

BALANCING ORGANISATIONAL SAFETY SYSTEMS AND SAFETY CULTURE - ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract *HSE professionals emphasised balancing the challenges and issues while integrating the safety systems and positive safety culture. The elements of the total safety culture interventions ought not to exist as a disjointed form in the organisation for the best results for the safety of manpower as well as business prosperity. Safety systems provide nothing more than a safety climate. At the same time, the safety culture interventions must move on with fast-tracking safety culture decisions. People need to feel psychologically safe to give optimum performances. The complicated human factors of safety and the complex human error in safety must be addressed by the corporates. Cultural safety and equitable care require workers migrated from diverse cultural backgrounds to be understood in their own cultural backdrop, language and communication so that any kind of racism or inequity is ruled out. The total safety culture framework integrates information across disjointed conceptualisations to clearly portray the dynamic nature of safety culture and the specific drivers of its development.*

Keywords: *Balancing, Safety, Systems, Safety Culture, Challenges, BBS*

INTRODUCTION

Dhara (2022) questioned, 37 years after Bhopal, why are industrial accidents still so common in India? The accidents spread across small, medium and large enterprises in the public and private sectors, including transnational companies. Business Manager (2022) emphasised that safety standards and systems flavoured and reinforced with compassion, human connection, and care for everyone in the workplace and social places make a bigger difference in our safety culture to save people from injuries and fatalities.

The Total Worker Health approach prioritises a hazard-free work environment for all workers. It also brings together all aspects of work in integrated interventions that collectively address worker safety, health, and well-being (NIOSH, 2022). Integrating safety interventions is crucial and a long-term commitment. But, there are challenges, especially in the beginning when a company launched the safety culture intervention, how to balance the two entities while the safety systems are weak and in the hands of a few safety and management staff. Safety culture presupposes that everyone, from the CEO to the last worker at the site, is involved in the safety culture of caring for each other. As one has to become a child to interact well with children, likewise manager has to stoop to the level of a worker to interact with workmen to understand them. A large number of factors affect the development and maintenance of a safety culture, including communication (explicit and tacit) on safety within an organisation, including incident

reporting systems, apportionment of blame, managing and learning from incidents, investment in safety systems, and emergency management procedures; training and awareness of human factors (e.g., teamwork, the effect of stress, and fatigue on performance); cultural influences, such as societal acceptance of open comment and a willingness to speak out (Arblaster, 2018).

The benefit of the presence of a safety culture in the workplace is that it has the potential to influence negative safety outcomes. In addition, safety compliance and safety participation as mediation paths would be the strengthening addition to an integrated and robust safety model (Hafeez et al., 2022). Occupational safety interventions directed at the corporate group or organisational level are more effective for improving safety and behaviour and reducing accidents at work than interventions directed solely at the individual level. Multifaceted measures are particularly effective. However, safety regulation and enforcement contribute to the prevention of accidents at work, but with lesser effect (Dyregborg et al., 2022).

Organisations with strong safety cultures are recognised as having an effective safety standard for integrated management systems. If the safety culture is weak, it will show in the poor design, poor strategies to achieve good production results, lack of systematic approach to the work processes and so on (IAEA, 2015). It is crucial to understand how safety culture ties in with an HSE management system, for example, an appropriate balance between production and

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safety issues (SaferMe team, 2019). The most successful types of interventions were those related to the importance of safety, leadership style and behavioural monitoring (Aburumman et al., 2019). Organisations with strong safety cultures are not characterised by a complete absence of adverse events but by their commitment to capturing and responding to these events, recognising how each one gives valuable insight for further system improvement. Unsafe cultures, in contrast, can be highlighted by a lack of trust, fear of speaking up, absence of transparency, incivility, or even workplace violence. A robust safety culture includes several fundamental elements, such as: a) Psychological safety: In a psychologically safe environment, individuals feel comfortable, even obligated, to discuss adverse events and near misses in an open and transparent manner, with the goal of improving safety and quality of care. b) Just Culture: Just Culture guides an organisation's response to accountability for errors based on a central belief that most adverse events reflect complex interactions of human factors within imperfect systems. c) Reporting, learning, transparency, and feedback: All team members recognise the value of reporting errors and near misses. Events are analysed, and learning is transparent and shared with all team members (ASA, 2022).

