Steering Teams as Strategic Drive Toward Positive Safety Cultural Maturity

Harbans Lal

Professor of Psychology (Retd.), SNDT Women's University, Director - Forum of Safety Culture, Mumbai – 400049, Maharashtra, India; kailahl@hotmail.com

Abstract

The steering teams need to awaken and act to the depth and intensity of positive safety culture at sites. They take safety pledges every day, but injuries and fatalities continue. Risk is live daily; risk control must be live daily. The focus of this paper is to describe and simplify the action of steering teams as the strategic drive of executing safety culture for the benefit of organizations. Some salient features discussed are like top to bottom steering teams of safety culture concerning cultural maturity, what would motivate steering teams for achieving the next safety cultural levels, and how steering teams work in unity to be a strategic drive for safety culture. The corporate and site steering groups would monitor the progress of a good positive safety culture and ensure that the core principles/values of safety culture intervention do not deviate, failing which the long-term safety culture goals and effects are not achievable. This paper serves the literature reviews, case briefs, and experiences of field experts/practitioners and highlights how the steering teams' members deliver change through the execution of safety cultural intervention through their leadership, commitment, passion and quality time.

Keywords: Organizations, Safety Culture, Steering Teams, Strategic Groups

1. Introduction

What organizational values are supportive of Health, Safety and Well-being (HSW) of people at work? Health, safety, and well-being are values in themselves. The 2nd OSH Strategy Conference representatives from governments and several European and international institutions agreed that Vision Zero should be valued as both the foundation and the objective for a culture of prevention to focus on rational and informed behaviour when dealing with HSW risks (Zwetsloot *et al.*, 2013).

The term safety culture first appeared in 1987 OECD (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development) Nuclear Agency report on a 1986 Chernobyl disaster (Satyendra, 2020). It took almost three decades for organizations to realise the implementation of safety culture methodology.

A corporate safety steering team, while focusing on safety culture strengths and weaknesses, brings together front-line personnel, safety professionals and top management. The safety steering team engages corporate and front-line leadership and focuses on safety culture data, continuous improvement teams and emerging safety needs (Williamsen, 2014).

According to Lalit Ghbahane, Director-General, National Safety Council of India (2016), "Safety must be embedded with corporate strategy. Strategic planning and development of a three-to-five-year business plan is not uncommon among corporate executives. It is not enough to have good systems because performance is determined by how people behave. Top management must increase visibility by personally conducting safety walkabouts. Safety is to be included in the annual KPI of all. Business decisions must be made by leaders with support from safety experts, internally or externally. Safety culture can be eroded, when employees perceive that safety improvement project is impeded by financial constraints or red tape. Steering team leaders must be

visible ambassadors for safety". Steering team is to lead safety culture from within the organization (ProAct Safety, 2017). Decision-making for safety culture is often affected by trade-offs between multiple, competing objectives. Managers need conceptual inputs to help them develop risk management strategies and justify their decisions in such ambiguous settings (Claude *et al.*, 2018). For many companies, conceptual interactions with safety culture experts have helped to design, customize, roll out and continue positive safety culture interventions by their sites. The importance of top management decisions is highlighted in achieving safety culture effects (Bugalia *et al.*, 2019).

The collective leadership for safety culture team intervention has proven feasible to implement and effective in supporting teams to lead collectively to enhance safety culture. Traditional hierarchical leadership has been implicated in safety failings internationally. Given that safety care is almost wholly delivered by multidisciplinary teams. There is a call for a more collective and team-based approach to sharing of leadership and responsibility for the HSW of people (De Brún, 2020). It was observed that strengthening the learning culture in organizations can enhance safety and performance in preventing incidents (Suprapto, 2021). The Campbell Institute believed that EHS is at the core of business vitality and is intrinsic to operational excellence and financial performance for organizations of all sizes and businesses to achieve and sustain excellence (The Campbell Institute, 2022). It is recommended that the organization sets up a multidisciplinary steering team coordinated by a safety culture initiative leader (Manufacturing Safety Alliance of BC, 2022).

