

See risk before it becomes reality

A positive safety culture depends on visibility. When people feel empowered to report near misses, hazards and observations, leaders can spot potential safety issues earlier and act before risk turns into a serious accident.

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Introduction

The importance of driving a culture of health and safety within an organisation cannot be underestimated. But if you need to make some changes in your organisation, where do you start?

This paper helps you navigate the journey towards a positive safety culture where you work. We've included information to help influence your leaders and reaffirm health and safety's rightful place as a top priority for your company's most important assets: its people. And how can you get your colleagues' support?

Changing an organisation's culture is daunting. Let's face it, we're human, and most of us fear change. It's a natural instinct. That's why it's so important to engage your people and make them part of the journey, and the solution.

Losing their role, a change in responsibilities and worries about their ability to adjust to the new ways of working. They're all fears that may come to the surface when you dig a little deeper with your colleagues.

That's where the 'why?' comes in. When you've established why the culture change needs to happen, it's vital to communicate this clearly with your people. Involve them and reaffirm the importance of their support in this shift to a new way of working.



The **Health and Safety Executive (HSE)** defines an organisation's safety culture as: "the product of individual and group values, attitudes, perceptions, competencies and patterns of behaviour that determine the commitment to, and the style and proficiency of, an organisation's health and safety management."

Communicating the “why”

Let's get back to basics. Why do you need to change your organisation's health and safety culture? Remember, communicating the 'why' is really important to ensure your people are on board. It's useful to break this down into three key areas: moral, legal and economic.



Moral

You care about your people. You want to see them go home safely every night. Your people are the most important asset to your business, so it's imperative that their wellbeing comes first, above your company's profitability. All organisations should feel morally responsible for their workforce and anybody else affected by the work activity they're undertaking.

Over 90% of incidents reported to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) are due to unsafe acts. "That would never happen to us" is no doubt a phrase you've heard before if you've tried to influence change with your leaders. We've spoken to leaders who have had to attend a colleague's home or funeral following an incident. It's something they would not wish on any family or individual.

We have an obligation to care about our people. An organisation or individual is required to take responsible care of the people affected by their work activities. It's not the law; it's the right thing to do.

Legal

In their day-to-day operational roles, your colleagues may not be aware or overly concerned about legal obligations, but your leaders certainly should be. Taking reasonable care of people at work is not just reflected in common law, but also in statute law. So, it's criminally enforceable. Most health and safety legislation cases go beyond taking reasonable care. They place duties of absolute, practicable or reasonably practicable care.

When you're influencing a culture change at the top of the organisation and helping your colleagues connect with their 'why', ensure they're fully aware of all potential consequences of failing to comply with legislation, approved code of practices and accepted standards. This could involve criminal prosecution (custodial sentencing/ fines), serving of enforcement notices or fees for intervention contravention (fines). They can all cause loss to your organisation.

Consider too that fines are now linked to turnover, following new sentencing guidelines in February 2016. It's something to remind your leadership teams. Also, all improvement notices are in the public domain, so it's perhaps unsurprising that most organisations found guilty of corporate manslaughter don't survive

Economic

The moral, legal, and economical reasons for effectively managing health and safety are closely linked. If an organisation fails to effectively manage health and safety, it hits their bottom line. They'll suffer economically, which impacts its financial stability.

From the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)'s recent statistics, 40.1 million working days were lost due to work-related ill-health and non-fatal injuries in 2024/25. That's a whopping cost of £22.9 billion!

Need to remind your leadership team of the consequences of getting it wrong?

It's worth stressing these three points:

1. Fines are no longer fixed (They're now linked to turnover).
2. Reputational damage can be huge.
3. The economic impact is significant.





Influence your organisation's health and safety culture

When you're building your change management strategy to influence your organisation's health and safety culture, it's important to consider both internal and external factors.

