

The essentials

OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP

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FEBRUARY 2023

Editorial

ICSI and its members have been working on the topic of safety leadership for a number of years. A first *Cahier de la sécurité industrielle*, published in 2011, presented an initial assessment of the situation, with prominence given to first-hand accounts from sharp-end workers.

Having since been challenged regularly on the topic, as a number of our members decided to rethink their managerial model, we felt it important to re-examine safety leadership.

With this *Essentials*, we wish to share with you a concise overview of the seven major principles of safety leadership, along with an initial summary of the work and findings of the “Leadership in uncertainty”

working group. In an ever more complex world where uncertainty is increasing, the classic models of top-down leadership embodied by charismatic individuals are being called into question and it is becoming very difficult to make decisions...

The new leadership styles taking their place are better suited to the safety challenges of our time, but also to the current ways of working, to more decentralised organisational structures and to the aspirations of employees, who are looking for more meaning and autonomy in their work.

We hope you enjoy reading our publication.

Ivan Boissières,
General Manager of ICSI

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What is safety leadership?

Safety leadership and contractor companies

Client companies and contractor companies have everything to gain from working together on their safety vision, commitments, practices and tools. **This starts with the leaders:** they must get everyone on board and they must demonstrate their willingness to cooperate. For example, it is important for everyone to be committed to shared vigilance and for all workers to feel it is acceptable to call attention to unsafe practices or situations and to have their own practices and behaviours challenged. It is also important to analyse events together and encourage experience sharing.



What makes a manager a safety leader?

Historically, the job of a manager has consisted in planning, doing, checking and acting – the famous PDCA cycle taught in management schools. But to move towards an integrated safety culture, **the role of managers now extends beyond this cycle: they influence and inspire safer behaviours from their teams.** The involvement of managers is essential, since they set the tone: it is they who mobilise everyone.



Leadership beyond safety

Safety leadership is just one aspect of leadership. Recently, as part of their managerial transformation, companies have been establishing a sort of “leadership charter”, clearly outlining what they expect from their manager-leaders. And the skills and competencies expected of leaders extend well beyond the field of safety: they are expected to **listen, to be supportive and show consideration, to be capable of making tough decisions, to embody the company’s values...**



Definition

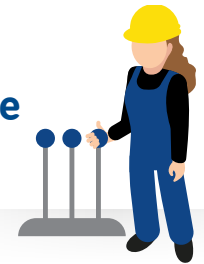
Safety leadership is the ability to mobilise people around safety challenges and influence behaviour so that it becomes safer.

A safety leader:

- makes major risk prevention a mainstay of the company’s day-to-day operations,
- knows how to place safety at the heart of decisions.



3 ways to improve your safety leadership



In your day-to-day actions:

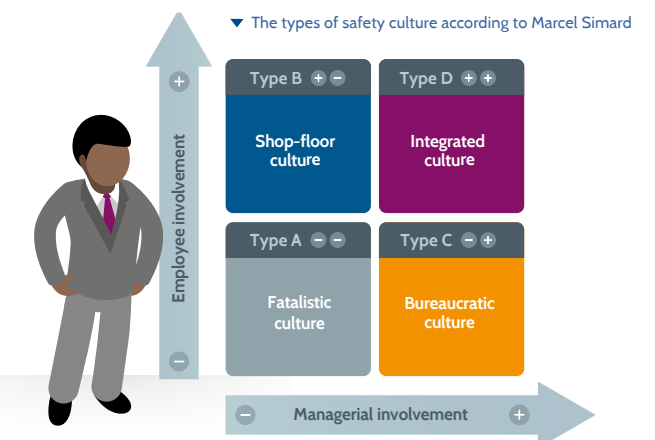
- What is your safety vision? How do you share it?
- How do you behave when spending time in the field – do you lead by example?
- Is safety given due consideration in your decisions and trade-offs?

In the quality of the dialogue you encourage:

- Do you listen to feedback, questions, doubts?
- Do you spend time in the field to experience the reality at the sharp end?
- Do you give recognition when good safety practices are observed?
- Do you respond appropriately and fairly when you notice unsafe behaviours?

In the technical and organisational resources you allocate to safety:

- Do you ensure the necessary equipment and resources are available?
- Are the rules clear, appropriate to the reality in the field and limited in number?



Managerial leadership and involvement of everyone, key elements of an effective safety culture

There are four major types of safety culture. The holy grail is **the so-called integrated culture**, which aims for a high level of safety and gets everyone involved, at all levels of the organisation. It requires:

- **A commitment from senior management**, evident in their words but also in the decisions made, the managerial style and the forms of presence in the field,
- **Strong managerial leadership** where each manager impresses on their team the importance of the safety policy and informs their own superior(s) of any difficulties encountered with implementation, dangerous situations, and suggestions for improvement,
- **The involvement of employees**, demonstrated through their professionalism each day: following applicable rules, flagging up those that are not being followed, displaying a questioning attitude, and looking out for one another (shared vigilance)...

The 7 principles

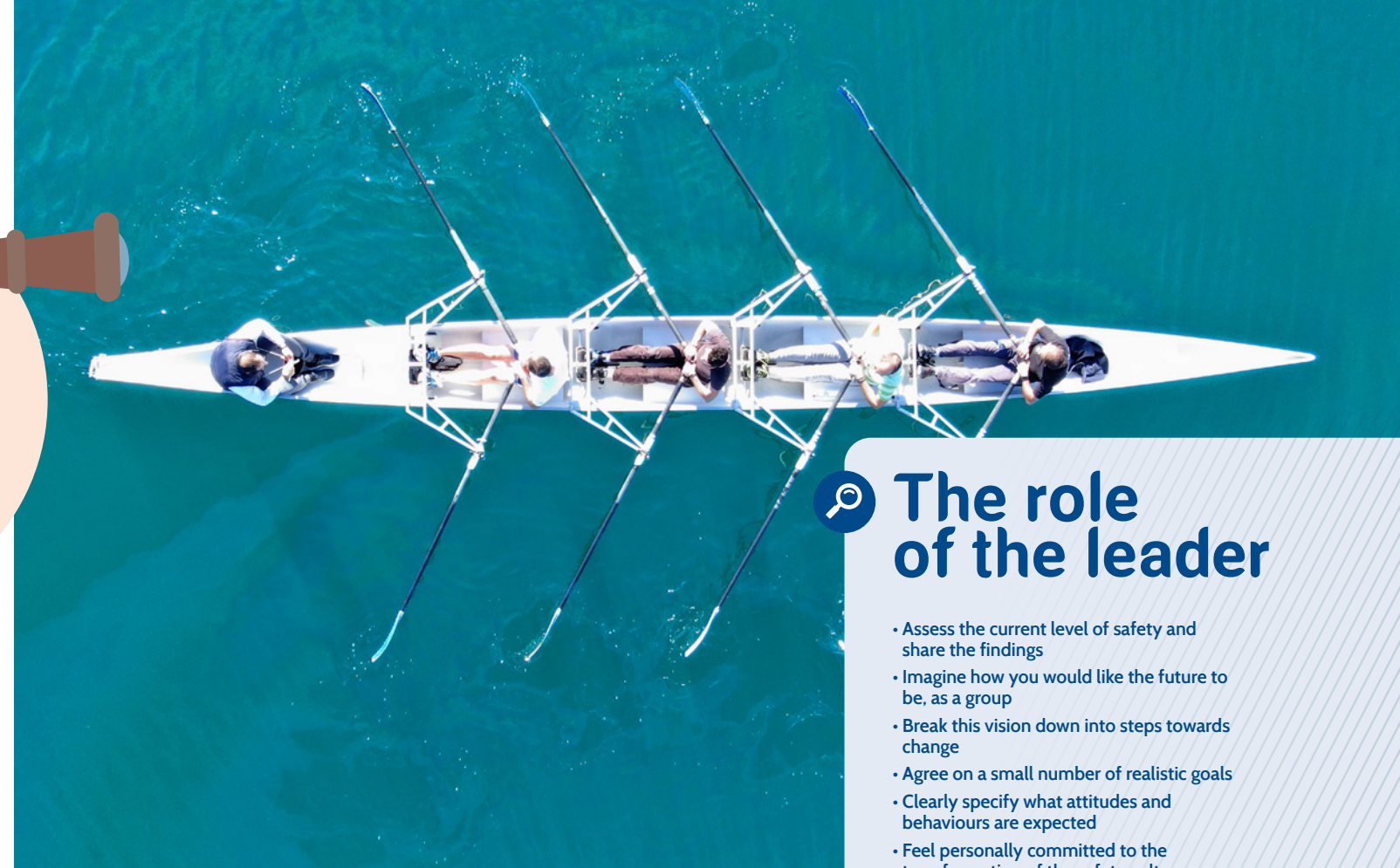
of safety leadership



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Create a safety vision

Creating a vision of safety means deciding on an ambition, identifying what you want the future to look like. The safety leader must then ensure that everyone understands the 'why' behind the chosen course and must galvanize people, both individually and collectively, to achieve common goals.