Generally speaking, a steering team is a group of high-level stakeholders who provide strategic direction for a project, provide governance, and supports the execution teams. Ideally, steering team increases the chances for project success by closely aligning safety culture goals to organizational goals. However, this is unfortunately not always guaranteed (Dolfing, 2018). "We put together the safety steering team that helped to embed safety culture for all Unilever leaders who manage a team. The board's corporate responsibility team prioritised safety and reviewed the safety progress scorecard at each meeting" (Unilever, 2022). What determines success from failure, at an organisation, is the ability to execute strategy effectively. As we know, Google wasn't the only search engine, and Amazon wasn't the only online marketplace. It was their ability to execute their strategy better than the competition that led to their success (Morgan, 2022). The mission of a company's steering team is to focus on achieving safety culture objectives and to ensure its long-term sustainability and growth. In general, it is taken for granted that when a person joins the steering team, they are very clear about their role and how to perform it. (Scanlon, 2022). But they need to be prepared and monitored for their roles and responsibilities.

2. Agile Steering Teams Drive the Positive Safety Cultural Maturity

Major incidents in the world had a worst impact on the environment, devastated families, and jeopardised the economic activity in that region. The bureaucratic safety culture that leans towards employee silence makes it difficult to drill down to the organisational culture. (The ICSI, 2017). All around the world, building positive safety culture is on top of voices now. But companies do lack an implementation strategic roadmap to work or walk on such long-term organization-wide intervention. The Total Safety Management Steering Team's major responsibility is to making safety and health concerns as high priority in the organization's strategic plan. The Steering Team must be established and comprise of organizations leaders plus the HSE senior officer (Safety Army, 2022).

Safety culture implementation is the process of adapting the program to the context of action while maintaining the intervention's core principles. In case the interventions do not include a good follow-up strategy or lack steering teams aimed at monitoring activity progress, potentially gives rise to misinterpretations of the intervention's effects, which may lead to a failure to achieve the proposed goals (Isabel *et al.*, 2017).

Steering teams are strategic groups for safety culture transformation in organizations. Inadequate risk control is not good for the health of any company's businesses. Steering teams of safety culture are strategic groups who set goals and objectives while giving action points (Table 1) to sites and support them to achieve and monitor the same very closely every month. The corporate director's team would oversee and support the quarterly reviews. The top management team shall monitor for goal setting

Table 1. Top to bottom steering teams of safety culture

Multi-Level Teams	Goals and Objectives	Action Points
Corporate Directors team	Oversee and support	Quarterly reviews
Top management team	Monitor for Goal setting	Achieve safety cultural change
Site management team	Impact culture development	Guide weekly assessments
Front-line personnel	Emerging safety needs	Continuous improvement
Safety steering team	Culture change in data trends	Engage corporate/ front-line leaders
Observers teams	Observations daily	Spot-correction of at-risk behaviours
Safety culture experts	Clarifying concepts	Guiding and handholding teams

to achieve safety cultural change. The site management team guides weekly assessments for impacting culture development. Front-line personnel focus on emerging safety needs for achieving continuous improvement. The safety steering team engage corporate/ front-line leaders for positive changes in safety culture data trends. Observers' teams conduct observations daily and achieve spot-correction of at-risk behaviours. Safety culture experts regularly clarify concepts, guide, direct and handhold teams into achieving objectives set for positive cultural changes.

