

SAFETY CULTURE TRANSFORMATION

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Introduction

The 'Culture' of an organization can be defined as 'the way we do things around here'. Culture is both the first and last line of defense against injury and loss. More specifically, safety culture ensures that employees follow designated processes and systems, and when those processes fail and those systems break (and they always do), a good culture will assert itself to drive the proper response. Here are some important characteristics to note:

- Culture is defined as a shared set of common values, experiences, beliefs, and characteristics
- Culture is learned by observation, experience, and example, it is not taught
- Culture is a living entity – it requires investment or it will rot
- Culture is messy
- The culture of safety are those values and beliefs that are commonly shared in work place operations – it is heavily influenced by factors outside the workplace

The Need for Cultural Change

Many organizations endeavor to improve workplace safety performance through both task and hardware approaches. Typically, in the past, these have focused on physical design and its relationship to employee performance and so engineers and ergonomists have dominated the safety arena. More recently they have been joined by sociologists and psychologists who try to explain accident involvement and poor safety performance in terms of either attitudes, safety climate and/ or organizational culture. The first of these approaches involves attempting to change employee attitudes and reduce accidents through the use of publicity campaigns, safety training or disciplinary actions. It can be recognized as the 'traditional' approach to improving safety performance. Other approaches tend to adopt the method of workplace survey (that is, interview and questionnaire techniques) with the aim of diagnosing problems.

So, the challenge to continually improve safety performance remains a key activity for many organizations. Indeed, managers and safety directors responsible for improving safety performance has contacted us asking for help because they believe that they have reached some sort of plateau. They have felt unable to drive down the level of accidents any further by the use of traditional means. Now, a growing body of evidence suggests that a shift in focus from traditional approaches to a behaviour-based approach to safety improvement can further improve workplace safety performance and will reduce the number and the severity of occupational accidents.

High Cost of Ineffective Safety Management

Failure to manage safety effectively in the workplace is evident and the penalties are high. Each year, there will be lost to business through occupational accidents and illness.

- **2 accidental deaths in the workplace**
- **2,500 reportable injuries**
- **9,000 work injuries**
- **250,000 thousand 'near misses'**

- ✓ 7 out of 10 occupational accidents (and cases of ill health) could easily have been prevented
- ✓ over 2,000 lives a year could have been saved if health and safety laws were followed by employers AND employees.

- time and costs due to repair of plant and equipment
- increased insurance premiums
- fines/ legal costs
- medical expenses
- the 'never quite the same again' implications, and/ or long-term physical and psychological health problems.



Organizational Safety Profiling

Safety-culture indicate that different levels of an organizational hierarchy have different influences on the safety-culture. These levels need to be differentiated. In this text an organization is considered as having four levels:

1. executive and senior management
2. middle managers
3. supervisors
4. The workforce teams. (These can be plant designers, the plant operators, maintenance engineers, technicians and contractors, and so on, who are assumed to work under a supervisor.)

The expert suggests that organizational culture arises from shared beliefs. These beliefs driving an organization's collective behaviours are not always overt but in reality, are buried beneath observable supportive layers of values, attitudes and artefacts. It is suggested that beliefs and hence culture can only be assessed and interpreted indirectly through observing human behaviours.

Schematic of safety-culture layers:

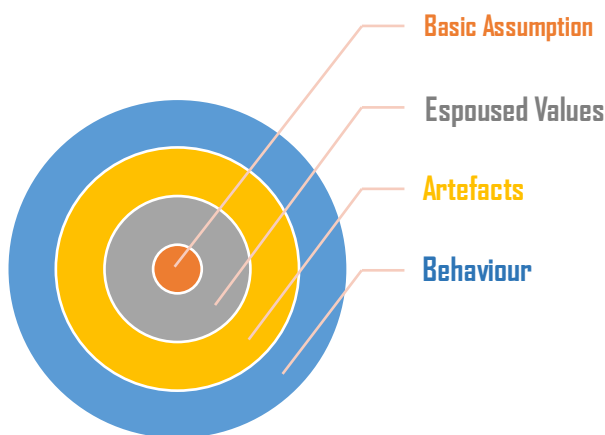


Fig – 1

Behaviour is determined by its consequences.

Specifically, this means that people will tend to repeat those behaviours that produce 'positive' consequences, and not repeat those that result in either no positive, or 'negative', consequences. In addition, they will also tend not to repeat behaviours that produce no consequences at all. In other words, people learn to behave in ways that produce rewards, and avoid behaving in ways that either produce no rewards or even punishment. This may appear to be simply applied common sense. By providing a theoretical structure, we enable managers to make more effective use of the techniques.

