

Safety Culture Change Process and Transformational Communication

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Introduction

This paper will refer to a *transformational change process*. It is not something organizations view lightly because it requires significant investment in time and financial resources. In the arena of health and safety it can be driven by external forces such as:

- When a company adopts innovative technologies to compete in the marketplace, it may require drastic changes in safety management processes and team structure.
- During strategic changes such as mergers or acquisitions always require attention to cultural changes.
- Implementing significant cultural changes following a major problem such as an environmental disaster.
- Offers a new core product or service to address external market forces.

It is popular convention that people are the most significant barrier to transformational change because it means changing behavior. And people don't like change. So, as transformational change increases in scale and complexity, leaders face more significant pressure to ensure that the people and culture sides of change get as much attention as the process and technology sides.

There are two mistaken assumptions in this statement. The first is that people are a barrier to be overcome. The second is that the need to ensure that people and culture receive equal attention to the technical aspects of the work does not increase because of change. It is always the most pressing need of organizational success. Why these beliefs are so detrimental and false will be covered in the next section.

The recommendations found here speak to transforming health and safety performance. Yet, they will change the entire organization. That is because change occurs within and is driven by communication. Producing change is not a process that uses communication as a tool, but rather it is a process that is created, produced, and maintained by and within communication. (Ford & Ford, 1995, p. 542).¹

Much of this material is based on an EFCOG guide to monitoring and improving safety culture. There is no sense in starting from scratch when a group of highly experienced individuals have shared their knowledge so generously.

As noted throughout this paper, significant contributions were included from trusted experts that worked in these areas for many years. They bring the EFCOG work up to date; they know what works and doesn't work.

Philosophy of Transformational Conversation

Philosophy is not a discipline typically included in business courses even though it underlies all success and failure in the business world. It is not intellectual pursuit. Philosophies are things we

¹ Ford, J. D., & Ford, L. W. (1995). The role of conversations in producing intentional change in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 541–570.

live by and are a matter of life and death for the human experience because of their powerful effect on human psychology. As human beings we long for certainty and predictability. We design all sorts of models to explain how and why things happen the way they do. Yet, something usually happens to unravel our plans.

Let's begin by spelling out a set of basic assumptions underlying a management philosophy based on the reality of existence. It is relevant to how we define effective communication. A manager that feels they cannot embrace these principles will experience limited success in any change effort.

- People are able and willing to contribute to the success of the organization.
- Accountability, discipline and the will to change are the outcome of relationships built on inclusion and psychological safety.
- The pursuit of safety in high risk environments is dynamic, not static. Therefore, effective communication is also dynamic and ongoing.
- There is no communication in the absence of relationship and trust.
- Conversation is communication understood.
- Conversation increases quality and frequency of shared information. Allowing adequate time for it is a priority. It always takes more time than you think, but the setbacks you avoid will more than make up for it.
- When speaking to employees assume competence. Assume you do not know half as much as the person doing the work.
- Building relationships increases trust and psychological safety. Use people's names. Ask them how they are and stop to listen.
- Compliance is not a driver; the importance/ value of the work is.
- Set the expectation that disagreement and questioning are expected.
- Blame is not an option. (Acknowledge errors and track down system failure.)

