

Quality of Leadership Definition of Positive Safety Culture is Critical for Business Survival

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Abstract

Organisational safety culture cannot be over-defined or under-defined, rather it becomes practically a company-specific definition for operational purposes. Global definitions or case studies are good points of learning for self-assessment and improvements. The quality of safety culture depends upon as per its existing steps and stages for a particular company for continuous improvements, which also varies from a company to company. Corporate definitions of the organisational safety culture suffer between the dichotomies of production and profits. Good safety culture is the struggle rather than the outcome, for making safety culture a personal and society value and practice it daily. This article discusses the problems and solutions of defining safety culture in terms of moving from old culture 1 to new culture 2. Important recommendations are made to overcome the challenges in reaching and deciding the implementable corporate definitions of company-specific safety culture based on the field visits to almost 50 site locations and interactions with 400 managers. Major conclusions are: a) Dichotomies of production and profits need focus and clarity to all. b) Make safety culture a personal and society value and practice it daily. c) Good safety culture is the struggle rather than the outcome. d) Safety culture is for inspiring people to adopt safer practices and e) visible leadership for inspiring positive safety culture.

Keywords: Business, Definitions, Safety, Culture, Corporate.

Introduction

An efficient safety management system ought to be based on safety awareness that should then become a

culture in the industry. Efficient safety culture should be demonstrated as a good value business (Misnan et al., 2007). Safety culture is a very important factor in a successful business endeavour. Employees who feel safe find meaning in their work and are motivated for changes in the company. Safety culture, as a sub-culture of the organisational culture controls the business success factors of the company. It is well recognised how human, technical and organisational factors are influenced by safety culture, and a successful company competitive strategy is built on the quality of the safety culture in the company, and that the meaning of work and the motivational potential of the working task are influenced by and the result of different organisational cultures. Managers should carefully consider the quality of the safety culture and its impact on the motives of the employees when they implement organisational changes in the company (Milan, 2015).

Safety culture is a nebulous concept related to the links between organisational culture, prevention practices and safety performance (Risk Engineering, 2020). No other concept in safety science is as studied, yet poorly understood (or measured) as safety culture, in terms of conceptual and methodological clarity with an argument to encourage industry to adopt closer definitional-methodological alignment (Casey et al., 2022).

In a positive safety culture, all employees are accountable for maintaining standards and procedures. Safety culture refers to the enduring value, priority and commitment placed on safety by every individual and every group at every level of the organisation (Canso, 2023).

The definition of safety culture has been broadened since the onset of this concept in the year 1984, now including safety perceptions and practices, beliefs and behaviours

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and so on (Abeje & Fan, 2023). The concept of safety culture in industry that enables staff and patients to be free from harm, is characterised by complexity, multifacetedness and indefinability. Over the years, unclear definitions have resulted in a proliferation of measurement tools, with lack of consensus on how safety culture can be best measured and improved. There are challenges and complexities in safety culture assessment relating to definition, tools, dimensionality and response rates. The aim is to prompt critical reflection on these issues and point to possible solutions (Ellis et al., 2023).

Fire and fatalities are a daily affair in India which reflects upon the lack of training, re-training, enforcement and reinforcement of safety culture by managements and workers in organisations.

Safety professionals from industry make it clear that most companies in India focus on zero fatality, not on zero unsafe behaviour or zero incident. In case, fatal incident happens, they can hide it, they can manage it by paying rupees 5,00,000 and gifts to authorities on festivals. If they employ a safety expert, it would cost heavily, hence they explore a middle way to manage business first, safety second. In speech expressions, it is safety first, production next. This is a norm for most private and multi-national organisations.

The critical question is how to stop these fatal practices so that workers and employees in plants/sites do not lose lives. Practically, the business definitions of safety implementation are customised and based the prevailing calculations of managers about the production targets and manipulations of safety practices that are possibly hand-in-glove with authorities, local politicians, factory inspectors and so on. Though some organisations and corporate try maximum to be ethical in safety care of workers. But mostly, due to lack of awareness of safety methodologies and usefulness, the companies and top managements prefer and prioritise to bypass safety norms considering safety budgets, and find out loopholes to do so. In this process, they lose their businesses, in the long run, as they adopt unsafe short-cuts to achieve business heights. However, there is no short-cut for better business and/or safety culture, but the same can be fast-tracked with easy and scientific ways with professional mentors involved.

