

Leadership Attributes for Corporate Safety Culture

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Abstract

The positive safety culture at work sites is a buzzword today. Safety culture is the business strategy, and without leadership's active involvement, this is not possible to achieve. The focus of this paper is to describe and simplify the leadership attributes as the strategic drive of executing safety culture for the benefit of the industry. Some salient features discussed are safety criticalities, the role of reward and recognition in safety culture, safety culture management: a ritual or a reality, change in safety culture is possible by employees' involvement, safety culture and transformational leaders, presence of top management at the site for safety culture, top management re-orientation for safety culture, profit-oriented organisations and safety culture, a test of 100 per cent safety culture, safety culture sensitivity, under which conditions, safety culture rules are bypassed/deviated in order to meet projects results, balancing positive safety culture with consequences management, environment focus, and safety culture observations. This paper serves the literature reviews, case briefs, and experiences of field experts/practitioners and highlights how leaders' attributes deliver change through the safety of cultural intervention through their leadership's commitment, passion, and time.

Keywords: Leadership, Attributes, Corporate, Safety, Culture

Introduction

Having seen significant improvements in accident rates in the last 40 years, companies in the industry now show a greater focus on the development of safety cultures throughout their organisations and workplaces. However,

there is a lack of research examining the different safety initiatives and strategies practised in the industry today. There is a need to explore the potential challenges and consequences of the development of safety cultures in the industry. However, it is important to emphasise the opportunities to approach safety culture from different perspectives than those common today (Sundström & Nygren, 2023).

The very first challenge is that the safety culture is arguably a poorly articulated concept, whereby many different definitions (Lal & Choueiri, 2023), studies and field surveys (Lal, 2023) indicate that there are several critical challenges in the transformation of the safety culture for corporates as follows:

- Companies design safety culture intervention enthusiastically, so why don't they continue?
- Business contexts in India do not allow managers for stringent safety enforcement.
- Business safety or human safety is a critical concern for organisations.
- Are managers well aware of building a positive safety culture?
- What are the big reasons for the un-sustainability of safety culture in companies?
- Are we meeting standards of safety ethics in our industry?
- Are organisations showing commitment to evolving a positive safety culture?
- What are the standards of a positive safety culture for an organisation?
- How critical is it to introduce the culture of psychologically safe environments (PSE)?
- Are management looking for 'just training' or safety culture transformation?

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- Is it developing a positive safety culture or a positive organisation?
- Are there many bottlenecks in management decisions for developing a safety culture?
- How important is the history of safety of a company in building safety culture?
- Is emotional connection difficult for managers in building an ethical safety culture?
- What is the impact of perceived severity of incidents on business for safety culture response?
- Are safety culture reviews and continuous improvement happening for life-saving processes?

Table 1 provides a summary of the eleven themes and the number of studies identified incorporating each theme. The most commonly assessed dimensional themes present in over half of the current approaches to assessing safety culture include leadership; perceptions of safety; teamwork and collaboration; safety systems; prioritisation of safety; and resources and constraints (Churrucá et al., 2021).

Table 1: Safety Culture Dimensions

Theme	Definition	No. studies/surveys used in (%)
Leadership	Leadership, their support, and commitment to safety.	85 (77.3)
Perceptions of safety	Perceptions of how safe the organization is.	65 (59.1)
Teamwork and collaboration	Working together as a team and coordination of care among staff.	61 (55.5)
Safety Systems	Systems, procedures and processes exist that facilitate patient safety (eg, rewards, reporting systems).	58 (52.7)
Prioritization of safety	Shared belief, behaviors and norms in which staff in the work area prioritize and value safety.	59 (53.6)
Resources and constraints	Resources for safety including staffing, equipment, lack of time and training.	58 (52.7)
Reporting and just culture	Willingness to report and a culture that does not assign blame.	54 (49.1)
Openness	Open communication, staff feeling comfortable to express their issues or concerns and question behaviors.	54 (49.1)
Learning and improvement	A focus on learning from mistakes, responding to, and improving systems.	51 (46.4)
Awareness of human limits	Awareness of individual ability to be safe and how that can be limited by various factors (e.g., fatigue).	24 (21.8)
Wellbeing	Job satisfaction, burnout and other psychosocial factors.	17 (15.5)

Eliminating fatalities and serious injuries is the main challenge for the global industry. The focus is to provide the industry with actionable recommendations and passionate leadership guidance to create safer and healthier workplaces (World Steel Association, 2022).

