



SAFETY BULLETIN 33/22

Human Factor - Organisation Safety Culture

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Organisation Safety Culture



What is safety culture?

“The safety culture of an organisation is the product of individual and group values, attitudes, perceptions, competencies, and patterns of behaviour that determine the commitment to, and the style and proficiency of, an organisation’s health and safety management. Organisations with a positive safety culture are characterised by communications founded on mutual trust, by shared perceptions of the importance of safety and by confidence in the efficacy (*efficiency and effectiveness*) of preventive measures.”

ACSNI Human Factors Study Group⁽¹⁾

An organisation’s culture can have as big an influence on safety outcomes as the safety management system itself. ‘Safety culture’ is a subset of the overall company culture and societal culture.

Many companies talk about ‘safety culture’ when referring to the inclination of their employees to comply with rules, act safely or not. However we find that both the culture and the style of leadership have even more influence on safety culture and performance. Examples include placing a higher priority on safety rather than production, not focusing on the short-term and being highly pro-active, which will all result in a good safety culture.

Learning more about your company's safety culture.

1. Is Safety perceived to be a priority for senior management?
2. Do managers generally involve the workforce in discussions about safety related matters and consult them before introducing new safety procedures or systems?
3. Does the company listen and try to solve problems raised by the people closest to the hazards?
4. Do managers including senior managers visit site regularly and talk about safety when in the workplace, is it visible to the workforce?
5. Is there an effective two-way communication about safety?

6. If there is an incident or accident, does the organisation seem interested in solving the problem rather than finding out whose fault it was?
7. Are incidents always reported and investigated and given the right level of attention according to how serious they were or could have been?
8. Does the company learn from incident history, such as through incident reporting and investigation?
9. Are people at all levels involved in safety? Is it a joint effort between all in the company?
10. Do managers give positive and negative but constructive feedback on safety performance and do they take pride in it?
11. Does the company actively look outside itself and keep up to date on information and new ideas in safety?
12. Do operators avoid risks and behave as if they are genuinely concerned about their own safety and that of other people?
13. Do people seem aware of the hazards in their work and how to control them?
14. Do management, safety representatives and workforce generally trust and respect each other?
15. Are people who intentionally break rules disciplined?
16. Does the company reward and recognise safety performance?
17. Do people have the same attitude and care for the safety of contractors and 3rd parties as they do for employees?

If the answer to any of the above is 'no', then you need to take action!

Key aspects of an effective safety culture

There are a number of models of the requirements of an effective safety culture, but they generally include the following key aspects:

Management commitment

Management commitment produces higher levels of motivation and concern for health and safety throughout the organisation. It is indicated by the amount of resources (time, money, and people) and support allocated to health and safety management. Management commitment is also indicated by the priority given to health and safety versus other business requirements. The active involvement of senior management in the health and safety system is critical.

Visible leadership

Managers need to be seen to lead by example when it comes to health and safety. Good managers appear regularly on the 'shop floor', talk about health and safety and visibly demonstrate their commitment by their actions. This may include participating in shop floor and tool box meetings or even interrupting activities to resolve safety issues. It is important that management is perceived as sincerely committed to safety. If not, employees will generally assume that they are expected to put commercial interests first, and safety initiatives or programmes will be undermined by cynicism.

Good communication

Good communication and consultation between all levels of employee is vital: in a positive culture questions about health and safety should be part of everyday work conversations. Management should listen actively to what they are being told by employees, and take what they hear seriously.

Active participation

Active employee participation in safety is important, to build ownership of safety at all levels and exploit the unique knowledge that employees have of their own work. This can include active involvement in activities such as safety meetings and workshops, risk assessments, plant design. In companies with a good safety culture, you will find the messages from employees and management being consistent, and safety is seen as a joint responsibility.

Motivation and discipline

A successful safety culture relies upon motivation of all staff. In a motivated organisation, managers are fully and personally involved and every employee and contractor is committed to good safety performance.

Employee motivation is directly linked to the interest shown by managers. They are alert to managers' focus and will tend to value safety only to the extent that managers do.

The effectiveness of management motivation is seen in the informal discussions and actions that take place during day-to-day business activities. Formal announcements are quickly devalued if employees do not see positive actions from management.

Fair and consistent use of discipline is a necessary feature in the management of safety, but the desired outcome is that counselling and coaching is sufficient to alter behaviour. Employees will lose motivation if unsafe behaviours are not dealt with correctly.

What should my company do about it?

The culture in a company is strongly influenced by management attitudes and behaviours and also by the effectiveness of management systems in place.

Creating a good safety culture - management responsibility

There are four main activities necessary to form a good safety culture:

- control of safety management system,
- cooperation,
- communication, and
- competence.

