen, PhD, MPH  
Center Director  
HSPH Professor of Social and Behavioral Sciences

# CWHW Investigator Team

- Glorian Sorensen (PI)
- Jack Dennerlein (co-PI)
- Lisa Berkman
- Les Boden
- Orfeu Buxton
- Alberto Caban-Martinez
- David Christiani
- Dean Hashimoto
- Karen Hopcia
- Jeffrey Katz
- Ichiro Kawachi
- Justin Manjourides
- Deborah McLellan
- Eve Nagler
- Cassandra Okechukwu
- Nico Pronk
- Erika Sabbath
- Anne Stoddard
- Greg Wagner
- Lorraine Wallace

**Join us in Boston for our course on  
*Integrating Wellness and Occupational Health and Safety in the Workplace*  
January 26 – 29, 2015**

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# Overview

- Guiding themes and shared approaches
- Applications across three settings
- Challenges for TWH interventions
- Research gaps and priorities
- Plenary conclusions

# HSPH Center for Work, Health, and Wellbeing

- **Our Goal:** Improving the health and safety of workers
- **How?** Designing, testing, implementing and disseminating effective and integrated worksite policies, programs and practices to...
  - foster a healthy work environment
  - reduce potential hazardous job exposures
  - promote safe and healthy behaviors

**PI: Glorian Sorensen**  
Co PI Jack Dennerlein  
Manager: Lorraine Wallace

***Be Well, Work Well***

Integrated approaches for  
health care workers  
2007-



***All the Right Moves***

Integrated approaches for  
construction workers  
2011-



***SafeWell***

Disseminating integrated programs to  
small, medium businesses  
2011 -



# Guiding Themes

- **Shared definition of an integrated approach**
  - Application of a common conceptual model
  - Continuum of indicators of integration
  - Attending to work context in TWH interventions across high-risk industries
- **Facilitating translation from research to practice**
  - Use of the SafeWell Guidelines to support a systematic implementation process across multiple levels of the organization

# Our Shared Definition

“A **strategic and operational coordination** of policies, programs & practices designed to **simultaneously prevent work-related injuries & illnesses & enhance overall workforce health & well-being**”

- Coordination and linkage of separate policies, practices & programs
- Continuum of approaches exists

## REVIEW

### Integration of Health Protection and Health Promotion Rationale, Indicators, and Metrics

Glorian Sorensen, PhD, MPH, Deborah McLellan, PhD, MHS, Jack T. Dennerlein, PhD, Nicolaas P. Pronk, PhD, FRCSM, Jennifer D. Allen, ScD, MPH, Leslie I. Boden, PhD, Cassandra A. Okechukwu, ScD, MSN, Dean Hashimoto, MD, JD, Anne Stoddard, ScD, and Gregory R. Wagner, MD

**Objective:** To offer a definition of an “integrated” approach to worker health and operationalize this definition using indicators of the extent to which integrated efforts are implemented in an organization. **Methods:** Guided by the question—How will we know it when we see it?—we reviewed relevant literature to identify available definitions and metrics, and used a modified Delphi process to review and refine indicators and measures of integrated approaches. **Results:** A definition of integrated approaches to worker health is proposed and accompanied by indicators and measures that may be used by researchers, employers, and workers. **Conclusion:** A shared understanding of what is meant by integrated approaches to protect and promote worker health has the potential to improve dialogue among researchers and facilitate the research-to-practice process.

Increased attention is being placed on the worksite as an important venue for influencing worker health. Because the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 mandated the development and enforcement of worksite standards and assigned employers the responsibility to maintain safe and healthy work environments, health protection efforts have been important in the prevention of work-related injuries and illnesses.<sup>1-3</sup> In addition, health behaviors are critical contributors to a range of chronic disease outcomes,<sup>4-6</sup> and workplace health promotion efforts may have a substantial influence on these health-related choices and behaviors. These initiatives include educational programs as well as workplace policies and practices that affect health directly or through their influence or support of individual health-supportive choices. The emphasis on primary prevention in the Affordable Care Act offers further opportunities for employers to encourage participation in workplace health promotion approaches.<sup>7,8</sup>

Traditionally, health protection programs and policies have functioned independently of workplace health promotion. These efforts are often located in organizationally distinct “silos,” have sep-

arate budgets and personnel, oversee discrete policies and practices that affect worker health, and offer distinct educational and training programs, with little if any coordination or integration. These independent efforts related to worker health may include occupational health and safety, health promotion, disease management, and human resources and benefits, among others. This article examines the opportunities for the integration of health promotion and health protection, although integration across all health-relevant domains may also be valuable.