Analysis of accidents and incidents shows that human failure contributes to almost all accidents and exposures to substances hazardous to health. Many major accidents, such as Bhopal and Chernobyl, were initiated by human failure. In order to avoid accidents and ill-health, companies need to manage human failure or errors as robustly as the technical and engineering measures they use for that purpose (Health & Safety Executive, 2023). Human factors (positive or negative) are the organisational factors or situations that impact people's actions and mindsets. Supportive factors would reinforce safety culture, whereas negative/reactive factors impede the safety behaviours of the workers. Managers and supervisors need to be trained to deal positively with stress and mental health issues of the employees to augment the safety culture. Similarly, situational factors like time pressure, fear, lack of resources create a mindset that nobody takes safety decisions, and safety culture takes a back seat, and incidents creep in, taking a toll on people and property. How organisations' leadership respond in such situations matters most in re-building positive safety culture.

As a ground reality, most companies take safety culture implementation as a face-saving exercise to suit business perspective because the long-term commitment is a bit harder for them. Thus, they do their bit and sit back to wait and watch for incidents. Some organisations set in a safety culture intervention but did not continue as because they largely dwelt on individual behaviours, not organisational behaviours. It is considered that the cluster of open conversations across levels over a variety of organisational

factors (such as rewards and relationships, perceptions and passions, beliefs and barriers, would re-create a new organisational behaviour pattern to follow, implicitly put as behaviour-based safety (BBS) 2.0. The challenges of implementing BBS 2.0 are manifold, but the chances of succeeding in safety culture would be maximised, as the focus is on the open conversations and dialogues about all the behaviours and antecedents related to safety culture in the organisation. If the employees feel that something new and positive in the organisation is going on, then it should continue over the years to become a norm, culture and a people's value. BBS, especially in its more recent incarnations, such as so-called BBS 2.0, go beyond a strict focus on reducing injuries (and oftentimes, unfortunately, blaming the victim) to take a more holistic approach that focuses not only on behaviours but work environment, cultural antecedents, systems and employee attitudes to strengthen organisational cultures, values and performance (Johnson, 2021). The change in positive safety culture has happened over the years, and its sustainability need to be constantly explored. The management should continuously monitor and evaluate their strategies while delivering multifaceted interventions to be more specifically focused and to motivate workers to be enthusiastic in sustaining a safety culture (Wong et al., 2021). Sembcorp Energy India Limited (SEIL) manages Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) responsibility as its core value (SEIL, 2023a). To further strengthen the safety culture and secure a positive behavioural change within the workplace, SEIL has implemented and integrated BBS into its safety systems across all assets. ISO 45001:2018 mandates that human competence and behavioural elements need to be considered in risk assessment and as an internal issue for managing risks (SEIL, 2023). Importantly, the success of a safety culture does not mean a destination, but it is a roller coaster with ups and downs (Tata Steel, 2021).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To explore the challenges and issues while integrating and balancing the safety systems and positive safety culture.
- To explore the Total Safety Culture (TSC) Interventions.
- To explore how to achieve a good balance between safety systems and safety culture.

Sample and Sample Size

252 industry professionals participated in the study as part of an action field survey with the researcher. These research participants had been implementing behavioural safety compliance culture at their work sites. The research participants included the CEO, Directors, Managers, Heads of Departments, and Safety Professionals belonging to the

public and private industrial sectors, including chemicals, construction, gas, power and steel, across Indian locations.

Participants were selected from the researcher's contact list and invited by WhatsApp and e-mail to complete the online survey. The sampling method used was non-random convenience sampling.

