

SHAPING A SAFETY CULTURE

by Alan Ryan.

Safety & Training Superintendent
Mt Leyshon Gold Mine and Pajingo Joint Venture

Introduction

The nature of human potential is that it must be nurtured, guided, and exemplified. Full potential rarely spontaneously appears. Rather, it evolves from and grows into its own expression. The process by which human potential is realised is called shaping, the act of guiding the evolution of behaviour towards some predetermined final form. Behaviour is shaped successfully by positively reinforcing progress towards that form.

Shaping an organisation's culture involves similar requirements, because culture is the collective behaviour of a community of individuals. First, we must define the kind of culture we want. Then, we must design the developmental steps necessary to help an existing culture evolve into the desired one.

Organisational cultures evolve in different directions depending on leadership style and what business factor leaders emphasize. The values of an organisation are based on what is important to its leaders. If leaders emphasize productivity, those who report to them will build structures that are likely to perpetuate the behaviours that satisfy the leaders' emphasis. If they move towards incorporating the concepts of risk assessment into their rule making, risk management programs will be integrated into the behaviours spread throughout the organisation, and the culture evolves to take on a specific form.

The culture of a for-profit organisation is influenced by the dynamic tension between four fundamental business factors. These are productivity, quality, cost, and safety. Some people who work in production environments worry that a focus on safety invariably will detract from production. This does not have to be the case. The main question that should be addressed in designing a culture is "how can we facilitate safe, quality production?" After all, without production, the business would not exist. Safety without meeting quality production goals eventually will kill the business. Meeting quality production goals without safety is likely to kill someone.

The safety culture we want is characterized by behaviours that focus on the identification of hazards, quality production and ensure safety for everyone. This culture, called the "want to" safety culture, is the outcome of a collaborative effort between management and workers. It can be cultivated by positively reinforcing behaviours and results that make progress towards it. We strive to achieve human potential in safety by shaping a culture in which safety permeates all activities.

The Evolution of a Safety Culture

The evolution of a "want to" safety culture contains three main developmental structures:

- (a) Basic compliance ensures that safety training programs, work conditions, procedures, and processes comply with regulations. This is passive or structural compliance because it does not address the individual's specific actions.
- (b) Self-directed safety compliance involves workers in the task of ensuring regulatory compliance, and encourages them to take personal responsibility for making use of training and other regulatory provisions. This emphasises active compliance with regulations.
- (c) Behavioural safety introduces a process for teaching individuals to scan for hazards and address them, to focus on the potential injuries and the safe behaviour(s) that can prevent them, and to act safely.

These collectively comprise a comprehensive process for building a "want to" safety culture.

Employee Perception

The evolutionary stage at which an organisation's culture has reached will define the attitudes of employees towards the company, company property, and other workers. These attitudes will be observable in what people do and what they say to each other. Thus, in designing a system that will

help a culture evolve, one must also consider employee perceptions, because perceptions prompt behaviour, and repeated behaviours become habits and take on attitudinal change.

An acceptable safety culture is defined as one in which employees:

- (a) hold safety as a value;
- (b) feel a sense of personal responsibility for the safety of their coworkers as well as themselves; and
- (c) are *willing* and *able* to ACT on the sense of responsibility they feel. They actively care, and have the necessary skills and tools and are supported by the culture to go beyond the call of duty on behalf of the safety of themselves and others. If one was to list some specific components of a "want to" safety culture, they would include:

- All employees comply with safety rules and regulations at all times.
- Employees continuously search for safety hazards and take personal initiative to correct hazards when found.
- All workers are eager to participate in safety-related activities. Participation in safety-related activities is promoted and encouraged through respect and positive recognition.
- All safety-related issues are openly communicated. Fear of reprimand or negative discipline does not inhibit discussions.
- Safety-related incidents are viewed as an opportunity to identify system failures and therefore improve the system. Individuals are not assumed to be, and are rarely found to be, at fault.
- Education/training programs teach employees the needed knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform their jobs safely.
- All employees fully understand and appreciate the potential hazards of the operations performed.
- Employees do not consider taking unnecessary risks.
- Managers never (knowingly or mindlessly) encourage employees to take unnecessary risks.
- Regular behaviour-based feedback on safety matters is a way of life. Corrective feedback is constructive and appreciated.
- Peer pressure acts toward, rather than against safety (and is really peer support).
- All business activities are managed with a constant focus on hazard eradication and injury prevention.

