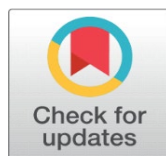


TOP MANAGEMENT'S WILL TO SUPPORT SAFETY CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

How Do Company Directors Support Safety Culture Excellence is a deep question to explore the goal of incidents-free status? This article presents a qualitative framework on the issues related to the top/site management at large that are responsible for weak safety culture at the corporates as well as sites resulting in incidents and fatalities. Qualitative research in this paper makes a lot of sense in this regard. 204 industry professionals participated in the study to reflect on the top/site management issues and solutions. Almost 80% industry professionals observed a lack of management's will to support in safety culture, which amounts to a lag in business sustainability. Top managements need guidance about interventions leading to safety culture transformation.

Keywords: Top Management, Safety, Culture, Qualitative

1. INTRODUCTION

Social learning theory indicates that the powerful individuals significantly influence the behaviours of others. Similarly, the organizational leaders and top management influence positive safety results [Tucker et al. \(2016\)](#). A Research pointed out strongly to the importance of Senior Level Management commitment to Safety as a significant factor in the reduction of risk [Sherry \(2018\)](#). "As CEO, my primary goal will always be to ensure we are continuously identifying ways to improve employee safety. I understand that a commitment from the top that is reaffirmed at every level of the organization is the only way to build a workplace culture that truly values safety" [Advaithi \(2022\)](#). An EHS site head of a Singapore based company reminded that Post Covid, they resumed Mass Toolbox Talks. Demonstrated Swiss Cheese Model. Hazards, Types of Barriers (Engineering,

Administrative, Behavioural, PPEs and Mitigating), How Injury Happened, Mitigating Barrier. Important point is to convey the message to all, and everyone gets involved to perceive the risk proactively and connect with it to correct on-the-spot. The traditional safety approach has failed to develop a stronger safety culture at sites; hence it is crucial for top management to innovate on the new safety culture transformational methodology. The leaders build cultures of empowerment [Baumgartner \(2020\)](#). Lack of empowerment to employees in building safety culture amounts to a lag in business sustainability. A Successful Safety Culture begins with Leadership's Commitment and Engagement. Sometimes leaders are committed, not engaged with safety culture [Prescient National \(2021\)](#). Corporate top managers influence the safety culture through their decision-making on budgets and policies, their daily actions, and attitudes [Räsänen \(2008\)](#). GAIL's top management decided to implement the Behavioural Safety Organizational Longterm Planned intervention (BSOLPI) across all of the company's work sites and transformed the safety culture of the company successfully [Nambudiri and Ghulyani \(2018\)](#) and managed significant reductions in lagging indicators.

While the [Government of India \(2020\)](#) ensure the safety and health of all the workers through The Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code, 2020. Then why the CEOs/ top managements of companies don't support and practice this, is a critical researchable query.

2. RESEARCH QUESTION

In the present research, the Indian industry professionals were asked a question on Top Management's intentions on safety culture. Do you think, there are issues related to the top as well as site managements at large, which are responsible for the weak safety cultures at the corporates as well as sites resulting to incidents and fatalities.

3. METHODOLOGY

204 industry professionals participated in the study as part of an action field survey with the researcher. These research participants implemented supportive safety culture at their work sites. The research participants included, the CEO, Directors, Heads of Departments, Safety belonging to chemicals, construction, gas, power, and steel units across Indian locations. Both primary data (interviews, discussions) and secondary data (incident and accident rates) were collected. Interviews based on open-ended questions and personal in-depth discussions were conducted through remote data collection techniques over 2-months during March-April 2022. The sampling method used was a non-random convenience sampling. This is an innovative and exploratory research design with involvement of field professionals as being study participants, using qualitative framework. This study is part of a national longitudinal action survey in India. Crucial element in this research was data collection conducted by means of controlled interviews and questionnaire surveys in the organizations. Their responses to the relevant questions were collated. [Eeckelaert et al. \(2011\)](#) suggested that the safety culture can be assessed using questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and observations. In practice, quantitative questionnaires are the simplest and cheapest assessment method and the most widely implemented in industry.