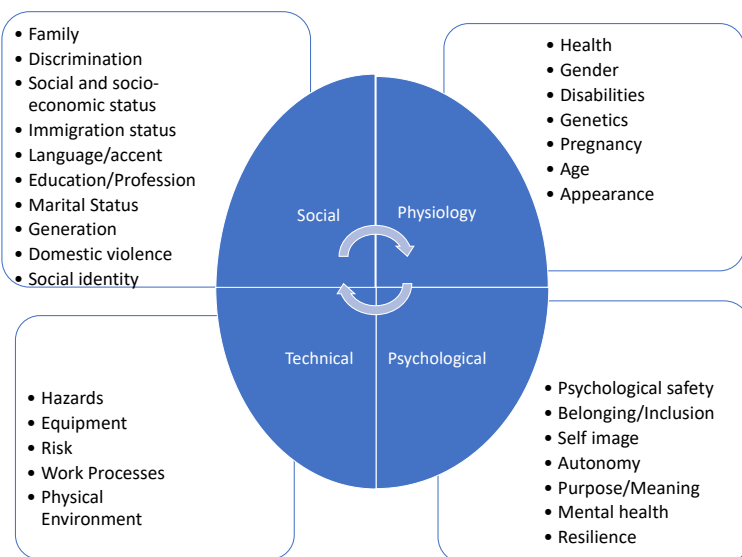
Finally, while all of the above is vitally important, we also need solid management systems and technical competencies to achieve excellence in organizational performance. Also a disclaimer—this is not about positive thinking. “Life is hard.”² No one ever promised that the quality of these interactions would result in employees who always behave and think the way you would like. Quite the opposite, flexibility in acceptance of personalities, habits and beliefs is an essential leadership capability.

Human nature is a deep well of resources always available to support, ignore or thwart management's efforts. Figure 1. Total view of human influences on organizational performance, shows the four major areas to consider addressing in transformational initiatives. Areas of Assessment from left to right:

² Setiya, Kieran. (2022). Positivity is overrated. NY Times.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/04/books/review/life-is-hard-kieran-setiya.html>

1. The **social** environment in which the individual operates at work and their home life. A person living in their car is likely to face more psychosocial hazards than someone living in a comfortable home.
2. The individual's **physical** condition. Is accessibility for all body types available? Are there health concerns that need to be addressed?
3. The **technical** environment involves the physical hazards, technology, tools and processes that can present a danger if not addressed by the safety management systems.
4. The level of mental health or **psychological** wellbeing. This is an entire topic in itself. We recommend you read Clive Lloyd's *Next Generation Safety Leadership*. Also Rosa Antonia Carrillo's *The Relationship Factor in Safety Leadership* (2020).

Figure 1. Total view of influences on organizational performance



There are overlaps between these areas. One example is psychosocial hazards in the work environment as well as in the larger society that affect psychological as well as physical health. Hazards in the technical environment can also impact psychological and physical health. Lastly, the body's physical condition and appearance affects our social identity and ultimately our self-image.

The purpose of this breakdown is to depict the complexity of the human side of the organization. Reductionist behavioral views are inadequate to understand human motivation or how to begin to facilitate change in an organizations. Of these four areas, the technical and physiological are the easiest change or improve. We can design safer technology or we can put in ramps or elevators for those who can't walk.

Executive Committee Leadership Team

There are multiple levels of leadership starting with the executive committee at the corporate level, union leadership onto managers, supervisors and frontline employee influencers. In my new book, *Health & Safety Leadership Strategy*, I present substantial evidence that most transformational efforts fail and the ones that do succeed have two things in common. Measures of success and a senior leadership team that meets weekly to discuss progress on the initiative.

Interestingly, experts claim that 70% of transformational efforts fail to reach their objectives and a McKinsey study found that only 25% of companies engaged in such efforts had a weekly executive leadership meeting to monitor progress. Perhaps it is a coincidence that these numbers come close to 100%, but intuition would indicate it isn't.

I have brought this up with a few potential clients who want to embark on a safety culture change process. The reaction is that the executive team would never buy into weekly executive meetings for a safety and health initiative. I'm not the only one having this experience. Per Clive Lloyd:

I often get told the same thing... executives wouldn't meet for that long... the reason given is that they're too busy, and safety is usually seen as an operational matter (yes, really!).

An executive recently felt it would be good for me to present to the executive team. They booked in a 4 hour session, but later came back and said it was only going to be an hour, as the CEO saw safety as an operational matter. When I presented to the executive group, the CEO acknowledged why it's important they are actively involved in the change process.