Internal factors

Leadership commitment to health and safety should be clear, visible and should cascade down from the most senior level in the organisation. Leaders must be 'walking the walk'. It's not good enough for this commitment to be just a formal policy statement; it should be demonstrated in every activity, every day, across the organisation. Your people must be able to see a clear alignment between what your leaders communicate and how they behave. This alone will determine the journey the business will travel to establish that positive safety culture. Lead by example!

Unrealistic targets drive the wrong behaviour. A successful organisation has targets that are directly connected to their relevant key performance indicators (KPIs). These could be the company's profitability targets or department-led targets, such as production volumes or timeliness of deliveries.

In most cases, team leaders are being challenged to deliver more with less. If these goals are no longer achievable, it could lead to individuals demonstrating poor safety behaviours, such as cutting corners to achieve targets. It's not uncommon for senior managers to compromise health and safety to meet production targets, which often results in a poor safety culture. How many business leaders know that this is happening within their organisation?

Key internal points to consider:



Communicate effectively to your people.

The importance of health and safety needs to be communicated effectively and regularly. Each person needs to understand the part they play in maintaining a safe working environment. Poor communication can lead to doubt or uncertainty. Remember, the gap between what a person thinks, and what they actually know, gets larger if a communication vacuum exists. People usually feel more confident if the risk controls have been communicated to confirm their understanding. A positive health and safety culture thrives on a well-balanced communication policy.



Competence and training within your organisation, as you have a duty to employ or contract health and safety assistance to ensure that competent and current safety advice is available across all levels of your company. Regular training and education on health and safety topics ensures that your people have the required knowledge and skills to stay safe on a job. If you're the person delivering the training, ask for regular feedback from your colleagues on the content and approach you're using. Always adapt your approach to ensure your colleagues are engaged and are truly present.



Employee representation such as trade unions, where they exist in organisations, can work with employers to help identify hazards and implement measures to mitigate risks. By advocating safe working practices, procedures and policies, trade unions can help to create a workplace culture where safety is a top priority throughout the organisation.

External factors

Legislation and regulations set minimum standards for workplace health and safety, and organisations must comply with these standards to prevent accidents and injuries. However, the impact of external legislation on safety culture goes beyond simply complying with legal requirements.

Key external points to consider:



External legislation can influence an organisation's safety culture by setting expectations for acceptable behaviour and by creating a framework for accountability. When organisations are held accountable for their compliance with legislation, it encourages them to take safety more seriously and invest in resources to improve safety measures. If you comply with external legislation, it can also help foster a culture of continuous improvement. Organisations can then strive to exceed the minimum standards and improve their safety performance over time.



Enforcement agencies such as the HSE, local authority and enforcement agencies can be a powerful motivator for organisations to prioritise and invest in their safety performance. The risk of legal action, negative publicity and financial penalties can create a sense of urgency around safety issues. Organisations may be encouraged to take proactive steps to prevent accidents and injuries. Enforcement agencies can also influence an organisation's safety culture by raising the awareness of safety issues and promoting best practices. HSE resources provide guidance on a range of safety topics, including risk assessments, workplace hazards and safety management systems. This can help organisations understand their legal obligations and take practical steps to improve compliance and workplace safety.