The role of the leader

- Assess the current level of safety and share the findings
- Imagine how you would like the future to be, as a group
- Break this vision down into steps towards change
- Agree on a small number of realistic goals
- Clearly specify what attitudes and behaviours are expected
- Feel personally committed to the transformation of the safety culture

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Who has ever wanted to set off on a journey without knowing the destination and the reason why? That is purpose of the vision. Once you have taken stock of the existing situation and reached a consensus on the need for change, the vision determines **where you want to go in terms of safety and why it is worth the effort.**

HOW DO YOU CREATE A SAFETY VISION?

To galvanize the teams, a safety vision should be **desirable, credible, and as close as possible to an ideal.** Instead of "Our ambition: reduce our incident rate by one point", a better vision would be "Our ambition: within three years, we want to eradicate serious injuries and fatalities for our employees and subcontractors."

If the safety vision is to be **truly embraced**, it must be **shared by everyone**. Employees must feel that:

- their superior believes in it and, ultimately, that the organisation believes in it. In other words, the vision is not just a slogan or wishful thinking,
- their contribution is expected and needed in order to achieve it.

If it is to be brought to life, the safety vision must then be implemented at all levels of the organisation and the necessary resources must be made available.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF A SAFETY VISION

Of all the attributes of an effective safety culture, **the three deemed "strategic" are fundamental** for creating your safety vision:

- Focus on what is essential: a better prevention of major risks and accidents
- Work on human and

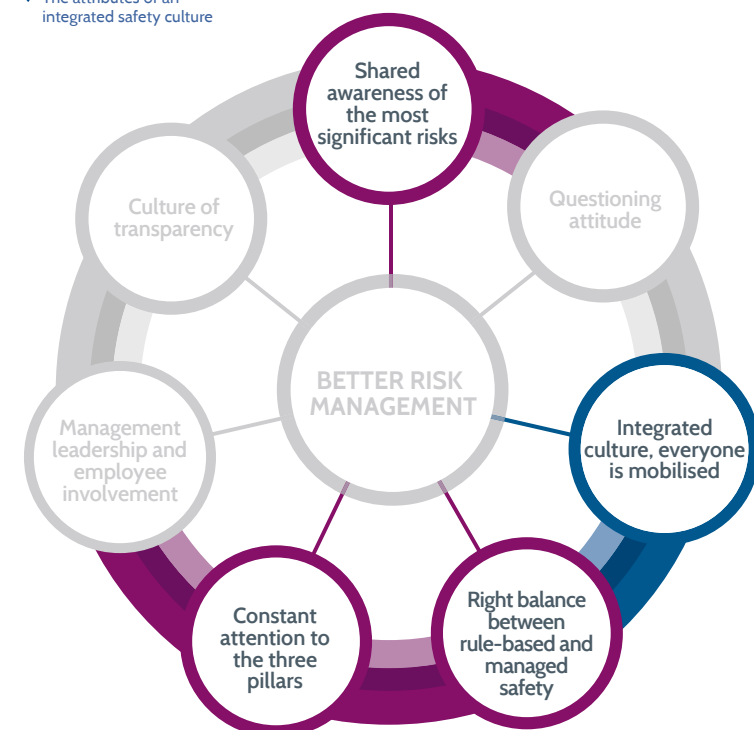
organisational factors to achieve more safety-conscious behaviours

- Find the right balance between rule-based safety and initiative-based safety

Since no single person holds the keys to safety, it is also essential to **focus on a fourth attribute:**

- Develop and maintain an integrated safety culture by involving everyone

▼ The attributes of an integrated safety culture



THE VISION IS NOT JUST HIGH-LEVEL

Yes, there needs to be a strategic company vision that is broader in scope and gets a maximum of people "on board".

But complementary visions that are a great deal more operations-focused are also needed. While they do of course need to align with the overarching vision, they are adapted to different time frames and perimeters to take into account the reality in the field. Even within a very small group you can work on developing your own safety vision, by identifying the improvements you

would like to achieve for yourself and your co-workers. And you will be using the same skills and tools. Line managers, get to work on your vision!

ONE POSSIBLE WAY TO CREATE YOUR SAFETY VISION

Envisioning an "ideal" future where your leadership and safety performance have improved and then figuring out the path to take to get there is a future planning exercise that can help you create your safety vision. While this type of exercise is most often conducted by management committees, it can be applied at any scale, to a work site, a team, etc.

When examining your ideal, focus on four themes:

- **The rituals:** what practices, what meetings will have become expected and essential? For example: regular safety moments, taking time to chat with the teams before the first meetings, taking a minute to pause and check...

• **The no-no's:** what practices, behaviours and attitudes do you want to eradicate going forward? For example: turning a blind eye to at-risk situations, entering a confined space without authorisation, leaving one's zone without tidying up...

• **The taboos:** which subjects go unmentioned today and should be talked about in the future? For example: making it acceptable to talk about sanctions, situations where the rules do not apply, a superior not setting the example...

• **The symbols:** what words, images or gestures will hold special meaning for the company?

Tip: for this exercise, do not hesitate to close your eyes and imagine yourself 3 or 5 years into the future. Do not think about current constraints and limitations; allow yourself to dream big. Then open your eyes and, as a group, ask yourselves who can enable you to progress and move closer to your safety vision.

There are only two ways to influence human behavior: you can manipulate it or you can inspire it

Simon Sinek, author and speaker on leadership and management

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Share the safety vision

Now that you have created your safety vision, you must share it and you must adjust it based on feedback from the field, discussions with the teams, etc. In short, you need to bring it to life. Sharing the safety vision encourages buy-in and commitment from the teams.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Is your safety vision relevant? Engaging? Perfect! But if nobody knows about it or has a clear understanding of it, if your employees feel like they have no say in it... nothing will change.

So tell staff about it and **take time spent in the field as an opportunity to find out what everyone there feels is important when it comes to safety.**

HOW DO YOU SHARE THE SAFETY VISION?

Sharing the vision is about ensuring that **safety-related messages and actions make sense** to all concerned, and encouraging discussions in an atmosphere of communication and trust. It is also about using the right messages to communicate with the different levels and functions within the company, to strike a chord with employees.

Thankfully, a safety vision is not set in stone! The teams have some leeway to adapt this vision to their needs and their occupation, to make it their own.

The role of the leader

- Identify key opportunities and use them to encourage feedback and dialogue about safety
- Deliver engaging safety messages
- Use communication efforts to support a more participative approach to management
- Regularly remind everyone of the objectives and of the issues that still need work
- Reiterate messages to maintain awareness, motivation and commitment
- Give recognition for good practices, encourage and support initiatives

WHEN TO communicate?

THREE KEY OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE THE SAFETY VISION

From onboarding a new hire to briefings and more informal chats... any time is a good time to talk about safety! A little each day. Any time spent in the field then becomes an opportunity to discuss and learn from any safety-related events or news, to talk about a specific hazard or the changes and decisions impacting on the safety of the teams, or to share a relevant personal experience that will resonate with co-workers.

The toolbox talk

The toolbox talk (aka safety chat) is a fantastic tool for encouraging discussions about safety around a message, an image or a first-hand experience. Spend a minute on it each day or 15 minutes once a week or every month, but remember it is not just for the operational teams: the support functions are also exposed to hazards (electrical hazards, same-level falls...) and it is a good idea to **keep everyone aware of the risks.**

During a toolbox talk, you can:

- share messages about a safety-related topic or an undesirable event that occurred,
- invite the group to speak, ask them about their experiences,
- work on team cohesion and ensure these talks translate into safe practices.