Sense of positivity in thought and action has to prevail from all top to bottom in order to achieve a cultural change in organizations. Empowered employees would save sites from incidents and accidents. The independent safety culture truly means when a helper at site can identify and control the critical risks, also when the chairperson of site steering team, the project manager is reporting to the board meeting that his site people are doing daily spot-correction of at-risk behaviours. Also, when the HSE Head has given an ownership to the safety team to nurture positive safety culture at sites. Importantly, the numbers of safety cultural change trends must match with field stories of implementation effects. While much effort has been put into assessment to diagnose a cultural improvement, the relationship between culture and behaviour remains ambiguous and steering a culture into a desirable direction is equally uncertain. Skipping the assessment altogether, it is important that people can voice their concerns and share information openly (Guldenmund, 2018). The management commitment, appraisal of hazards, supportive environment and

Table 2. Steering teams and safety cultural maturity levels

Teams Passive or Active	Cultural Maturity Pre-Intervention	Cultural Maturity Post-Intervention
Corporate Directors	Reactive/Dependent	Independent/Interdependent
Top management team	Reactive/Dependent	Independent/Interdependent
Site management team	Reactive/Dependent	Independent/Interdependent
Front-line personnel	Interdependent/Dependent	Independent/Interdependent
Safety steering team	Independent/Interdependent	Independent/Interdependent
Observers teams	Dependent/Independent	Independent/Interdependent
Safety culture experts	Designing intervention/coaching	Spot-motivating leaders/teams

communication influenced the safety culture (Tehrani *et al.*, 2019).

The top management team would normally sit directly beneath board level to gather and review data from broad parts of the business, then filter and summarise it upwards to the board (VinciWorks, 2022). These steering teams empower each other to set objectives and achieve outcomes. It would take lots of time to come on same page for all these teams as they discuss the concerns over meetings. A strong positive safety culture adopts the just culture and abandons blaming actions of individuals involved in incidents but rather the culture (Flott *et al.*, 2018). Safety culture can be enhanced by the actions of top to bottom steering teams to focus even up to the last line of observers' daily observations, spot-corrections and reporting.

During the years 2000 and later, a series of safety awareness surveys across Indian refineries were conducted and observed that almost 30 per cent of awareness was lacking among employees, which reflected in a series of accidents and fatalities in later years. This signified that the safety culture steering teams of industry must take up seriously when presently about 30% of at-risk behaviours are observable across Indian sites (Lal, 2021).

Reactive safety culture is a source of the fear of hierarchy and power structure. Dependent safety culture is a dependency syndrome. Independent safety culture is an ownership, and interdependent safety culture is caring for each other. These four levels of culture shape the work channels and are either facilitators or constraints for safety cultural change. Companies need to understand that the steering team's behaviour and safety cultural maturity are correlated. Incident frequency is determined by the company's cultural maturity. All the steering teams need to be aware of the ladder and journey of cultural maturity. Cultural maturity would depend upon how far the steering teams are passive or active (Table 2). If steering teams are passive, dependent safety culture continues to follow. Hence steering team members must be made aware of this fact so that they can remain active in safety culture development. when all steering teams work in sync, the interdependent safety culture follows. Cultural maturity before intervention is mostly reactive and dependent. Cultural maturity after positive safety intervention gradually turns towards independence or interdependence over a period.

Teams need a formal leader, a proper start-up and support to become effective and valued by the team members. In some businesses, self-steering teams are operating for quite some time now. Successes are reported, but it is not at all a recipe that fits us all. Some people love to be part of a self-steering team, others hate it (Krijnen Bert, 2019). It matters a lot, who's steering? When it comes to turnarounds, that responsibility falls to the steering team to achieve turnaround preparation and successful execution. On average, of companies, 90% have some sort of steering team in place. But only about 10% of those teams are truly effective. An effective steering team makes a big difference in turnaround outcomes (AP Networks, 2022).

The important question remains as to what would motivate members of the steering teams for achieving

Table 3. What would motivate steering teams for achieving higher safety cultural maturity?