Think NASA, Volkswagen etc... the executives set the values (yet often have no idea what they are when I ask them)... if they are not engaged in (and SEEN to engaged in) a change process, the message to others is clear. You cannot at once say "safety is our highest priority" then say "but we are too busy to attend" without losing trust and creating cynicism ("anything before 'but' is bullish*it"). Lloyd, 2020)³

This is why my upcoming book is titled, *Health And Safety Leadership Strategy: How authentically inclusive leaders inspire employees to achieve extraordinary results*. There is no difference between improving safety performance, organizational effectiveness, increasing inclusion and belonging or profitability. My colleague, John Green, puts it well. "Safety is often a Trojan horse to bring in desired organizational changes. People tend to support goals where they see a direct benefit to themselves. That is certainly the case with health and safety."

I believe a big reason the executive committee does not meet on a weekly basis to evaluate progress on an initiative is due to a lack of psychological safety among them. Uncovering this obstacle would be difficult because admitting that you do not feel it is safe to fully express yourself could result in losing face in front of peers. This could only be accomplished by a strong

³ Lloyd, C. (2020). [Next Generation Safety Leadership: From Compliance to Care](#). CRC Press.

leader on the executive committee who recognizes the need for such safety. Or such a leader might call in an expert facilitator in these matters.

The next section from the EFCOG Guide focuses on roles, communication between the SLT and the HSTT, and external communication.

SLT: Senior Leadership Team

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) is defined as the most senior management personnel onsite charged with the safe operation of the organization. For example, the SLT could include high level functional area leaders in areas such as research, operations, support, maintenance, and human resources.

SLT Responsibilities

- Review safety culture data and recommendations to determine if action is necessary. (This input may be from a dedicated resource such as a social science subject matter expert, existing data reporting systems such as a company-wide dashboard, or a Safety Culture Improvement Team).
- SLT interactions should occur in a group setting to promote reflective conversation about safety culture.
- The SLT members should share their own interactions with organization personnel, field observations, and other individual experiences to help the SLT understand the organization's safety culture. The most valuable insight often comes from frank discussion of safety culture based on the SLT members' observations and insights.
- Document periodic review of safety culture. Follow-up actions should be tracked (e.g., through an issues management system or other means). Strengths and improvement opportunities should be communicated to the organization.
- Keep their organizations informed of safety culture initiatives to avoid duplication of efforts such as training. At the same time their organizations may already be working on initiatives that would support the safety culture effort and those can be added to the activity map.

H&S Transformation Team (HSTT)

The HSTT proactively monitors performance and processes inputs to identify emerging challenges and opportunities for improvement. The level of effort and formality used to conduct culture monitoring and periodic reviews should be tailored to the needs of the organization and be proportional to size, budget, and mission. A complex organization with multiple high risk facilities would likely benefit from a more structured approach, whereas a smaller organization could adopt a less formal approach.

HSTT Team Composition

HSTT members should represent a cross section of functional areas, be familiar with daily work activities, and have knowledge of Safety Culture principles. The team must have a common understanding of organizational goals and objectives and an appreciation of how safety culture influences operational performance. The HSTT must be trusted by the workforce and management. Team members should have broad-based operational experience, and some team members should have the ability to collect, analyze, and interpret data. It is strongly advised to train the team on the content of Attachment 10 (or equivalent), methods of changing behavior and culture and conducting culture evaluations. If an organization is not using a HSTT, a social scientist/organizational development professional may help identify and analyze available data to infer safety culture trends.

Allow time for the HSTT team to agree on the most important areas for monitoring and improvement and watch membership for attrition and fatigue. Likewise, management commitment is necessary to ensure HSTT members have adequate time allocated to monitoring duties to prevent burnout.

Union and Hourly membership

Union leadership and hourly employee participation is not a topic of the EFCOG Guide, however it is recommended that union members have a role. Most companies have safety committees or grassroots safety leadership teams that need to be included in the communication process.

HSTT Responsibilities:

- Analyzes data to determine performance areas to focus on (e.g., “What” is not working to expectations of published safety management systems).
- Uses walkarounds and two-way communication to directly observe behaviors related to performance issues (the “why” behind the “what”).
- Compares observed behaviors to desired behaviors (as defined by safety culture behavior attributes).
- Identifies gaps to recommend improvements in the work environment to improve behaviors.
- Makes recommendations to the SLT and agrees on actions.
- Keep their organizations informed of safety culture initiatives to avoid duplication of efforts such as training. At the same time their organizations may already be working on initiatives that would support the safety culture effort and those can be added to the activity map.