The briefing

A briefing takes place before the start of any activity. This brief chat on site is essential to ensure safe operations. During a briefing, you can:

- share what needs to be done and how to do it, identify the major hazards,
- report relevant information, anticipate possible difficulties and disruptive elements,
- ensure that preventive actions adapted to the specific characteristics of the activity and its hazards are in place and monitored.



Onboarding of new hires

The first safety messages communicated by the manager are essential; they set the tone.

The onboarding process provides opportunities to:

- share the safety values, explain the safety vision and make it meaningful to the new hire,
 - show that you are committed to safety and that you expect any new employees to be just as committed,
 - encourage transparency when difficulties are encountered or mistakes made.
- These opportunities are **not necessarily manager-led. While the leader might initiate them, anyone can contribute.** This is even advised, to get everyone involved in safety and ensure different views are heard.



Avoid top-down communication; instead, share and discuss to make the safety messages meaningful

Leadership at the heart of a shared vision of safety



It is the managers who drive the safety culture within the organisation. Through what they pay attention to, what they comment on and what they question. This is how they communicate what is truly important to them. This is how they create a safety culture. When they mention safety issues they have noticed, when they monitor and measure safety, they send a strong signal about its importance. But if they ask questions about production, about the rate or speed of production, this then sends the message that this is the most important factor and that it takes precedence over safety in this situation. One sentence sums this up nicely: what interests my boss fascinates me.
Andrew Hopkins, Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the Australian National University

Give safety due consideration in trade-offs

The 7 principles of prudent decision-making

It is important to have a systematic and exhaustive decision-making process in place. While it applies especially to strategic levels, it can be adapted to all levels, because trade-offs must be made everywhere within organisations.

- ✓ **Recognise the existence of and the need for compromise:** accept that at every level the company can die in a number of different ways (loss of customers, major quality issue...), safety is one of these ways but it is not in an isolated bubble.
- ✓ **Make decision-making unambiguous:** openly and clearly list all the priorities involved (ethical, production, finances, safety...) and the interactions and contradictions between them. These priorities must then be represented fairly, by going around the table for each one.
- ✓ **Positively discriminate towards safety:** evaluate how the decision might potentially impact on safety; identify any necessary trade-offs. Do not allow yourself to step into "no-go" territory.
- ✓ **Communicate the decisions:** be completely transparent when communicating the decisions to the managers and teams who will have to handle the situation. Explain the reasons why and the trade-offs.
- ✓ **Support the teams:** provide training, assist the managers and teams concerned with applying the decisions.
- ✓ **Keep track of decisions:** keep a trace of decisions so that they may be critiqued (the best form of wisdom!) and to ensure that you do not accumulate safety trade-offs over too long a period.
- ✓ **Re-analyse the decisions made:** gather feedback and lessons learned so as to review the decision-making process and improve the next important decisions to be made.

Several factors influence the long-term viability of a company: quality, market, lead times, regulations... and of course safety is one such factor. Giving it due consideration in your trade-offs ensures that no decision will undermine safety to an unacceptable level.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Organisations must manage a multitude of issues and constraints, ranging from time pressure from customers to technical malfunctions, losing a contract, staff shortages and more. Every day brings the same question: "What is the most immediate and critical threat to the company? Is it a financial risk? A business risk? Or the risk of an accident?" And the answer is never the same.

Every day, decisions must be weighed and trade-offs made in the areas that

are not the priority on that particular day. "Giving safety due consideration in trade-offs" allows you to:

- **Leave behind the idea that safety functions as a separate bubble:** the safest company in the world would have to shut down its operations,
- **Ensure that no decision undermines safety to an unacceptable level.** The safety requirement must be taken into account in the decision-making process of all levels of management, of the support functions, of field workers, of external contractors, etc.

▼ Every day, organisations make trade-offs between competing priorities



The role of the leader

- Ensure that safety is not just a slogan; it is taken into account in all decisions and trade-offs
- Communicate, explain decisions and trade-offs, as well as any compensatory measures
- Clarify everyone's role in the co-construction of a good level of safety; involve employees and external contractors
- Demonstrate, through listening and through your actions, the importance attached to working conditions in the field
- Identify any obstacles to achieving safety objectives, then work to eliminate them

HOW DO YOU GIVE SAFETY DUE CONSIDERATION IN TRADE-OFFS?

When weighing decisions and making trade-offs, any issue that is not a priority on the day is "shelved". When it comes to safety, that is not easy. This is where the question of margins enters into the equation: has the organisation left safety margins? Where? What do they look like in the field?

Decisions will not intentionally disregard safety, because no one wishes to deliberately compromise safety. But when making decisions about the other priorities, it is possible to miscalculate or underestimate the consequences on safety. Take for example the decision to allocate fewer workers to a task because more manpower is needed for another critical activity: has the impact in terms of safety, skill availability and worker fatigue been thought through?

Anytime something is shelved or pushed down the list of priorities, an acceptable level of safety must be maintained despite any compromises

made. It then becomes a question of identifying compensatory measures: "I can make this a lower priority if..." Such measures may include:

- adjustments to staffing levels, deadlines, workloads or schedules,
- strict compliance with the rules, increased supervision,
- giving careful thought to team composition to ensure a certain level of experience and/or expertise,
- additional equipment,
- increasing safety rituals, briefings, debriefings, safety visits, etc.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NO-GO RULES

To maintain a satisfactory level of safety, establish "no-go" rules – lines that must not be crossed – and ensure they are followed. These no-go rules must be:

- **explicit** and establish clear criteria for determining when to seek additional resources,
- **shared** so that operations can be shut down before the situation worsens,
- **accepted** and upheld even when a stoppage does not clearly reveal a problem.

Making trade-offs in safety is about finding the best possible compromise, agreeing on safety margins and managing them

René Amalberti, Director of FonCSI

Can productivity and safety co-exist?



Some believe that it is impossible for productivity and safety to co-exist, as one is necessarily achieved at the expense of the other...

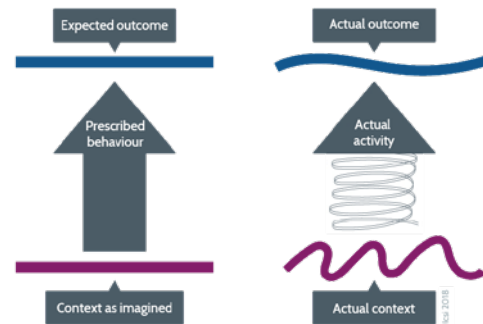
That is not true! Yes we must produce, but we must do so safely. Otherwise, someone will end up injured or worse. And work interruptions will generate costs for the company. If someone has a safety-related concern, they must be able to say: "Let's stop for a moment and fix this problem." It might take a few minutes, sometimes longer, but the problem will have been resolved. When in doubt, safety must come first.
Dominic Cooper, B-Safe Management Solutions (USA)

4

Spend time in the field



Spending time in the field is an opportunity to connect with the teams, observe them and chat with them during organised safety visits or informal interactions. It is also an opportunity to see the reality of how safety measures are implemented, and to demonstrate your interest and commitment.



▲ Work as prescribed, work as done

The ordinary mess zone

The “ordinary mess zone” refers to operations that fall between what is prescribed in procedures and what is in the high-risk zone. In other words, real life! The primary aim of a frontline worker is to do what is asked of them. To do this, they will follow the procedure as much as possible, but they may also need to adapt or take initiatives. Of course, deviations from procedure in the high-risk zone are the most visible and management will be informed. But it is also important for managers to take an interest in this ordinary mess zone, in the day-to-day problems that can make the human cost of meeting performance objectives very high... because, while the operation may have been successful this time, the next time it may take very little to cause an incident or even an accident.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

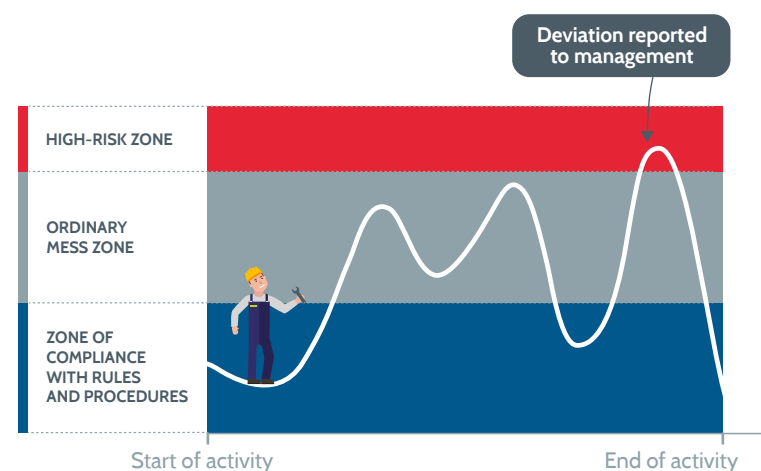
To assess the reality of how safety measures are implemented

Of course, there are procedures, plans and schedules in place to describe the work and tasks to be performed. But in reality, the work rarely goes exactly to plan: someone might be away, there could be an emergency, unexpected simultaneous operations... This is where the difference appears between work as prescribed and work as done. For an accurate assessment of the level of safety and of how work is being performed at the sharp end, it is essential to spend time in the field. It is only there that you will really be able to hear what the teams have to

say, observe their practices, realise the difficulties they face in applying certain rules, and notice any pertinent initiatives or adaptations that have been implemented.