Major Objective

The objective of this study is to explore the leadership attributes of corporate safety culture to deliver and drive change through safety cultural intervention.

Sample

200 industry professionals participated in the study; those included were the CEO, Directors, Managers,

Heads of Departments, and HR/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 a non-random convenience sampling.

Method

Interviews based on open-ended questions and personal in-depth discussions were conducted through remote data collection techniques over 3 months (during June-August 2023) from diverse locations and organisations in India, using the qualitative descriptive framework. This study is part of an ongoing national longitudinal action

survey. The responses to the relevant questions were collated. 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

This paper dwells on 14 aspects of leadership attributes for safety culture as below.

As per project sites' practice, the management needed three H attributes:

- Honesty for safety, which means transparency and not hiding any at-risk behaviours.
- Hard work for culture building, which means a commitment for long-term interventions.
- Heart for worker's well-being, which means connectedness with the lowest-level worker.

Broadly, all these three attributes are lacking in corporate culture and approach. Finally, the managements' criticality perception is culturally determined, and safety leadership helps in improving the perception of employees and contributing to a safety culture. The research results showed that the more deeply people sense safety leadership, the clearer their risk perception will be and the more helpful it would be in achieving safety performance. It is worth mentioning that risk perception can serve as a mediator, while safety culture can mediate the relationship between safety leadership and safety performance (Siao-Yun & Kuo Yen-Ku, 2023).

Safety Criticalities

Do companies wait for safety criticalities and incidents before they act, or do they plan well to prevent any such harm to assets and manpower at workplaces? The success in delivering targeted programmes that help prevent injuries and harm depends on collective action by government, businesses, sector and business leaders, unions, and workers. A joint review of the 2019-22 Harm Reduction Action Plan shows good progress continues to be made toward reducing workplace harm through the initiatives we're undertaking together. We continue to strengthen and evolve our partnership. Together, we

identified key areas of collaboration to progress over the next 12 months to maximise our collective effort and reduce workplace harm (WorkSafe, 2022).

People in organisations don't understand safety until it becomes critical. Workers follow what mindset is demonstrated by the management. Managers take safety only in a critical sense, which transpires into incidents and results in the loss of mankind, assets, and delays in meeting project deadlines. Practically, the industry is focused on cutting costs, savings, and profits, but these are not achieved without a safety culture. The more deeply people sense safety leadership, the clearer is their risk perception for achieving safety performance, leading to a safety culture.

Role of Reward and Recognition in Safety Culture

BBS culture development is restricted due to a lack of information collected about the cultural background of an organisation where BBS intervention is implemented. Moreover, BBS is not only about corrections of at-risk behaviours and barriers, but it is a great deal about how an organisation promotes, reinforces, and importantly celebrates safe behaviours through a reward and recognition (R&R) system on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. Quite often, organisations underestimate R&R, thinking that it is a waste of time activity, not realising its strengths and positive consequences and influence on the organisational culture-building process. The employers' practices must emphasise incentive programmes that aim to encourage and reward safe behaviour. Rewarding practices of large multinational companies should become more responsive to the individual employees and their specific socio-economic contexts and highlight the importance of employee involvement in reward programs (Houette & Mueller-Hirth, 2022).

Safety Culture Management: A Ritual or a Reality

Is safety management a ritual or a reality? Managements need to understand and focus accordingly and implement it as an integral value in the behaviour of all employees and workers. Many a time, safety remains as a speech

of leaders and does not go down the levels. Essentially, safety management is a goal, not just a one-time training of people at workplaces. It is, of course, a long-term work culture intervention for the leaders of any company. Unless efforts are made to understand and alter cultural drivers and share these findings within and across industries, the same accidents are likely to continue to occur (Emily et al., 2021).

