INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

Organizational Safety Culture Transformation through Coaching

Okeudo Ameze
Engineer, Department of Safety and Environment,
SPDC, SPDC, Port Harcourt. Rivers State, Nigeria
Kevin Odiase
Engineer, Department of Safety and Environment,
SPDC, SPDC, Port Harcourt. Rivers State, Nigeria

Abstract:
Organizational culture is simply known as 'the way we do things around here'. Culture is developed over time and evolves as people transit through the organization. It is an uphill task to transform organizational culture when this is not desirable. With regard to safety, it becomes even more important that the right mindset and behaviours are modelled across the organizational strata, as these are fundamental to keeping people, assets, and the environment safe. Personnel becomes wary of reporting incidents for fear of toppling the safety performance when the focus is placed on keeping safety track records. Another factor that contributes to underreporting is the attitude of the leaders while receiving 'bad news' of an incident. Excessive questioning, blame culture, and consequence management for failures create an environment of fear and inability to intervene in unsafe conditions.

Keywords: Safety culture, lost time injuries, context drive behaviour, medical treatment case, safety pyramid, learner's mindset, safety culture ladder, transformation through coaching

1. Introduction

1.1. Understanding the Culture

It is said that a problem shared is a problem half solved. How do you get organizational leaders to accept that there is a fundamental issue with the culture of their organizational safety, which they have probably contributed to? A first look at the safety statistics gives an insight into the frequency of reporting. A red flag is raised with zero near misses, zero recordable incidents, zero lost time injuries, zero fatalities, and minimal safety interventions over months with active operations. What is the underlying strategy for such pristine performance? In organizations such as this, good safety performance means the absence of incidents. As such, all effort is geared towards ensuring zero-incident occurrence or, worse still, zero reporting. The leaders are happy with all green key performance indicators. The danger with this is: first, the organization is not learning. No incidents mean no investigations and no gaps to identify and close, and ultimately nothing to learn. Without interventions, there is a threat of failures lining up to create a big bang once luck runs out.

Investigating the underlying reason for safety performance scorecards by asking open questions can begin to unravel the issue. Some leaders call this 'scratching the green'. The intent is to identify where there is a watermelon effect. All green on the outside and possibly red when you dig deeper. A simple example is shown below:

Key Performance Indicator	Plan	Actual
Fatality	0	0
Lost Time Injury	0	0
Medical Treatment Case	0	0
Nearmiss	0	0
Unsafe Acts/Conditions	100	60

Table 1: Safety Performance Outlook

A look at table 1 presents an excellent safety performance. Any leader will be happy with the zeros. However, this table's statistics are not healthy. Zero reporting of low-level incidents present a red flag. We should be curious to understand the underlying factors driving this performance. Humans interacting with machines present exposure to

hazards. In addition, humans make mistakes. Eventually, something is bound to happen. To scratch the greens, critical questions to ask can be:

- How many incidents have been reported over the past 6 months?
- What barriers prevented injuries?
- Are events occurring without corresponding reporting?
- What success factors are driving this performance?
- What does this performance tell you?
- How many non-compliances were escalated?

Further insights can be gleaned, helping to frame the present culture of the organization. In my experience, getting leaders to probe further is the first step through the door to transformation. As a leader, what will be your response to:

- How important is safety to my organization and me?
- How many resources are reasonably adequate for safety programs?
- Is it okay to prioritize quality, production, and profit while compromising safety?

This is a reflective question to guide one in making an informed decision toward promoting a positive safety culture.

The crux of the matter is tied around performance. When workers underperform, especially on safety, they are blamed for the problem. This makes it look like the workers are responsible for their performance. Albeit, poor safety performance, which is directly linked to the organization's safety culture, has more to do with organizational leaders than workers.

It is not pleasant for managers to own up to this, as this is more than just a safety performance issue. It is the safety culture of the organization. That said, there is a need to know when to look past workers' performance alone. Below are some nuggets that explain organizational managers, not workers, are the problem with your workplace safety performance management.

1.1.1. Workers' Attrition Rate

It always sounds far easier to say workers leaving the organization is not in the control of the organization. It is quickly tied to their decision as their reasons are self-controlled. However, the reality is that most of the reasons workers leave an organization are entirely within the organization's control. In fact, some of the top reasons are directly linked to the organization, including the worker's relationship with their work environment, the workers' skills at work, organizational culture, and leaders' recognition of workers' performance. In reality, workers leave their bosses, not the organization. Their bosses are their organization and must demonstrate good safety leadership. Their safety leadership must translate to an actionable culture shift. (Agnew, J. & Daniels, A. C., 2010).

