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She currently supports various steering committees in the implementation and monitoring of a safety culture programme internationally

## We all want to be champions

Many companies approach Icsi because they want to find the key to the “best” safety culture, the culture of champions. The request is usually accompanied by a kind of utopian ideal: the notion that the benchmark practices and tools found in the safest companies are what works best, and they can be successfully transferred, in their entirety, to a new context. Unfortunately, there is no universal program that can transform an entity into a safety culture champion. Several crucial parameters play a large part in determining what can be done: industrial sector, location, history, socio-economic context, etc.

Putting aside the debate about what good safety results look like and the choice of associated indicators, it is interesting to look at what these ambitions mean in terms of safety culture.

## A featherweight boxer cannot fight in the heavyweight category

Nobody in the world of boxing would put a featherweight in the ring against a heavyweight. It's the same for safety culture: aims must be consistent with the socio-economic context, together with the activities and resources that the entity can draw upon.

*Take the example of a business with a few dozen employees, which is under economic pressure in a low-added-value artisanal sector. Competition is tough and better safety isn't going to win them any new contracts.*

In this scenario, it would be suicidal for this featherweight to set their sights too high in terms of safety culture. The resources, time and commitment it would have to devote would be

disproportionate to its capacity and any benefits—in particular in terms of competitiveness. On the other hand, aiming to develop a safety culture that is appropriate to the context *will* make a positive contribution and the business should:

- Assess the contribution of safety to its economic health;
- Choose flexible investments that support the development of new activities;
- Develop fall-back options in case there is a down-turn in activity.

In this scenario, safety culture is only meaningful if it contributes directly to the company's economic health. In particular, safety culture could reduce productivity losses due to accidents and become an asset for continuity.



## A heavyweight can't box like a featherweight

Conversely, a safety heavyweight that has featherweight ambitions is also in danger. In particular, its ambitions would not meet industry standards.

*Take the example of a business with several hundred employees, in an economically stable sector where the management of major industrial risks is an important issue. There are a few competitors, but they do not threaten the company's market share.*

In this scenario, the heavyweight's ambitions must correspond to the industrial risk challenges. Its high visibility means that any failures can quickly affect the health of the industry (this was, for example, the

case with the Fukushima nuclear accident). For this reason, supervisory authorities in safety-critical sectors usually pay very close attention to the aim and ambitions of safety culture programs. This is especially true when the effects of an accident extend beyond national borders. In this scenario, safety culture contributes directly to the social acceptability of the company and the industrial sector as a whole.

In order to define appropriate safety culture ambitions, the heavyweight business should:

- Make a commitment to best-in-class safety standards;
- Identify long-term safety investments;
- Develop a strategy that insulates safety from the direct effects of market or production pressures.

## To conclude: try to be the best in *your* category

Safety culture ambitions that are set too high, too low or too soon can put the business at risk. Safety culture is a function of a few crucial parameters that are the prerequisites for success.

A simple rule is to not try to simply replicate what other companies have done. Instead, look at how to develop a level of safety culture that is appropriate to your context.