Safety culture is a mindset issue of top managements, and a set of behavioural interventions are the solutions for change in the positive culture mindsets of the

organisations. This requires an undeterred determination of company leaders which can do wonders for saving human lives and businesses towards achieving better economies.

Practically, the safety culture is to develop an organisational support network to enable all those factors responsible for keeping safety practices/values as low, poor, reactive, uncaring and so on.

Objectives of this Survey

To explore problems in the quality of corporate definition of safety culture terms of moving from old culture-1 to new culture-2.

To explore challenges and solutions in reaching and deciding the implementable corporate definitions of company-specific safety culture.

Method

Field visits to almost 50 site locations and interactions with 400 managers comprised sample of this research. Industry professionals participated in the study as part of an action field survey with the researcher. These research participants had been implementing behavioural safety compliance culture at their work sites. The research participants included, the Directors, Managers, Heads of Departments, EHS/HR Professionals belonging to the public and private industrial sectors, including chemicals, construction, gas, power and steel, across Indian locations. The sampling method used was a random sampling.

Both primary data (interviews, discussions) were collected. Interviews based on open-ended questions, focus group interviews and personal in-depth discussions were conducted over the year 2023. The responses to the relevant questions were collated.

The study results and implications are reflected below from a rigorous review of safety culture literature and experiences/case studies shared by the industry leaders across Indian organisations.

Results and Discussion

This paper dwells on four themes of exploring problems in the quality of corporate definition of safety culture terms of moving from old culture-1 to new culture-2. Table 1

highlights the problems of safety culture-1 and solutions for moving to culture-2.

Problems in the Quality of Business Definition of an Existing Old Safety Culture-1 and Solutions for the Implementable Corporate Definitions of Company-Specific New Safety Culture-2.

There are five aspects or problems in the quality of business definition of an existing old safety culture-1 of companies that need attention and focus as highlighted below. These factors (mindset of top leadership; more focus on profits, less on safety culture; lack of awareness about safety culture; internal politics for not adopting safety culture; and visible leadership for inspiring positive safety culture are interconnected and push each other for poor safety culture affecting financial performance and sustainability of the organisations.

- *Mindset of Top Leadership about Safety Culture:* 92% of managers believed that the mindset of top leadership is a problem in the quality of business definition of an organisational safety culture. Solution for this issue involves providing orientation to top leadership for a new culture-2. Successful safety leaders encourage robust and open communication among team members. Good safety leaders actively energize the employees. This is very critical issue as the fatality’s numbers are still unacceptably high when seen through the promise of the OSH Act, which entitles every worker to safe and healthful working conditions and makes all employers and employees responsible to provide a work area free from recognised hazards (Lundell et al., 2021).
- *More Focus on Profits, Less on Safety Culture:* (90%) Nearly 90% of managers expressed that companies focused more on profits rather safety culture for employees, being an issue for low quality

of an existing safety culture. Solution strategy for this aspect is in balancing perceptions about profits and safety culture. More recent studies have found the superior stock performance by organisations that achieve a culture of health, safety and well-being. Nearly three decades of research suggest the importance of corporate culture and financial performance of companies that demonstrated that they valued employees (Fabius & Phares, 2021).

- *Lack of Awareness about Safety Culture:* Almost 80% of managers observed that the lack of awareness about safety culture is a reason for poor quality of business definition of an existing safety culture of companies. Solution for this aspects lies in increasing awareness about safety culture to all at site. Poor awareness about safety culture has contributed to many major incidents and personal injuries. An organisation’s culture can have as big an influence on safety outcomes as the safety management system (HSE, 2023).
- *Internal Politics for not Adopting Safety Culture:* (75%) Managers (75%) perceived that the internal organisational politics for not adopting transformation in safety culture is a factor for low quality definition of an existing safety culture of companies. Solution involves in recreating positive mindset into internal politics which is a difficult challenge but not impossible. A study draws particular attention to the influence of political factors and the impact of organisational factors on the successful transfer of training, areas not consistently considered in safety training design and delivery. It provides a useful tool for discriminating between different contextual factors and the level at which they operate. This could enable more effective management of these factors to improve the potential for transfer of safety training from the classroom to the workplace (Pilbeam & Karanikas, 2023).

