



# **The Art of Assessing Health and Safety Cultures**

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# What is Culture?

- **cul-ture** (klchr) *n.*
- The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought.
- The predominating attitudes and behavior that characterize the functioning of a group or organization.
- The International Atomic Energy Agency IAEA (1991) defines safety culture as follows:
  - “Safety culture is that assembly of characteristics and attitudes in organisations and individuals which establishes that, as an overriding priority, nuclear plant safety issues receive the attention warranted by their significance.”

# Typical Methods to Assess HSE

- Documentation Review
  - Policies and procedures
  - Records
- Interviews
- Surveys
- Worksite Observations

# Why Typical Assessment Doesn't Evaluate Culture

- Heavy reliance on documented paper trail
  - Due diligence concerns
  - Easy to find
  - Easy to evaluate (exists or doesn't exist)
  - Only identifies aspects of the framework for a safety culture
  - Audit success (score/performance) recognizes "paper"
- Observations
  - Validate legislation, policy and procedure
  - Rarely assesses "why" observations exists

# Why Typical Assessment Doesn't Evaluate Culture – cont'd

## ➤ Interviews

- Closed questions
- Assumed “right answer”
- Rarely assesses effectiveness or what drives decision making

## ➤ Surveys

- Closed questions easier to log but less data
- Varied participant interpretation and understanding of the questions

# Visible Behavioral Traits of Organizations with a “Safety Culture”

- Senior Management Commitment to HSE
  - Not just “stated” but “demonstrated”
- Systematic and Strategic Approach to HSE - Integrated into decision making
- Absence of Safety vs Production Conflicts
- Adequate Resources & Staffing – sufficient and competent
- Open Communication

# Visible Behavioral Traits of Organizations with a “Safety Culture”

- Clear Roles and Responsibilities - HSE is “the work” of every individual
  - Responsibility - Authority - Accountability
- Motivation, Job Satisfaction & Collaboration – effective teams
- Employee Involvement
- Good Working Conditions
- Organizational Learning

# The Scope of HSE Culture Assessment

- Evaluate corporate and individual **values and behaviors** concerning HSE
- Input from all employment levels
- Look beyond compliance
- Seek tangible examples and results of HSE cultural norms



# The Critical Role of the Interview as an Assessment Tool

- ➔ Can allow for understanding of how the company “thinks and problem solves”
- ➔ Inputs include body language, tone and inflection
- ➔ Explores issues with “open” vs “closed” questions

# Situational Discussion Technique

- Describe a work situation
- Ask participant how their management and supervision would respond
- Ask why they believe this to be the company response
- Ask what their response would be
- Ask if they would be supported
- Ask for examples of how this has worked or not worked in the past

# Systemic Factors to Consider

- Management Commitment
  - not just stated, but demonstrated
  - Peer to productivity, quality, profit, good name
- Core Values of the Company
  - Specific examples of execution
  - HSE part of operational agendas for management and workers
  - When “stressed” will the organization uphold HSE
- Policy and Procedure for HSE
  - Built into purchasing decisions
  - Accounted for in budgets
  - Influencing others
    - Regulatory input
    - Expectations of Contractors
- Communication Systems
- Willingness to Learn
  - Problem solving
  - Continuous improvement bias

# A “David Letterman” List of Culture Assessment Questions

- What role does HSE have in decisions to purchase products, equipment, services or hire personnel?
- What part does HSE play in strategic planning and budget cycles?
- Under what conditions would HSE be the driving factor in the company shutting down operations?
- How do your people know that HSE is a core value in the company? Provide examples.
- How much time in your week is spent on issues that have an HSE link? Provide examples.

# “David Letterman” List cont’d

- How are safety concerns that you voice received and acted upon?
- What would the reaction be if you pointed out a PPE shortfall of your supervisor to him/her? What would the reaction be if you did the same thing to a fellow worker?
- What kinds of information do you receive from other departments or regions concerning H&S issues, investigations, hazards?
- What would your organization do if you didn’t report an incident and it was found out later?
- How does your organization respond/react when near miss incidents or loss producing incidents are reported?

# Interview vs Survey

## ➤ Interview Pros

- Use of exploratory questions
- Can judge/view body language
- Can explore a line of thinking
- Allows for clarification

## ➤ Interview Cons

- Takes time

## ➤ Survey Pros

- Minimal time requirements
- Consistently stated & repeatable questions

## ➤ Survey Cons

- No mechanism for clarification
- Literacy barrier
- Multiple interpretations of the same question
- Tendency to ask closed questions

# What Next?

- Implementing Cultural Assessment into HSE Audits
  - Engage senior management
  - Evaluate systemic factors that support a HSE culture
  - Use Interviews to
    - assess decision making and values
    - gather process thinking not memorized information

# Conclusion

- ➔ Thank you!
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- ➔ Questions