Growing evidence indicates that comprehensive policies and programs that simultaneously address health promotion and health protection may be more effective in preventing disease and promoting health and safety than either approach taken separately. Although additional evidence of the effectiveness of this approach is needed, there is an increasing acknowledgment of the potential advantages of integration. Integrating health promotion and health protection efforts may contribute to greater improvements in behavior change,<sup>9,10</sup> higher rates of employee participation in programs,<sup>11</sup> potential reductions in occupational injury and disability rates,<sup>12,13</sup> stronger health and safety programs,<sup>14</sup> and potentially reduced costs.<sup>15</sup> Integration further facilitates better use of limited resources and improves the overall health, productivity, and resilience of the workforce.<sup>16,18</sup> In addition, internal collaboration across multiple departments may lead to improved processes and outputs, and an enhanced work climate.

This integrated approach has been adopted as a research-to-practice priority by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) in its Total Worker Health<sup>19</sup> (TWH) program. The TWH program reflects a strategy for integrating occupational safety and health protection with health promotion, to prevent worker injury and illness and to advance health and well-being.<sup>17</sup> In addition, this integrated approach has been endorsed by the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine,<sup>16</sup> the American Heart Association for cardiovascular health promotion,<sup>18</sup> the International Association for Workplace Health Promotion,<sup>19,20</sup> the Institute of Medicine,<sup>20</sup> and others.<sup>16,18,20-23</sup>

Despite this broad conceptual support, there is no shared definition of integrated approaches or set of standard metrics useful in their evaluation. A common definition and consistent metrics would facilitate the adoption of integrated approaches to worksite health and assist wider dissemination of these strategies. Measures are available to assess safety climate,<sup>24-26</sup> the presence of workplace health promotion,<sup>27</sup> and a “culture of health.”<sup>28,29</sup> These measures tend to focus on either health promotion or health protection rather than on their integration. Another relevant resource is NIOSH’s Essential Elements of Effective Workplace Programs and Policies,<sup>30</sup> developed to serve as a guide to employers interested in comprehensive approaches to worker health. Nevertheless, they were not intended to be used as measures of integrated approaches. Thus, although there is growing dialogue in the literature about what might be included in integrated approaches to worker and worksite health, no standard definitions or metrics have been developed to assess these initiatives.

From the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute (Dr Sorensen, McLellan, and Allen), Boston, Mass; Harvard School of Public Health (Dr Sorensen, Pronk, Okechukwu, and Wagner), Boston, Mass; Northeastern University (Dr Dennerlein), Boston, Mass; HealthPartners, Inc (Dr Pronk), Minneapolis, Minn; Boston University School of Public Health (Dr Boden), Boston, Mass; Partners HealthCare, Inc (Dr Hashimoto), Boston, Mass; Boston College Law School (Dr Stoddard), Newton Centre, Mass; New England Research Institute (Dr Stoddard), Watertown, Mass; and National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (Dr Wagner), Washington, DC.

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Address correspondence to: Glorian Sorensen, PhD, MPH, Center for Community-Based Research, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, 450 Brookline Avenue, Boston, MA 02215 (gsorens@rics.harvard.edu).

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# Shared definition for Indicators of Integration