METHOD

Both primary data (interviews, discussions) and secondary data (incident and accident rates) were collected. Interviews based on open-ended questions and personal in-depth discussions were conducted through remote data collection techniques over 3 months (during Oct-Dec 2022) from diverse locations and organisations in India. This is a concept-building, innovative and exploratory research design with the involvement of field professionals as study participants, using the qualitative descriptive framework. This study is part of an ongoing interdisciplinary intervention of behavioural science, management and industrial safety disciplines and part of a national longitudinal action survey in India. The crucial element in this research was data collection conducted by means of controlled interviews and questionnaire surveys in the organisations. Their responses to the relevant questions were collated. Eeckelaert et al. (2011) suggested that the safety culture can be assessed using questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and observations. In practice, quantitative questionnaires are the simplest and cheapest assessment method and the most widely implemented in the industry.

The study results, and implications are reflected below from a rigorous review of safety culture literature and experiences shared by the industry leaders across organisations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are categorised into three themes and discussed here below.

- Challenges and issues in balancing the safety systems and positive safety culture.
- Total Safety Culture (TSC) Interventions.
- How to achieve a good balance between safety systems and safety culture?

Challenges and Issues in Balancing the Safety Systems and Positive Safety Culture

HSE professionals emphasised balancing each of the challenges and issues in percentages while integrating the safety systems and safety culture (Table 1). Though safety culture and systems complement each other to be effective, both have unique core operatives and distinct aspects to

function that cannot be compromised. Aligning safety culture with performance analysis is important for bringing all operations people together. Not following safety culture intervention, organisations are almost three times backwards to the global practices and just focusing passively on the safety systems. By following safety cultural practices as long-term intervention, this gap is closed, and organisations are almost at par with the world practices. The efficient safety management system ought to be based on safety awareness that should then become a culture in the industry. Efficient safety culture should be demonstrated to the public as a good value business (Misnan, 2007). The Plan, Do, Check, Act approach achieves a balance between the systems and behavioural aspects of safety management (HSE, 2022).

Table 1: Percentages of HSE Professionals Emphasising the Challenges and Issues in Balancing the Safety Systems and Positive Safety Culture (N=252)

1. Enforcement and soft peddling culture transformation - 89%.
2. Involvement of all workforce by regular training - 84%.
3. Safety systems are weak such as SOP, work permit system - 81%.
4. Safety Resources are insufficient - 75%.
5. Management will to safety is poor - 70%.
6. Clarity of safety culture roadmap - 63%.
7. Need to Strengthening safety procedures - 55%.
8. Resolve Safety budgeting issues - 52%.
9. Willing to continue the long-term safety culture - 50%.
10. Meeting time of Directors for safety - 46%.

There is a need to check the pros and cons of each of these challenges while balancing safety systems and safety culture. Enforcement and reinforcement are both part of the soft-peddling culture transformation with the involvement of all workforce. Most companies have safety systems, but they are passive and weak. Safety resources are insufficient, and the management's will for safety is poor. The clarity of the safety culture roadmap is inadequate. There is a dire need to strengthen safety procedures and resolve safety budgeting issues. Organisations willing to continue the long-term safety culture is an issue, and meeting time of directors for safety is scarce. When employees see that leadership truly cares for them, the relationship is strengthened, and safety is more assured (Sears & Sullivan, 2022).

Safety should be more than just the focus of a few designated roles within an organisation. Instead, a successful safety program requires creating a culture of safety that permeates all departments and all levels of a company. Organisations that embrace worker safety in a holistic way strengthen employee loyalty and build trusted relationships between workers and management, ultimately increasing productivity, helping attract and retain top talent, and reducing costly turnovers. A culture focused on safety directly correlates with business performance. "When workers are getting hurt, it's a sign that

things aren't going right," says David Michaels, eight-year OSHA Assistant Secretary of Labor, whose work focuses on helping companies be "safe, productive, and profitable at the same time." In other words, safety isn't a discrete issue for companies: it's actually a key performance indicator of an organisation's overall operational effectiveness (Blackline Safety, 2021). Safety is an emotional trigger that employees receive from each other.