Overview of communications to design and sustain the safety culture change process

Meeting structure during the design process

Ongoing communication

Communication should be occurring throughout the health and safety (H&S) improvement process. The HSTT activity is not designed to replace primary communication between management and the workforce.

During the change process communications should provide continuity from previous messages. Over time, frequent, timely, honest, and transparent communication helps build trust and mutual respect between management, the workforce, and stakeholders. For example,

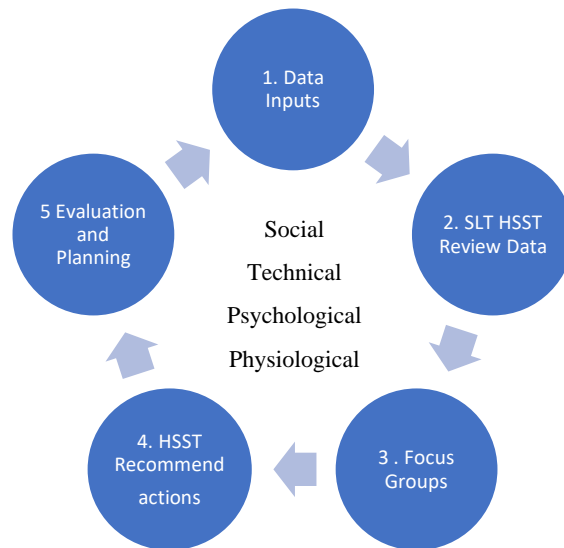
- After the results of a safety culture evaluation have been communicated, follow-up actions addressing comments show that management values input from the workforce.
- Integrate safety transformation communications into other, existing operational feedback mechanisms (e.g., contractor assurance system, causal analysis, lessons learned, and safety shares) to provide an organizational behavior component.
- Communicate the results of safety culture improvement efforts help everyone embrace the safety culture initiatives and desired culture of the organization during the conduct of their day-to-day work.
- Include celebrations of success as well as thoughtful communication of challenges.

A typical transformational communication plan analyzes the data gathered via surveys, focus groups and observations. The delivery is framed primarily around conversations, but will also include other venues. The team must decide:

- What are the messages?
- What is the value of the messages? What needs do they meet?
- Who are the audiences?
- Who will be starting the conversations?
- How can we prepare people for those conversations?
- When and how will they take place?
- How will we track progress and effectiveness of the communication plan?

Operation of the HSTT and SLT in the Data Collection and Assessment Process

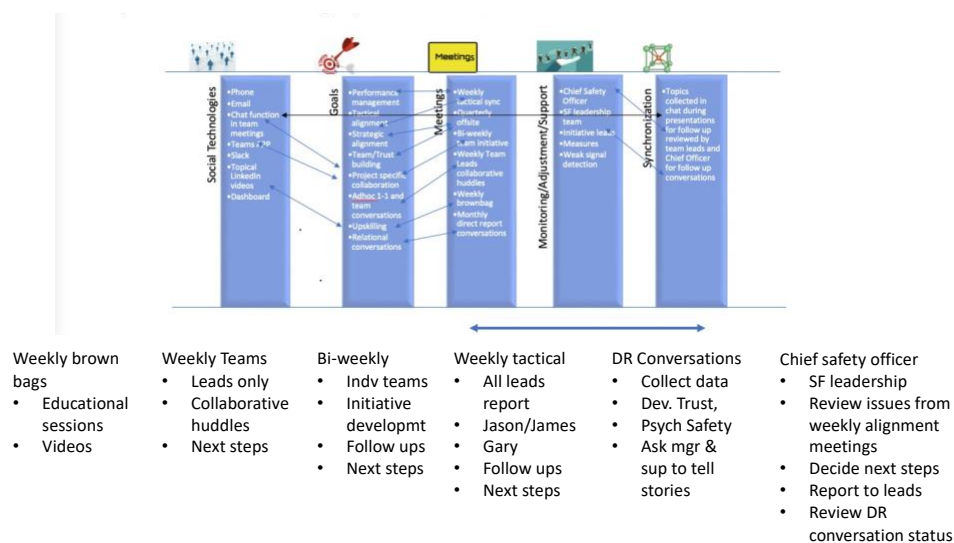
Figure 2. Path of data gathering and communication