Table 1: Problems of Safety Culture-1 and Solutions for Moving to Culture-2

Problems of Old Safety Culture-1	Solutions for Shifting to New Safety Culture-2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mindset of top leadership (92%). ● More Focus on profits, less on safety culture (90%). ● Visible leadership for inspiring positive safety culture (87%). ● Lack of awareness about safety culture (80%). ● Internal politics for not adopting safety culture (75%). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Orientation to top leadership for culture-2. ● Balancing perceptions about profits and safety. ● Leaderships’ daily safety time at shop-floors. ● Awareness about safety culture to all at site. ● Recreating positive mindset into Internal politics.

As these results of this study point out that what is most problematic in promoting safety culture in organisations is the business-profits orientations over and above the lack of awareness about the value of safety culture, that impacts the mindset of top leadership leading to group dynamics turning into internal politics for being comfortable with the poorest definitions of organisational safety culture leading to incidents to manpower and a big threat to business sustainability.

Conclusions and Implications

- **Balanced Dichotomies of Safe Production and Profits Need Focus and Clarity to All:** business definitions of the organisational safety culture suffer between the dichotomies of production and profits. The purpose of safety culture is not clear to organisations due to unserious and essentially a fluffy thinking. Safety culture becomes like a pickle that everyone tastes but it remains a side dish, not a part of main menu or major focus thrust area of the company.

Dichotomy is due to the fact that one is the background to which the new safety culture is to be

registered and established (culture-1), and second is the manner and clarification by which the concepts in training by the mentor for new safety culture is imparted and grasped by the employees (culture-2). There are two issues, one is that the organisations are not aware of the right definition and approach of safety culture, and second, they don't intend to adopt the same due to internal safety politics. The managements need to understand and emphasise the positive relationship between a sustainable corporate safety strategy and stakeholder perceptions that brings advantages to business performance (Hristov, 2022).

- **Make Corporate Safety Culture a Personal and Society Value for Employees:** Unless safety culture is a personal persuasion, it becomes very difficult to sustain the same at workplace or in personal life. The thrust of safety culture at sites impacts the learning transfer to personal lifestyle. Every day, there are road accidents killing young adults who are national human capital of any country. They must be saved. Companies organise safety learning programs on road safety for employees to see that safety behaviours are personalised (Fig. 1-2).

बाइक की आमने-सामने टक्कर में घायल सगुनी की इलाज के दौरान गोरखपुर में हुई मौत, मातम

खसीर कुमार घोरत, नरकटियागंज

कहीं रिता बेटे की मौत के बाद फरक रहा है तो कहीं मर्दाने अपने लाल को खंडन खानी घंटे लगे हैं। कहीं कबले अपने रिता के कबले से रिहाट कर चलाये मार रहे हैं। हर दिन मरके खून से लाल हो रही है और कंधे पेसा दिन नहीं है, जब लोग मौत के अमेस में नली ममा रहे हो। 13 नवंबर को नरकटियागंज सखेदा मुखा पथ पर हुई दो बाइकों की टक्कर में गोरखपुर मॉरीखर के रमू पासवान ने अपने 13वर्षी उषी दिन गंज दे तो दो दिन बाद बाई सखेदा में के नोका कुमार के पुत्र और रिटन गैलमर कान्नी डिग्री की गंग हार मार। हड्डि कंधे अघाव के मीके को जखम बंदे की मौत ने इन्दु देवी की कंकडोर कर रखा हवा है। गंकेस और इन्दु देवी को दहाइ से रगू मुलख जलाने रार। इन्दु देवी बेटे के मर से रिहाट कर अपने किम्यत को कोस रही थीं रिता कौन खूब बिलख रहे थे, खान्नेव लीन खीदने लगे रहे थे लीनन लीनन के बौदुन का जग हार।