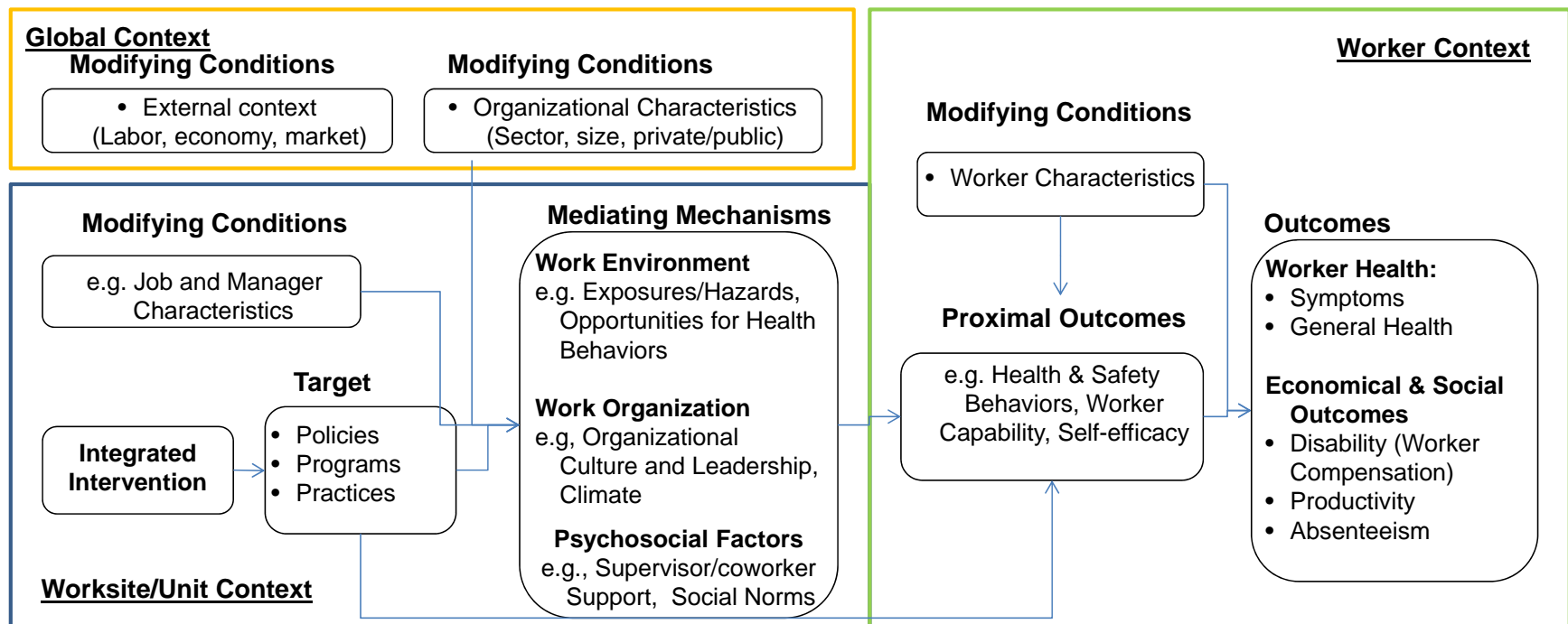
- Organizational leadership and commitment
- Coordination between WHP and OSH and others
- Supportive organizational policies and practices
  - Accountability and training
  - Management and employee engagement
  - Benefits and incentives to support OSH and WHP
  - Integrated evaluation and surveillance
- Comprehensive program content



# Applications of Indicators

- **Measurement:** How do we know it when we see it?
- Outlines possible **points on a continuum** of TWH intervention approaches
  - What are core versus adaptable components?
- Defines optimal **best practice**
  - Implementation process: *SafeWell* Guidelines