1. Data Inputs: Surveys audits regulators employee concerns walkarounds conversations.
2. SLT HSST Sort topics and formulate questions for focus groups.
3. Focus Groups Fact and recommendation gathering conversations.
4. HSST: Sort, review & recommend experiments to managers.
5. Evaluation and next steps in strategic improvement process.

Figure 2, Path of data gathering and communication, depicts the path of data gathering and communication. At the center are the four areas that affect human performance: Social, technical, physiological and psychological. The exact order and who does each step is at the discretion of the organization. The integration of union leadership and employees play a role throughout.

Figure 3. Meeting system to create the conditions for transformational conversation



HSTT to SLT Communication

There should be a formal connection between the HSTT and SLT to facilitate communication and decision-making. The HSTT should invest the time to ensure the SLT sees the value of cultural insight so that the SLT owns/values the process and results. A key value to emphasize is avoiding complacency leading to a major event.

Clear roles must be established for both the HSTT and SLT regarding safety culture communication. **At least one member should participate on both the HSTT and SLT to provide continuity and promote efficiency in communication.** This person should provide the SLT with insight into how HSTT results were formulated and answer HSTT questions related to the SLT. The person should understand the connection between safety culture and successful mission accomplishment and be knowledgeable about how the HSTT achieves those results (i.e., understand the results and communicate the recommendations of the HSTT to improve the chance of mission success). In addition, SLT participation in HSTT activities sends a message that the SLT is committed to, and supportive of, those activities.

This is a suggestion for you to consider as part of the communication strategy with the directors. You are obviously well regarded and respected. So this is aimed at furthering behavior/attitudinal change using communication, psychological and political theory.

Let me begin by saying that the success of this initiative lies in the willingness of the directors to amplify psychological safety. This is done by investing time speaking 1-1 with direct reports and

expecting them to have 1-1 with their Direct reports. This communicates urgency, prioritization and intention.

Some of the recommendations below may require 1-1 conversations between Cedric and his peers or between you and your peers before or after the general presentation.

When communicating with the SLT and other senior managers:

Identify the audience – How much does management know about the topic? Some managers will be very familiar with the material being covered, while others may have just basic background knowledge and need more context. What areas are particularly relevant to them?

Message – What specific message is to be communicated to management? What are the most important points and what is the message? It is important to be direct and efficient in presenting the information; senior management has limited time and a wide range of issues demanding their attention. Stay focused on the core point(s).

Context – Why does the information matter to management? What is the significance and context? Show how the information relates to organizational goals and historical performance. What are the influencing factors? What are the potential risks, and what opportunities are being presented?

Quality of Information – What is the certainty of the data and conclusions? When presenting to senior management, data must be accurate and precise. How the information gathered and what was the potential flaws or gaps? Data can be ambiguous, and any attempt to draw conclusions from incomplete or incorrect data will be challenged.

Future Actions – When management understands the current status, where does that lead? Be prepared to discuss not only the current information, but also the recommended next steps. How will problems be addressed, and how will opportunities be exploited? When consuming management's time and attention, recognize the value of their time and tell them what they can do to help.

There are a variety of ways to present the HSTT information to senior management. Some examples include:

Dashboards – A dashboard is a data visualization tool that displays the current status of selected metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs). Dashboards consolidate and arrange numbers, metrics, and other information on a single screen. Dashboards may be general or tailored for specific roles, and can display metrics from a single point of view or from a wider perspective. Optimally, dashboards can pull real-time data to maintain a snapshot of the most current information, and can be customizable to the exact needs of the customer.