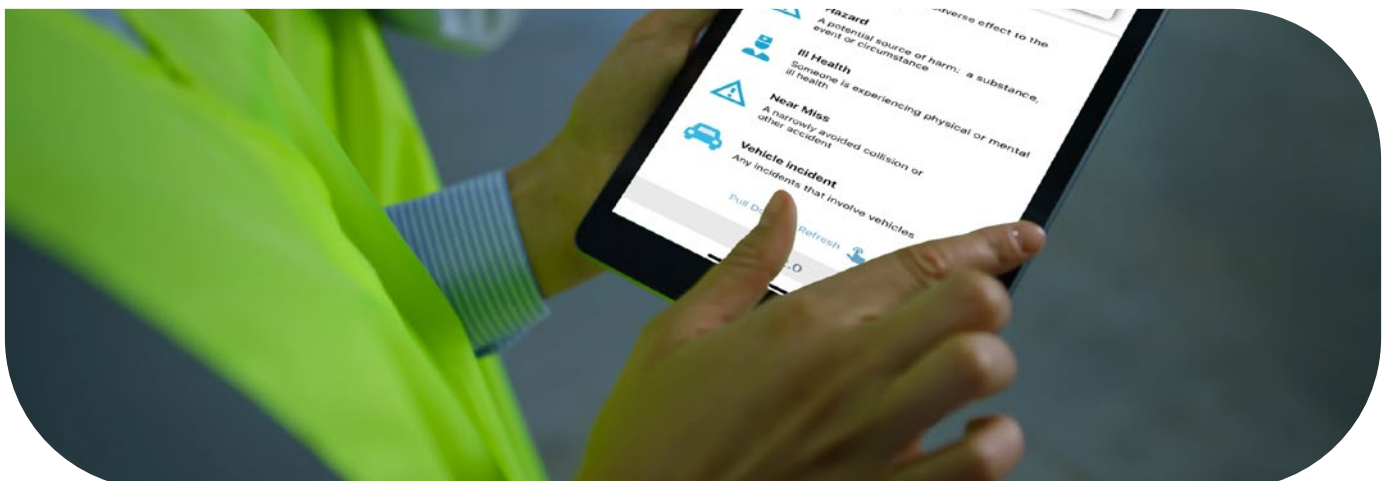
Contracts are an ideal way for organisations to set standards for the health and safety performance of their suppliers or contractors. They can outline safety specific requirements and hold third parties to account for meeting them. Establishing a clear expectation for safety performance upfront helps to create a culture where safety is a top priority for all parties. It promotes safety both within the organisation and throughout the entire supply chain.



Insurance companies have become increasingly aware that they have undervalued the risk related to some organisations they're insuring. This has caused insurance companies to assess the risk of certain organisations' health and safety performance. By demonstrating a commitment to safety and working collaboratively with insurance providers to implement comprehensive and effective risk management strategies, organisations can potentially lower their insurance premiums and save money on insurance costs. This creates a clear financial incentive to prioritise and invest in safety performance.



Shareholders can play a significant role. Their power and influence can help shape an organisation's health and safety culture and promote accountability. By working with them to engage with your colleagues and utilising their advocacy for greater transparency and disclosure around safety, you can help to create a culture where issues related to safety are openly discussed and addressed.



Create a positive safety culture

If your organisation is going to create a positive safety culture, it needs to understand the signs of a poor safety culture. A poor health and safety culture can lead to weaknesses, perhaps due to poor training or communication.

It promotes an atmosphere where non-compliance with safe working practices is acceptable and doesn't help the organisation take effective action to address health and safety problems.

Often, organisations with a poor safety culture have the same underlying attitude to all processes and procedures. This can result in poor product quality and financial control, as well as poor health and safety. A poor health and safety culture can be identified by:

- A lack of safety leadership/commitment from the top down, with no safety ownership or responsibility for health and safety at board level.
- A board of directors that are more concerned with profit over safety.
- Poor incident/accident reporting:
 - Accidents in your workplace happen but aren't reported.
 - There's no formal procedure for accident/incident investigation to prevent them from happening again in the future.

- Blame culture in an organisation that tends to blame individuals for accidents/incidents. This creates a culture of fear, mistrust, and a reluctance to report accidents or near misses.
- A lack of communication and consultation where employees aren't aware of policies and the safety expectations set out by the organisation.
- Minimal or no training on health and safety topics. This means employees do not have the necessary skills required to carry out their roles safely.

A positive safety culture is a way of doing things that's shared, taught, or copied. Everyone in a particular culture tends to do things in a similar way, which they consider to be the norm. So, an organisation's safety culture consists of its shared working practices, its tendency to accept or tolerate risk, how it controls hazards and how it deals with accidents and near misses.

Safety culture can also be described as a combination of how people feel about safety (the safety climate), individual actions, and the policies and procedures the organisation has in place. In accordance with the [Institution of Occupational Safety and Health \(IOSH\)](#), a positive safety culture has three key elements:

- Working practices and rules to effectively control hazards.
- A positive attitude towards risk management and compliance with control processes.
- The capacity to learn from accidents, near misses and safety performance indicators and promote continuous improvement.