Change in Safety Culture is Possible by Employees' Involvement

Change in safety culture is possible by employee actions, not just by thinking or speaking about it by leaders at meetings. If our organisational leaders do not choose to make a planned change in their safety culture, any employee is likely to be affected by the incidents. Safety communications by the operations managers were the best predictor of safety culture, as well as developing training programs to help managers understand safety roles (Tsung et al., 2010). A positive safety culture is a real-time intervention that provides measurable outcomes, transformational work experiences, activated leadership, and empowered employees (ILO, 2017).

Safety Culture and Transformational Leaders

True safety culture leaders are transformational leaders who act out of the box, not just transactional leaders who limit themselves to safety systems implementation only. The Campbell Institute believed that EHS is at the core of business vitality and is intrinsic to operational excellence and financial performance for organisations of all sizes and businesses to achieve and sustain excellence (The Campbell Institute, 2022).

Presence of Top Management at Site for Safety Culture

Positive body language and the presence of top management at the site are essential for sustaining a safety culture. If leaders wish to see the change amongst employees on the shop floor, they must go there amongst employees and workmen. The intervention requires management presence, interaction, and openness with people (Cooper,

2006). It is recommended that the organisation sets up a multidisciplinary steering team coordinated by a safety culture initiative leader (Manufacturing Safety Alliance of BC, 2022).

Top Management Re-Orientation for Safety Culture

Top management needs re-orientation for not falling into the trap of a dependent safety culture, and not holding safety officers but HODs responsible for incidents or bad news. In this regard, quarterly cross-functional reviews of safety culture by leaders is necessary. Leaders, at all levels, need to understand the range of health and safety risks in their part of the organisation and to give proportionate attention to each of them (Health and Safety Executive, 2022).

Profit-Oriented Organisations and Safety Culture

Profit-oriented organisations grow slower than safety-oriented organisations, and vice versa. 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). A business that has a poor safety culture won't just sacrifice its profits; it'll also put human lives at stake. A missing or lacking safety culture may lead to concerns such as increased injuries and deaths and more legal issues (Rupert, 2023).

Test of 100 Percent Safety Culture

Companies that assess and understand the core aspects of safety culture more comprehensively, including the contextual aspects of safety culture, achieve better results in terms of loss prevention. A 100 per cent safety implementation only can produce 100% results in every way desired. The business results and safety culture are

often in proportion with regard to each other. However, the industry didn't stand the 10-point test of 100 per cent in terms of:

- Acceptance of safety as a value.
- Participation of employees.
- Wholehearted management involvement.
- Top management push.
- HODs are coming forward to lead safety culture actions.
- Contractors inclusion.
- Safety is perceived as a business sustainability factor.
- Reactive versus interdependent approach.
- Focus for a supportive safety culture.
- Safety ethics (Lal, 2022).

Safety Culture Sensitivity

Safety culture sensitivity for employees, means coming together for the safety of each other at the workplace. The collective leadership for safety culture intervention has proven feasible to implement and effective in supporting teams to lead collectively to enhance safety culture. Traditional hierarchical leadership has been implicated in safety failings internationally. Given that safety care is almost wholly delivered by multidisciplinary leadership teams, there is a call for a more collective approach to the sharing of leadership and responsibility for the health, safety, and well-being of people (De Brún, 2020).

Under Which Conditions, Safety Culture Rules are Bypassed in Order to Meet Results?

Ethically, safety rules can never be deviated under any conditions. Practically, the managers break safety rules while meeting timelines, doing night work activities, when sufficient manpower is not available, or during the very initial project phase when not much critical work is carried out, or under a lack of observations of seniors. Responsible leaders can enforce and implement safety standards in the organisation through policy-making,

planning, training, and communication (Saleem & Malik, 2022).

Balancing Positive Safety Culture with Consequences Management

All around the world, building a positive safety culture is at the top of voices now. However, companies do lack an implementation strategic roadmap to work or walk on such long-term organisation-wide intervention. The leadership team's major responsibility is to make safety and health concerns a high priority in the organisation's strategic plan. The team must be established comprising of leaders plus the HSE senior officer (Safety Army, 2022). The negative approaches, like penalties, and punishments, don't work effectively. At the same time, balancing enforcements and behavioural reinforcements are necessary.