Scorecards – A performance scorecard is a graphical representation of an organization's progress toward some specified goal or goals. Both dashboards and scorecards measure performance against certain metrics and KPIs, but while a dashboard indicates the status at a specific point of time, a scorecard shows progress over time.

Scorecards can be tailored to the needs of the customer, and can be utilized to show trends and to identify short and long term effects of organizational changes.

Reports – A report can provide details on the data sources evaluated during a specific period and resulting analysis that substantiate subsequent actions and initiatives. The reports can also outline planned actions for the next period.

HSTT members serve a dual communication role. The initial communication role is to communicate to senior management/ leadership the results of the safety culture monitoring process. The second communication role is to provide clarity to the members' home organizations concerning the results.

Written communications

Communication vehicles such as e-mails, posters and newsletters should be used to ensure rapid and wide distribution of safety culture results and meaning to the organization, as well as other communication methods such as hard copies, use of multiple languages, videos, briefings, etc. If the facility has a communication organization, coordinating messaging can be done to promote efficient delivery and message cohesion. A good working relationship with the communication organization can also keep the HSTT in the loop if other organizations start to issue competing messages.

External Communication

Stakeholders are parties that have a vested interest in the successful accomplishment of the mission. Therefore, they have an interest in safety culture because it can impact mission success. The list of stakeholders varies from organization to organization but typically includes:

- Customers
- The community surrounding the site
- Corporate entities
- Subcontractors
- Elected officials
- Other contractors and entities (share best practices)
- Regulators
- Organized labor organizations

Communication with stakeholders constitutes external communication and therefore requires a different protocol and degree of rigor. Coordination with your organization's Public Affairs Office (or equivalent) is essential. Requirements may vary depending on where you are within the DOE enterprise (e.g., National Nuclear Security Administration vs. Office of Science). External communication tends to be more formal, requiring review and release by the technical information office and authorized derivative classifiers/review officials.

Examples of how safety culture monitoring results and associated improvements are communicated to stakeholders include:

- Safety culture sustainability plans submitted to DOE
- ISMS declaration (see DOE O 450.2 paragraph 4.c.)
- Informal safety culture forums at large sites where contractors can share information with each other and with DOE representatives

- Performance Evaluation Management Plan
- EFCOG meetings
- Community safety fairs/forums

Characteristics of Transformational Communication

This section reflects updated communication concepts in line with complexity management theory that are not currently in the EFCOG model.

This description of the people who work in the Utilities Sector from the EFCOG Guide should set the tone for organizational communication.

“In the Utilities Sector people know why they come to work, they know what their job is and how to do it, they know how to work with others in the organization to get the job done. Their work is more than a job; their labor and voluntary daily encounters with hazards are undertaken to make life better for others. What they do and how they do it is a part of their personal identity. They are members of unique professional families with relationships that last a lifetime. These are all critical factors to consider in communicating with the workforce.”

The overall purpose of the communication plan is to gain employee support and engagement for safety culture improvement. To do this the communications process must be crafted to create psychological safety, trust and inclusion. Leaders find that these efforts improve organizational effectiveness as well as safety performance.

Communication is a 2-way conversation

Organizational communication takes place at several levels. If it is not happening at all of these levels, the ones left out will get the message that they are not valued or respected. In addition, the SLT and HSTT should agree upon a set of questions and information points that need to be communicated in a dialogue or conversation, seldom in a one way format.

“Neuroscience and complexity principles are redefining the practices used in organizational change initiatives. For instance townhalls, videos with senior executive explaining the reason for change and written materials are still part of the communications mix. But the emphasis is on conversations in one on one and small groups that allow for clarification and expression of concerns. The information gathered in this way is then used to course correct the process. The management voice is always present via team leaders, supervisors, managers or executives. Neuroscience exposed the importance of belonging, inclusion, respect and autonomy in any process involving learning or change. These were not the focus of change management models in the past (Carrillo, 2022)⁴.”