To show your interest and commitment

Spending time in the field is also an opportunity to make yourself available, show that you are open to listening, and demonstrate that you are truly committed. As you observe your teams, **they will also be observing you and gauging your level of commitment...** So spend time with them, ask questions, show them you are genuinely interested. As the saying goes, “actions speak louder than words”... and they tend to be remembered.



▲ The ordinary mess zone

HOW CAN YOU MAKE THE BEST USE OF YOUR TIME IN THE FIELD?

The importance of commonplace presence

There are certain formal practices associated with presence in the field, such as safety visits. But so-called “commonplace”, “informal”, or “everyday” presence is also essential. If you want to know how people are really working, **management visits must not be an exceptional event** for which time is set aside in the schedules of frontline staff or production is slowed so that your performance dashboards can be up-to-date at the end of the year. No, here we are talking about **ongoing and regular presence and attention**.

Managers must allocate time in their schedules to ensure appropriate time is spent at the sharp end. The organisation must of course support this and agree, for example, to clear their schedule of certain low-value but often time-consuming tasks.

A tool to support presence in the field: the preventive safety visit

The preventive safety visit consists in **observing a person as they work and talking to them about what they are doing** in order to agree together on the safest way to perform the task or activity. The aim is to identify possible improvements and turn these into concrete actions such as changes to work practices or modifications to situational parameters, and then, over time, follow up on observations and any actions taken.

Be aware, though, that the teams sometimes see the safety visit as a type of “policing”, a fault-finding mission or a way to collect statistics. If this is the case, it will have failed in its aim!

Finally, safety visits are not just for managers and frontline staff.

There are many possibilities, such as directors visiting their operational and functional managers, or visits to the design and engineering teams and even to external contractor companies. All such visits provide a clearer picture of what is going on safety-wise in an organisation.

Note that a safety visit is not an audit! Encourage discussion and deciding on actions together

The role of the leader

- Schedule in non-negotiable time to spend in the field, combining regular commonplace presence and safety visits
- Anticipate the difficult periods during which you may need to spend more time than usual in the field
- Be present during both hazardous activities and routine tasks
- Ask the team leaders to accompany you on your visits
- Vary the times and the teams you visit, so as to see as many people as possible in a variety of work situations
- Observe the implementation of actions suggested and circle back to sites you have already visited



Safety visits: a few questions to fuel discussions

- **Risk awareness and situational awareness:** what are the major hazards in your line of work? How should you react if a major accident occurs?
- **Environment and working conditions:** do you have issues due to the heat or cold, height, bad weather, confined spaces, etc.?
- **Compliance and rule following:** are there any golden rules that apply to your work? Are there any conditions that would make it difficult for you to apply the rules?
- **Best practices and safety initiatives:** are there any safety practices that you feel would benefit your co-workers?
- **Task preparation and execution:** how do you prepare so as to ensure optimal safety? Is the situation as you had imagined it would be?
- **HSE news and priorities:** has there been a safety-related event or decision that has particularly affected you?
- **The human factor:** how do you feel in terms of fatigue, morale, etc.? How are the working relations within the team?

5

Foster team spirit and cooperation

As the saying goes, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together”... and it is true! Fostering trust, cooperation and a culture where workers look out for one another’s safety is not always easy, but it is a key skill in safety leadership.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Is instructing your team or organisation that you want “more team spirit and better cooperation” enough to actually make it happen? No, says author and speaker Simon Sinek: “*The problem with concepts of trust and cooperation is that they are feelings, they are not instructions. I can’t simply say to you, ‘Trust me,’ and you will. I can’t simply instruct two people*

to cooperate, and they will. It’s not how it works. It’s a feeling.” That we can foster by putting in place favourable conditions, but not by dictating.

When there is trust, we channel our energy into protecting one another, together, from hazards and accidents. Without trust, we use our energy against others, to protect ourselves from a boss, a co-worker, a client company...

HOW DO YOU FOSTER TEAM SPIRIT AND COOPERATION?

Find a mutual benefit in cooperating

To foster cooperation, everyone within a group – and between groups – must see the advantage of cooperating, in terms of benefits and values, or they simply will not buy in. Ask yourself: how will the various actors benefit from cooperating? How do we get cooperation to make sense for everyone?

Encourage dialogue

A group is neither a homogeneous whole where each member shares 100% of everything, nor is it an agglomeration of individualities. Developing the ability to listen, getting people with diverging opinions to find a common ground, and making room for discussions about work is no easy task, but each of these is essential to achieve

good working relationships and to overcome employee silence.

Foster trust

Trust is crucial in making safety a collective pursuit. Within companies, establishing a just culture is fundamental to fostering this trust. This means putting in place a clear, fair and just framework for recognising safe practices and reacting to deviations.

COOPERATION PRACTICES THAT BENEFIT SAFETY

To eliminate the silos companies sometimes build around their departments, and to ensure that safety – but also many other issues! – becomes a company-wide concern, we must establish new cooperation models. Cooperation between management and employees, within and between teams, between client companies and contractor companies...

Cooperation is reflected in three main practices:

- **informing and being informed:** cooperating for a smooth flow of information in order to better identify and report anomalies, malfunctions and problems encountered,
- **learning and improving safety:** cooperating to pass on knowledge gained through experience, to share accident and incident analyses,
- **taking safety initiatives:** cooperating to make the right decisions as a group – or at least to reach a consensus – when unexpected events occur.

Cooperating implies that everyone finds some benefit or purpose in working together

Florence Osty, sociologist

Shared vigilance, a form of cooperation

When we are focused on a task, such as a meeting or opening a valve, we become “deaf and blind” to the external signals around us, like a noise for example. “*We are only aware of a tiny part of our environment, and that is normal,*” explains Isabelle Simonetto, a doctor in neuroscience. A solution to this is shared vigilance, or looking out for one another’s safety.

This consists in:

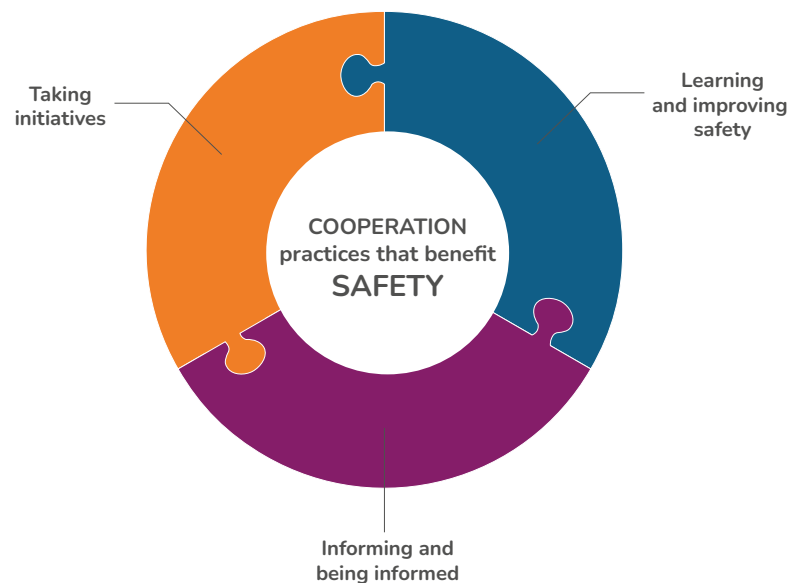
- daring to challenge,
- knowing how to challenge,
- being open to being challenged.