Environment Focus

If we don't save our environment, safety and health will fail automatically. Climate change is impacting us today, as we failed to save our environment. Hence, an equal emphasis is necessary for EHS aspects by all of us, including governments, organisations, individuals, etc. Organisations find their financial, social, and environmental risks, obligations, and opportunities better met when focused on safety in workplace culture. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) says: "Sustainable organisations strive to balance the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit to achieve long-term success and viability". EHS and sustainability are two sides of a coin (PULSE, 2021).

Safety Culture Observations

The safety culture observations card (Table 2) reflects the categories of safety behaviours for assessing the trends of at-risk behaviours for monthly monitoring by leaders and daily control by employees. It enhances understanding of the risks, and this learning culture can improve safety performance in preventing incidents (Suprpto, 2021).

Table 2: Safety Culture Observations Card

BBS OBSERVATION CARD (बीबीएस अवलोकन कार्ड)					
Observer's Name: (पर्यवेक्षक का नाम)		Employee ID: (कर्मचारी पहचान संख्या):			
Dept.(विभाग):		Project name & number (साइट का नाम और नंबर)			
Date & Time (तिथि और समय):		Area Visited:(क्षेत्र का दौरा किया):			
Sl.No . क्रम संख्या	12 Behaviour Categories (12-व्यवहार की श्रेणियाँ)	No. of Safe Behaviours (सुरक्षित व्यवहारों की)	No. of At-Risk Behaviours (जोखिम भरे व्यवहारों की)	No. of Spot corrections of At-Risk Behaviours (कार्य स्थल पर सुधार किए गए)	Remarks (टिप्पणियाँ)
1	PPE (पी.पी.ई.)				
2	Housekeeping (साफसफाई)				
3	Using tools and equipment (औजारों और उपकरणों का उपयोग करते हुए)				
4	Body positioning / protecting (शरीर की स्थिति/सुरक्षा)				
5	Material handling (सामग्री का संचालन करना)				
6	Communication - Verbal / Non-verbal (मौखिक और गैर-मौखिक संसृचना)				
7	Following procedures (प्रक्रियाओं का पालन करना या नहीं करना)				
8	Visual focusing (attentiveness) (दृश्य ध्यान केंद्रित करना)				
9	Using mobile while working (काम करते समय सेल फोन का उपयोग)				
10	Road Safety (सड़क सुरक्षा)				
11	Personal Health and Hygiene related issues. (व्यवसायिक स्वास्थ्य और स्वच्छता संबंधी)				
12	Emotional Care (भावनात्मक देखभाल)				

Note: For special remark please mention below for any Barriers, resources, unsafe conditions etc. (नोट: विशेष टिप्पणी के लिए कृपया नीचे)

12 Strategies while approaching Observee (ऑब्जर्वी के पास पहुँचते समय रणनीतियाँ)	
1	Parikrama (परिक्रमा) Take an observation round of your unit/plant/area. (अपने क्षेत्र का निरीक्षण करें।)
2	Prashna (प्रश्न) Put a question to observee whether he / she is safe. (प्रश्न रखें कि वह सुरक्षित है या नहीं।)
3	Prashansa (प्रशंसा) Praise his / her safe behaviours to reinforce. (उनके सुरक्षित व्यवहार की प्रशंसा करें।)
4	Pariwartan (परिवर्तन) Convert his / her unsafe behaviours to safe. (उनके असुरक्षित व्यवहार को सुरक्षित में परिवर्तित करें।)
5	Prashikhann (प्रशिक्षण) Educate /re-train him / her for his / her unsafe behaviours. (उसके असुरक्षित व्यवहार के लिए उसे शिक्षित/पुनः प्रशिक्षित करें।)
6	Pratigya (प्रतिज्ञा) Take an oath not to repeat unsafe behaviours. (असुरक्षित व्यवहार न दोहराने की शपथ लें।)
7	Prachar (प्रचार) Ask an observee to observe another co-worker. (एक पर्यवेक्षक को दूसरे सहकर्मी का निरीक्षण करने के लिए कहें।)
8	Prarthana (प्रार्थना) Repeatedly request for safe behaviours.(सुरक्षित व्यवहार के लिए बार-बार अनुरोध करें।)
9	Promise (वादा) Seek promise from him/her: I care for you, do you care for me? (उससे वादा मांगें: मुझे आपकी परवाह है, क्या आपको मेरी परवाह है?)
10	Pursue (अनुवर्तन) Follow-up on his / her at risk behaviours. (उसके जोखिम भरे व्यवहारों पर अनुवर्ती कार्रवाई करें।)
11	Puraskar (पुरस्कार) Spot-recognition for a changed behaviour. (बदले हुए व्यवहार की तुरंत पहचान।)
12	Patience (पैर) For permanent change : Prampara and Prakriti. (स्थायी परिवर्तन के लिए.)