Total Safety Culture (TSC) Interventions

Corporations need to take insights beyond the safety culture and safety systems. A positive safety culture helps organisations achieve their ultimate goal of achieving better safety performance. However, the process of understanding and improving a safety culture can be way beyond achieving vision zero. The best way to do this is by tracking the right data efficiently, which is best achieved by using an automated safety data management system (Easton, 2011). Many organisations are not able to resolve human factors of safety such as teamwork, group dynamics, groupthink, relationships, stress, pressure, fear, fatigue, mental health, sub-group cultures and so on. While the safety culture refers to the overall culture of an organisation as a whole, safety culture is just one aspect of the total work culture values and virtues. Promoting a positive safety culture can reduce stress at work (Pearson, 2021).

Total safety culture is a long and continuous journey strengthening and consolidating each of the elements involving everyone from top to bottom. Many organisations leave the safety culture interventions in-between at some stage. Table 2 reveals the percentage of HSE professionals favouring each of the TSC interventions that must be implemented by the organisations.

Table 2: Percentages of HSE Professionals Emphasising Total Safety Culture (TSC) Interventions (N=252)

1. Robust Safety systems with digital intervention: positively reinforcing antecedents for managing all safety issues such as barriers, resources, safety controls - 92%.
2. Safety culture: long term behavioural interventions with fast-tracking action plan - 90%.
3. Psychological safety: do people feel psychologically safe in an organisational context? - 88%.
4. Human factors in organisational cultural context: do people feel very strained with occupational stresses, workload, decision latitude issues? - 86%.
5. Human error in organisational cultural context: human cognition, decision making, fear, pressure. How companies handle group conflicts and differences that delay safety culture decisions. The Bhopal tragedy and the IOCL Jaipur fire incident were the result of top level dis-engagement with the safety culture of their respective companies effecting into human error and poor decision making for actions needed to correct unsafe antecedents at sites. Human error is not personal error but in organisational cultural context - 80%.

6. Cultural safety and competency: do people feel being understood with due respect to their cultural background and beliefs, and how companies respond to these factors effectively? - 78%.

7. Integrating and Reviews by the topmost leaders on all the above six interventions towards a goal of Vision Zero harm - 75%.

These above-said seven elements ought not to exist in disjointed forms in the organisation for best results for the safety of manpower as well as business prosperity. Safety systems, though they provide only and nothing more than a safety climate, must be handled with a single window for closing all safety issues. At the same time, the safety culture interventions must move on with fast-tracking safety culture decisions. Thereon, people need to feel psychologically safe to give optimum performances. The complicated human factors of safety and the complex human error in safety must be addressed by the corporates. Cultural safety and equitable care require workers (Fig. 1) at the last rank and file or less educated contract staff migrated from diverse cultural backgrounds or locals to be understood in their own cultural backdrop, language and communication so that any kind of racism or inequity is also ruled out. Integration of all these above elements of the total safety culture is absolutely crucial and holistic over a period of time. The recommendations for the industry are in terms of implementing a safety climate as a form of social control over safety performance. The most compelling rationale for including safety climate and culture within systems models is the notion of bottom-up control. Bottom-up control is likely to be more effective and sustainable under the types of conditions faced by high-hazard organisations in the modern age, where uncertainty, interdependence, and dynamic environments are encountered routinely (Casey et al., 2017).



Fig. 1: Workers Safety with Tool Box Talk (TBT)

Eliminating indigenous and ethnic inequities require addressing the determinants of health and safety inequities which includes institutionalised racism, and ensuring a system that delivers appropriate and equitable care. To do this, we must be prepared to critique the taken-for-granted power structures and to challenge the cultural systems rather than prioritise becoming competent in the culture of others. A move to cultural safety rather than cultural competency is recommended (Curtis et al., 2019). The management should continuously monitor and evaluate their strategies while

delivering multifaceted interventions to be more specifically focused and to motivate staff to be enthusiastic in sustaining a safety culture. The change in positive safety culture over the years and its sustainability need to be further explored (Wong et al., 2021).