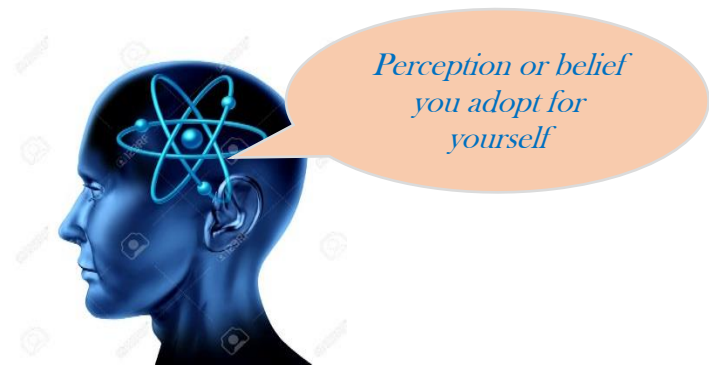


Fig – 2

Only your mindset can change your belief!!

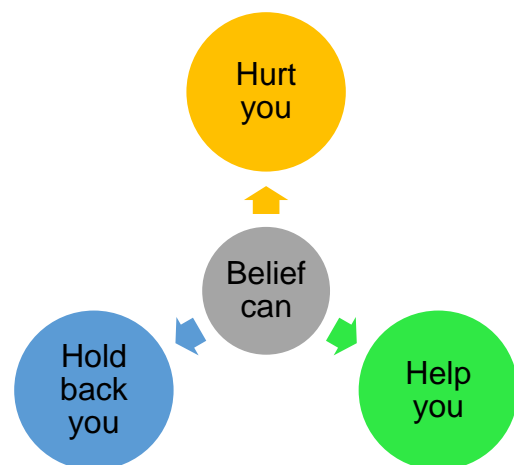


Fig – 3

Typically, many companies wait for 'something to happen' before they take action. Usually this occurs when a situation reaches an unacceptable level.

Figure 4 illustrates this concept. When accidents (or production problems, or quality issues) are at a very low-level management tends to be relaxed and their attention is focused on some other 'alligator which is trying to sink their canoe'

Essentially, 'their eye is not on the safety ball'. For much of the time accident levels remain at an acceptable rate which is 'comfortable' for management. Thus, it is known as the 'happiness zone', wherein managers adopt a recording and monitoring role. However, as the rate of injury or events rise to an unacceptable level or 'something happens', the attention of management is triggered and this results in some form of action.

This behaviour takes various forms, but is normally typified by much shouting, banging fists on tables, and exhortations such as, 'we can't go on like this . . . things have got to improve around here!'

However, in time, accidents start to happen again and the cycle re-starts. Within this traditional approach, safety improvement is a 'boom or bust' activity because only a few people are charged with the responsibility for safety.