Conclusion

Poor quality safety culture may mar business growth, which is what the industry would expect (Lal, 2021). The safety leadership steering team is required to spend sufficient time every month and work on the weak points of the culture (Williamsen, 2021). Leaders need

to pay attention to a variety of attributes/factors (Table 3), such as perception of safety criticalities, the role of reward and recognition in safety culture, safety culture management: a ritual or a reality, change in safety culture is possible by employees’ involvement, safety culture and transformational leaders, presence of top management at the site for safety culture, top management re-orientation for safety culture, profit-oriented organisations and safety culture, test of 100 per cent safety culture, safety culture sensitivity, under which conditions, safety culture rules are bypassed/deviated in order to meet projects results, balancing positive safety culture with consequences management, environment focus, and safety culture observations. The leadership attributes can surely deliver change through the safety of cultural intervention through their leadership, commitment, passion, and time. The challenge to the industry is that the leaders as key players deliver time for driving change (Hackitt, 2022).

Table 3: Leaderships Attributes for Safety Culture

1. Safety criticalities
2. Role of Reward and Recognition in Safety Culture
3. Safety management: a ritual or a reality
4. Change in safety culture is possible by employees’ involvement
5. Safety culture and Transformational leaders
6. Presence of top management at site for safety culture
7. Top management re-orientation for safety culture
8. Profit oriented organisations and safety culture
9. Test of 100 percent safety culture
10. Safety culture sensitivity
11. Under which conditions, safety culture rules are bypassed in order to meet results?
12. Balancing positive safety culture with consequences management
13. Environment Focus
14. Safety Culture Observations

Site Heads and HODs are naturally focusing more on production targets than safety implementation. These trending behaviours of leaders are disturbing and a warning for incidents to set in. The company’s directors need to act upon it immediately for business sustainability.

Site Heads are generally not safety-minded; they believe in delivering numbers of production and profits. Site Heads need to review the status of safety culture every month along with HODs, corporate HSE Heads need to

monitor safety culture progress, and Directors need to reinforce quarterly with appreciation and gaps notification. Business leaders' involvement is useful for creating a positive safety culture (Dahl et al., 2022). It is worth mentioning that risk perception can serve as a mediator, while safety culture can mediate the relationship between safety leadership and safety performance (Wei & Kuo, 2023).

As a matter of fact, only a few companies are focused on long-term safety culture intervention. The leaders need to aim for a decrease in the quantity and severity of incidents and injuries. Improving safety culture is demonstrated in these events occurring, even if they did not follow a predictable path or happen overnight (Williams, 2023). The action points for top leaders are to engage corporate/front-line leaders for spot-correction of at-risk behaviours and barriers, guiding and handholding teams, guide weekly assessments and quarterly reviews, and achieve continual improvement for safety cultural change. The board of directors must provide active and visible leadership and direction on occupational health and safety (Health & Safety Executive, 2022a).

The industry should push for a culture change in 2023 regarding the way that risks to workers' health, safety, and well-being are managed (Kamarajan, 2023). CEOs need to write and speak in a way that ensures their company's commitment to a strong safety culture as a key strategic element of their business model (Craig & Amernic, 2023). Behavioural safety culture decisions, especially the formation of leadership steering team members and the performance of these members in the implementation of behavioural safety are strongly associated with the overall worker well-being program and safety culture (Adair et al., 2023).

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