Irrespective of one’s position within the organisation. Whether field workers, line managers or senior executives, we must all ask ourselves this question: “Are we applying the principles of shared vigilance?”



The role of the leader

- Acknowledge and encourage cooperation within and between teams...
- ... but also point out any lack of cooperation, bring it up for discussion, and find ways to improve
- Develop a team spirit focused on safety and based on mutual respect
- Guarantee high-quality dialogue, make room for constructive discussions
- Take an interest in existing groups, in the collective identity, in what “makes sense” to each individual
- Maintain a climate of trust



▲ Cooperation practices that benefit safety

Acknowledge safe practices and apply fair sanctions

Implementing a “just culture” in an organisation means creating the conditions of trust needed to overcome employee silence. It also means defining the behaviours that should be recognised and encouraged, but also the unacceptable behaviours that should be sanctioned.



The different behaviours

POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS

- **Compliance and setting an example:** My attitudes and practices are in line with expectations
- **Positive and proactive contribution:** I have a good attitude, I take initiatives
- **Exceptional contribution:** I show exceptional initiative when it comes to safety

ERRORS

- **Routine errors:** I make a mistake due to inattention, a bad reflex...
- **Rule-based errors:** I apply the wrong rule or incorrectly apply the right one
- **Situational assessment errors:** I misread the situation
- **Errors as symptoms of an organisational problem:** I make a mistake due to an unresolved root cause

VIOLATIONS

- **Situational violation:** I bend a rule because it is impossible for me to adhere to it strictly in the circumstances
- **Routine violation:** I break the rule because this is how we have always done it!
- **Violation in the interest of the organisation:** I break a rule to achieve one of the company's goals
- **Violation in my own interest:** My actions benefit me; I place my own interest above the rest of the system
- **Sabotage (very rare):** I have malicious intent



Appropriate managerial responses

Give recognition, encourage, promote

- Make the employee feel like they have done their job well... and give them a sense of pride
- Keep people motivated to work
- Increase engagement
- Encourage the group to adopt safe behaviours and take initiatives

Admit that anyone can make a mistake, provide support and guidance

- Foster trust and invite people to report errors
- Improve the safety of the work environment by dealing with the causes of the error
- Provide working conditions that encourage learning
- Prevent serious injuries and fatalities

Refocus, re-motivate, sanction

- Hold people accountable for their unsafe behaviours
- Identify and resolve organisational causes
- Validate the legitimacy of any sanction applied
- Put a stop to the most serious violations
- Prevent serious injuries and fatalities



The role of the leader

- Create the conditions for trust so that everyone feels it is acceptable to report any safety-related information and take action
- Keep everyone aware of the red lines that must not be crossed
- Recognise positive contributions to safety, to increase team engagement and embed safe practices
- Respond appropriately and consistently when deviations occur: this means accepting that to err is human, ensuring fair treatment, etc.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

It is important for any employee to be able to anticipate how their superiors will react if they take an initiative or make a mistake: if an employee believes they could be punished arbitrarily if they make a mistake, they are much more likely to hide it from their superiors. By the same token, if a sharp-end worker who reports problems never gets a “thank you”, they may get discouraged and stop sharing the information.

When employee silence sets in, the flow of information stops and potentially hazardous situations are no longer reported. As a result, they are no longer dealt with and they get overlooked in prevention strategies.

HOW DO YOU DEVELOP A JUST CULTURE?

Creating a just culture means choosing to:

- create the conditions of trust and transparency needed for the proper flow and reporting of information,
- respond fairly and consistently to both desirable and undesirable events.

The key is to establish clear, consistent rules that can be applied to everyone. Rules that must also be known to and

shared by all, so that everyone knows what to expect and accepts “the rules of the game”.

A just culture includes:

- **recognition of positive contributions to safety:** problems reported, work stopped when a hazard was detected, improvements suggested, etc,
- **the right to make mistakes**, and support from superiors when it comes to receiving guidance, training, etc,
- **a fair response to a deliberate deviation** – in certain circumstances this could take the form of a sanction, in the case of a violation in one's own personal interest for example.

When an undesirable event occurs, it is important to:

1. **Give recognition** for reporting the information, whether the news is good or bad,
2. **Gather** the facts with the help of the people involved in the event,
3. **Analyse** the facts by identifying what is due to technical malfunctions or managerial causes and what is due to behaviours,
4. **Deal with the root causes** to avoid another such situation in the future,
5. **Opt for the responses that are fairest** to the people involved, and ensure that everyone understands these responses.

Let us focus more on our teams' successes in order to amplify them, and less on their failures in order to correct them

Employee silence, the greatest enemy of safety

Employee silence is a situation where important information is available at the sharp end but does not, or no longer, flows upward to management. Numerous psychological and organisational mechanisms can contribute to this: the absence of a fair response when events or problems are reported, systematic recourse to sanctions, a lack of field knowledge on the part of managers, etc.

7

Be credible and set an example

When it comes to safety, setting an example means behaving the same way you expect your team to behave. It means routinely and consistently demonstrating your commitment through your words but also, and especially, through your actions.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

While it is easy to make up slogans about safety, it is harder to demonstrate your commitment to it day in and day out through your decisions and behaviours.

But **nothing influences employee behaviour more than the conduct of their managers and leaders** and seeing consistency between their words and actions. For example, if you are always talking about the importance of safety, you cannot then neglect to bring up the subject

when welcoming a new hire, or fail to mention the major hazards during a briefing, or postpone your scheduled safety visits on a regular basis.

Being credible and setting an example is essential to **fostering a commitment to safety among employees**.

HOW CAN YOU BE CREDIBLE AND SET AN EXAMPLE?

Most importantly, you must do and be exactly what you ask of your team. **Behave the way you would like others around you to behave:** follow the life-saving rules, listen, dare to challenge others when something is not right, and be open to others doing the same to you...

And the **more you ask of your team, the more they will ask of you and look to you to set the example**.

While being credible and setting an example happens as a natural consequence of applying the six principles covered in the previous pages, **we are not asking you to be a completely infallible superhuman!** Only to be sincere and authentic in your commitment to safety.

So, taking into account your context and challenges, choose some key behaviours you would like to develop within your team and **model those behaviours**.

And do not hesitate to seek out constructive criticism; this is an excellent way to create more transparency and improve your leadership skills.

Finally, when it comes to leadership – in safety but also other areas – be constant and consistent rather than making a big show of it on the odd occasion. **Credibility is built over time** by maintaining a focus on safety and working conditions, no matter the circumstances and the storms you must weather.

TEAM MANAGEMENT AND LEADING BY EXAMPLE

It is important to make your commitment to safety concrete and visible, which is why safety must be **incorporated into your team management tools**. It should be an integral part of the welcome kit handed to new hires, it should be discussed during yearly performance reviews, and it should be included in career management programmes.