Direct interpersonal communication between management and the workforce.

Routine informal conversations between managers and the workforce are an important method of communication. Management observations in the field are intended to stimulate conversation between managers and members of the workforce. Often, managers need training and coaching

⁴ Carrillo, R.A. (2022). Pending publication.

so they can have meaningful engagements with the workforce and to create a climate where person-to-person communication openly occurs.

Senior management needs to communicate directly to organizational members any planned adjustments necessary to address safety culture areas needing improvement to enhance mission effectiveness. This communication may need to be tailored to individual groups so that all personnel understand the message. **Management must clearly state an expected action, deliverable, and the intended impact of the action.**

A key benefit of monitoring safety culture is to stimulate two-way communication between management and the workforce. First communicate what the monitoring is telling the organization and second, identify the specific behaviors that lead to successes and challenges. The Following methods have been found helpful:

Management Walkaround Work Observations

Management real-time work observations help responsible managers understand actual job performance – rather than hoped for performance. Appendix A describes what these observations should look like and offers guidance to help observers optimize their time in the field. Like anything worth doing, however, observation efforts require management commitment and ongoing leadership. There are always challenges and setbacks in any significant change effort and observation programs are no exception. Based on actual implementation experience I will briefly, but candidly, discuss some of those challenges and pitfalls and how to minimize them (James Loud, 2022).

Monthly senior leadership team conversations

Input and learnings from "walkarounds" are shared by every top line manager (not the safety staff). These inputs are fed by walkaround input from every level of management below starting with field supervision. DuPont called their walkarounds "nested" audits and every level of management met monthly to discuss the audits with their next level of management. No one wants to look bad or unprepared in front of their boss.

Corrective actions generated from walkarounds were also quantified as a performance indicator. Although I never liked the compliance focus of DuPont's audits, I did like the way the sustained the process

Monthly 1-1 conversations between executives, managers and direct reports.

Operational issues as well as the safety culture initiative can be discussed. An agenda could include:

- Clarify priorities
- # of visits/conversations in the field and with direct reports
- Any support needed, barriers or risks?
- General check-in on wellbeing

Regular 1-1 conversations between supervisors and direct reports.

Frequency depends on number of direct reports. These should not start until supervisors have experienced several conversations with their boss and achieved a certain level of psychological safety.

Mandatory supervisor/employee conversations often fail because the parties do not see the benefit. For this reason it is important to involve supervisors in designing the types of questions and information that would be useful to gather. For example, once trust and psychological safety are present employees might share near misses or situations where they weren't sure how to manage risk. These one on one conversations are a much safer place to talk about these things than in safety meetings or pre-job briefs. Finally, some supervisors will need to learn how to conduct these conversations so that they feel confident.

Topics for Supervisory/team post-job conversations

- What went right?
- What went wrong?
- How did you deal with it?
- What did you learn?
- What can the organization learn?
- What can we change to be even better?

To make this effective, supervisors and managers need to be committed to listening, learning and positively acting on these "lessons learned" opportunities.

This worked—Stories from the field

I have some current experience with a large client who were doing quite well - but then made major changes to staffing, roles and positions With very little transparency, via emails, and essentially killed PS. Even though people didn't really know the executive, they feared them.

And intra team vs inter team PS. One team can be high in PS, but it doesn't go outside of their team. To me this is where the wider topic of trust comes in. Just because an executive is low in PS, some teams can be high in PS (that is, within their own teams they feel free to speak up ... usually a function of the local leadership) - but trust levels in the organization can be really low.

I've seen orgs with low OPS and high EPS, but have seen the opposite as well, decent OPS in work locations but stifling fears within the exec ranks

Work Observations: Challenges and Pitfalls

By James Loud

Observation Challenges

- **Motivating Managers** – Managers need to understand that they are accountable for knowing how safely (and efficiently) the work they are responsible for is actually performed. Managers should also understand that continuous improvement via manager/worker engagement is an organizational expectation. Practical goals and

metrics are important but the author has found that routine management discussions are perhaps the most effective means to ensure high quality observations and share learnings. These management team discussions identify issues that have surfaced during field observations, and the resultant improvement efforts to address them. Managers that chronically offer little input may require additional attention and coaching but the desire to avoid appearing like a slacker in front of their peers (and their boss) is generally sufficient motivation for meaningful participation.