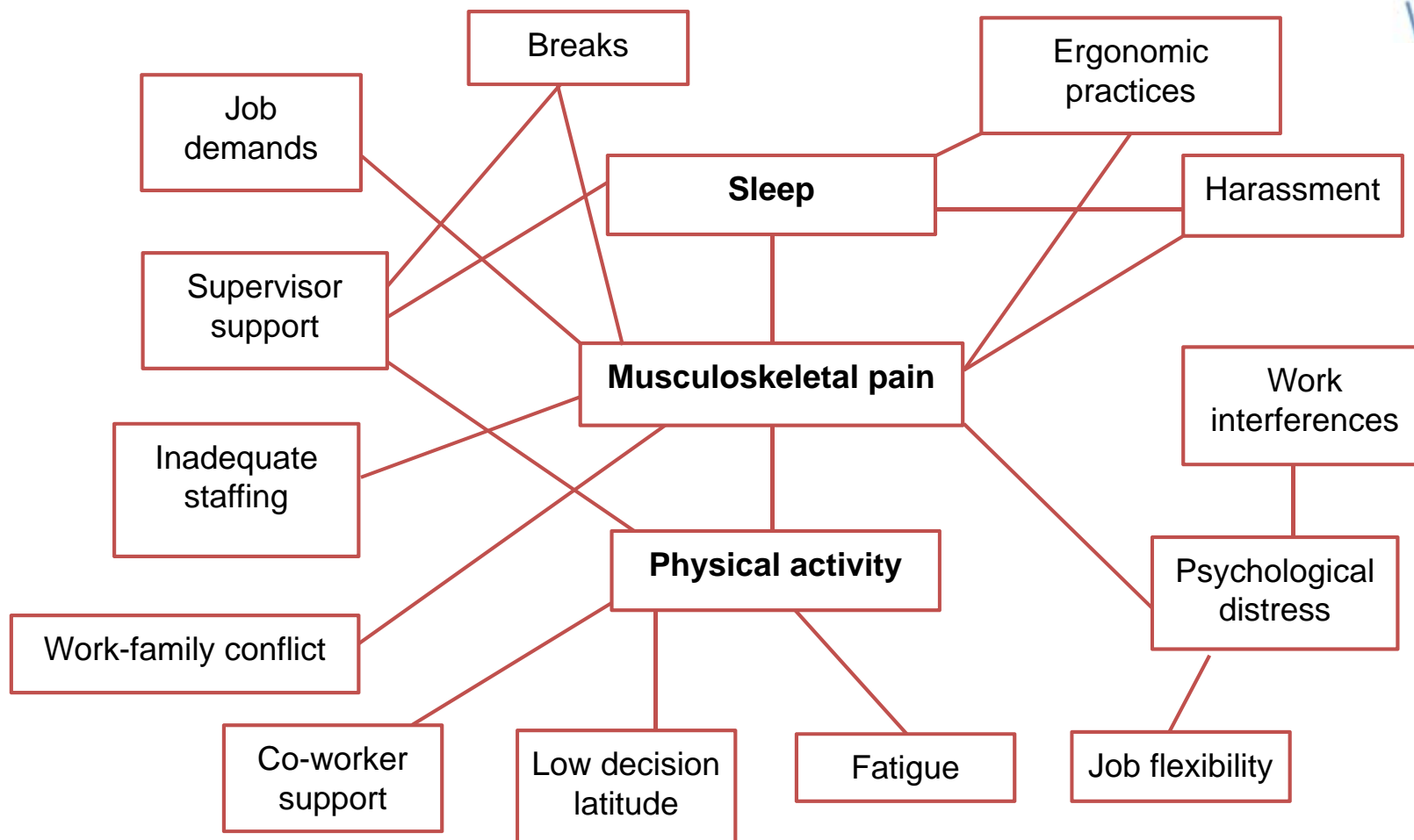
# Common Conceptual Model



# Contributions of Conceptual Model

- Guided by solid theoretical foundation
- Specifies mechanisms by which interventions may operate
- Prioritizes pathways in the work organization and environment – systems strategies
- Adaptable across settings and populations
- Guides our research on the role of work context on worker health

# Attending to the Work Context: Summary Findings



*Sorensen et al, JOEM, 2011; Nelson et al, AJPM, 2014; Sabbath et al, AJIM, 2013; Kim et al, AJIM, 2012; Buxton et al, JOEM, 2012; Reme et al, J Occup Rehabil, 2012; Dennerlein et al, AJIM 2012, Umukoro et al JOEM, 2013; Hurtado et al (in review).*

# Adapting to the Setting

- Organizational, job and worker characteristics
- Identifying risks
  - Nature of work/job
  - Work environment/organization
- Existing resources– budget, staff, prior programs, leadership support
- Key priorities as gatekeepers to TWH
  - Examples: Safe patient handling in health care; project planning in construction

# Challenges for TWH Interventions

- Competing priorities (e.g., production demands, timelines, patient safety)
- Embedding in organizational practice and structures
- Dynamic nature of the modern workforce
  - Healthcare – Patient Care workers – tasks change with patient's needs, shift work, varying work groups and teams, 12-hour shifts
  - Construction – short time on worksites, worksites change, and groups of workers change

# Research Gaps and Priorities

- Assess efficacy of TWH in an expanded range of work settings
  - Improved generalizability
  - Redressing disparities
- Assess cost and related factors to support the business case for TWH
- Assess strategies to improve sustainability and institutionalization of TWH approaches
  - Toward a culture of TWH
- Determine best processes to support dissemination and knowledge transfer