1.1.2. Morale Depletion

Workers want to work for leaders they trust and respect. This is typical of workplaces that strive for excellent safety performance. One can argue that workers' relationship with their boss directly translates to a workplace morale boost and begs the question of how workers perceive the leaders in their organization. That said, if the leaders in an organization pride themselves on safety but are not consistent in complying with safety practices and impose these safety practices on the workers, the workers will be demoralized, cut corners and hurt themselves. This is a recipe for disaster in workplaces.

Leaders often boast about zero harm culture for many reasons, but if their actions and behaviours do not tie to their words, their workers will stop listening and comply with safety standards and practices. Leaders permit poor safety culture in the workplace.

1.1.3. Metric Driven

As discussed earlier, many leaders are metric-driven and are happy to keep the needle right on poor safety culture so far as metrics tied to production are moving in the right direction. What they forget is that one incident can wreck the organization. The stakeholders investigate the safety metrics of the organization to determine what stock to invest in. It is said that an organization that is meticulous in driving good safety culture will definitely get the production metrics right. This is exactly where the rubber meets the road. That said, it is good to be target driven, but there has to be a balance between safety and production/productivity. In fact, the scale should tilt higher in favour of safety culture and compliance with safety practices.

2. Discussion

2.1. Why Safety Culture Matters

The term safety culture might seem ambiguous, but for clarity, it is not something you buy off the shelves of shops or gifted. Rather it is a set of intentionally acquired habits, a way of doing things that often stem from the product of some other cultures, such as organizational culture, professional ethics, and environmental culture. Organizational safety culture can be either neutral, negative, or positive. The determinant factor is how people perceive safety and/or what people believe the importance of safety to be.

Context drives behaviours; as such, the Safety Culture of an organization is the offset of the group values, attitudes, and laid down rules that guides and determines patterns of behaviours. Once built and engrained, the resultant effect is clearly seen in the behaviours and responses of the workforce, reflecting the style and proficiency of an organization's

safety management system. By simply observing how things are done, i.e., belief systems, attitudes, and overall practices in an organization, one can easily deduce the existence of organizational safety culture and where they are in the safety culture ladder. The safety culture ladder will be explained deeper in subsequent pages of this paper.

Developing and maintaining a positive or good safety culture is the expectation of any successful organization. In achieving this, some factors have been identified as major contributors that influence the safety culture journey. These are:

- Leadership/Management Commitment
- Good/effective safety communication
- Profit/productivity ranking in relation to safety
- Learners' mindset and capacity building
- Level of Risk-taking behaviours
- Competency of the workforce, especially frontline workers.
- Reward and recognition for good safety behaviours

Organizations that desire positive safety culture create an environment where workers have chronic unease with actions and conditions that could undermine workplace safety. The workers have the responsibility to keep themselves and others safe. They want to be safe rather than forced to be safe. These organizations are intentional in developing their leaders and managers, equipping them with the right skills, knowledge, and coaching to effectively deploy the responsibilities of managing safety.

2.2. Safety Pyramid as it Relates to Safety Culture

The safety pyramid, sometimes called the safety triangle, is a pictorial representation of a concept called Heinrich's Law, developed by H. W. Heinrich. Heinrich, a Traveler's Insurance Company worker in the 1930s, published a series of ground-breaking theories on health and safety at work.

The most famous of these is Heinrich's Law, which states, 'in a workplace, for every accident that causes a major injury, there are 29 accidents that cause minor injuries and 300 accidents that cause no injuries.' Heinrich HW (1931).

Heinrich's Law indicates a relationship between major injuries, minor injuries, and near-misses. Heinrich's most-cited figure states that 88% of all injuries and incidents are caused by a human decision to perform an unsafe act.

Heinrich concluded that by lowering the number of minor injuries, organizations could reduce the total number of major injuries and incidents. Moreover, while Heinrich's most often cited figure would suggest an emphasis on man-made failures, Heinrich actually suggested that workplaces focus on hazards, not just worker behavior.

There is a direct relationship between Heinrich's law and safety culture. Organizations with good safety culture quickly address issues from unsafe acts and unsafe conditions as these issues can quickly transform from unsafe acts and unsafe conditions to real incidents that can wreck the organization's financials and avert lawsuits and litigations.

