DEKRA

2017

GUIDE TO SAFETY ASSESSMENT:

Six Critical Areas for Diagnosing Performance

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INTRODUCTION

Safety leaders in 2017 will face a different world from many of their predecessors. Safety has grown far beyond the programs' focus of past years. Emerging issues — such as the shortage of safety talent, the introduction of new and more complicated technologies, the need for a strategic infrastructure, or resolving the tension between what we need from leaders and what they have been conditioned to deliver — are too complex for single-step solutions. Add to that today's low to very low injury rates in many organizations, and it's clear that achieving gains now will require different strategies.

Fundamentally, leaders need good organizational intelligence in order to make the right decisions on how to lead the organization forward in safety. While organizations have usually relied on safety assessments to inform improvement efforts, traditional assessment approaches that measure one or two aspects of safety are no longer enough to support today's need for precision and granularity.

Instead, leaders need diagnostic tools that show not only the elements of organizational life that affect safety but also how these elements interact with and influence one other. This kind of assessment is similar in depth and scope to the analysis we would perform when planning a high-profile engineering project.

This e-book outlines six critical areas that leaders must understand in their own organizations in order to support effective safety decision making and action.

Assessing Performance is About Asking the Right Questions

Traditional safety assessments tend to be narrow in scope (by auditing only safety systems or culture) or shallow in depth (by relying on blanket assumptions about a wide range of factors). As a result, safety assessments too frequently do not lead to confidence that the real issues stalling change are fully understood. They often do not provide the insight and understanding necessary to allow for the development of a strategic plan.

While there are various methods of assessment and information gathering, the fundamental purpose of an assessment is to gather information that will guide action and direction. No matter what tools you use, an effective safety assessment will answer five basic questions:

1. How successful are our current approaches, structures, and systems at identifying, controlling, and continuously reducing exposure?

2. How well do our approaches, structure, and systems align with and support our desired future state?

3. What basic beliefs in our organization will impede progress to our desired future state?

4. What are the most crucial things we can do to close the gap between our current state and desired state?

5. What strategic improvement plan will give us the highest probability of achieving our objectives, safety excellence, and sustainable change?

Six crucial focus areas to assess

While we need to evaluate each of these areas independently, what's important is that they are assessed holistically, meaning we look not only at the information that yields insight into a specific area but also the findings that potentially impact other parts of the assessment. Assessment areas are interdependent, and it's important to understand these dependencies and the integration between organizational components. Taking this high-level view of how focus areas overlap and impact each other allows us to provide insight and targeted recommendations.

1. CULTURE & ENGAGEMENT:

2. SAFETY ENABLING SYSTEMS

3. SAFETY LEADERSHIP & OVERSIGHT

4. SAFETY ORGANIZATION FOCUS & STRUCTURE

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1. CULTURE & ENGAGEMENT:

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Every workplace has a discernible "way" that things are done. If you watch carefully and long enough how people make decisions and approach tasks, you can learn what the people in that organization value and uncover the unwritten rules of the workplace.

Culture refers to the values, beliefs, and unstated assumptions that influence what people in the organization do and the way in which they do it. There is a rich body of research on the organizational characteristics that support high performance in safety and other critical business functions.[1] A good assessment will uncover not just these beliefs but also how people invest themselves in safety — the value for people and relationship within the organization. Key points to assess when developing a profile of culture include:

- What are the cultural beliefs and norms? Uncovering the unstated core beliefs that drive groups to think, respond, and behave the way they do.
- What is the history that created those organization norms?
- How do leadership actions, decisions, and behaviors drive the perceptions around the cultural attributes?
- Are these perceptions barriers to change? If so, how will we account for them in the strategic plan?
- To what extent is safety woven into the values of the organization and as a foundation of the relationships across and within levels of the organization?

[1] See for example: Gerald R. Ferris, "Role of Leadership in the Employee Withdrawal Process: A Constructive Replication," Journal of Applied Psychology, 70 (1985): pp. 1075-1089. Jacqueline A-M Coyle-Shapiro and Neil Conway, "Exchange Relationships: An Examination of Psychological Contracts and Perceived Organizational Support," Journal of Applied Psychology, 90 (2005): pp. 774-781. Mary A. Konovsky and S. Douglas Pugh, "Citizenship Behavior and Social Exchange," Academy of Management Journal, 27 (June 1994): pp. 656-669.