Basic Compliance

Shaping and cultivating a positive employee perception about a company's concern for safety starts with them learning the applicable standards, putting into place systems to facilitate compliance with them, devising a system for monitoring compliance and building a relationship with the regulatory body eg. Department of Mines and Energy. It accomplishes two objectives:

- It allows employees access to the company's safety standards; and
- through appropriate training, can build employee confidence in the company's concern for their safety.

Organisations rely on a number of processes and procedures to manage risk and thereby decrease the chance of incidents and injuries. These generally include systems such as safety rules and procedures, safety training, hazard identification and correction, discipline, incident reporting and

analysis, safety communications, safety suggestions, group celebrations, and rewards and recognition. Each safety management system has an important contribution to make in terms of not only improving workplace safety, but also helping to achieve an acceptable safety culture. At best, when the system is poorly designed or operating ineffectively, its ability to affect beneficial change is compromised.

A poorly designed, badly implemented, or ill-functioning system can actually have a destructive influence on an organisation's overall safety culture. Achievement of an acceptable safety culture is inhibited, for example, when incident analyses create an air of mistrust and fault-finding, safety incentive programs discourage injury reporting, accountability processes fail to recognise individuals for their accomplishments, and performance evaluations focus on outcome number rather than process accomplishments.

To compound the situation further, safety systems are interactive and, in many cases, overlap. For example, hazard identification and correction requires:

- a) a climate that fosters employee participation;
- b) sufficient training so employees can recognise and correct hazards; and
- c) ample communication of the hazard and/or its removal.

Therefore, the poor qualities of one system can have a negative impact on other systems. For example, when employee incentive programs and/or supervisor performance evaluations are based primarily on injury rates, it is unreasonable to expect those employees to embrace an open injury reporting and analysis system, or when the incident analysis process is viewed as extremely blame-oriented, it is not reasonable to expect employees to feel comfortable when their safe and at-risk behaviours are observed and recorded.

Self-directed Safety Compliance

In most organisations, the roles of management and employees are usually separated. Management is typically responsible for regulatory compliance and employees are usually held responsible for their behaviour at work. The ideal situation, however, is one in which management and workers collaborate on regulatory compliance issues. By using a team consisting of workers, supervisors and managers, the organisation can monitor and manage the compliance of the safety-training program, work conditions, job safety analysis and work processes and ensure they comply with appropriate State Legislation and Codes of Practice. They learn to develop compliance monitoring tools and to deliver "feed-back" to co-workers.

The practice strengthens the basic compliance ethic because team effort affords workers greater access to regulatory and industry provisions. Team effort also increases the efficiency of addressing those issues and of delivering training. Where before, the safety coordinator shouldered the responsibility for ensuring that everyone had received the necessary safety training, now workers are empowered and encouraged to take charge of their own compliance with job requirements. This implements the concept of empowerment in safety and further shapes the perception that safety involves a personal commitment.

However, even with adequate training, there is no guarantee that a trainee will work safely. The temptation to take shortcuts is fuelled by past experiences in which similar activities were completed successfully and injury-free using shortcuts. Another factor that fuels risks taking is that the methods specified for doing work often take more time, and can be cumbersome. In this age of time consciousness and decreasing cycle times, a safety procedure that has not followed acceptable risk management guidelines is likely to fall by the wayside.

The absence of injuries leads many managers to conclude that people are working safely. This is a faulty and dangerous assumption because the absence of injuries could be because people are not reporting injuries or were lucky. By making such an assumption, managers inadvertently submit safety to luck. The only way to know if people are working safely is to measure it. In the past, frequency and severity rates have determined whether or not an organisation has an effective safety program. New

methods of performance have been presented based on current observations in the workplace using specific activities that have identified risks. By using a simple fraction converted to a percent with the number of positive observations as the numerator and the total number of observations as the denominator, the focus shifts to safe performance from the results of unsafe activity.