Teams	Motivational Factor for Cultural Maturity	Focus on Objective
Corporate Directors	Business excellence	Incident-free business
Top management team	Safety excellence	Injury-free environment
Site management team	Performance excellence	Injury-free performance
Front-line personnel	Achieving higher output	Hurdle-free site
Safety steering team	Zero-incident	Zero-unsafe behaviour
Observers teams	Rewards and recognition	Maximum spot-corrections
Safety culture experts	Mentoring interventional implementation	Spot-motivating leaders

safety cultural maturity? Table 3 guides further as to how each of the teams has an inherent strong motivational factor and an objective to focus upon for an organizational safety cultural maturity. Thereby the steering teams need regular focused orientations to remain motivated in order to achieve independent and interdependent safety cultures for business sustainability. Corporate directors who desire for business excellence require an incident-free business. Top management team who wishes for safety excellence need to focus on an injury-free environment. Site management team who are motivated for performance excellence must aim at an injury-free performance. Front-line personnel need a hurdle-free site for achieving higher outputs. Safety steering team would focus zero-unsafe behaviour to achieve zero-incident. Observers' teams shall be rewarded and recognised when they conduct maximum spot-corrections of at-risk behaviours as well as rectify barriers. Safety culture experts mentor safety culture intervention implementation by involving, facilitating and spot-motivating the leaders.

The role of safety culture experts is crucial in designing intervention, mentoring interventional implementation as well as spot-motivating leaders and teams to be focused on core principles and moving on to the next milestones of zero-at-risk behaviours, zero-harm, zero-blame goals. Here follows such an example. In a recent follow-up of monthly review with the steering teams, it was observed by the safety culture expert that only 14 out of 29 sites were reporting safety implementation, which indirectly reflected on the passive behaviour of steering team leadership. The feedback was given on the spot, the result of which was that the leader spot-corrected his behaviour and requested for an immediate meeting with those sites for implementation of safety culture actions. This was appreciated by all present in the review meeting. Hence, the spot-observation, spot-feedback, spot-correction, spot-motivation are the mantra of going forward in monitoring and achieving positive safety culture intervention and benchmarks in industry (Gibbs, 2022). *Safety culture excellence means engagement at every level*. The safety leadership steering team is required to spend sufficient time every month and work on the weak points of the culture (Williamsen, 2021). Steering teams define the safety culture excellence and achieve the same. Safety culture steering group can influence safety culture through multiple mechanisms and can rectify challenges posed by site or even benefit from them (Viitanen *et al.*, 2017).

Case studies of safety culture steering teams over the past 10 years of various companies such as Sembcorp, ThyssenKrupp, Baerlocher, GAIL, SAIL, Toyota, Galaxy Surfactants, Volkswagen, DCM Shriram revealed that some of these steering teams were not active, or active in the beginning for few months. But for some of these, companies' steering teams were engaged about the safety culture transformation for many years. As a result of

Table 4. How do steering teams work in unity to be a strategic drive for safety culture maturity?

Planning a Strategic Drive for the Company	Goals to Lead the Change
Actions of the entire manpower provide culmination to culture	Zero-vision
Time each individual employee (from first to the last one) spends	Zero-injury, Zero-harm
Sensitivity to each risk	Zero-incident
Speak up to correct risk immediately	Spot-correction
All serve as one family caring for each other for risk control	Human care
Not a single person ignores the risk	Zero-risk ignorance
Each employee stops for a couple of minutes to approach the risk	Give Safety time
Questions and spot-solutions for all barriers to safety	Spot-motivations

which, their overall safety statistics improved significantly. Incidents also took places where the steering teams dumped all safety culture actions down the levels. Then these teams reviewed and rejuvenated the safety culture at their sites, and improvement was noticed (Kaila, 2022). Integrating these teams with national levels forums is necessary to develop confidence and competencies of safety cultures.

So, the need was felt to form a national levels safety culture experts' steering teams for industries of all sectors and sizes to collaborate, and consider the benchmarks achieved and share with the fellow companies. Overall, several such national conferences and courses were conducted, which also identified the experienced safety culture ambassadors to support regional and neighbourhood organizations with help from industrial associations and directorate of factories, academic and professional institutions such as NITIE, DGFASLI, NSCI. This fast-tracked the spread of positive safety cultures at various levels. These forums and interactions are continuing more which helps develop the practice of safe industries (Forum of Behavioural Safety, 2020). The HSE National Open Disclosure Steering Team was established to strengthen corporate oversight, strategic leadership and accountability (HSE, 2022). Such collaborated efforts and initiatives are visible across the world for safety of human civilizations and heritage.