2. SAFETY ENABLING SYSTEMS

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Safety Enabling Systems are the specific mechanisms used to communicate about safety, identify and eliminate exposures, and drive improvement. They cover, but are not limited to, awareness campaigns, policies and procedures, skills, knowledge, and training, hazard recognition and mitigation, and exposure reduction mechanisms. Evaluating your safety-enabling systems fundamentally looks at the skills, competence, knowledge, process, and procedures required to work safely. A profile of this area should include:

- What safety systems have been put into place to help employees identify and control personal and/or process safety exposures and risks?
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- How are these systems intended to be implemented and functioning?
- To what extent are these systems implemented in the field?
- What are the perceptions around the buy-in, quality, and effectiveness of these systems?
- Is the organizational focus balanced, with systems that focus on eliminating and controlling the exposure and systems focused on equipping the employee?
- What opportunities exist for employees to be engaged and active in the safety process and at the working interface?

3. SAFETY LEADERSHIP & OVERSIGHT

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Safety Leadership and Oversight is critical not only to defining the goals we set around safety, but also to the fundamental way in which we articulate, construct, and execute every day activities. For example, how we define and understand our safety goal focuses not only our activities but also our motivation to improve safety. How we think about injury causation directly influences how exposure reduction efforts are structured and used. Even how leaders in the organization are developed and deployed in safety strongly affects the sustainability of safety efforts.

When assessing safety leadership and oversight, we need to ask things such as:

- What are safety leadership responsibilities by level?
- How effectively are leaders seen in executing their safety activities and responsibilities?
- What mechanisms are in place for the ongoing development of safety knowledge and leadership?
- What safety leadership opportunities exist for workers?
- What governance structure exists for safety; what is the level and quality of sponsorship and what is the primary focus of these safety governance groups?
- Do leaders have access to data that provides insight into the level of organizational understanding and control of life-critical exposures?

4. SAFETY ORGANIZATION FOCUS & STRUCTURE

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The focus and structure of our exposure-reduction efforts is the engine of safety performance. A picture of the formal framework that supports safety decision making, accountability, and action helps us understand how well we can deliver. The position, function, and contribution of the safety professional in turn illustrates the status of safety on the organization's agenda and is a good indicator of how well safety is integrated with other performance areas.

Questions to evaluate Safety Organization include:

- What safety positions exist here and what is the focus for each position?
- How well-aligned are the safety groups?
- To what extent do the safety professionals perceive they, and the programs and recommendations they generate, are getting sponsored and supported?
- What is the basis for the current reporting structure? What are the benefits and potential disadvantages to this reporting structure?

5. SAFETY SUSTAINING SYSTEMS

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Safety Sustaining Systems are those organizational antecedents and consequences that support effective safety management, leadership, and performance. Sustaining Systems include the selection and development of people, organizational structure, performance management, and rewards and recognition.

Understanding Safety Sustaining Systems start with gathering data that help answer:

- To what extent do our human resources programs support the selection, promotion, and development of employees with a safety orientation?
- To what extent does our performance management system support a focus on safety?
- What is the primary focus of our performance management system regarding safety — e.g., is it lagging or leading?
- To what extent do we reward and recognize people for their contribution to safety and exposure reduction?
- Does the organizational structure (ratio of leaders to employees, alignment of work hours, etc.) allow leaders to realistically develop relationships and lead safety?
- To what extent are new leaders and workers on-boarded in regards to safety? What is the organization's value for safety, principles, and expectations?

6. SAFETY DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM & ANALYTICS

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The deficiency of safety measurement in describing actual performance is so common as to be a cliché: many catastrophic industrial events occur in organizations with a history of low injury rates (and who may have even been recognized previously for "high" safety performance). The reality is that there are many variables that determine the quality of safety functioning. It is often only after a serious event that a picture of these elements (e.g., the execution of safety systems, the consistency of follow through on safety issues, the quality of culture and leadership) begin to paint a truer picture of the safety functioning present before the incident — one that could have been detected with the right set of metrics, processes, and analysis.

The fundamental question we must ask about safety data is whether we are collecting, compiling, and analyzing the data necessary for employees at all levels to understand whether exposure is increasing or decreasing. Assessing it involves a review of what measures are used, how the data are collected, and how data are used. Principally, the organization will want to review:

- To what extent does the safety data management system provide the data and information the organization needs to understand exposure and track critical information to aid in leading and managing safety?
- Does the safety data analytics provide meaningful and actionable data?
- Does the data and analysis mitigate cognitive bias?

Putting Diagnostic Information to Use

A good safety assessment not only reveals the actual state of functioning (i.e., "how" the culture is not doing great) but also provides a picture of why that is the case. Such results provide a foundation for improvement.

The ultimate goal of any assessment is to provide leaders with a clear understanding of how well their organization is positioned for continuous safety performance improvement, resulting in a roadmap that people are confident will deliver long term results and that has high levels of support.

Please feel free to contact us at dekra.us/osr to further discuss our groundbreaking approach to data analytics and our wide range of safety offerings and solutions.

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