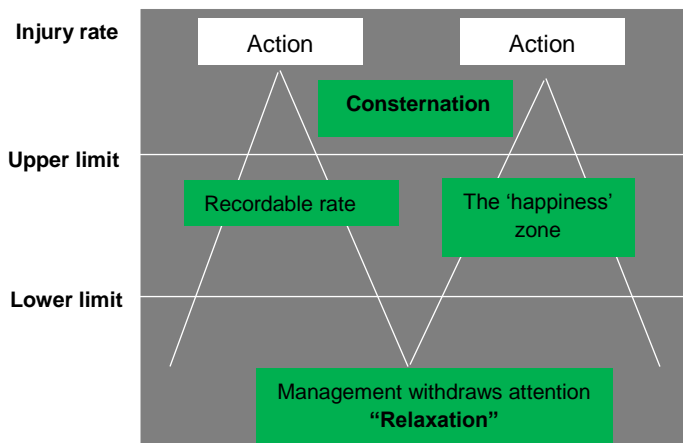


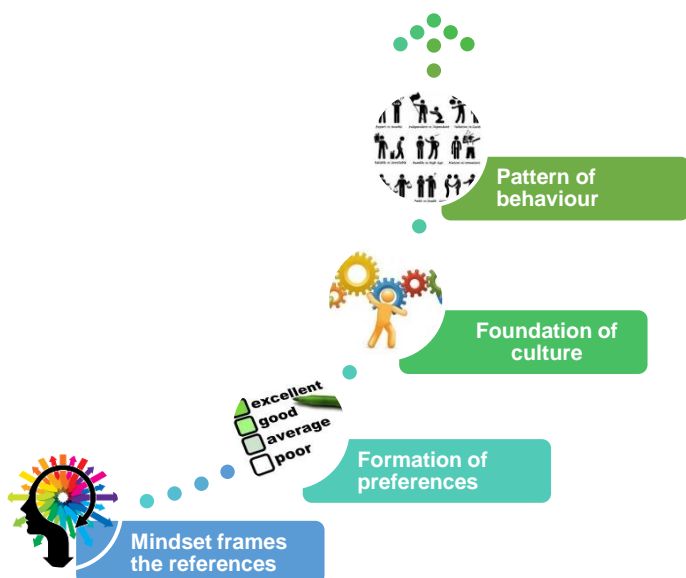
Fig – 4

Behaviour Approach - Mindset & Risks

In the behaviour-based approach to continuous safety improvement, many more people take responsibility for safety and 'keep their eye on the ball', every day, every shift. Shop-floor personnel take turns to act as observers within their own work group and continually measure safety performance through the use of a checklist which is regularly updated to take into account the changes that might take place in the work environment. In these ways the approach stays alive and is not allowed to become stale or jaded. Neither can it be labelled as a **'flavor of the month'** campaign.

To summarize, in the behavioral approach the emphasis is on the encouragement of safe behaviour, not the changing of attitudes or the use of discipline.

How you act or respond in a particular situation shows your behavior. Below are steps which can be used for setting the pattern of behavior -



Psychology safety improvement initiative for the company focus would be on:

- Safe behaviour rather than attitudes, and this would lead to fewer accidents; any change in attitudes is a consequence and not the cause of safe behaviour.
- Reinforcement of safe behaviour rather than the punishment and discipline of unsafe behaviours.
- Measuring safe behaviour not hazards.
- Accepting that the best people to identify safe behaviour are the operators.

Bringing Change

As described in the previous section, the behavioural approach to safety is based on clearly defining the required behaviours and setting up a system to observe and record when these occur.

The mechanism for doing this is to establish a checklist of safe behaviours, which is used for periodic random checks on activities in that part of the organization where the intervention is taking place. This information is then fed back to the participants, who use it to assess their progress towards safety goals and also, periodically, to revise and set new goals.

Designing the checklists and carrying out the observations is done entirely by participants in the work activity in question. Checklists and the results of observations are the property of the group and need not be disclosed to anyone else. It is stressed that they may not be used for any sort of disciplinary action.

In this part the complete process of setting up and managing such a behaviourally based safety intervention will be carried out.

- Be Active & visible as an observer
- Introduce yourself
- Look at people & look at what is going on
- Look for potential injury
- Use the checklist
- Calculate the safety performance measure
- Give feedback

When the baseline is established the observer is responsible for convening a 'goal-setting meeting', where the group is given feedback about its level of safe behaviour and then defines a goal for improvement, that is, a target for an increase in the overall index of safe behaviour.

These cycles continue with each member of the group taking their turn as observer. In this way observation, feedback and continuous safety improvement becomes part of the normal



ongoing activity of the work group. It is our experience in many organizations that this activity quickly becomes accepted and taken over by the employees themselves and provides an example of true empowerment, in that groups of individuals are now taking full responsibility for an important aspect of their working life.

Benefits

It is suggested that good safety-beliefs, values, behaviours and supportive soft skills are needed to develop a strong organizational safety-culture or sustain an already good culture. Following are the benefits of safety culture transformation –

- A non-autocratic, open and listening management style
- Overt commitment to safety, health and environment protection
- A documented safety-management system, monitored for its use and effectiveness in delivering safety
- Proactive involvement of staff in safety-strategy decisions
- Good internal safety communications (dialogue) between management and the workforce that is driven and pursued by the management
- A process is in place for the reporting and analysis of all internal and external safety events, recognizing that all safety events are a learning opportunity
- Cost saving due to less injury

How we can Help?

TSM TheSafetyMaster Pvt Ltd, is a young organization with a dedicated team of young, innovative, research driven & experienced professionals, who want to create value for their customers by providing ingenious services in the field of Safety. We can assess your safety culture system & implementation of safety culture transformation. You can send your enquiry to info@thesafeymaster.com for followings -

- **Safety Perception Survey**
- **Behaviour Based Safety Training & Implementation**
- **Safety Culture Transformation**
- **SBOP - Leadership**