



Correlation of Safety Leadership and Safety Culture

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Abstract

Diversity in today's workforce is evident due to different cultures. As a result, innovation thrives, which facilitates knowledge exchange and encourages the development in industry practices. Production also benefits from this type of environment; however, cultural differences within a workforce can initially complicate the process of creating and implementing a common safety culture. What may seem strange in one person's culture may be normal in another person's.

Several leadership concepts preach and practice the idea of workers *owning* safety as common practice. However, in order for that to happen, and in order to best develop safety practices in the workforce, the respective management needs to first develop an environment based on the understanding of diversities and keeping them engaged. Management can encourage the workers to "own" safe behaviors and empower employees to take action when they witness unsafe behaviors. Educating employees about off duty activities that can lead to unsafe acts at work is also valuable in the management of risk in the workplace. An important fact to always remember is that there is no compromise to safety, in the workplace irrespective of cultural or economic environments. This paper will discuss how leadership influences the implementation of a safety plan, while considering cultural differences with a diverse workforce.

1. Introduction

The term "culture" can have different interpretations based on the context of the conversation. The basic definition, according Merriam-Webster [1], is:

- "the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time
- a particular society that has its own beliefs, ways of life, art, etc.
- a way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place or organization (such as a business)"

However, culture is more than just one's nationality or one's religious beliefs. In another sense, culture can be defined as simply, "the way things are." Culture can range from a variety of beliefs, lifestyles and practices. These differences exist both on small and large scales which all affect the way a person acts on a day to day basis, and consequently in the workplace. The primary thing that keeps our cultures intact and consistent is that they are all founded on the same common belief system; we all *believe* that our cultures are the right ways of doing things; therefore we do not question them. While interacting with people of the same culture, the established belief system is generally unproblematic; however when people from different cultures start mixing into the equation, everyone needs to take a step back and consider all of the different cultures that are present.

Similar to this, the term "safety" can have various meanings depending upon the context of the conversation. The basic definition, according Merriam-Webster [2], is:

- freedom from harm or danger : the state of being safe
- the state of not being dangerous or harmful
- a place that is free from harm or danger : a safe place

The workforce within a company can exhibit various approaches to the concept of safety, whether it is willingly embracing this concept or adopting it with resistance. Irrespective of the nature of this acceptance, every company wants its workforce to come to work all intact and also to be able to return to their families all intact. All the while, the integrity of the environment and the wellbeing of the dwellers around the company premises should also be given the respect and credit due.

This article which is an extension of a previous work [7], and brings about discussions on a workforce's differences in cultures, management can implement a global safety management system which establishes common belief systems, that everyone will eventually adopt towards.

2. Differences in Culture [7]

2.1 Global Problem

Many of today's oil and gas companies have become globally developed and have assets in nearly all parts of the world. With such an established global presence, a company's workforce is often multi-national and multi-cultural in nature. These differences in a diverse workforce should be considered during the development of a company's mission statement and overarching policies and procedures to ensure that the company runs safely and smoothly.

Cultural diversity opens the door for productivity and efficiency, especially when individuals share their knowledge and practices from different cultures and past experiences. Management can assess methodologies and take the best practices from different regions to decrease downtime and improve workflow.

Sometimes, however, cultural differences can clash and create barriers to moving forward which in turn decreases productivity and efficiency. Differences in culture can be a challenge especially

while creating and implementing common safety values amongst a global workforce. A couple conflicting differences are:

- Between same kind of workers from different national or religious cultures
- Between different career types who come together to work on the same project

2.2 Creating a Common Work Culture

Various corporations constantly roll out behavior based safety programs, with regular enhancement. Here the focus is aimed at human mannerisms, noted through observations. While the takeaway message from such programs is to emphasize on following safe practices, and then to communicate this information in a positive, non-intimidating and educative manner [6], another important factor that enriches this exercise is communicating of and learnings from incidents.

While this practice is more visible in fieldwork and its impacts have positive ramifications to Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) programs, the same concept is successful in the process safety management realm as well.

The role of management is very crucial to the success of the company's safety management system. Figure 1 illustrates this in what is called the Bradley curve [3].