4. RESULTS

Yes Certainly, as affirmed by 80 percent of the industry professionals that there are issues related to the top as well as site managements at large, which are responsible for the weak safety cultures at the corporates as well as sites resulting to incidents and fatalities. Two top chemical and construction safety professionals with 30 years' experience and a young EHS professional with 10 years' experience accepted this straight away. A professional dealing with all industry categories emphasized that definitely, the issue is the 'top management' not giving due priority to Safety. Safety relates to cost. They are pre-occupied with Price and Production. According to National Safety Council, in 2017, about 155 million workers were affected by workplace injuries, resulting in total costs of \$161.5 billion [ROSS \(2022\)](#). Government authorities is to be so tough that safety culture in an organisation is maintained.

Top management at corporates do not walk the talk, many times. At the time of taking strict decision, they normally tilted towards progress and not towards safety. When talking about site top management they are interested to show progress as they are not made accountable of fatalities. The analysis revealed that there is no relationship between the cultural values a company emphasizes and how well the company lives up to those values in the eyes of employees, so exactly they don't walk the talk [Sull et al. \(2020\)](#).

On the positive side, a HR professional from sugar mills ascertained that here at our units, there is lot of genuine concern and culture developed for safety. Round the year employees are engaged in various activities and recognised for their contribution in respect of safety. Also, a EHS professional from Godrej industries denied enthusiastically that there was a management issue in the safety culture. On same lines, [ABB \(2020\)](#) emphasized that the health and safety of employees and all stakeholders remain number one priority and we are working hard to make sure that we minimize risks. Whereas a safety head from a large steel conglomerate stated that yes, top management thinking regarding safety is different with site in charge. The corporates need to recognize and appreciate the safety performance of site heads and site HODs each year to sustain the safety culture down the levels.

A top EHS Head is of the view that not top or middle, it's human perception, so invariably it varies. Focusing on ever increasing visible safe behaviours at sites are best friends of safe businesses. A seasoned EHSQ professional from multinational confirms that yes, it's the tone at the top that boils down to the site safety culture. A construction EHS chief opines that head of operations and site construction head is responsible for a weak HSE culture. A corporate safety head explained the issues as due to overload with audits, manpower shortage, incompetency of employees, no freedom of expression of site management, no proper follows up and lack of support by the Corporate, lack of sincere commitment from the top management. A safety officer of a cargo port trust reported that an issue arises when the site management does not provide adequate information regarding safe work, then bypass of SOP's occur due to lack of supervision, may be in hurry or laziness. If there is no proper action to present safety loopholes, then safety culture is hard to develop and results in incident and fatalities unfortunately. [Unnikrishnan et al. \(2014\)](#) observed that safety management practices were inadequate in small and medium enterprises (SME). The financial constraints, insufficient awareness, resistance to change, and inadequate training for employees were main barriers. Competition between SMEs was a major reason for better safety practices. This indicates that safety culture is insufficient across industries due to lack of leadership initiatives. [Unilever \(2022\)](#) underlined that safety mission is, through authentic leadership, to build an

interdependent safety culture that protects the wellbeing of employees, contractors, and assets, and delivers on the responsible growth.

5. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The CEO/Directors messages are important in communicating with employees, in terms of sustainability management, especially for safety contents [Choi and Cho \(2020\)](#). Top management needs to move the implementation of safety culture actively in order to avoid incidents and fatalities at sites as evidenced in qualitative research of this study. ONGC top management professional clarified, "certainly, safety needs to be driven from the top, not merely by lip service but through visible actions". Safety culture mainly depends on everyone. Site management is responsible for weak safety culture. Those working on maze companies, SPO/JPOs and workers sometimes ignore safety culture, that's why incidents are occurring.

Here below is a message of a company Director that helps.