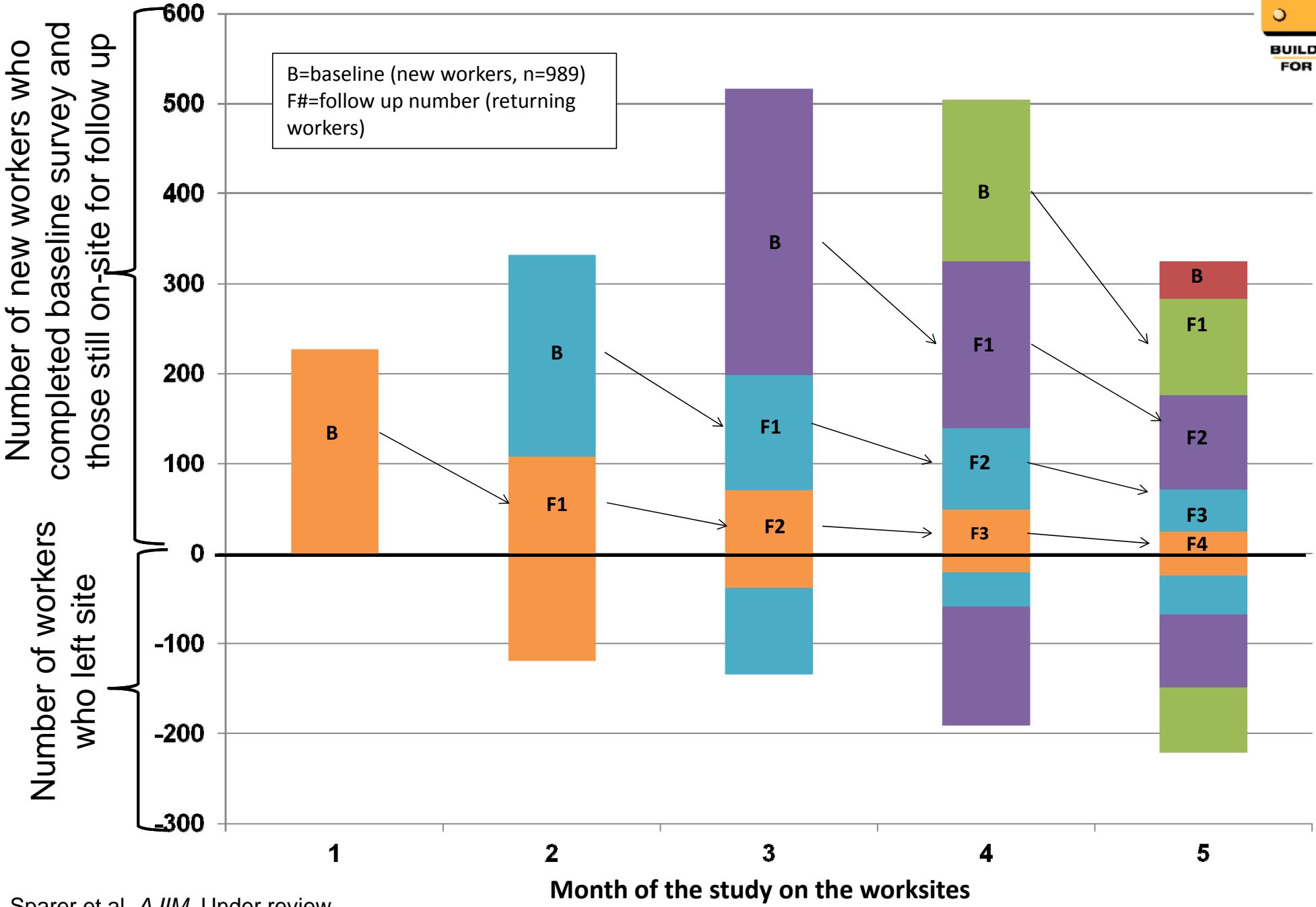
# Plenary Conclusions

- The Centers' research exemplifies the range of approaches that can be included within the TWH umbrella.
- There is a need for identifying TWH best practices across different industry groups.
- The research of the Centers has provide a useful set of measures and intervention tools to guide future research and interventions.





# Dynamic Workforce: Worker Flow on Construction Sites



# SafeWell Integrated Management System

