QUIZ ON SAFETY CULTURE

The results
1 quiz posted on ICSI’s website
12 questions about safety culture
302 responses

Objective: To evaluate the perceptions of respondents on several topics related to safety culture
WHAT SAFETY OBJECTIVE MOTIVATES YOU THE MOST?

Results

- Manage situations at work that could cause irreversible damage: 49% (144)
- Lower the severity of accidents: 10% (31)
- Lower the frequency of accidents: 14% (41)
- Increase the number of safe situations: 27% (80)

ICSI’s view:

Obviously, all of these concerns are legitimate. ICIS’s experience is that it is necessary to prioritise the prevention of the most serious risks, those that pose the greatest threat to the organization. Addressing these risks is more motivating, consensual, and has more far-reaching effects. Moreover, to prevent accidents, we need to look at how safety is ensured on a day-to-day basis, and understand how daily activity generates, in the vast majority of cases, safe situations. The knowledge of both HSE experts and actors in the field is essential, as no one person knows everything.
MINOR AND SERIOUS ACCIDENTS ARE LINKED

ICSI’s view:

Bird’s pyramid is well known in the safety domain: it states that there is a ratio between minor and serious events. Many companies interpret it to mean that a proactive policy to reduce minor occupational accidents ensures a high level of industrial safety. Unfortunately, many serious accidents (Texas City, Longford, AZF) have occurred at sites where the accident rate was very low. The principle is only true if minor and serious accidents belong to the same family of causes. However, the role of the individual component is higher in minor accidents, while the organizational component plays a determining role in serious accidents. There needs to be a dedicated policy for the prevention of major risks!
SAFETY CULTURE IS A REFLECTION OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

ICSI’s view:

A company’s actors do not only have to manage safety. Organizational culture is a set of ways of doing and thinking that are shared by people in order to do their job, deal with the external environment and ensure internal coherence. Safety culture refers to how this organizational culture influences all of the day-to-day strategic trade-offs; in this context, safety has a more-or-less important role. The safety culture of an entity cannot be understood without looking more generally at its organizational culture.
THE SAFEST INDUSTRIAL SYSTEMS
(AVIATION, NUCLEAR) MUST SERVE AS MODELS

ICSI’s view:

Ultra-safe systems (such as civil aviation and nuclear power), where the stakes are very high, have a very specific characteristic: international regulations require them to stop operations if all safety conditions are not met. An example is the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in 2010, which grounded all aircraft in Europe. If this procedure was applied to the fishing industry, fish would be a rare dish! Other production sectors must maintain their operations in very variable conditions, while at the same time ensuring safety. The organization can die for many reasons—not just accidents. Therefore, each company must try to maintain the highest safety levels given their own constraints, rather than copy other models that do not take into account these constraints.

Results

- Totally agree: 52%
- Somewhat agree: 22%
- Tend to disagree: 22%
- Completely disagree: 4%
We must distinguish between the values that are promoted in publicity material and those that guide decisions and trade-offs. It is important for senior managers to demonstrate that safety is a key priority, but what matters most is how safety is actually integrated into trade-offs at all levels: investment, technical and organizational design, purchasing policy and outsourcing, recruitment and training, management leadership, professionalism and the involvement of employees and their representatives.
SAFETY CULTURE IS NOT DRIVEN, 
IT IS NURTURED FROM THE GROUND UP

Results

ICSIs view:
The culture of the organization, and therefore the importance it gives to safety are the result of interactions between all actors over a long period of time. It translates into shared ways of thinking and doing. Culture cannot be changed in the same way a new technology or organizational structure is introduced. Culture is not a driver; it must be nurtured from the ground up. Let us take an example. If, for many years, hazardous situations have not been reported because of a fear of sanctions corresponding to a repressive management style, it will take a long time for a change in policy to have an effect, for confidence to return, and for feedback to begin to flow.
SAFETY CULTURE MUST BE MANAGED
INDEPENDENTLY OF OVERALL COMPANY PERFORMANCE

An organization cannot manage safety independently of other performance issues: the safest company is the one that does not operate at all. Conversely, a safety culture that looks in detail at ways to think and act at all levels of the organization can focus attention on factors that hamper overall performance. Examples include: organizational silence (lack of reporting), poor interfaces between services, lack of social dialogue, outsourcing policy, actors feeling that they cannot do their best work.
The difference between safety culture and safety climate can be compared to the difference between a person’s personality and their mood: culture refers to ingrained traits, shared ways of doing and thinking that have been created over time. Safety climate refers to a set of behaviours and perceptions that are shared at a given moment. In a crisis (at the social level for example), a very strong safety culture results in small changes in the safety climate, while a weaker culture can lead to a sharp deterioration.
Regulated safety refers to all of the measures taken in advance to ensure safety (technical design, rules, procedures, etc.). Initiative-driven safety refers to the real-time contribution of the skills and knowledge of the workforce, who must deal with unanticipated situations.

Both are always necessary, but the balance between initiative-driven safety and rule-driven safety is a function of the stability of processes and the environment. It is a mistake to try to base safety primarily on regulations when there is a high degree of variability: an agent’s real-time assessment of the situation and the appropriate response is critical. A company that has invested primarily in rule-driven safety—and not enough in the professionalism of the workforce and management—may be helpless when operating conditions depart significantly from what was expected. It will lack resilience.
INDIVIDUAL SAFETY CULTURE IS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF RISK MANAGEMENT

ICSI’s view:

Culture is an attribute of a group, rather than an individual. Each individual is part of several cultures: ethnic, regional, religious, professional, etc. The challenge for the organization is to know how to manage this diversity. It must suggest ways of thinking and acting that make sense in everyday life and are clearly relevant to each individual.
WHICH ATTRIBUTE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT FOR AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE THAT SUPPORTS SAFETY CULTURE?

**Results**

- **A just culture**: 13% (39 respondents)
- **Managerial leadership in the context of safety**: 40% (119 respondents)
- **Reporting and processing of information about at-risk situations and accidents**: 28% (84 respondents)
- **Shared awareness of major risks**: 19% (55 respondents)

**ICSI’s view:**

Classically, these four attributes must be present to develop an effective safety culture. They are tightly linked. For example, a clear reward and sanction policy (a just culture) fosters reporting of at-risk situations. A second consideration is the role of the workforce and their representatives in the development of safety-related measures (directive-participative management).
An organization’s safety culture is the result of a long history. On-the-ground actions that nurture its development take years to come to fruition. Actors seeking to change their safety culture should combine short-term actions with rapid effects (for example improving at-risk situations) with symbolic, actions that will take longer to have an effect, but that focus on deeper layers of the organization. All of these actions must form a coherent program that is supported at the highest levels of the organization, shared by all actors, implemented by named individuals (who are given the necessary resources), and regularly updated.
Institute for an industrial safety culture

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