The steering teams are not advisory committees to sit back, relax and dump the work down the levels. The challenge to industry is that the steering teams as key players deliver time to understand and drive the safety cultural significant intervention and demonstrate leadership, commitment and their passion for driving change (Hackitt, 2022). Table 4 describes as to how do steering teams work in unison and become a strategic drive for safety culture maturity in planned manner? How do all teams draw synergy from actions of the entire manpower to culmination and fulfil a zero-harm goal? How much time does each individual employee (from first to the last one) spends on safety at workplace, and then each day each one is safe and returns home as he/she came to work? Do people at work continue to be sensitive to each risk and speak up to correct immediately? These questions are the source of synergy that drives safety culture maturity. Not a single person can afford to ignore the risk or look the other way. Do all questions and barriers to safety receive spot-solutions as a motivation. There is no shortcut to

safe workplace. On a positive note, each employee stops for few minutes to approach the risk as one family and serves a risk control while actively caring for each other. It's crucial that businesses work to achieve unity. The financial incentives of a unified, collaborative workforce are clear. Deloitte found that greater collaboration creates value and saves time inside organizations, and leads to higher-quality work output (Altschuler, 2020). Develop a shared sense of vision and value amongst all businesses of the organisation aligned to the safety strategic direction and execution through a clear and coordinated approach (WSSA, 2022). Harvard Business Review found that 72% of strategies fail not because the strategy was wrong, rather because the execution was poor (HSE Global, 2022). Companies enjoy best level of cultural maturity when multilevel steering teams gradually sync on the core principles of safety culture concepts, its approach, analysis, monitoring, support, handholding, reviews, follow-ups for benchmarking across businesses within an organization.

3. Acknowledgement

4. References

Altschuler, M. (2020). How managers can support business unity. Available from: https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/how-managers-can-support-business-unity/

AP Networks (2022). How do you build an effective turnaround steering team? Available from: https://www.ap-networks.com/how-do-you-build-an-effective-turnaround-steering-team/

Bugalia, N., Maemura, Y. & Ozawa, K. (2019). Safety culture in high-speed railways and the importance of top management decisions. ADBI Working Paper Series, No. 955, Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI), Tokyo. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3512286

Claude, G., Journé, B., Laroche, H. & Bieder, C. (2018). Safety cultures, safety models taking stock and moving forward. *Springer Briefs in Safety Management*. ISBN 978-3-319-95128-7 ISBN 978-3-319-95129-4 (eBook) https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95129-4

Flott, K., Nelson, D., Moorcroft, T., Mayer, E. K., Gage, W., Redhead, J. & Darzi, A. W. (2018). Enhancing safety culture through improved incident reporting: A case study

in translational research. *Health Affairs*, *37(11)*: 1797-804. https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2018.0706

Forum of Behavioural Safety. (2020). Forum of behavioural safety - Besafe. Available from: https://www.facebook.com/ForumBeSafe/

Gabhane, L. (2016, Dec 28). Strategic approach to develop a safety culture in an organization. Available from: Available from: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/strategic-approach-develop-safety-culture-lalit-gabhane/

Gibbs, A. (2022, September). The three key trends challenging safety culture. Available from: https://www.ausimm.com/bulletin/bulletin-articles/sentis-latest-industry-report-into-the-state-of-safety-culture-in-mining/

Guldenmund, F. (2018, July). Are safety culture assessments really necessary? *Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing,* 101-10. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60525-8_11

Hackitt, D. J. (2022, January). Building safety: The industry safety steering group's third report for the secretary of state and the minister for building safety. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/industry-safety-steering-group-third-report-on-culture-change-in-the-built-environment-industry/building-safety-the-industry-safety-steering-groups-third-report-for-the-secretary-of-state-and-the-minister-for-building-safety

HSE Global. (2022). Performance - Strategy and execution. Available from: https://hseglobal.com/strategy-and-execution/

Isabel, M. H.-S., José, M. L.-P. & José, M. L.-R. (2017). Steps to ensure a successful implementation of occupational health and safety interventions at an organizational level. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8. Available from: https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02135 https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02135

Krijnen, B. (2019, February). Self-Steering Teams: heaven or hell? Available from: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/self-steering-teams-heaven-hell-bert-krijnen/

HSE. (2022). National open disclosure steering team. Available from: https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/nqpsd/qps-incident-management/open-disclosure/national-open-disclosure-steering-team.html

Lal, H. (2021). Behavioural economics of safety culture management in companies. Opus, *XXX(4)*.