"I am pleased to inform you all that we are introducing Behavioural Based Safety (BBS) program all across our manufacturing sites to strengthen our safety discipline. This program is named as 'Suraksha Sankalp'. As necessitated by BBS program, more than 370 employees are trained (by a renowned BBS expert Dr. H.L. KAILA) to perform as BBS observers and implementers in their respective departments. Further trainings are being conducted to include more BBS observers. An action plan for BBS implementation is developed towards fulfilment of our goal of zero injury and zero harm to our people, property, and the environment. Steering committees are being formed under the leadership of respective Site heads and comprising of all HODs who would meet periodically, at least once in a month to review BBS implementation plan. Procedure and Formats in this regard will be released by Corporate HSE. I entrust all HODs and FHDs to show passionate leadership by making daily BBS observation round for spot-correction of at-risk behaviours as a Big Brother of Safety (BBS) and train everyone as BBS observers in their department for doing the same daily. We EMPOWER everyone at our manufacturing sites to speak up for spot-correction of any unsafe behaviour by anybody or unsafe condition being observed by yourself, it would help create a better HSE culture". Signed by the Director- Factory Operations.

Actually, demonstration by Management group is the key to build the culture, as aptly described by an EHS officer from a chemical plant. EHS fraternity almost 100% agreed that the physical and financial targets leave safety behind by the top bosses. An Analysis of Safety Culture Weaknesses in Chemical Safety Board Investigation pointed out that never accept any unsafe behaviours or normalization of deviations or deviation from safe behaviours [Uno \(2021\)](#). The highest level of interdependent safety culture is crucial to achieve zero-harm status for business sustainability which needs to be understood by the managements [Kaila \(2022\)](#).

It is important to remove the misunderstanding between the concepts of safety climate and the safety culture. What you can see happening at a time, is the reflection of a safety climate. Safety culture is deeply embedded in the beliefs and values of company employees. Hence the managements must emphasize and go beyond the safety climate to achieve zero-harm safety culture as a goal of the strategic business excellence as top priority, ahead of production quality or performance. Also, good to note that the safety competence might moderate the effects of safety culture and safety climate on safety performance [Arzahan et al. \(2022\)](#).

Strong businesses are shaped by their culture. The CEO as chairman of the safety culture assurance team (SCAT) must be able to see through and track the percentage of at-risk behaviours in each department, plant, site, location, almost on daily basis as a gesture of reflection of his commitment down the levels to all employees. Even if, a CEO spends 1% of his worktime in tracking safety culture daily, he doesn't have to hear bad news of any incidents. Creating a safe production culture improves operations and is reflected positively in profit margins [Michrowski \(2021\)](#). Powerful CEOs seem to be better positioned to foster safe workplaces [Safety and health magazine \(2021\)](#). It is crucial to realize that the positive safety culture is based on high level of trust and respect between different level of employees such as top management level, middle management level, and Lower management level including workers [Rayani \(2020\)](#).

[Dekker \(2014\)](#) pointed out that the good safety leadership is about enabling your people to do things safely, more than about putting in place the constraints that prevent your people from doing things which are unsafe. The companies must resolve these safety issues related to the top as well as site managements, which are responsible for the weak safety cultures at the corporates as well as sites resulting into incidents and fatalities. It may pose serious costs and challenges to the company's businesses if their top management don't respond to the safety culture transformation requirements. Just to remind here that Covid-19 pandemic brought the positive difference on employee safety and wellbeing, with 71% companies in a global survey listing it as their top business concern [Economic Times \(2020\)](#). Though companies' top managements promised more safety during Covid19, this study participants don't think that the managements are walking their talks at present times post Covid19, may be, to manage business costs. However, it is important to understand that the success of a company's HSE program depends upon how much the top management demonstrate a long-term serious commitment to protect each employee from injury and illness on the job [OSHA \(2022\)](#). Helping people to behave safer rather constraining to do so, is being a true leader and mentor. Being safety support is a virtue, finding fault is to hurt.

World Day for Safety and Health at Work on 28 April 2022 emphasized to act together to build positive safety and health culture [ILO \(2022\)](#) to manage OSH risks in the world of work at all levels. It is a promise of safety, voice over safety, feeling of safety, service of safety, and humanity in safety. We need to get back these aspects of safety in corporate life as well as work culture as an SOP. When everyone at workplace practices this SOP daily, it becomes a safety culture. So let everyone be empowered, enabled, and reinforced by their HODs to do this daily as an interdependent culture.

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