Management's responsibility is to ensure that these activities are carried out and to continually improve the means of carrying them out.

Control and cooperation

In a good safety culture, management will:

- Develop practical safety policies and standards to measure safety achievements
- Provide employees with clear job descriptions that emphasise safety responsibilities
- Review individuals against health and safety objectives and reward or correct as necessary
- Adopt a 'collaborative style' - consult employees and encourage them to participate in decision-making about safety
- Support a culture that is open, trusting, fair and just, for example "We don't blame people for having incidents caused by mistakes". However unsafe actions and behaviours including those of supervisors and managers have disciplinary consequences based on severity.
- Show their visible commitment to safety by making site visits and discussing issues

- Clearly support safety over production issues
- Have a good safety management system
- Have contingency plans
- Be flexible (prepared to change) when faced with new situations and problems
- Learn from mistakes
- Encourage a team spirit and trust between employees and management
- Have a good relationship with Authorities

Communication and competence

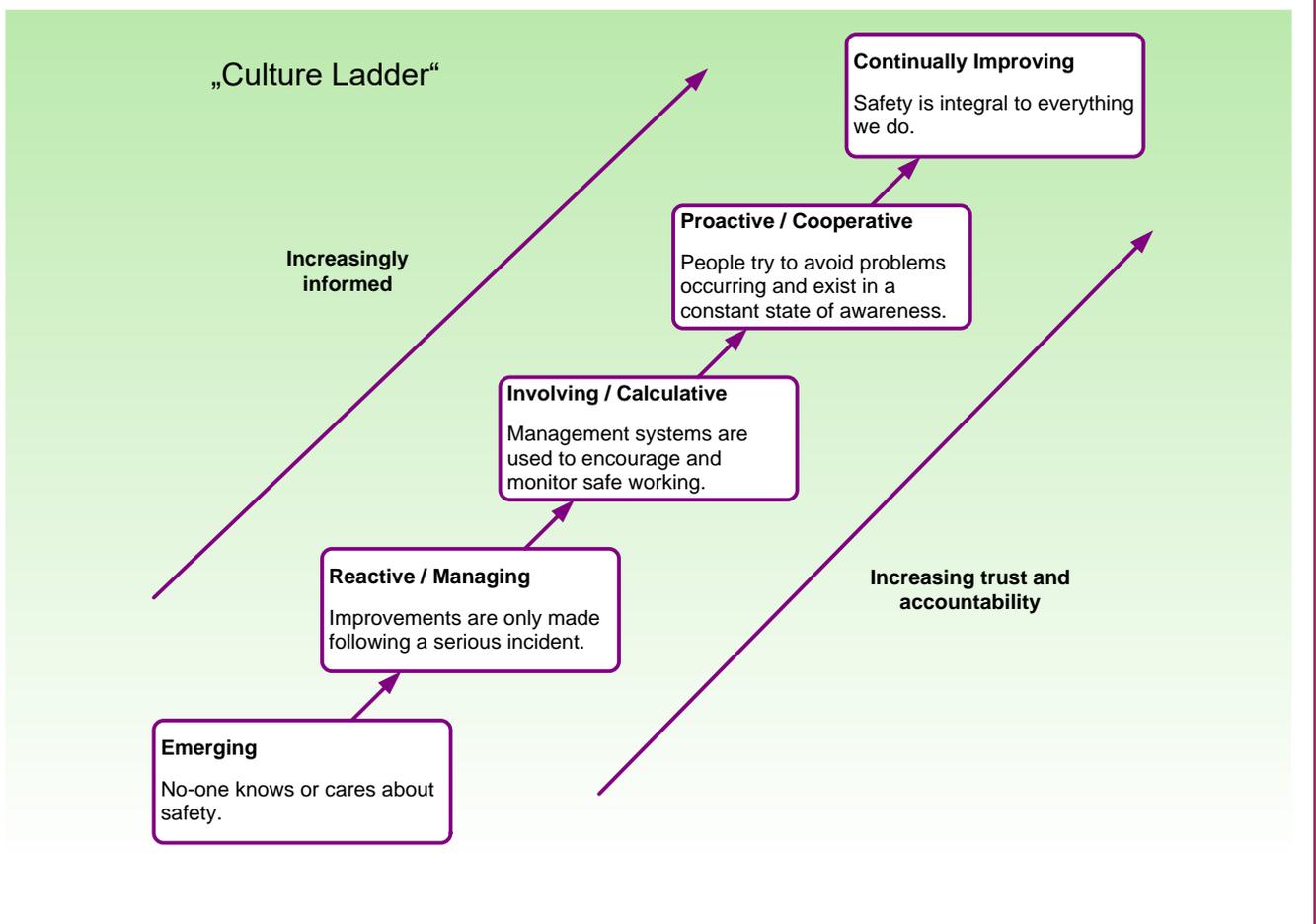
Management will also:

