

When Culture Gets in The Way of Safety

A review of 1000+ days of observation & measurement on offshore drilling rigs.

We know this, leadership at the worksite is the critical measure in understanding the likelihood of a given worksite achieving sustained performance in safe operations. This is no more evident than in remote locations such as offshore drilling rigs.

It is though our over dependency on perceived commitment to safety that impedes us. This is no more evident than in the simple question of rating yourself on your commitment to safety at work (lets say out of 10) and then following through with the question comparing your commitment to safety at home. Overwhelmingly 70%-80% of us do not pay the same attention, the same commitment when outside of the workplace. Why? It's our culture that when 'comfortable and relaxed' fails to follow through on appropriate checklists, procedures, systems and policies. More often than not we develop a culture that accepts certain practices and as a consequence behaviours.

Attention capacity should never be underestimated. In particular when we are in multi-task environments. We need checklists, procedures and systems. However, in order for this to succeed, where people are encouraged to challenge and improve established practices, we need engaged leadership at the worksite as well as head office, or, 'town'. Overwhelming data from multi site studies demonstrates that leaders need ten (10) key attributes that contribute to engaged leadership and the ability to influence team members in order to develop successful (that's safe) workplace culture(s).

The BTB Safe Performance Inventory Tool (BTB Tool) provides us with subjective and objective assessment of observed behaviour towards the attributes required of a safe workplace as indicated above. Once we understand what areas of safe performance is/are lacking, then action can be undertaken. We have come to this conclusion following 500 days study (2009-2010) and 1000 days study (2011-2012).

When there is a significant gap between the performance of the crew we examine effort that is observed in everyday behaviours towards tasks and procedures. What we describe as; average effort, high effort and crew ownership. Crew ownership leads to sustainably safe performance and this is only achieved through good workplace culture that is the result of effective leadership.

When culture gets in the way of safety sustained safe performance is rarely achieved.