National Program: Safety Culture Improvement Initiatives in the Offshore Petroleum Industry

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Overview

• Background to national program

• National program overview

• Key findings

• Recommendations
Background
Why safety culture?
“It is essential to create a corporate atmosphere or culture in which safety is understood to be, and is accepted as, the number one priority

Management have to communicate the safety philosophy at all times and at all levels within the organisation but most particularly by their everyday decisions and actions

Those provide the opportunity for subordinates to see real, practical substance put to the safety philosophy”
20 years later...
Have we improved?

- Technology
- Systems
- People
- Injury rates
• Major incident investigations continue to identify cultural failures
  – Challenger space shuttle
  – Columbia space shuttle
  – Texas City refinery
  – Macondo / Deepwater Horizon

• How can we change this?
What does the research say?

• Safety culture research:
  – Fragmented
  – Confused
  – Contradictory

• No academic consensus on:
  – Definition
  – How it is built
  – How it works
  – How to measure it
  – Predictive capability of measures

• Where to from here?
The National Program
Let’s ask the industry

1. How *prevalent* are safety culture improvement initiatives across the industry?

2. How does the industry *conceptualise* safety culture?

3. How does the industry *operativealize* safety culture?
National Program Part 1

- Online survey
- 39 questions
- 28 participating organisations
- 78% of facilities
- **People-focused safety improvement initiatives**
  - Training and coaching
  - Reward and recognition
  - Perception surveys
  - Safety culture
• Semi-structured interviews
• Organisations with safety culture improvement strategies in place
• 17 participating organisations
  – Their understanding of safety culture
  – Their improvement strategies
Key Findings
• Has your organisation implemented a safety culture improvement strategy?

- Yes
- Not yet, but we have a formal plan in place to develop a strategy in the near future
- We are currently developing a strategy but have not yet commenced implementation
- Not yet, but we have informally agreed to develop a strategy in the near future
- Unsure
- No, and we have no plans to do so

Percentage of Responses:
- 92% Yes
- 10% Other (informal plan, current development, plan in place)

Prevalence

Percentage of Responses
• Inconsistent definitions of safety culture

• Varied understanding of:
  – How culture *works*
  – How to *build* culture
  – How to *change* culture

• Consistent with academic and practice-based publications
Varied approaches between companies
Strategies reflect conceptual understanding
Some holistic approaches
“Safety Culture” label applied to strategies that do not target culture:

– Traditional safety improvement initiatives
– Initiatives targeting only one element of culture
Why is this a problem?

• Conflict between contractor and client organisations
• Confusion within a mobile workforce
• Poorly designed initiatives
• Failure of initiatives
• Poor outcomes blamed on safety culture concept
• Perception that safety culture is a weak concept
• Loss of a powerful safety improvement framework
Recommendations
Recommendations

• A **common definition and model** of safety culture is required...

• **To frame** the design and implementation of safety culture initiatives

• **To ensure that initiatives** target culture change rather than other things

• **NOT** to dictate content, process, or structure
Safety culture refers to the shared basic assumptions held by most members of an organisation, which create and reinforce group norms of thinking, language and behaviour in relation to major accident event prevention.
Proposed Model
Culture starts at the top

Executive Commitment

- Safety Knowledge
- Decisions and Behaviour
- Understanding of Organisational Behaviour
The Culture Onion

- Decisions and Behaviour
  - Leadership Practices
  - Systems
  - Working Environment
Group Norms

Leadership Practices

Systems

Working Environment

Decisions and Behaviour

Organisational Behaviour
Proposed Model
How to use it

• Guide design of safety culture initiatives
• Target each element of the model

• Initiatives should be fit-for-purpose

• NOT a regulatory requirement
Further information

• Report – Safety culture improvement initiatives in the Australian offshore petroleum industry
Questions?

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