



People and Quality Solutions Pty Ltd

How to Lead and Achieve a Safety Culture



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Carl authored and developed the Australian nationally recognised Course in Advanced Safety & Quality Awareness (AS&QA) and the Australian Safety Awareness Training Survey (A-SATS).

Carl is a member of psychological bodies in Australia and the USA and a former member of the executive of the Australian Psychological Society (APS). He has conducted numerous seminars and workshops on safety psychology and safety culture solutions to conferences and organisations.

Carl's special area of interest is in what drives unsafe thinking (undeveloped psychological constructs and perceptions) that affect unsafe behaviour, human error and non-compliance issues.

Carl assists organisations with the tools and training to assess, evolve and lead their own safety culture.

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How to Lead and Achieve a Safety Culture

Evolving your safety culture begins with understanding culture!

Personality is the result of the sum of an individual's beliefs, attitudes and values in interaction with the environment and expressed through behaviour . it evolves!

An organisation's culture is the sum of personalities, predominant attitudes and agreed values in interaction with the environment and expressed as performance.

Like an individual's personality, an organisation's culture is an evolving process. People can't change their personality to be someone else and no matter how much they try - organisations can't have another organisation's culture:

Good systems, processes, procedures . yes!

Culture . no!

Unhappy news to the Britney or DuPont wannabes!

All personalities and cultures have evolved to be what they are - unique! All have inherent strengths and vulnerabilities. Your culture has evolved to be what it is and cannot simply be exchanged for a different one.

However, cultures, like personalities, have elements that can be continuously improved by enhancing, developing, modifying, innovating, growing . evolving!



Safety Cultures

On April 26, 1986 at 1:23 a.m. local time, an event called Chernobyl triggered or certainly contributed to a new focus on traditional OH&S management - **safety culture!!**

Shortly after Chernobyl the Federation of Nuclear Cooperation in Asia was formed (FNCA) which the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) joined.



They defined safety culture for their industry this way:

%Safety culture is that assembly of characteristics and attitudes in organisations and individuals which establishes that, as an overriding priority, nuclear plant safety issues receive the attention warranted by their significance.+

Safety culture is defined by the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours about safety or safety awareness.

But, what is safety awareness? Traditionally and quite correctly, we have thought of safety awareness in terms of organisational environment and climate.

Environmental Safety Awareness (ESA) is the knowledge of hazards in the environment and the proper tools (engineering) and systems, procedures and training (OH&S) to avoid them.

However, there is now a much greater, emerging understanding and focus on the human element, personal (psychological) safety awareness.

Personal Safety Awareness (PSA) is comprised of several thinking constructs (or for simplicity's sake -attitudes) that affect an individual's perceptions, judgment and awareness of their personal ability and responsibility to avoid risks by managing hazards in the environment.

The safety culture of an organisation may have and promote a visible ESA but will be driven and defined by its people's PSA - their motivation, ability and responsibility to think and behave safely.



When PSA (safety attitudes) are not developed, incident reports typically indicate human error or non-compliance as the cause.

When Good Safety Systems Fail?

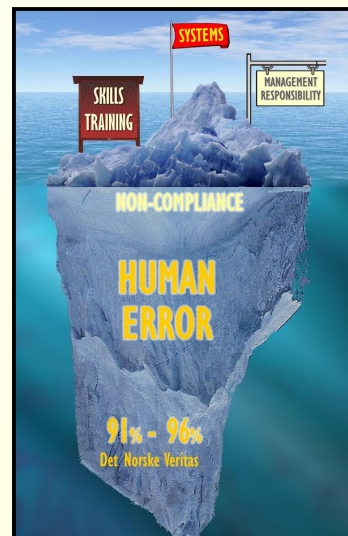
Clearly, tremendous progress has been made in understanding and applying OH&S systems and management over the last 30 . 40 years, particularly in Australia.

Unfortunately, no matter how well resourced or skillfully and professionally implemented, **good safety systems often appear to fail.**

Developments in workplace safety training, enhanced procedural initiatives, and systems approaches have achieved excellent results, however the greatest challenge continues to be to understand and eliminate human error incidents.

Human error and non-compliance are often the reasons given to why an organisation's safety or quality systems do not achieve anticipated or desired results. Many human error accidents and injuries are due to unsafe workplace attitude and behavioural factors (PSA), rather than 'environmental factors', like safety education, knowledge and safety skills or systems deficiencies.

Human error (perceptual distortion, fatigue/distraction, error of judgment, etc) is directly responsible for the majority of accidents, injuries and safety or quality systems failures today. Safety risk experts predict between 91% and 96% of all incidents involve some element of human error.