Behavioural Safety

Employees who are confident in the company's commitment to safety will be more open to participating in a behavioural safety approach. In such, the burden of success rests with development of plans of action to remove the barriers from at-risk behaviour, so the employees are able to perform in a manner that does not expose them to a hazard. Employee commitment will address facility, maintenance and design issues present in the workplace, using behavioural data based on actual work exposure, shaping their experiences and therefore their perceptions about the value of participating in the process.

If designed and implemented correctly, a behavioural safety process drives beneficial change in an organisation's safety culture. The optimal implementation incorporates principles developed from psychological research. These behavioural science principles, fifty of which are compiled and reviewed in Geller (1996), include concepts such as:

- Behaviour is directed by activators and motivated by consequences.
- People are motivated to maximise positive consequences and minimise negative consequences.
- Feedback is necessary for behavioural improvement.
- Although negative consequences can lead to behaviour change, they usually have undesirable side effects.
- Sometimes people compensate for increases in perceived safety by taking more risks.
- People view behaviour as correct and appropriate to the degree they see others doing it.
- Long-term behavioural improvement requires people to be self-directed (change from the inside out).
- When people feel empowered, their safe behaviour spreads to other situations and behaviours.
- People feel more personal control when working to achieve success than when working to avoid failure.
- Perceived personal choice increases commitment, ownership, and involvement.

An behavioural process cannot, however, succeed on its own to improve an organisation's culture, no matter how well it is designed, implemented, and executed. Other safety management systems as well as individual management practices are needed to support an acceptable safety culture. In fact, in the absence of a positive (or improving) safety culture, the success of the process will be limited and short term.

Increasing the Value of Participation

Traditional measurement tools used for behavioural safety can have a major limitation. That is, they focus on behaviours that are relevant only to those people who have problems doing them regularly. Examples of these behaviours include "wearing appropriate PPE," or "following recognised procedures." A lack of relevance, increases the chances of people perceiving low value in the process, and can decrease participation in it.

An alternative approach, used in some successful safety systems, is to allow individuals to practice generalised safety behaviours. Generalised safety behaviours are those that can be applied to any situation, anytime, and anywhere. These behaviours include scanning the environment for hazards, focusing on the potential incidents and on the safe behaviour(s) that can prevent them, and acting

safely. Scanning, focusing, assessing and acting safely become habits when applied repeatedly in a variety of situations chosen by the individual. Thus, this process promotes choice and flexibility for the performer and thereby enhances the relevance and value of the safety tool.

Another way is to help employees realise the benefits of using a system that makes the user aware of the potential hazards that he or she is avoiding by practicing safe behaviour. This is important because it increases the likelihood of a person doing safe behaviour. For example, if a person actively thinks about the third degree burns he could get if molten metal splashed on his unprotected body, then he is more likely to put on his personal protective gear to avoid being injured.

A third way to promote value is to share and celebrate the impact of participation and generalisation on the overall safety performance of the facility. Feedback and reinforcement systems that uses the data people spend time collecting will enhance the value of that activity. One type of data collected involves work conditions and processes that require attention. The process will gain value in the eyes of workers if the self-directed safety compliance team gives timely feedback to the group about actions being taken to address reported issues.

Conclusion

Shaping a safety culture involves taking deliberate steps to guide the evolution of a culture towards one characterised by a concern for personal and others' safety. A healthy philosophy for any organisation is that no accident is acceptable. It begins with the realisation that every accident can be prevented and the elimination of accidents can be an achievable goal.

In essence, by continuously improving performance to the highest level possible, system failures are reduced to the lowest level possible. This allows an organisation to enter the realm of "world class" where they seek and achieve "zero accidents"

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BIOGRAPHICAL PARAGRAPH

Alan Ryan is a safety professional responsible for the Health, Safety and Training at Mt Leyshon and Pajingo Gold Mines. He has been involved in Industrial Safety and Health for thirty years, twenty related to mining. He is a member of a number of professional organisations including the:
Safety Institute of Australia;
American Society of Safety Engineers;
Institute of Australian Mechanical Engineers;
Australian Institute of Automotive Mechanical Engineers.

He is a graduate of Western Australian Institute of Technology (Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety);
Ballarat University (Graduate Diploma in Hazard Management); and
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (Mechanical Engineering).