The challenge for any organisation is how to foster and maintain a positive health and safety culture. It's hard to change the attitudes and beliefs of colleagues by direct persuasion. But by acting safely and leading by example, people will start to think "safety first". It's important to involve your people in safety processes to give them that same sense of ownership.

8 steps to create a positive safety culture

1

Lead by example: Your leaders and managers should demonstrate their commitment to safety by following safe work practices, using personal protective equipment, and addressing any safety concerns promptly.

2

Hold your leaders accountable: They must be held accountable to ensure a safe working environment and proactively promote safe behaviours.

3

Provide safety training: All your people need regular training on safe work practices, hazard identification, and risk assessments. This helps them understand the importance of safety and how to identify and address potential hazards.

4

Get your people onboard: Involve them in the development and implementation of safety policies and procedures. This helps ensure that policies and procedures are practical and effective.

5

Encouraging reporting: Employees should report any safety concerns, incidents, or near-misses. This helps identify potential hazards and allows for corrective action to be taken before an incident occurs.

6

Investigate incidents: Identify the root cause and ensure the findings are reported back to the reporter and employees.

7

Acknowledge safe behaviour: Recognise and reward employees for safe behaviour, such as following safe work practices, reporting hazards, and participating in safety training.

8

Continuously monitor and improve: Use key performance indicators—such as the number of incidents reported, the number of safety observations and lost time injuries—to inform the efficacy of your safety strategy, performance and culture. Also consider qualitative information from safety culture surveys to make any improvements. Ensure any outcomes are communicated across your organisation.

An organisation can develop standard safe working practices that comply with the law and best practice. It can also create a positive attitude to compliance by making sure that board members and senior managers lead from the front. For these two elements to work effectively, the organisation needs to learn from what's happening in the workplace. Good information is essential for a positive safety culture. For the information to flow, the workforce needs to be willing to participate and be prepared to report their mistakes, near misses and accidents. Only through awareness of, and analysing accidents and near misses, is it possible to develop suitable improvements to safe working practices and create a positive health and safety culture.

40.1 million

Working days lost due to
work-related illness and
workplace injury (HSE)



Culture change programmes

Health and safety culture change is not something that happens quickly. Plans to improve an existing culture should take into account that culture evolves over a long period of time. A culture change programme is also very unlikely to succeed unless senior managers and board members are committed to leading the change.

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If you try to change a culture too quickly, you may generate resistance. It's true that the direction of a culture often comes from senior managers. But it's important not to overlook influential people and employees with positive safety traits within your organisation. These can be key people to engage with to help foster a positive safety culture. You might even be able to persuade them to become safety champions.

Culture change programmes which succeed at one location can fail at another. The factors that increase or decrease the chance of success can be identified and linked to the existing culture of the organisation.



Organisations should:

- Find out what their managers and people actually believe about health and safety, and make it clear what's expected of them in terms of health and safety values, beliefs, attitudes and practices.
- Consider the most appropriate interventions to address any differences between expectations and reality in the organisation's health and safety culture.

Organisations need to find the right balance between decree, prescription, organisational learning and joint goal setting, and acknowledge the time that it's likely to take to achieve measurable and permanent change in the health and safety culture.



Empower your people with Notify

As a provider of smart SHEQ management software, Notify understands the importance of promoting a positive health and safety culture within your workplace. We also understand that driving such a culture can be a challenging process.

That is why we would like to invite you to share your experiences with us. By doing so, you will have the opportunity to showcase your company's successes in creating a positive health and safety culture, and help inspire others to do the same. Contact us at hello@notifytechnology.com

Our products

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Ready to turn reporting into visibility? Notify helps teams capture better safety data at the source, spot patterns earlier and give leaders a clearer view of workplace risk.

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mission is to
make a billion
**people safer
at work**



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