Developing a Safety Culture

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- What is a safety culture?
- Differences between safety culture and safety climate
- Elements of a safety culture
- How to create a safety culture
- Management responsibilities
- Behavioral safety
What is Safety Culture?

Safety Culture is the enduring value and priority placed on workers and public safety by everyone in every group at every level of an organization.

It refers to the extent to which individuals and groups will commit to:
- personal responsibility for safety
- act to preserve safety
- enhance and communicate safety concerns
- strive to actively learn
- adapt and modify behavior based on lessons learned from mistakes
- be rewarded in a manner consistent with these values.
What About Safety Climate?

- Safety Climate is the temporal measure of safety culture
- Subject to commonalities among individual perceptions of the organization
- It is therefore situational based
Key Differences
Culture vs. Climate

- **Safety Culture** is commonly viewed as an enduring characteristic
- **Safety Climate** is viewed as a temporary state that is subject to change depending on current circumstance
- **Safety Culture** is the attitudes, values, norms, and beliefs that a particular group of people share with respect to risk and safety
- **Safety Climate** can be defined as a “snapshot” of employees’ perceptions of the current environment or prevailing conditions which impact upon safety
Key Differences
Culture vs. Climate

• **Safety Culture** is a group of individuals guided in their behavior by their joint belief in the importance of safety.

• **Safety Climate** varies individually depending on current perceptions and can change daily. Perception of safety procedures and rules are a reflection of safety climate.

• **Safety Cultures** build joint responsibility between individuals from management to employee.
Elements of a Safety Culture

- Organizational Commitment to Safety
- Operational Personnel
- Formal Safety System
- Informal Safety System
Organizational Commitment to Safety

• Refers to the degree to which an organization's upper management prioritizes safety in decision-making and allocates adequate resources to safety.

• An organization's commitment to safety can be reflected by three major components:
  – Safety Values
  – Safety Fundamentals
  – Going Beyond Compliance
Operational Personnel

• Refers to the degree to which those directly involved in the supervision of employees’ safety behavior are actually committed to safety and reinforce the safety values espoused by upper management.

• These personnel include:
  – supervisors/foremen
  – Maintenance supervision
  – Safety Trainers
Formal Safety System

• Refers to the processes for reporting and addressing both occupational and process safety hazards.

• These systems include
  – Reporting systems
  – Feedback and response
  – Safety personnel
Informal Safety Systems

• Refers to the unwritten rules pertaining to safety behavior including rewards and punishments for safe and unsafe actions

• These systems include:
  – Accountability
  – Authority
  – Employee professionalism
Creating a Safety Culture

• Stop relying solely on the line-management

• Involve all employees

• Stop accepting the “Blind Eye” syndrome
Leadership is Essential

• How does safety become a value?
  – Consistent demonstrable leadership

• Senior managers should instill “safety is a value” to all employees and design a safety vision
  – This vision should spell out the entities objectives, standards, and what actions they will be taking to reach it
Selling the Vision

• Upper management need to develop and personally commit to the vision
  – This can be accomplished by:
    • leading by example
    • Highlighting an unsafe condition or practice and correcting it on the spot (without casting blame)
    • Don’t allow the “I’m too busy” phrase to impede the process. Set aside ½ an hour to 1 hour a day to visit operational areas
Assigning Responsibility and Accountability for Safety

• Upper management need to take personal responsibility for bringing the vision to fruition!

• Responsibility and accountability needs to be cascaded throughout the entire organizational employee structure
Focusing on Success and Not Failure

• Measure proactive successes
  – Number of weekly safety inspections
  – Number of personnel safety trained
  – Number of personnel receiving safety refreshers
  – Number of SOPs reviewed
  – Number of remedial actions completed
  – Number of near misses reported
  – Number of safety suggestions received
Align Policies and Practices With the Stated Vision

• Policies and practices MUST be aligned with entity’s safety objectives
• All departments must be involved
  – e.g. Purchasing must know exactly what safety equipment each department needs
  – Human resources must practice more sound hiring and placement standards
  – All departments need to be involved with the procurement of safety precautions and suggestions
Safety Management is Key for Maintaining a Safety Culture

• Different from safety leadership, safety management deals with the practical implementation of the espoused vision

• The vision should be continuously sold to managers and supervisors

• Middle managers should engage employees in safety conversations
  – Ask what can be done to prevent an injury while performing a certain job. If something is identified be prepared to deal with it as quickly as possible and monitor the status of the remedial action until completion.
Proactive Focus on Safety at the Operational Level

• One of the primary causes of accidents is poor management control
• Front line managers play a HUGE role in embedding safety visions within the file and rank employees
• Front line managers MUST NEVER turn a blind eye to unsafe practices or condition – This will be seen as visionary lip service!
Management Responsibilities

• Front line managers should be vigorously encouraged to:
  – Correct any and all unsafe acts when seen
  – Identify unsafe conditions
  – Discuss safety with the work group each and every day
  – Close any outstanding remedial actions
  – Conduct safety training and risk assessments
  – Provide feedback on safety issues to the workgroup
  – Praise and or acknowledge people who are doing things safely
Instilling Employee Ownership

• How people are approached about safety will generally determine their subsequent behavior and values

• ALL levels of management must actively show they care about the well being and safety of every employee
Behavioral Safety

• Behave – to act, react, or function in some specified way

• Safety – being safe, freedom from risk or danger

• Behavioral safety – the way in which an individual responds to a decision involving risk or safety
Socio-Technical Systems

• Looking at work cultures in this sense means recognizing that the work culture influences the way operations are performed.

• Without a supportive culture even the best designed safety programs will FAIL!
Elements of a Social System

• Social systems include:
  – Trust
  – Collaboration
  – Communication
  – Working in teams
Elements of a Technical System

• Technical systems include:
  – Operational procedures
  – Equipment calibrations
  – Policies
Socio-Technical Systems

• Our ability to overlap these two is the point where our productivity, quality, and safety will be maximized.

• High accident frequency rates “normally” correlate with low employee perceptions of the safety culture in perception surveys.
Socio-Technical Leaders

• Qualities of a transformational leader: Ability to create, communicate, and implement a new vision

• We must instill in others the capability to create common values around safety goals
Challenges of Tomorrow

• Focus on safety behavior, not safety attitudes

• Entails adopting a collaborative problem solving approach to identifying critical sets of safe and unsafe behaviors

• Management and employees MUST participate together
Resources

• The Values Based Safety Process. Terry McSween
• Practical Guidance for Introducing the Ethos that “Safety is a Value”. July 2000 Dr. Dominic Cooper
• Grassroots Safety Culture. Steven I. Simon, Ph.D.
• Behavioral Safety. Training Solutions, summer 1999 Edition
• Goal Setting for Safety. The Safety and Health Practitioner, November 1993
• Implementing Culture Change. Steven I. Simon Ph.D.
• On the Future of the Safety Profession. Steven I. Simon Ph.D.
• Measuring and Improving Safety Culture. The ESH Handbook for the Public Sector
QUESTIONS?