While it is well recognised that safety compliance is paramount to the success of any safety system, it is often overlooked for a lack of knowing what to do about addressing human error and non-compliance issues.

Of course, ESA is a continuous improvement process, however human error or non-compliance is not typically an ESA failure. It is predominantly a result of a lower PSA and an undeveloped safety culture.

The Safety Attitudes

A safety culture characterised generally or in part by non-compliant safety behaviour and human error is usually the result of undeveloped PSA or safety awareness attitudes in otherwise safety informed and knowledgeable people.

Personal safety awareness is learned "non-traditionally" usually through informal life experiences. Numerous research studies demonstrate that people with lower Attitudinal Safety Awareness are at greater risk, and have many more accidents and injuries.

In Australia, many across industry studies of PSA (Accident Risk Management (ARM) survey) have shown that people with lower PSA have the highest proportion of incidents and injuries, often greater than 90%.

	Accident	LTI
Higher Risk	74%	91%
Lower Risk	26%	9%

Safety psychologists have identified three core constructs (safety attitudes) that are the primary contributors and motivators to how people think and make decisions that influences (affects) how they are likely to behave in safety sensitive situations.

Briefly, they are:

1. Personal safety responsibility, control and rational judgment
2. Risk perceptive and avoidant
3. Stress tolerant (distraction and fatigue resistant).

Psychologically, these three constructs not only determine likely safety behaviour but are reflective of how a person defines who they are and how they live their life. Psychologists typically refer to this thinking structure theory as **%locus-of-control+**

A person's **%locus-of-control** refers to the attitudes or beliefs about who or what controls one's behaviour and consequences that reach far beyond safety to personal, family and community life. In a safety context individuals with an **%internal+** locus-of-control generally take personal responsibility for their own safe behaviour and accident prevention. They are more able to see the relationship between behaviour and outcomes . cause and effect, for example:

- Unsafe behaviour equals more incidents and injuries.
- Following safety procedures reduces my chance of an incident or injury.

Individuals with an external locus-of-control tend to blame accidents on external factors such as someone else is responsible for what happens to me or fate, chance or even bad luck is the cause.

Thinking like fate and bad luck cause accidents . so what do we need safety procedures for?+more often than not leads to taking a chance.

What confounds and frustrates many safety professionals and managers is why people who have been trained, have the knowledge and know the procedures . don't follow it!

It is really a matter of understanding that information stored as knowledge is not the same as attitudes which are impressions, motivations and drives that will either support or negate (override) knowledge and experience (common sense)!

Examples (the first many people can relate to):

Knowledge/Information

I will be healthier if I lose some weight.

I know PPE is for my protection and I should use it.

Overriding Attitude/Impression

I feel better when I eat.

The job will only take a minute.
Wearing PPE makes me look like a clown.
I don't like people telling me what I should do.

The importance in understanding locus-of-control in a safety culture strategy is that the safety attitudes that determine locus-of-control are not skills that are trainable. You can't train other people's attitudes, no matter how well meaning. People's attitudes define areas of their life well beyond the workplace.

Evolving your safety culture requires that you do train ESA but that you also address each individual's locus-of-control safety attitudes.

Fortunately, attitudes do change. Everyone has the ability to evolve, enhance and modify their own attitudes. Few adults have all the same attitudes they had when they were either five or fifteen years old.

Attitudes evolve through experience in an environment that provides individual relevance and acceptance. The focus needs to be on each individual's current awareness, performance, personal strengths and areas requiring specific development.

In other words, to use a sport analogy, coaching!

Not Difficult – Just Different!

Evolving a safety culture is not difficult . just different!

Analogous to professional team sport, it is where personal attributes are coached individually but within a framework of team identity and toward team objectives. Keep in mind that evolving a safety culture is not a substitute for ESA. Training, systems compliance, managing and monitoring (policing) are important.

However, a safety culture of personal safety awareness is ESA's best foundation. In this manner, it is first and foremost coaching before policing. There are certainly some haves+when it comes to ESA, however the PSA attitudes of a committed safety culture are want to+attitudes!



Achieving a Safety Culture (10 Factors)

Industries and organisations have their own unique environments and operational requirements. While every organisation's issues cannot be addressed in this short paper, there are some important factors (people and operations) to consider to ensure the successful implementation of your safety culture strategy.

People and operational factors overlap so they are not presented in any specific order or priority. The more you can apply, the more effective your strategy implementation. Here are ten to consider:

1 Know Thyself

Good advice from Socrates.

The best start is to know what your culture is now. An objective assessment of the safety attitudes and their relationship to your incident and injury results provides you with a benchmark to track your culture as it evolves.

Make sure you are measuring and assessing safety attitudes though . not subjective opinions.

