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# Strategies for Achieving a World Class Safety Culture

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## ABSTRACT

Behavioural safety is a proven technology based on the established science of behaviour. When implemented with fidelity, it can dramatically improve safety performance, i.e., the rate of occupational illnesses and injuries among employees. What has also emerged in 40 years of implementation in a wide variety of industries and countries, is that behavioural safety can also improve safety culture.

*Keywords: Behavioural Safety, Safety Culture*

## INTRODUCTION

End users were ahead of researchers and experts in identifying one of the benefits of using a behavioural approach to improving safety results – improved safety culture. Now many companies seek out behavioural safety as much to improve their safety culture as to reduce incidents.

## BEHAVIOURAL SAFETY

Behavioural safety is a process of improving the systems within an organisation that prevent incidents that could lead to employee injuries. The process has two major components that lead to improvements in safety performance: feedback on performance and changing the contingencies that control performance.

## SAFETY CULTURE

Safety culture is best defined by James Reason, University of Manchester and Andrew Hopkins, Australian National University. For these researchers, to say that a company has a safety culture is to say that managing the risk of an incident is an over-riding priority. In the words of the International Atomic Energy Agency, “safety issues receive the attention warranted by their significance.” This is the most useful focus when companies seek out strategies to strengthen their culture of safety. We have a powerful technology for aligning the behaviors of all the members of an organization – Organisational Behavior Management based on the science of behavior analysis. If strengthening the culture of safety means strengthening risk management behaviors, we

can make practical recommendations based on research and proven methodology. Reason and Hopkins argue that a culture of a safety exists when the organisation is informed about risks through frequent and comprehensive reporting of errors and near misses and when that organisation uses the information to change.

## **CONTINGENCIES**

Creating an environment where people report errors and where people learn from the errors of others requires changing the consequences for those behaviors. Many organisations have already established antecedents for reporting but this has proven insufficient. Behavior is elicited or evoked by its antecedents but its recurrence is determined by its consequences. Changing an organisation is a desired direction requires deliberate management of consequences.

## **LEADERSHIP**

This focus on changing behavior as the key to strengthening a safety culture indicates that senior management creates the organisational culture through what they pay attention to. Senior management determines what behaviors will be attended to and how they will be consequted.

## **BEHAVIOR SETS THAT COMPRISE A SAFETY CULTURE**

- Highly sensitive front line workers who identify anomalies
- Well-developed systems for reporting these
- Strong processes for analysing the reported data
- Structures that change in response to the evolving situation
- Authority to act that devolves to those with the most information

## **USING OBM TO STRENGTHEN SAFETY CULTURE**

The familiar OBM tactics of pinpointing desired behaviors, establishing effective measurement and feedback systems, and shaping with appropriate consequences will promote these sets of behaviors just as powerfully as they increase the frequency of using safety glasses. There are examples of companies who have done just that such as Western Mining Corporation in Australia (now part of BHP Billiton), Stewart and Stevenson, and Western Energy Corporation (part of Westmoreland Coal Company) in the United States.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Reason and Hopkins have done important work comparing effective and ineffective safety cultures. They have extrapolated from these cases the characteristics of robust safety cultures. It falls to organizational behavior management to apply applied behavior analysis to shape these repertoires.

## **REFERENCES**

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