Kaila, H L. (2022). Fast-track industry safety culture and reduction of incidents/losses. *International Journal of Research -Granthaalayah*, XXXI(1). https://doi.org/10.32381/JPR.2022.17.01.13

Manufacturing Safety Alliance of BC (2022). Safety culture: A guide to effective measurement and improvement. Available from: https://safetyalliancebc.ca/wp-content/uploads/guidebook/11865/Safety-Culture-Model.pdf

Morgan, L. (2022, February). Achieving strategy is everything. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/steering-achieve-strategy-how-business-modelling-enables-morgan/?trk=pulse-article_more-articles_related-content-card

ProAct Safety. (2017, March). Facilitator or steering team leading BBS from within. Available from: https://www.safetycultureexcellence.com/category/teams-and-teams/

Safety Army. (2022). Based on Professor David L. Goetsch's implementing total quality Management. Available from: https://safety.army.mil/portals/0/documents/onduty/workplace/safetyprogrammanagement/standard/total_safety_management.pdf

Satyendra. (2020, July). Importance of safety culture in the organization. Available from: https://www.ispatguru.com/importance-of-safety-culture-in-the-organization/

Scanlon, H. (2022, March). How to prepare a company's steering team for its mission. Available from: https://huntscanlon.com/how-to-prepare-a-companys-steering-team-for-its-mission/

Suprapto, V. H., Pujawan, N. & Dewi, R. (2021). A framework to strengthen learning culture and safeguards. *Safety, 7(4)*, 78. https://doi.org/10.3390/safety7040078

Tehrani, V., Rezaifar, O., Gholhaki, M. & Khosravi, Y. (2019). Investigating factors of safety culture assessment in construction industry projects. *Civil Engineering Journal, 5*, 971-83. https://doi.org/10.28991/cej-2019-03091304

The Campbell Institute. (2022). Defining EHS leadership in world class organizations. Available from: https://www.thecampbellinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Campbell-Institute-Defining-EHS-Leadership-WP.pdf

The ICSI Safety Culture Working Group. (2017). Safety culture: From understanding to action. issue 2018-01 of the Cahiers de la Sécurité Industrielle collection. Institut pour une Culture de Sécurité Industrielle (ICSI), Toulouse, France.

Unilever. (2022). Safety at work. Available from: https://www.unilever.com/planet-and-society/responsible-business/safety-at-work/

Viitanen, K., Gotcheva, N. & Rollenhagen, C. (2017). Safety culture assurance and improvement methods in complex projects.

Vinci Works. (2022, December). What does an ESG committee do? Available from: https://vinciworks.com/blog/what-does-an-esg-committee-do/

Williamsen, M. (2014, September). Developing effective safety steering teams. Available from: https://wasteadvantagemag.com/developing-effective-safety-steering-teams/

Williamsen, M. (2021, June). Delivering safety excellence: engagement culture at every level John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119772279

WSSA. (2022). Water industry health and safety maturity model. Available from: https://www.wsaa.asn.au/sites/default/files/publication/download/WSAA%20Water%20Industry%20Health%20and%20Safety%20Maturity%20Model%202019_0.pdf   Zwetsloot, I. J. M. G., van Scheppingen, A. R., Bos, E. H., Dijkman, A. & Starren, A. (2013). The core values that support health, safety, and well-being at work. *Safety and Health at Work*, *4(4)*:187-96. ISSN 2093-7911. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shaw.2013.10.001