2.3. Characteristics of Strong Safety Culture

In the quest to develop a positive safety culture, the Workplace Safety Competency Framework identified nine broad behaviours, or cultural actions, considered essential. These are listed below:

- Communicate company values
- Demonstrate leadership
- Clarify required and expected behaviour
- Personalize safety outcomes
- Develop positive safety attitudes
- Engage and own safety responsibilities and accountabilities
- Increase hazard/risk awareness and preventive behaviours
- Improve understanding and effective implementation of safety management systems
- Monitor, review and reflect on personal effectiveness

A major drawback or challenge facing many leaders lies more in efficiency and strategy to adopt to positively influence worker attitudes and behaviour, not just for the purpose of compliance but for workers to own the process and system. As we know, the success of any organization is embedded in its system. Finding a framework that works, especially one that aggregates all the 9 factors listed above, has hitherto been a dilemma, but coaching has proven to be effective in championing and deploying these ideas in a more friendly, non-confrontational way while addressing the three bedrocks on which safety culture is built on, i.e., psychological, behaviour and situational,

Effective coaching is one of the indicators of strong leadership and management commitment. When channeled to safety management, it enforces the desired culture, providing clarity through visible demonstration to workers on how things are done and what actions/attitudes are rewarded, tolerated, or punished. However, consequence management is mostly the last option as the aim is towards causative learning to ensure a psychologically safe work environment, not just performance tracking.

2.4. Setting up for Success

Turning around a team's sense of comfort in the status quo requires intentionality and planning. Success in culture transformation requires the patient to follow the following steps:

2.4.1. Sensing of the Organization

This can be accomplished through interviews, round table discussions, and observations of behavioural patterns. It involves documenting behavioural responses to safety reports across the entire strata of the organization. Is there hesitation and fear while discussing safety incidents? How do the leaders respond? What is the body language? What is the focus of the discussion? Where is the source of the highest influence?

2.4.2. Developing the Message

Transformation starts with sending the right message. Clear expectations set by leaders on safety give a strong boost to turning the tide. Leaders should be clear on the expected behaviours and be seen to model such. In the execution, the leaders will back this up by recognizing interventions.

2.4.3. Engaging the Leaders

Analysis and insights from sensing the team should be shared with the management team. This is usually a difficult conversation but the most important step. A clear assessment of what the ideal is and where the organization sits on the scale should be presented. Getting the executives to accept this assessment as a true reflection of the culture and the need to take action begins the journey to success.

2.4.4. Action Plan

Design and communicate the transformation plan to the leaders. Leaders' buy-in and sponsorship of the intervention activities are critical to success. Define the levels of supervisors to be coached and trained. Develop a schedule to provide regular feedback to leadership with examples to show progress.

2.5. Where Do We Want to Be?

The quote: 'The journey of a thousand miles starts with one step' by Lao Tzu is indeed appropriate for the transformation journey. Now that you have set up the plan, it is time to work on the plan. As mentioned earlier, human performance and learner mindset are major drivers in piloting positive safety culture within any organization. On the other hand, workers are encouraged to be bold, own the process, and be creative in their ideas while ensuring safety is of utmost priority. However, developing a learner mindset requires an out-of-the-box strategy with clearly defined goals and a strong desire for growth.

The process of helping an individual towards improving their own performance is referred to as coaching. It incorporates learning from incidents or mistakes, and turning them into a positive outcome is the real target. According to John Whitmore, in Coaching for Performance, 'Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance; it is helping an individual to learn rather than teaching him/her.'

Safety coaching, a process that aims to improve safety performance by focusing on the 'here and now' rather than on the distant past or future, equips the workers with the right tools, skills, and knowledge needed to be effective, accountable, and committed to themselves, the organization and of course their work. In simple terms, its focus is to ensure that individuals become their best selves. This is of advantage to the company as the results not only reflect in safety but in the overall production performance. Good safety is good business.

2.6. Organizational Safety Culture Resulting from Workers' Upskilling

The primary objective of workplace safety upskilling is to protect workers and reduce the chance of an accident or injury. However, safety training done the right way can do so much more than that, helping the organization on a number of levels. The question is: How does workers' safety training make a workplace better? Let's take a look at several of the ways that workers' safety training can strengthen the organization.

2.6.1. Keeps Production up and Running

Safety training not only helps to protect the workers, but it also makes the workers more productive. If there are accidents in the workplace, the workers will almost always force production to temporarily or permanently stop – depending on the gravity of the incidents. Injuries will also cause workers to miss work, reducing the size of the workforce. Both of these factors can slow down production and hurt the business's bottom line. On the other hand, safety training can prevent the types of accidents that cause production to slow down or stop.

2.6.2. Reduce Accident-Related Costs

In addition to production losses, many other costs are associated with workplace accidents. The price of insurance, workers' compensation and similar costs will all increase if there are frequent accidents in the workplace. This is essentially throwing money away if there are accidents that could have been prevented with better training. Numerous lawsuits and litigations will creep in and cause worries for the workers, organization, investors, and other stakeholders.