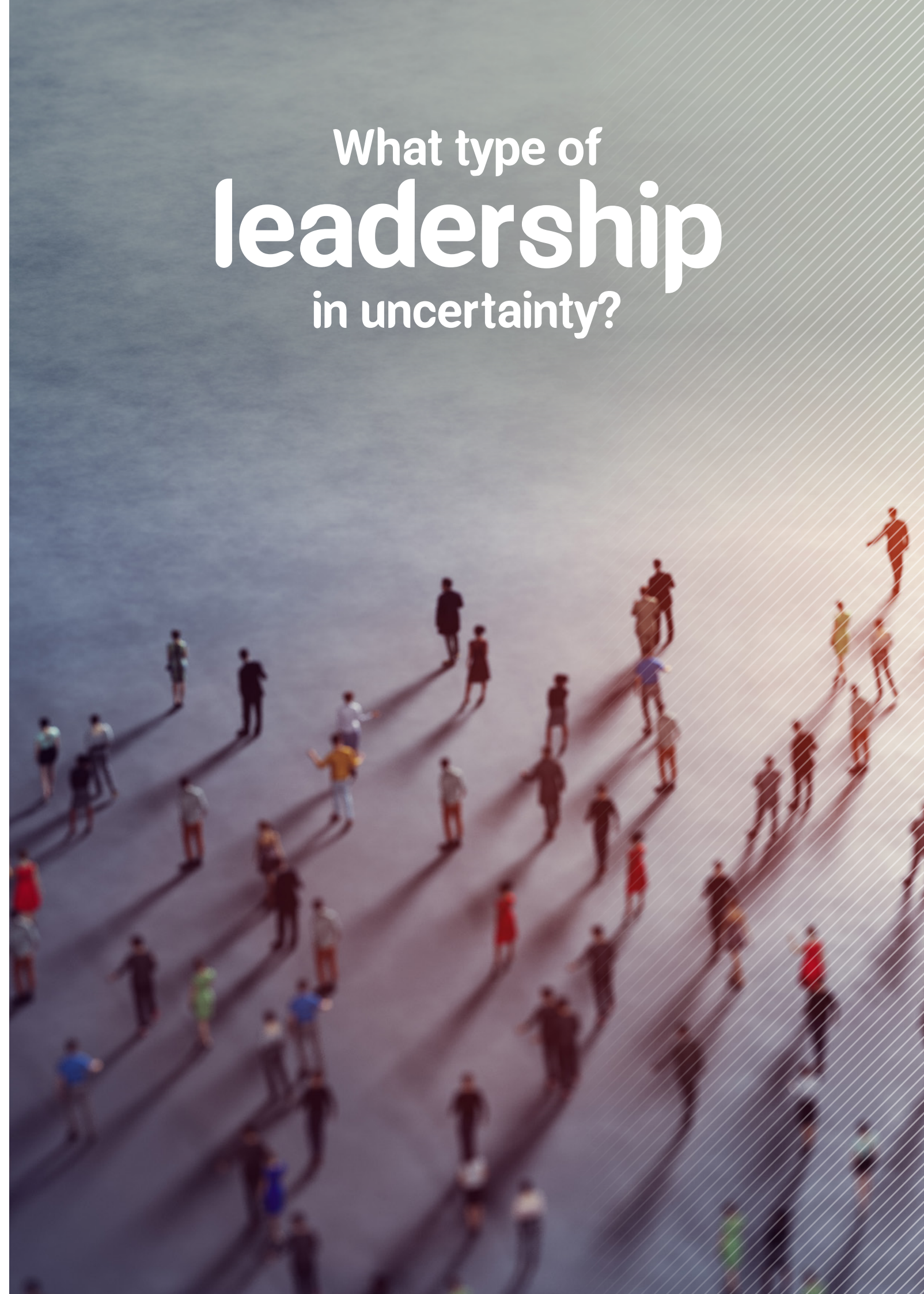
Example is not the main thing in influencing others; it is the only thing
Albert Schweitzer, physician and philosopher



The role of the leader

- Develop leadership over time
- Be consistent over the long term rather than taking strong actions on the odd occasion
- Ensure that your words and actions are always aligned
- Demonstrate the importance and attention given to safety and working conditions on a daily basis, through your willingness to listen, your attitude, your decisions, and your responsiveness
- Use team management tools to make your commitment concrete and visible

What type of leadership in uncertainty?



What type of leadership in uncertainty?

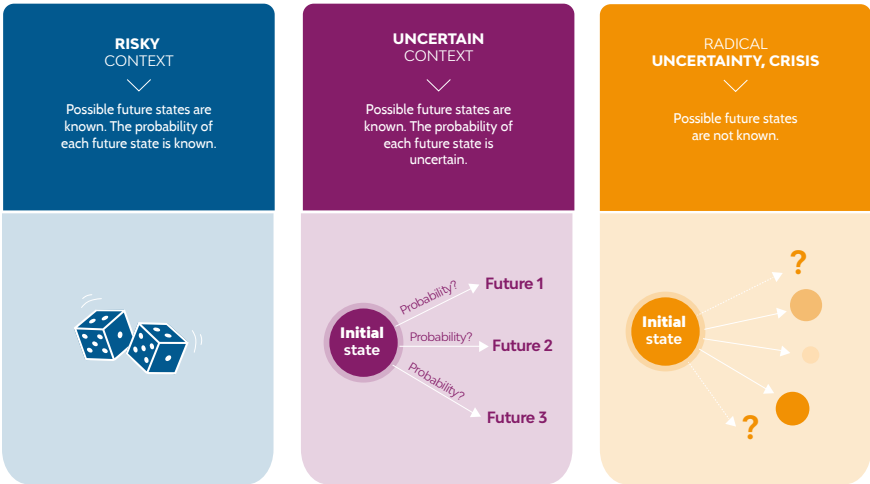
In situations of great uncertainty, the classic models of top-down leadership embodied by charismatic individuals are called into question. But that is perhaps for the best, as new leadership styles are now emerging. We are now seeing leaders with more diverse and agile profiles, who act on behalf of and with their teams, have more contact with the field, and are guided by shared values...

We live in a world of constant uncertainty. Fortunately, we humans are built to survive and we do not need to know everything in order to do so: we do not have time to read the 60 million articles on Wikipedia, we do not want to know the date of our death or all the risks and hazards that exist on this planet. But while we are accustomed to living with some level of uncertainty which we

know how to manage, what is new to us is the intensity and frequency of events. The multitude of potential problems that make work difficult, frequent restructurings, digitalisation, the societal expectations of employees and clients, public health and geopolitical crises that bring upheaval... Clearly, we are now living in a more complex and uncertain world.

Different levels of uncertainty

Uncertainty is always present, but its nature and amplitude vary. There are many models available to characterise uncertainty. Here is a rather simple one.



▲ Terminology developed in economics, following the work of F. Knight (1923)



What happens when the level of uncertainty increases?

If uncertainty increases suddenly or considerably, our cognitive processes change: our tried and tested methods no longer work, our intuition fails us, our emotions take over. The group dynamics change, sometimes revealing spontaneous solidarity – which may eventually subside – or at times creating an opportunity for new actors to show leadership. The balance between predetermination and adaptation changes, tipping over towards more adaptation, which becomes necessary.

And last but not least, the more uncertainty rises the harder it becomes to see the situation clearly and to know what to do... The ability to predict future outcomes is reduced and we can no longer anticipate the way we used to, because there are too many data interfering with each other. One of the pillars of leader legitimacy, “create the vision”, crumbles. The role of the leader as the person who champions the vision, who gets everyone on board and motivates them to act, no longer works.

From “create the safety vision” to “encourage a common vision to emerge”



In times of uncertainty, it becomes even more important not to say “here is the right vision”, but rather to encourage the vision to emerge, to create favourable circumstances in which a common vision can develop. This causes a shift in approach from leader-follower to leader-leader, where numerous potential leaders can present their vision of safety. After a discussion of each, a consensus is reached: “this

is where we are heading.” This does not mean that it is the right solution – there is most likely no right solution when the level of uncertainty is high – but it is our common vision, our decision, and it is the best we can do in the circumstances. This requires more humility from leaders, who will go from “I know, follow me” to “I don’t know everything, but we are going to work together to decide on a way forward.”

Even when you can't see ahead, take action

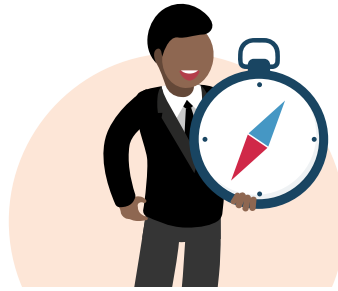
In times of uncertainty or crisis, it can be very tempting – and easy – to sit tight and wait for a clear way forward to emerge. Here is why that is not a good idea.

The first thing to do is to safeguard and protect the vital functions.

Emergency physicians maintain air and blood flow to the vital organs of a patient while they figure out what is wrong, see how the patient reacts, and decide on the best course of treatment. An organisation requires the same type of care: protect its

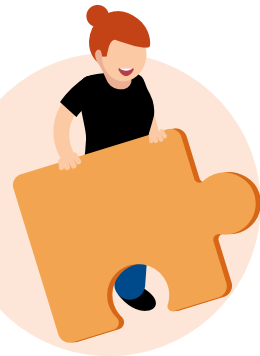
“heart” and get to work gathering clues to understand the situation. The world does not wait; reality is not separate from us: we contribute to building it, we are active participants in what is happening!