13 नवंबर को हुई वा हादसा, डॉक्टर बोले शक्य है। पल्लो रेशी रो वा हादसी की जखम बोले 13 नवंबर को एक बाइक पर सवबर नगर के बाई सखेदा 9 निवासी सनी कुमार व उनम कुमार ठोरी से नरकटियागंज सखेदा मुखा पथ पर हुई दो बाइकों की टक्कर में गोरखपुर मॉरीखर के रमू पासवान ने अपने 13वर्षी उषी दिन गंज दे तो दो दिन बाद बाई सखेदा में के नोका कुमार के पुत्र और रिटन गैलमर कान्नी डिग्री की गंग हार मार। हड्डि कंधे अघाव के मीके को जखम बंदे की मौत ने इन्दु देवी की कंकडोर कर रखा हवा है। गंकेस और इन्दु देवी को दहाइ से रगू मुलख जलाने रार। इन्दु देवी बेटे के मर से रिहाट कर अपने किम्यत को कोस रही थीं रिता कौन खूब बिलख रहे थे, खान्नेव लीन खीदने लगे रहे थे लीनन लीनन के बौदुन का जग हार।

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बच्चों को हेलमेट पहनने की दें सीख : चंद्रमोहन

सुरक्षा को लेकर जानकारी देते कार्यपालक अध्यक्ष व निदेशक.

नरकटियागंज.लगातार हो रही सड़क दुर्घटना और उन दुर्घटनाओं में जान गंवा रहे लोगों के प्रति मिल प्रबंधन ने गहरी संवेदना जतायी है. न्यु स्वदेशी सुगर मिल्स के कार्यपालक अध्यक्ष चन्द्रमोहन ने लोगों को व्यवहार आधारित सुरक्षा के प्रति जागरूक करने की बात कही है. उन्होंने कहा कि दुर्घटनाओं को रोकने के लिए मिल प्रबंधन की ओर से मिल कर्मियों, किसानों और आम लोगों को जागरूक किया जा रहा है. पिछले दिनों मिल में बिहैरियर बेस्ट सेम्टी को लेकर सेमिनार का आयोजन किया गया था. सेमिनार में भाई बहन सुरक्षा को लेकर चीनी मिल के अधिकारियों व कर्मियों ने व्यवहार आधारित सुरक्षा की शपथ ली है. बिहैरियर बेस्ट सेम्टी मुंबई के निदेशक डा. एचएल केला के साथ मिलकर इसे नरकटियागंज समेत पूरे जिले में चलाया जाएगा. कार्यपालक अध्यक्ष ने बताया कि अगर मां बाप बच्चों को बाइक की साब्री देते हैं तो उन्हें हेलमेट भी दें. ताकि बच्चे अपने जान को कीमत समझ सकें. उन्होंने आदर के साथ लोगों को सुरक्षा के प्रति जागरूक रहने की अपील की है. कार्यपालक अध्यक्ष ने बताया कि अगर लोग सचेत रहें और सुरक्षा नियमों का पालन करें तो सड़कों पर हो रही दुर्घटनाओं को रोका जा सकता है.

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Fig. 1-2: Companies Organise Safety Learning Programs on Road Safety for Young Employees

Develop a win-win situation for creating psychological safety, clarify the rationale for speaking up, stamp out the fear of punishments and amplify rewards. Make it safe for employees to speak up, to spot-correct at-risk behaviours and safety barriers (Hadley et al., 2023).

- *Good Safety Culture is the Struggle Rather than the Outcome:* Good safety culture demands continued struggle and persistence. If you are convinced that your organisation has a good safety culture, you are almost certainly mistaken, a safety culture is something that is striven for but rarely attained. The virtue and the reward lies in the struggle rather than the outcome (Canso, 2023). Safety culture transformation and preventing fatalities is a big hurdle for companies to reach and achieve global businesses. That's because, nobody at top levels takes complete responsibility for zero-harm or vision zero, as safety culture outcomes are not immediately visible but in long term very useful in business sustainability.