2 Coaching – not Training

Remember, training imparts knowledge and skills . coaching addresses safety attitudes. Coaching addresses the core elements of unsafe behaviour, human error (poor judgment, perception, fatigue, distraction, etc) and non-compliance (conflict, personal issues, lack of insight or maturity, etc).

Coaching is applied to develop safety thinking and judgment not only to current environments and behaviour but to all future ones as well.

A coaching model is an industrial relations friendly approach . it is developing and empowering personal awareness and responsibility. It is not policing or confronting unsafe behaviour. This may be necessary too as part of your ESA responsibilities but it does not contribute to evolving your culture.

3 Drive it Yourself

Evolving your culture should be driven from within every day, not by consultants who don't know your culture as well as you do and are here today . gone tomorrow. Certainly use consultants to provide you with objective assessment and training of your coaches. However, keep the responsibility and control internally.

4 Safety Focused

Keep it safety aware focused and promote it as such . safety is in everyone's interest and everyone can understand it. Flagging culture change can be threatening to employees and managers (remember, it is an organisation's personality). Keep the focus on the safety process and to everyone's benefit . a safety culture is the result.

5 OH&S Integration

Select a coaching program that integrates easily with your current OH&S initiative. Train your current OH&S or training professionals as coaches. Implement as a new standard operating procedure - not an optional extra that is easily discounted as inconvenient.

6 Has Credibility

Is it a program that has industry recognition? Is it competency or learning outcome based? What is the benefit to the employees? It is one thing to be told you are professional. It is much more meaningful to have achieved a competency or assessed learning outcome where you have a certificate that is nationally recognised to prove it.

7 Operationally Flexible

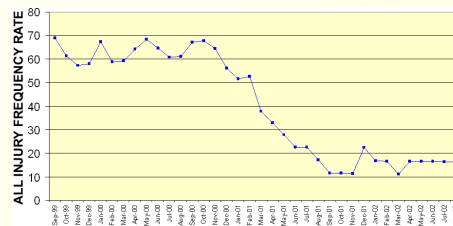
A program that is operationally flexible is vital.

At the end of the day a company exists to operate its business which has to be its first priority. A program that can be implemented around operational priorities (one-on-one coaching, one hour at a time, in any workplace environment, on site?) is more likely to succeed because it does not interfere with operational imperatives. You want a safety culture that %operates+as part of your business . doing business!

8 Measurable Proven Results

Leadership from the top is a given to get any program underway. However, commitment from the top requires long term, sustainable confidence and support.

Ongoing objective measures, not only of the improvements to safety awareness, but its impact on incidents, reporting and lost time injuries are necessary to maintain management buy-in, support and confidence. Managers have to account to someone as well.



Frequent objective assessment lets you know your safety culture is evolving by demonstrating lower incidents and injury trends. If it isn't, find out why and do something about it. Don't be afraid to find out what is not working (it's not working whether you know about it or not). Knowing gives you a chance to find out why and fix it.

9 Involves Everyone

Achieving a safety culture requires everyone as part of the team approach (from top management to admin support). Don't single out individuals or workgroups for special treatment because they are higher risk (even if incident results confirm it). This only creates or reinforces them and us/divisions.

Poor performance or behaviour labels are often interpreted as permission to wear it as a badge and act accordingly (remember when you were a teenager?).

Also, don't exclude higher safety awareness people. They are your greatest on-the-job, day in . day out reinforcement of the thinking and behaviour you want.

10 Return on Investment

Training and focus on safety often have been seen as a cost to an organisation or at best an abstract benefit for the long term.

Evolving a safety culture however is an investment that can deliver real returns quickly. Lower incidents and injury costs, less disruption to operations and productivity, lower insurance premiums all have an immediate impact on the bottom line.

Perhaps a more profound, if not abstract, benefit is that in today's competitive market, the safety culture and safety record of an organisation is increasingly a factor in winning business or contracts.

A visible return on investment is the best guarantee of a continually evolving safety culture.

Summary

An organisation's culture is its personality. Culture is not the assets, equipment, work processes, procedures or paperwork. Culture is:

- The shared values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of its people . its identity
- Like personality - can be mimicked but never copied or substituted
- Like people - unique and will evolve within the environment created for it by its Leaders.

A healthy safety culture is foremost people focused and characterised by individual personal responsibility, willing participation, professional pride, shared identity and commitment to continuous improvement.

Evolving your culture begins by moving people from non-compliance to compliance and then compliance to commitment.

Total commitment occurs when people comply, not because they have to, but because they want to!

A shared safety vision and behaviour driven by want to attitudes becomes your organisation's identity - your organisation's culture.

Research Studies: www.paqs.com.au