2.6.3. Identify Struggling Workers

An effective Safety training program can help to shine a light on workers who might be struggling or need a little help. This will allow managers and supervisors to give these workers the help they need to get them up to speed and will help to improve any weak links in the business, creating a stronger organization overall.

2.6.4. Reduce Absenteeism

One of the worst side effects of accidents in the workplace is absenteeism. When workers get hurt on the job, they will likely miss a significant amount of time. This reduces the number of workers, which slows down productivity. Even if the organization can replace those injured workers with temporary workers, the new workers will likely not be as skilled as the more experienced workers that were injured in workplace incidents. This is one of the reasons why it is best to train workers properly on safety programs which will, in turn, result in the avoidance of absenteeism. Christian, et. (2009).

2.6.5. Higher Retention Rate

Training will help workers avoid injuries and stay on the job and inspire them to stay with the organization for longer because the workers believe that the organization cares for them. No matter the industry, the longer you can keep the same workers, the better off the organization. Not only will the quality of work improve over time with more experienced workers, but it will also reduce on-boarding costs, which can be expensive for the organization. When workers are trained properly and create a safe work environment, the workers will stay with you for the long haul.

2.6.6. Improved Reputation

A strong reputation can go a long way in business, whereas a bad reputation can sink a business quickly. Today, workplace safety is an essential part of the equation regarding the organization's reputation. If workplace incidents and injuries occur, word spreads quickly, as clear and obvious incidents cannot be hidden. That means workers, business partners, and other stakeholders will be more reluctant to work with the organization because they do not want to be associated with an organization that does not want to invest in workplace safety.

While committing to a workplace safety training program is essential, it is equally important for organizations to complement that with a Health Safety and Environment Management System. This will help to keep everything organized so that no safety detail/program gets overlooked or fall through the cracks.

2.7. Workers Feedback Tool for Good Safety Culture

Communication is of the utmost importance when it comes to building and sustaining good safety culture. In an ideal situation, there will be a constant give and take between organizational leaders and frontline workers about safety programs, policies, and practices.

The organization has to co-operate and consult with workers on health and safety matters. Technically, constant engagement with the workers on safety issues is key to good safety culture. It is said that there are a couple of reasons why organizations should actively seek feedback from workers before making any meaningful decisions about workplace health and safety. (Clarke, S., 2006).

2.7.1. Workers Are on the Front Lines

An organization that really wants to know what is happening on the shop floor must engage the workers who are on the front lines. These workers will often have the best insight into the organization's strengths and weaknesses regarding workplace safety. The frontline workers will know about problem areas and what the business can improve. If the organization is considering changes to safety rules or procedures, it is usually a good idea to discuss those changes with frontline workers before implementing them. After all, rule changes will have the biggest impact on these workers as they will be the people to implement these changes. Therefore, the workers should be told about these changes beforehand and offer feedback so that they are not caught off guard and can work out any problems.

2.7.2. Makes Workers Feel Valued

When organizations actively seek feedback from their workers, it helps workers feel valued by the organization. This can help to build a positive relationship between the organization and the workers. Workers want to feel like they are the most important asset to the organization and contribute in various ways. When organizations go out of their way to ask workers for feedback, they are more likely to have a positive impression of the organization, promoting a good safety culture. More importantly, leaders must take feedback in good faith and take action to address areas of concern raised by the workforce.

2.7.3. Builds Trust

Trust is a huge factor in workplace health and safety. If workers know that their organizations are looking out for their best interests, they will trust and follow the safety procedures in place. By making an effort to get workers' feedback, organizations are opening the lines of communication, which helps to build trust. When that trust is in place, workers will start to be more proactive in letting the organization know about safety problems because they trust that organizational leaders will take them seriously. Trust also means there are no negative consequences for speaking up.

2.7.4. Gauge Workers' Attitudes

The more organizational leaders talk to their workers, the more they can sense the temperature of their workers. They can learn whether the workers are satisfied with what the organization is doing to create a safe work environment. They can learn if the workers are taking workplace safety seriously and if the workers feel safe every time they come to work. All this information is essential in assessing workplace safety and any potential changes that might need to be made.

2.7.5. Proactive Beats Reactive

The bottom line is that it is better to be proactive than reactive when it comes to workplace safety. The worst thing that can happen is to wait for something to go wrong, like an incident or an injury, before doing something. Constant engagement and seeking workers' feedback can help you understand flaws and changes that need to be made before they lead to an accident. Ultimately, it is all about gathering as much information as possible, which is perhaps the best reason to seek workers' feedback on safety topics. (Cooper, et., 1994).