Make it safe for employees to speak up to spot-correct at-risk behaviours and safety barriers. Clarify the rationale, stamp out the fear of punishments and amplify rewards. Ex-Chief general manager of ONGC says, "It's absolutely true, for nurturing a safety culture in any industry. ONGC general manager says, "we should instil the openness for speaking out". Ex-General manager of IOCL says, "offer some awards/rewards for successful spreader/transponder of positive safety culture".

- *Safety Culture is for Inspiring People:* All employees and associates who don't find time to participate very actively daily in the "positive safety culture initiative of the company" are the ones actually who are to be made aware that they are (directly or indirectly) responsible for any incidents at sites, and they need to be regularly encouraged and cared by their HODs as well as steering teams. Those who involve more actively are to be credited more actively. Follow at-risk behaviour (for spot-correction) not the outcomes. When safety culture is under direct radar of the managing directors' office, its implementation is faster and more accurate and vice versa. When safety becomes ingrained in the organisational values and practices, it becomes everyone's responsibility. Building a safety culture

requires the active participation and commitment of all employees, from top management to frontline workers (Kelly, 2023).

This study identified a set of four factors (mindset of top leadership; more focus on profits, less on safety culture; lack of awareness about safety culture; and internal politics for not adopting safety culture) that push each other in combination as constraint for better safety culture affecting the mindset of stakeholders and investors adversely impacting the financial performance and sustainability of an organisation. The next set of four factors (balanced dichotomies of safe production and profits need focus and clarity to all, making corporate safety culture a personal and society value for employees, understanding that good safety culture is the struggle rather than the outcome, and safety culture is for inspiring people) helps restoring the safety culture transformation for the interests of business and manpower safety. The synthesised conceptualisation of these safety culture aspects can be used to provide greater depth and practical applicability of safety culture, by increasing our understanding of the interactions between cultural and contextual variables in a given workplace and the effect they have on safety (Edwards et al., 2013). However, safety culture development depends on employee learning from behavioural outcomes, conducive enabling factors and consistency over time (Bisbey et al., 2019). This requires a culture of safety that allows people to say what they really think (McKinsey & Company, 2023). Thus, the development of quality of definition of safety culture in any organisation goes through an indigenous process and journey of the factors discussed above, which is necessarily a company based definition for corporates as they are always in a particular stage or phase of the quality of safety culture.

- *Clarity on Visible Leadership for Inspiring Positive Safety Culture:* When you wish to drive BBS in plants, it would first depend upon how well do you understand it as a behavioural science application? Mostly in general, top managements are less committed for visible safety culture participation, more so true in case of government companies in comparison to private multinationals. Government or-

ganisations demonstrate active participation due to enforcement by ministers. There's a need to amplify top leaders visible presence as a value addition in positive safety culture activism in shop floor. Visible leadership of top management team in safety culture Transformation must be part of their KRA. Like a business Head of SEIL comes fortnightly to site and conducts BBS mass-communication as well as takes account of weekly report on BBS implementation progress, which impacts participation of all HODs visibility and accountability in safety culture at sites. During the weekly round at site of each top management members, the barriers to safety culture must be spot-closed, such as providing material, resources, engineering controls, unsafe conditions, process hazards, systemic and administrative issues to demonstrate visible leadership. The Directors must define the concepts of visible leadership in positive and supportive safety cultural roles and values emphasis at sites. Management members are aware of production numbers at any point of time, why they are not aware of the behavioural trends of safety each month, as behaviour is the base of all incidents and organisations that are not aware of behavioural aspects of safety are safe only accidentally. Management team is the core team of safety culture transformation and if the team members don't act to their role, safety culture doesn't take place, whatever else companies do. Visible leadership is about inspiring, energising and mobilising employees and associates into their safety culture's active involvement. Management speeches and frequent field presence must come together for charismatic results in safety, culture and business. There are examples of leaders in industry who are demonstrating these behaviours but not each one of them, which slows down the spirit of positive work culture.