For Karl Weick, a professor of psychology and organisational behaviour, leaders do not use a map to navigate in times of uncertainty, as that would mean they are in charted territory. **In uncertain times, leaders use a compass to navigate.** In other words, they know which direction they



are heading in, but they do not know what lies ahead. **So they begin moving forward, aware that they might need to change course at some point.**

Embracing uncertainty therefore means accepting to do things even if we are unsure whether they will be helpful – we must be prepared for a multitude of scenarios. We need scenarios and we need to be capable of improvising around these plans, because the way to reach the objective set will rarely be what we initially thought it would be.



Mobilise groups and opt for a more distributed leadership model

Often, when someone says leader, we tend to think of individual leadership, a leader speaking to individuals, somewhat like a gardener tending to the growth of the young saplings in their department. But in uncertain times anything is possible – stopping the activity, continuing, continuing in a different way – and you cannot weigh up the different aspects alone.

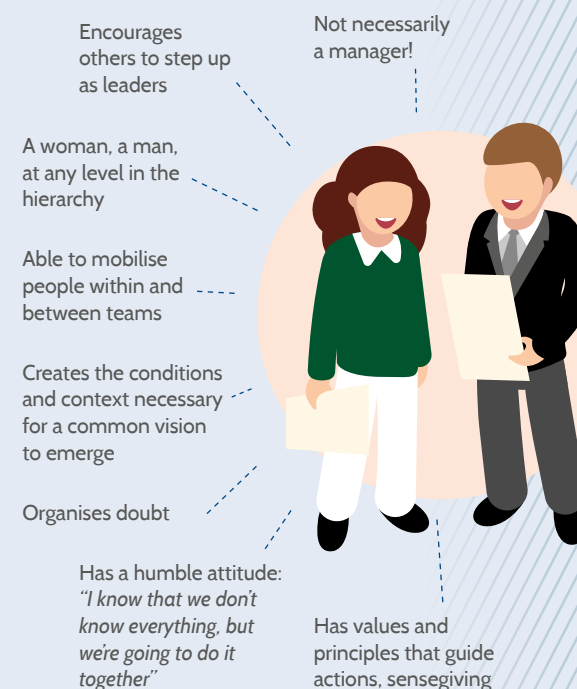
In these times, it is important to **introduce a form of leadership that is distributed or shared.** And to **hear a variety of viewpoints** and experiences in order to better understand the situation you are in.

Thus a **new role of the leader will be to make other leaders emerge, closer to the front line.** To encourage people who were not leaders to take the lead in a particular situation because they have already

experienced something similar or they know things that could be useful... This creates a shift, from an established, static form of leadership to dynamic leadership that emerges and changes according to the situation and to the profiles of the individuals.

Through group interactions, doubts and questions can emerge, and actions can be stopped which seemed evident but turned out not to be relevant. This requires good relations within the groups: people need to feel it is safe to ask questions, to challenge others and to be challenged themselves, and they need to be respectful of different points of view... This is not something that just happens; **long-term efforts must go into fostering cooperation and encouraging dialogue and shared vigilance.**

What is the role of the leader in uncertainty?



Our predictive models are no longer working... increase prudent decision-making

In an uncertain context, we can no longer use the classic methods of decision making based on calculating the quality-price ratio or the risk-benefit ratio for each identified possibility. As soon as uncertainty increases, our calculation-based safety models and references no longer work. **Uncertainty calls for rationales that are not quantifiable**, that have no common metrics; for example, how do you choose between saving a human life and saving the environment? **Making decisions becomes extremely difficult.**

So how do you give safety due consideration in decision-making during a crisis or in turbulent times? It becomes essential to:

- **Hold “decision-making round tables” that represent each of the priorities** – ethical and financial considerations, production, safety, etc. –, including representatives that have the appropriate level of

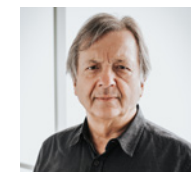
responsibility and power to guarantee that no one holds sway over anyone lest the decision-making process be biased.

- **Make safety sacrosanct:** the aim being to avoid the natural bias of minimising risks. Since major accidents are fortunately rare, the risk of them occurring can tend to be underestimated.

- **Improve communication about decisions:** explain the outcome of a decision but also the “why” behind it and the criteria and values on which it was based. Because that is what will help it make sense at all levels of the organisation.

- **Increase your presence in the field:** you need to be in close contact with workers on the front line to better understand the reality of implementing any decisions made, but also to measure their impact and request feedback so as to adjust them if necessary.

The importance of values in our choices



We make decisions based on our hierarchy of values, which is

influenced by both culture and circumstances and can thus change rapidly. One example of a radical shift in values – which does not happen often – is the COVID-19 pandemic. For the first time ever, health became the number one value almost everywhere in the world! This led to decisions such as lockdowns, mandatory mask wearing... previously unthinkable things become evident. This is one example of a radical shift that does not happen often.
Jean Pariès, Scientific Director at ICSI-FonCSI.



Maintain frames of reference, core values to guide actions

Yes, in times of uncertainty we can lose sight of our models or frames of reference. And that is exactly why it is important to **hold fast to – to look to – what you, as a group, deem essential**. In uncertainty, values, our fundamental frames of reference, let us know the extent to which we are truly aligned with the project, and this enables us to maintain cohesion around the main principles for action.

A leader is then in a position to uphold these main principles for action, but also to accept that

they may take different forms when applied in the field. This is an important point, because fostering a more shared or distributed approach to leadership also means **granting the teams more autonomy**, allowing them to use their inventiveness and, in a way, losing a little control.

These frames of reference serve as guideposts when making decisions and trade-offs. If they are shared early on by the entire organisation, this will help a common vision to emerge.

Accelerated by the ever-increasing presence of uncertainty, the transformations within organisations have opened the way for new leadership models. Better suited to the challenges faced in safety today, these models also seem to be a better fit for the current ways of working and more decentralised organisations, while coming closer to fulfilling the aspirations of employees as they seek more meaning and autonomy in their work.



Maintain frames of reference and continue to prepare for the future



Given the huge impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on Air France, the personnel were concerned for the future of the company and their jobs. *“We looked to our values in everything we did: exemplary behaviour, transparency, rigour, solidarity. Video conference calls where we held nothing back helped us, for instance, to establish trust. And we wanted to continue to concentrate on our future, by recruiting and training new pilots even though the crisis was ongoing,”* said Jean Fernandez, airline pilot and former VP of Flight Operations at Air France.



In 2017, one of the SNCF's train lines encountered a problem with the number of drivers available. *“We assessed the situation and took actions to address the need for drivers. While we agreed to break from our usual methods, it was important to us to keep certain things the same so as not to destabilise the entire system. We chose not to shorten the training dispensed to new drivers (12 to 18 months) and not to change the organisational structures to achieve greater productivity,”* explained Nicolas Ligner, director of RER C and the Paris Rive Gauche region at SNCF.

Find out more

These *Essentials* are based on an initial overview presented in the *Cahier* entitled “*Leadership in safety, industrial practices*”, published in 2011, and on the discussions that took place within the *Leadership in uncertainty work group* in 2022.



The publications in the *Cahiers de la sécurité industrielle* series are available as free downloads from the Publications section of our website, www.icsi-eu.org



Short animations and videos on key safety-related topics

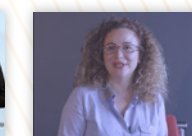
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Safety leadership



The seven principles of safety leadership



Leadership and managerial transformation



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Be credible and set an example
Demonstrate the importance given to safety, through both your willingness to listen and your actions



