

# Wilkins Safety Group

## Weekly Update Newsletter



Welcome to this issue - Friday 4th March 2011 - of our Update Newsletter

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to colleagues and friends.

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## Your Safety Culture!

### A gamble or an effective system?

Your Health and Safety Culture is Important.

*Health and Safety Culture has been variously defined as:*

- *The way we do things around here*
- *A set of attitudes, beliefs or norms*
- *A safety ethic*



However, a comprehensive definition that seems to have gained wide acceptance is:

***'The safety culture of an organisation is the product of individual and group values, attitudes, perceptions, competencies, and patterns of behaviour that determine the commitment to, and the style and proficiency of, an organisation's health and safety management'.***

What is certain is that the culture existing within an organisation plays a major role in determining the general level of health and safety. It is useful, therefore, to be able to assess and measure the level of health and safety culture and identify means by which it can be boosted.



## Reason for Assessing Culture

The problem with so many efforts to assess the safety culture within an organisation is that there is no clear objective in view and therefore the outcome is also uncertain.

If the aim is simply to **"measure"** culture, the chances are the management team will read the results and find them **"interesting"** but then do little with them. If that is the only result then there is little value in undertaking the exercise in the first place.

Much better to start off with clear objectives so that you know the range of possible practical actions that might follow, based on the results of the assessment.

Examples of the kind of objective that you may have in mind are:

- Given limited budget, in which areas should we concentrate our efforts to improve health and safety performance?
- What factors might account for a worse accident record than the average within our sector and therefore need to be addressed
- How can the organisation reduce the amount of lost time due to sickness, accidents and the investigations that follow?



Whatever your objectives, it is important to be clear about them up front since it will determine how you go about the exercise for best results.

## Assessing Culture Using a Questionnaire

When considering how to assess an organisation's culture, an obvious option that springs to mind is to use a questionnaire. Of course, if the results are to be of value, then it needs to be carefully crafted to properly explore important aspects of people's behaviour such as their:

- attitude toward safety
- understanding of risks
- understanding of safety measures

It makes sense to use an existing questionnaire that already has a track record rather than attempting to construct something from scratch.

A good example of a questionnaire that is applicable over a range of sectors is the Safety Climate Tool that has been jointly developed by the Health and Safety Laboratory (a government agency set up to support the HSE) and Snap Surveys Limited.

Information about this tool is available from [www.hsl.gov.uk/health-and-safety-products/safety-climate-tool.aspx](http://www.hsl.gov.uk/health-and-safety-products/safety-climate-tool.aspx)

This is not a free tool but the cost is not prohibitive, starting at £500 for a five year licence if you have less than one hundred employees

The tool is customisable to a limited degree so that it can be tailored to the needs of your particular organisation.

There are other tools that have been developed for use within specific industries such as:

- RSSB Safety Culture Improvement Toolkit for use across the rail industry.
- Loughborough University Safety Climate Assessment Toolkit for use in the offshore industry

Whichever tool you opt for there are a range of factors that you need to take into consideration when deploying it, such as:

- A potential issue may be a poor response rate if the workforce has a low level of interest in Health and Safety and therefore you may need to employ incentives to encourage participation. It's important, however, not to use methods that are likely to distort the responses.

Another potential weakness of this approach, particularly if used in isolation, is that the results may say more about what the culture is and less about why it is that way.

To maximise responses, make it convenient for employees to complete the questionnaire by, for example, ensuring sufficient time is allocated during the working day rather than expecting them to use their own time.

Because this is a mechanistic approach to collecting information, it is better to have other inputs that provide a degree of confirmation and confidence in the results of the survey



### Other Potential Sources of Information

There are other ways of assessing an organisation's culture such as:

- Reviewing accident reports that include investigation into the circumstances leading up to and surrounding each accident.
- Interviews with selected employees.
- Direct observation of work areas and the conduct of employees
- Discussions with Safety Representatives

For the most part, these options may not be as precise or all-encompassing as a survey questionnaire but they can help to validate the broad results of a survey.

### Changing Culture

Having measured the level of Health and Safety culture, the next step is to implement a strategy for improvement. This can be approached in a variety of ways but is likely to include some or all of the following:

- Desired behaviour must be modelled by management starting at the highest level. The example of management must be consistent and on-going if it is to have any persuasive value.
- To reduce the likelihood of standards slipping it is a good idea if members of the Board and the Management Team are made accountable for their conduct. A possible mechanism for achieving this is by using 360 degree reviews, which serve to emphasise the importance of health and safety culture through all levels of staff.
- Review existing safety procedures to ensure they are commensurate with the level of risk they are addressing, that they are practicable and as convenient as possible to encourage compliance.

- Safety messages need to be clearly communicated through multiple channels to ensure everyone understands what is required of them and, more importantly, **why?**
- When defining intervention strategies, involve specifically interested parties such as members of the Safety Committee
- Personal involvement of employees is also good in developing action plans so that they have a sense of ownership and have personally thought through the practicality and benefits of each strategy.
- Implement some form of on-going monitoring of the culture to identify which actions are working most effectively
- Encourage a just culture in contrast to a blame culture that is predisposed to seek out some person to blame for an incident when in fact the fault has more to do with systems, procedures, management structures or organisational factors.

Ultimately, the ideal is to encourage throughout the workforce a sense of anticipation and excitement in seeing the positive benefits of a constantly improving health and safety culture.

If you have concerns about the safety culture in your organisation then why not contact us to discuss how you may best go about assessing and addressing the issues.

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If you would like to discuss any of the issues highlighted in this newsletter, then drop an email to Jon on [jon@jonwilkins.co.uk](mailto:jon@jonwilkins.co.uk) or call the office 01458 253682



Your Business is Safer  
Your Business is Safer in Our Hands