How to Achieve a Good Balance between Safety Systems and Safety Culture?

Table 3 revealed how to achieve a good balance between safety systems and safety culture, as expressed by the HSE heads of companies who implemented safety culture interventions over the years. A Robust Safety Management System firmly implemented with human touch and care with an intent of learning and improving is necessary. This will help build an Interdependent and Learning culture with a commitment to improve continually. We should develop a culture of 100% compliance with the system developed; otherwise, hefty fines. If the seat belt is provided in the car, it must be used by the passenger, otherwise no point in talking systems. Good safety systems (adherence) drive good safety culture and vice versa. The relation between safety systems and safety culture is like mother and child. Safety culture always takes care of safety systems, like a mother taking care of her child. We should imbibe safety systems in our culture, which will be part of our life and generations to come, by providing behavioural training as well as regular review of system effectiveness by involving people. Safety systems and culture are two sides of a coin. To develop a safety culture, organisations should have a strong safety system. It can be a good balance through the involvement of the top management and the development of positive safety culture. The system and culture are a 70:30 ratio. Behavioural safety is the right approach. But without a positive health and safety culture, you're never going to get the best results (Haspod, 2020). Developing a strong safety culture has the direct greatest impact on incident and accident reduction in any workplace (Schonscheck, 2021).

Table 3: Percentages of HSE Professionals Emphasising How to Achieve a Good Balance between Safety Systems and Safety Culture? (N=252)

1. Robust Safety Management System firmly implemented with human touch and care with an intent of learning and improving is necessary. This will help build Interdependent and Learning culture with commitment to continually improve - 90%.
2. We should develop culture of 100% compliance of the system developed otherwise hefty fines. If seat belt is provided in the car, it must be used by the passenger, otherwise no point of talking systems - 87%.
3. Good safety systems (adherence) drive good safety culture and vice versa - 86%.
4. By providing behavioural trainings - 85%.

5. Regular review of system effectiveness by involving people - 81%.
6. It can be good balance through the involvement of the top management and development of positive safety culture. The system and culture are 70:30 ratio. Behavioural safety is the right approach - 79%.
7. Good Relations rather good balance. Relation between safety systems and safety culture is like mother and child. Safety culture always takes care of safety systems like a mother taking care of her child. - 70%.
8. Safety system and culture are two sides of a coin. To develop safety culture, organisation should have strong safety system - 66%.
9. We should imbibe safety systems in our culture which will be part of our life and generation to come - 60%.

CONCLUSION

Balancing organisational safety systems and safety culture underlines that the Total Safety Culture (TSC) framework synthesises information across fragmented conceptualisations to clearly depict the dynamic nature of safety culture and specific drivers of its development. TSC development may depend on employee learning from behavioural outcomes, conducive enabling factors, and consistency over time (Bisbey et al., 2019). The total system safety integration approach not only delivers a positive safety culture but also enhances other performance metrics such as increased organisational citizenship behaviours, reduced employee turnover, enhanced engagement, organisational learning, creativity and so on (Institute of Organisational Psychology NZ, 2021). Safety perceptions differ significantly among groups within an organisation. An integrated approach in the development of an organisation's safety culture may be useful for an in-depth analysis of the criticality and the adoption of appropriate improvement strategies (Tocco et al., 2022).

Industries are fast increasing in numbers, and so are the risks, fires, fatalities, incidents and accidents. Organisational safety is to be treated more than its celebrations and certifications. The elements of total safety culture interventions ought not to exist in disjointed form for the best results of safety for manpower as well as business prosperity (Lal, 2023). A safety professional's ultimate goal is to achieve a total safety culture (TSC) within his/her organisation. In a TSC, everyone feels responsible for safety and pursues it on a daily basis; employees go beyond the call of duty to identify unsafe conditions and behaviours and intervene to correct them; safe work practices are supported via rewarding feedback from peers and managers; people actively care on a continuous basis for safety; safety is not a priority that can be shifted depending on situational demands, rather safety is a value linked with all other situational priorities (ProQuest, 2023).

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