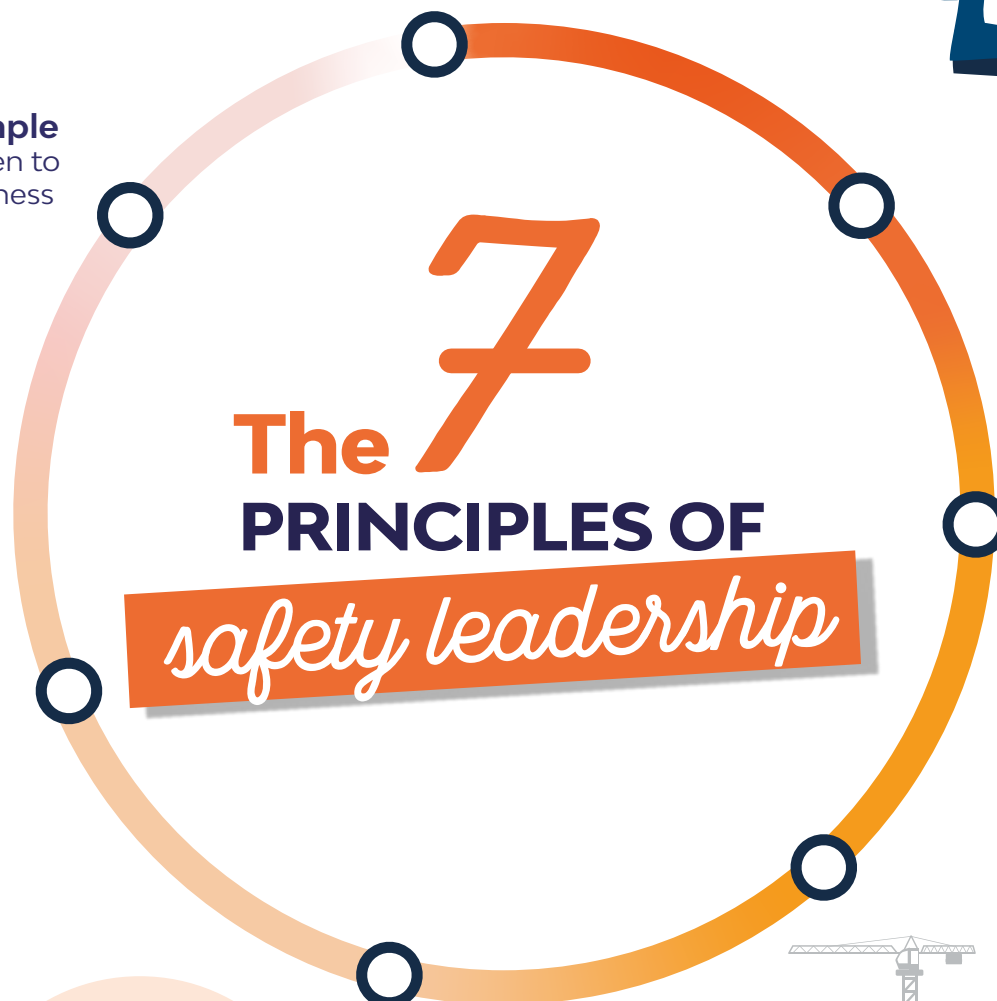
Create a safety vision
Ensure major hazards are the primary focus of safety



Share the vision
Use safety moments as an opportunity to communicate



Acknowledge safe practices and ensure fairness in sanctions
Create a climate of trust to encourage reporting and a smooth flow of information



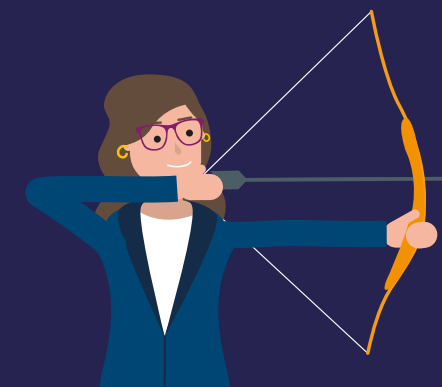
Give safety due consideration in trade-offs
Find the best possible compromise between competing priorities, know how to create safety margins and manage them



Foster team spirit and cooperation
Encourage a questioning attitude and develop shared vigilance



Spend time in the field
Spend time on the front line, observing and talking to the teams to see how the safety measures are really being implemented



Leadership is learned and developed by focusing on **3 areas:**



One's own behaviours



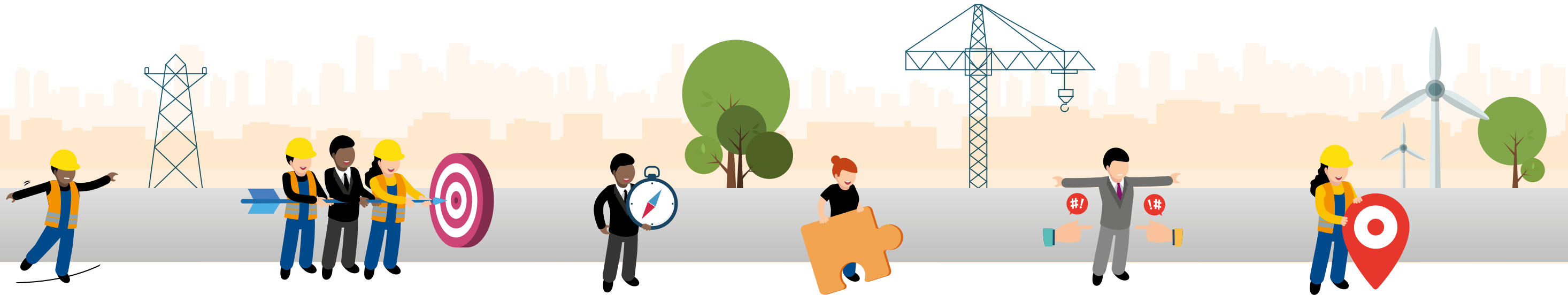
The type of **communication** established



The **means** and resources allocated to safety

What type of leadership in uncertainty?

In situations of great uncertainty, the classic models of top-down leadership embodied by charismatic individuals are called into question. But that is perhaps for the best, as new leadership styles are now emerging. We are now seeing leaders with more diverse and agile profiles, who act on behalf of and with their teams, have more contact with the field, and are guided by shared values...



What happens when the level of uncertainty increases?

We are accustomed to uncertainty and, thankfully, we humans are built to survive without knowing everything. But what is new to us is the intensity and frequency of events: the world we live in is more complex and uncertain.

This causes our cognitive processes to change: our tried and tested methods and our intuition no longer work. Group dynamics are altered and the balance between predetermination and adaptation changes. **And the more uncertainty rises, the harder it becomes to see the situation clearly and to know what to do...**

From "create the safety vision" to "encourage a common vision to emerge"

In times of uncertainty, it becomes even more important not to simply say "here is the right vision", but rather to help the vision to emerge, to create favourable circumstances in which a common vision can develop. It might not be the right solution – there is most likely no right solution when the level of uncertainty is high – but it is a common and shared vision decided on together.

This requires **more humility from leaders**, who will go from "I know, follow me" to "I don't know everything, but we are going to work together to decide on a way forward."

Even when you can't see ahead, take action

In times of uncertainty, it can be very tempting to sit tight and wait for a clear way forward to appear. But this is not a good idea... The first thing to do is to safeguard and **protect the vital functions**.

Next, reality is not separate from us: we contribute to building it. So we have to **get moving and use a compass to navigate, not a map**: we must choose a general direction and start moving towards it, knowing that the path to reach it will probably change. This implies having several scenarios and being capable of improvising around them.

Mobilise groups and opt for a more distributed leadership model

It is important to introduce a form of leadership that is distributed or shared.

To this end, **one new role of the leader will be to make other leaders emerge, closer to the front line**. And to listen to a variety of viewpoints and experiences in order to gain a better understanding of the situation.

Through group interactions, questions and doubts will emerge. For this to happen, efforts need to be channelled into developing **cooperation, dialogue and shared vigilance**, so that everyone feels safe to ask questions, speak up when something is not right, and have their behaviours challenged...

Our predictive models are no longer working... increase prudent decision-making

In uncertain times, **it becomes extremely difficult to make decisions** and giving safety due consideration in trade-offs is all the more essential.

"Decision-making round tables" must be held to consider each of the issues and challenges, **safety must be preserved and communication regarding decisions and trade-offs improved**. Spend even more time in the field in close contact with frontline workers, to better understand the reality of implementing decisions, but also to measure their impact. Being able to make adjustments if necessary is also key.

Maintain frames of references, core values to guide actions

In times of uncertainty, we can lose sight of our models and frames of reference. And that is exactly why it is **important to hold fast to – to look to – what you, as a group, deem essential**.

In uncertainty, values, our fundamental frames of reference, let us know the extent to which we are truly aligned with the project, and this enables us to maintain cohesion around the main principles for action.

These frames of reference serve as **guideposts when making decisions and trade-offs**. If they are shared early on by the entire organisation, this will help a common vision to emerge.



Accelerated by the ever-increasing presence of uncertainty, the transformations within organisations have opened the way for new leadership models. Better suited to the challenges faced in safety today, these models also seem to be a better fit for the current ways of working and more decentralised organisations, while coming closer to fulfilling the aspirations of employees as they seek more meaning and autonomy in their work.