For enhancing visible leadership in positive safety culture transformation, the following ten aspects need to reflect in the management KRA (Lal & Choueiri, 2023).

- How many spot-corrections did you engage in every day for at-risk behaviours and barriers-in-safety?
- How many BBS Gemba walks did you complete today and rewarded observers?
- Did you enter your daily contribution of spot-correction on the BBS company folder?
- How many safety budgets did you approve of today?
- How many BBS Mass-communication in a week did you have on shop floor?
- Do you know the weekly behaviours trends of at-risk behaviours and Barriers of your plants?
- Did you participate in participate in weekly and monthly BBS meetings?
- Did you consult and respect the EHS department before taking safety decisions?
- Do you know an overall increase of BBS mentors and observers of your plants each month?
- Have you personally stopped your own at-risk behaviours?

Recommendations

The industry practitioners recommended several ways of defining positive safety culture as below while moving from old culture-1 to new culture-2. ONGC Karaikal, executive director, Uday Paswan says, "People should not only be saved from physical injury but also from psychological harm at workplaces. I was recognised at ONGC more as safety person and trained in safety systems as I demonstrated interest in safety culture". Safety head of Nagpur Mumbai tunnel project, Subhrakanta Khuntia, said, "the entire project is completed without any reportable incidents, due to top management support. In my 22 years' experience (HSE), it is very clear that if Project Manager will lead, support and believe in HSE person (without any duplicity) then I am sure not a single incident will happen, and we will successfully achieve safety culture". U Shekhar, MD, Galaxy Surfactants stated, "Quarterly review of all sites related to Legal, Safety, process safety along with Factory Managers and seniors can be started. Only high risk points can be discussed and progress can be reviewed. Some of the aspects of leading / lagging indicators monitoring and display related to their own safety performance to be displayed as first slide in each meeting by individual Process head. Safety pause is one which have to be made mandatory and in some of meetings where top management present should also share safety pause. This will create positive impact. Being

concerned on total environmental, we need to improve and evaluate all off site incident thoroughly. Internal incident we have intense review. Let all managers variable pay have Safety as one of the component. External support partner strengthening like our transporter. Many of onsite vehicle incident are because of either misbehaving of driver, poor vehicle conditions. Stressing safety approach even in personal life is the support when seniors visit the site is the support I seek". Arun Deore, HOD, Afcons, says, "The Construction Project Manager and Project HSE Heads expect proactive commitment from top management and directors. They rely on Top Management and Directors to actively support safety initiatives. This involves dedicating sufficient budget and resources for regular safety training programs, ensuring the availability of modern safety equipment, and promoting a safety-first culture throughout the organisation. They expect leaders to conduct periodic site visits to demonstrate a personal commitment to safety, actively participate in safety meetings and promptly address any safety-related concerns raised by on-site teams. Additionally, clear communication of safety goals, the enforcement of safety policies and regular safety audits are crucial aspects of the support they seek to foster a positive safety culture across all construction sites". KK Sharma, Director EHS DCM Shriram emphasised, "As part of top management, I feel supporting plant heads and EHS heads in terms of execution of their plans by allocating adequate resources and budgets. Above all highest level of trust in them will go in long way for building a positive safety culture empowering them for various decisions at plant level". Pavan Rao, EHS Head, SEIL, said, "Support in actions instead of words. Act on advice of HSE Head. Clear verbal and non-verbal communications to all. Clear safety KPI for HODs and Line Managers". Arvind Roy, EHS Head of Agra metro Project observed, "Top management and directors should give authority to plant heads and HSE Heads in screening deployment of workforce in view of employees competency and safety orientation to develop safe work culture - no work with safety should be allowed - safety is never expensive - incident is always expensive and causes loss of moral of employees and organisation". MK Rao, ex Executive director of IGL, "Visibility in the top managements' support by promptly approving proposals to improve working conditions, automation and quality of PPEs, and ensuring that related implementations are on course". These practical inputs

would help to draw a broader view of defining positive safety culture for corporates (Personal Communications, 2023).

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