2.8. Transformation through Coaching

The dream is a workplace where workers go above and beyond in achieving pristine safety performance, a workplace boasting of 100% compliance to safety rules and regulations, with traceable evidence of zero harm, zero fatality, zero damage to assets, and no environmental pollution. However, in reality, getting workers to comply with safety policies and procedures and even the minutest requirement is a huge challenge. It is common knowledge that, to a large extent, workers comply with safety expectations because they feel that they must and not necessarily because they want to. Unfortunately, the leadership/managers are cut into this web, struggling to get their workers to do the right thing. Telling people what to do over and over or policing them is frustrating and saps energy and enthusiasm from both parties, not to mention the demeaning or negative reputation some workers tag the safety leaders with.

The traditional command and control style of management has been proven to be ineffective, especially in managing a safety-conscious workforce. Research over the years has shown clear differences when comparing the performance and compliance level of workers, that is, those who underwent coaching in relation to their counterparts that were managed to utilize other methods. It was observed that the former is more committed to achieving organizational goals. The question begging for an answer is: 'Are there better ways of engaging people to ensure their own safety, and are they willing to contribute to the greater benefit of the organization?' Yes, there is. Coaching has proven to be an amazing technique and an excellent way to achieve the expected result because it is embedded in human performance and the learner's mindset.

2.9. Utilizing Coaching Conversations

Adopting a coaching conversation strategy provides a new direction away from the traditional leadership style of 'command and control' and focuses on empowering the frontline workers. It reinforces any existing strengths of workers while prompting individuals to be problem solvers themselves. This is mainly done using effective questioning to draw strength and solutions from an individual. Rather than a supervisor or manager dishing out instructions or telling an individual what to do, a coaching question is asked, such as 'What are your thoughts? How might we go about solving the problem?

Engaging the workers through coaching conversations aid the process of trust building, as the resourcefulness of the workforce is recognized and taken into consideration. Demonstrating faith in the ability of workers to come up with ideas towards problem-solving and implementation of same reassure them on how important their contributions are valued within the team. This is a major moral booster. As workers become more inspired, they become motivated to go beyond management expectations willingly. The resultant effect is continual growth in the learning curve and the internalization of organizational culture, leading to better and overall better safety performance.

Coaching conversations do not present one size that fits all, as worker skills, experience, and demography vary, and it will require different engagement approaches. For example, a young or new worker with little or no experience will require more supervision and dedicated attention than a worker who has been in the organization for a much longer time. Coaching conversation does not need to be formal; in fact, it works best when certain steps are followed, such as:

- Conduct a platform of respect, trust, and openness to learning on both sides.
- There is an atmosphere of rapport and trust with the other person.
- Adequate attention is paid more to listening and seeking to understand the situation or the other person's perspective first before providing responses.
- The leader guides the worker or the team to develop their own answer through open questions (i.e., resisting the temptation of informing, telling, or directing).
- Focus on the positive and what could work well into the future rather than seeking to overcome or minimize weaknesses.
- Conversation is ended by confirming or setting a commitment to action.

3. Conclusion

Influencing positive culture requires a change in habits and attitudes. While some individuals are fast learners or easy to lead, others might not be as easy. Some workers or groups may need multiple coaching conversations before any noticeable positive change can occur. Coaching conversations is an effective and efficient tool in transforming an organization from its state of poor safety culture to a good safety culture which is the expectation of the organizational leaders. It works best by helping individuals utilize their strengths and identify solutions. This is a very powerful strategy to empower and focus a team on the attitudes and behaviours that will make an organization safer.

4. References

i. Agnew, J. & Daniels, A. C. (2010). Safe By Accident: Take the Luck Out of Safety: Leadership Practices that Build a Sustainable Safety Culture. Atlanta, GA: Performance Management.

ii. Christian, M.S., Bradley, J.C., Wallace, J.C., & Burke, M.J. (2009). Workplace safety: a meta-analysis of the roles of person and situation factors. Journal of Applied Psychology, 94, 1103-1127.

iii. Clarke, S. (2006). Safety climate in an automobile manufacturing plant: The effects of work environment, job communication and safety attitudes on accidents and unsafe behavior. Personnel Review, 35:4, 413-430.

iv. Cooper, M. D., Phillips, R. A., Sutherland, V. J. & Makin, P. J. (1994). Reducing accidents using goal setting and feedback: A field study. Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 67, 219-240.

v. Heinrich HW (1931). Industrial accident prevention: a scientific approach. McGraw-Hill.