- **Finding the Time** – Safety shouldn't be something you do only when you find the time. Managers are busy folks and seriously conducted observations do take a portion of their finite time. With the possible exception of first-line supervision, however, most managers need only spend a few hours a month looking at important work activities while partnering with their employees to improve operations. If safety really is an organizational value (not to mention “first” or “priority 1”) it's difficult to rationalize that spending such a modest percentage of time ensuring that their work is performed safely, is an undue burden. There are certainly few, if any, safety activities that will pay greater dividends.
- **Doing Them Right** – It is unfortunately true that some managers are simply not comfortable interacting positively with their employees. Whether or not such individuals should be in leadership positions is a moot point. We have to deal with the managers we have even if they are not necessarily the managers we want. Managers who lack social skills and/or come from a command and control background are a challenge to transition into effective observers. Since such managers are not comfortable interacting with their people, their field “observations” often become more like low value compliance inspections that focus on things (e.g., extension cords, ladders) rather than the work as a whole. Frankly, I believe that some managers are simply a lost cause. In general, however, most managers are capable of performing productive observations when provided clear expectations, sufficient training, ongoing coaching – and accountability. These provisions are not essentially different from what is needed to accomplish other important organizational objectives.

Avoiding Pitfalls

Some setbacks are unavoidable when implementing any new safety initiative. Keeping the following guidance in mind, however, should help you minimize some common observation pitfalls.

1. Keep your observations positive and fault free. Observations should help develop relationships where workers feel respected and empowered to bring up issues – without fear of intimidation or rejection. In other writings this is known as creating “psychological safety.”
2. Praise good performance – no “gotchas.”
3. *Listen* – humbly.
4. Know, and follow, the rules – no exceptions.

5. Be careful not to interfere unduly with work in progress, especially safety critical work. Wait for an appropriate time to interact with the workers.
6. Lastly, observations are your opportunity to not only enhance safety but to build personal and productive relationships with your workers. That effort will pay dividends in everything you do. Don't miss out!

Did not work—Stories from the field

- The CEO of a huge, multinational company decided to make an address in real time to his entire worldwide management team down to the site level. The address involved significant expense due to the state of communication equipment at the time and required almost half of the managers involved to attend in the middle of the night. The VP of EHS was excited at the prospect of the CEO really giving priority to safety and launching a new safety initiative that had just been approved. The CEO did promote safety but failed to mention the new initiative. When the VP pointed out the omission the CEO said that his omission in the one address would not compromise the importance of the new program. The disappointed VP mentioned that intelligent managers around the world would take what the CEO chose to discuss in such an important and unprecedented address as more important than anything he chose to omit. The CEO did not take the criticism well and the VP was reassigned to a regional position (Mathis, 2020)⁵.
- The manager of a complex of four petrochemical production units was concerned with the lagging indicators of his safety performance. He decided to get more personally involved in safety. One of his several chosen activities was to call anyone who was involved in an accident and anyone who turned in a near-miss report into his office for a personal visit. He thought this would demonstrate his concern for safety and possibly help him discover things he could do to improve. He felt successful when the number of accidents and near misses began to diminish and then disappear. He got a wake-up call when a near fatality happened and the investigation uncovered the fact that the risk involved was common, well known and repeatedly happening. After further talks with his safety professionals and workers involved, he discovered that his efforts had driven reporting underground. What he considered a demonstration of his caring about safety was perceived by workers as being called on the carpet for reporting. Their response was to quit doing what got them into trouble (Mathis, 2020).

Contributors (so far)

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Editor: Rosa Antonia Carrillo

⁵ Mathis, T. (2022). [How leaders undermine their safety programs. ProAct Safety Newsletter.](#)