- Listen to concerns and ideas raised by employees
- Actively seek out information and ideas from outside the company and from different business units about safety issues and new methods and initiatives
- Ensure that communications within the organisation are relevant and effective (not too much or too little)
- Provide communications in the most appropriate form, for example: bulletins, letters, notices, meetings, presentations, shift logs and face-to-face discussions
- Give employees information on health and safety policy and procedures, lessons learnt from incidents and feedback on performance
- Provide good information to those outside the organisation: Authorities, industry associations, others in the industry and the public
- Select, train and assess employees to ensure that they are competent in their work and in health and safety matters
- Provide competent safety representatives and safety advisors
- Ensure that there are sufficient numbers of employees to carry out all foreseeable tasks, including fault recovery and emergency tasks.

How would you describe your company's safety culture?

An oil and gas producers' workshop ⁽⁵⁾ developed a five level model of company safety culture which can be used to assess where your company's safety culture may be.

These are described in the following diagram:



Where does your company fit on this scale?

How do you assess your company's safety culture?

A large number of factors contribute to whether you have a good or a bad safety culture. The table below lists the main factors required for a good safety culture. It indicates what would show that you had a good safety culture, and what would support the safety culture. This can be used as a very rough guide to assessing your safety culture or as a way of developing ideas for improving it.

Assessment needs to involve interviewing a suitable cross-section of the company, particularly a reasonable number of employees, who need to be interviewed in a non-threatening manner. The number needs to be sufficient to take account of differing views and experience. Given this condition the open questions given in the question set will provide a helpful picture of the overall style of the company.

VISIBLE COMMITMENT TO SAFETY BY MANAGEMENT	
<p>A good safety culture is shown where management:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make regular <i>useful</i> visits to site • Discuss safety matters with frontline personnel • Will stop production for safety reasons regardless of cost • Spend time and money on safety, e.g. to provide protective equipment, safety training, and conduct safety culture workshops or audits • Will not tolerate violations of procedures and will actively try to improve systems so as to discourage violations, e.g. plan work so that short cuts aren't necessary to do the work in time.

<p>A good safety culture is supported and sustained when management:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes time to visit site (not just following an accident or incident) • All show commitment • Has good interpersonal and communication skills. • Is also interested in safety of employees when they are not at work, e.g. provide information on domestic safety • Shows concern for wider issues e.g. workforce stress and general health • Actively sets an example, e.g. always conform to all safety procedures.
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WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION AND OWNERSHIP OF SAFETY PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

<p>A good safety culture is shown where management:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consults widely about health and safety matters • Does more than the minimum to comply with the law on consultation • Seeks workforce participation in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ setting policies and objectives ○ workplace risk assessment ○ accident/near miss investigations
<p>A good safety culture is supported and sustained when management:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports an active safety committee • Has a positive attitude to safety representatives • Provides tools or methods that encourage participation e.g. behavioural observation programmes & incentive schemes that promote safety

TRUST BETWEEN WORKFORCE AND MANAGEMENT

<p>A good safety culture is shown where management:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages all employees and contractors to challenge anyone working on site about safety without fear of reprisals • Keeps their promises • Treats the workforce with respect
<p>A good safety culture is supported and sustained when management:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes job satisfaction, good industrial relations and high morale • Promotes a 'just' culture, e.g. assigning blame only where someone was clearly reckless or took a significant risk. • Encourages trust between all employees

GOOD COMMUNICATIONS

<p>A good safety culture is shown where management:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides good (clear, concise, relevant) written materials (safety bulletins, posters, guidance) • Provides good briefings on current issues day to day and informal safety meetings; listening and feedback
<p>A good safety culture is supported and sustained when management:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages employee participation in suggesting safety topics to be communicated • Provides specific training in communication skills • Has more than one means of communicating

A COMPETENT WORKFORCE	
A good safety culture is shown where management:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures that everyone working on their sites is competent in their job and in safety matters
A good safety culture is supported and sustained when management:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is supportive Has a good competence assurance system

Useful Reference Information

1. ACSNI Human Factors Study Group, Third report - Organising for safety, HSE Books, 1993
2. Institute of Petroleum, Safety Culture, Human Factors Briefing Notes No 9, 2003.
3. Health and Safety Executive, Safety Culture, HSE Human Factors Briefing Note No 7.
4. Health and Safety Executive, HSE Human Factors Toolkit, June 2004.
5. International Association of Oil and Gas Producers website: <http://info.ogp.org.uk/hf/>.
6. EIGA, Human Factors Safety Information series. <http://www.eiga.eu/index.php?id=317>

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