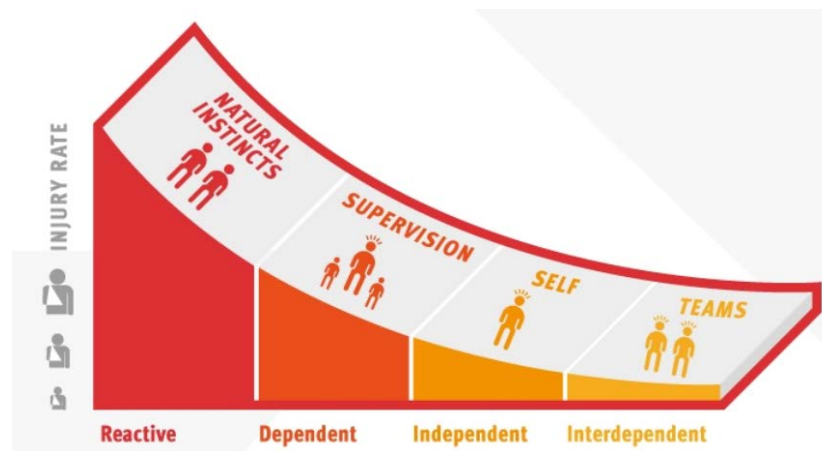


Figure 1 Bradley Curve

The right side of this curve indicates the independent and interdependent zones, which lead towards reducing the injury rate. It should be noted that these zones are highly individual based and will be effective when individuals adopt this safety understanding. One of the major factors to bringing this about would be to embrace safety culture universally and independent of individual's regional culture. According to a publication about safety leadership, the company's common safety culture needs to be "a reporting culture, a just culture, a flexible culture, and a learning culture" [4].

While steering towards this common safety culture, it is pertinent for organizations to have well defined indicators for safety culture [5]. This can be accomplished through adhering to several concepts [7]:

- Communication – Actively sharing and reminding about safety in the workplace. Developing a culture means sharing information in effective ways that help the employees take ownership of the culture. Adequate communication leads to have a just culture as well in that employees are aware of new
- Lessons Learned– Lessons learned is a way of reporting and spreading the knowledge to others who may be asked to do the same job. This concept has been made into regulation in certain parts of the Oil and Gas world, such as control room management operations. The benefits of Lessons Learned is that the next person performing a similar task to the one being shared can learn from previous attempts and adjust behaviors accordingly
- “Owning” Safety– Many employees do not practice safe actions at home because there are no work rules or regulations guiding them to do so. However, instilling employees with a commitment of safety both in and outside of work is the ultimate success in a safety culture. If employees can make the connection to be safe because they have families and friends depending on them, it will be a more powerful motivator than obedience to the company’s rules. If each person “owns” his or her actions and has a personal commitment to be safe then they will carry the attitude to non-work related activities as well.

2.3 Example of inclusion of Human Factors into Process Safety

With developing data sources on company’s safety culture, incorporated with the workforce diversity, along with safety communication and clear lines of communication, there have been changes to process safety applications.

Risk experts have shown this influence by use of human factor checklists in quantitative process safety work such as HAZOPs. Using such checklists generate varied reactions among team members due to variations in cultures – safety or experience. Irrespective of such reactions, it becomes customary for the risk experts to manage this challenge, and bring about an understanding of the end goal – which is safe operations.

The first challenge is to overcome cultural reservations amongst the various human minds, to identify the issues. Next comes, the understanding of remedial measures and areas of human intervention, which have opportunities for improvement. The key to success for all this lies in the successful implementation of the remedies. This implementation goes back to the same cycle of safety culture and environment of this company, and the willingness for change.

3. Conclusion

From the discussions and the earlier reports provided, it is evident that one of the biggest challenges in the workplace is dealing with human interaction. While a diverse workforce is essential to productivity and innovation, it may also lead to multiple points of view within an industry, especially when it comes to safety issues – occupational or process.

It is surely important to create a common safety culture and programs that “stay” and one that are socially established. But more critical is the successful implementation and practice of these creations. It will not happen overnight, but it is achievable with persistence. Leaders should motivate and inspire their workforce by committing to a continual campaign for safety understanding and implementation, along with constant reminders rather than a one-time training [4].

The respective managements have begun taking into account cultural differences and work towards understanding the different rationales and expectations of a multi-cultural workforce in order to best develop safety practices.

An underlying message always remains that there is no limit to safety or safe practices, irrespective of diversity in workforce or economic environments..

4. References

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