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Strengthening a positive safety culture despite underlying fear and peer pressure!

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

Peer pressure and workplace anxiety may have a global impact. Organizations of all sizes and industries may be affected by their damaging effects. This paper's goal is to provide recommendations for businesses looking to improve their current work cultures. The two biggest barriers to developing a culture of safety are fear of consequences and peer pressure to conform, according to a recent survey of 222 experts on workplace culture. The survey revealed five variables that were prevalent across all manufacturing industries; management implications highlighted the importance of promoting a safe and healthy workplace for all employees. The study also discovered that regular quantitative audits should be conducted and that everyone from the top management on down should be included in any actions.

1. INTRODUCTION

A debate is still going on about whether the term "safety climate" should be used at all because it suggests that it could be separate from the parts of an organization's culture that have major effects on health and safety (H&S). Various maturity models can be utilized to facilitate the growth of robust safety cultures. Models of maturity classify development into stages, ranging from somewhat immature safety cultures to cultures that substantially support positive H&S performance. The contents and components of long-term adjustments to the safety climate enhance culture over time.

Safety science uses scientific methods, research, and investigation tools to look at and manage safety (Aven, 2014). Numerous sectors have realized that a fear-based culture does not encourage learning from errors and can result in diminished organizational culture, decreased effectiveness, and reduced safety practices (Casey, 2020). Experts have said that the culture of an organization is a big reason for large-scale, avoidable institutional failures like accidents and corruption. Failures in safety and ethics are more likely to happen before certain kinds of outcomes. For example, a loss of life is more likely to happen before management ignores warnings (Hald et al., 2021).

If there is a "just culture" where problems can be talked about freely and underlying causes can be looked into and fixed without worrying about getting in trouble, employees should feel comfortable reporting safety incidents (JPT, 2019). Duncan and Aratani (2020) found that employees were afraid to

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talk about safety concerns because they thought they would be punished, and that industry standards put a lot of pressure on them. When a safe and supportive environment and culture exists, peer pressure is typically a constructive influence. However, it can readily operate in the reverse direction (Lamendola, 2021).

Studies show that employees only speak up 39% of the time when they see conditions and practices that they think are bad. This percentage is consistent across industries, countries, and cultures (Scace, 2018). When there is fear and pressure in the organizational culture, it is difficult at best to build a positive safety climate. It requires a long-term commitment to caring about employees, communicating honestly, rewarding safe work practices, and supporting positive attitudes from all stakeholders in safety, health, and the environment. Why does the administration delay climate-related safety measures? The duty of fostering an exceptional safety culture falls directly on the shoulders of the company's executives and management staff (Lal, 2022). What options exist for resolving this dilemma? Alinier and Verjee (2015) stressed the need for fostering a culture of safety through positive peer pressure that promotes and reinforces safe work behaviors. Regarding safety, peer pressure can be a two-edged sword. It can either urge employees to behave safely and ethically or force them to take excessive risks (Moyer, 2020).

2. OBJECTIVES

A review of the relevant literature indicates that there is a need to increase the safety climate, minimize fear, and reinforce peer pressure that promotes safe work practices and strengthens business culture. This article strives to:

- examine the origins of fear and negative peer pressure in corporate work cultures; and
- propose solutions, answers and recommendations to enhance a positive safety atmosphere, climate and organizational culture.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample

According to Eeckelaert et al. (2011), safety climate can be evaluated through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and worker observations. In reality, quantitative surveys are the simplest and least expensive method for evaluating worker perceptions and opinions about safety in their workplace. In the business world, surveys are also the most popular method for measuring progress toward achieving this goal.

For the sake of this study, a total of 560 individuals were sampled, but only 222 health, safety, and environment (HSE) professionals, including medical, education, management, and mental health experts, responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 40%. CEOs (chief executive officers), directors, managers, department heads, and safety specialists from India's public and private industrial sectors, including chemicals, construction, gas, power, and steel, participated in the study.

3.2 Data Collection

Primary data (interviews and discussions) as well as secondary data (incidence and accident rates) were collected. Interviews were based on open-ended questions; personal, in-depth discussions were conducted over a three-month period (from April to June 2022) at various locations and in different

organizations across India using remote data collection techniques. Non-random convenience sampling was used as the sampling method. Participants were recruited from the researcher's contact list and invited to complete the online survey via WhatsApp and email.

3.3 Research Design and Data Analysis

Using the qualitative descriptive framework, this was an exploratory mixed-methods research design with field professionals as study participants. The data for this study was primarily gathered through controlled interviews and questionnaire surveys.

4. RESULTS

How can a positive safety culture be strengthened when fear and peer pressure are degrading the workplace culture? A content analysis of the qualitative data revealed the following:

When there is fear and peer pressure, and people are afraid to speak up about safety, it is extremely difficult to develop and strengthen a positive safety culture. When work is well organized and planned, safety is never jeopardized.

4.1 Responses from Chemical Plants

The following responses were received: The "big brother" concept of "awards and recognition" creates a ground-level communication bridge. Employees must be trained and included in company communications. Specific comments included the following:

- Help employees understand that production is done by machine and that their role is to protect the safety culture and machines.
- Motivate employees by encouraging them to think positively.
- After completing their shifts, advise them to rest and eat a nutritious diet.
- Training and education, as well as looking at examples of safe work practices that have worked well, can help change the way management thinks.

According to Singer and Vogus (2013), isolated interventions are unlikely to address the underlying causes; rather, effective strategies necessitate a systemic approach to interventions that address the interrelated processes of safety climate and organizational culture in a balanced and positive manner. Understanding the issues and causes of fear and negative peer pressure is critical for developing appropriate and effective interventions. First and foremost, collaborating and working as part of a team to create a healthy environment and culture.

4.2 Responses from construction plants:

Top management must ensure that its safety philosophy has permeated all the way down to the ground level and must show strong support and a visible commitment to safety. Management must approach safety issues from the heart, not the brain, management must convey they care about the health and wellbeing of all their employees. Management should regard safety as a core value, not just a matter of situational priority. Priorities shift over time, but safety must never be compromised. The rules can be changed, but not the values.

Below are some of the observations and recommendations provided:

- *Organize small evening get-togethers; allow everyone to open up and speak freely with one another over a cup of tea and snacks. Play some team games indoors.*
- *There are many ways to create a safe environment on the job site, including, but not limited to:*
 - *program encouragement and participation;*
 - *willingness to report safety and health concerns;*
 - *education and access to safety and health information;*
 - *lack of fear of retaliation; and*
 - *training for all employees*

The United States Forest Service (USFS) created initiatives to improve safety outcomes and incorporate social science perspectives to enhance its understanding of emergency fire incidents and vulnerability mitigation across all fields of work. The USFS considered using three recent changes in organizational safety culture—cultural awareness, cultural management, and cultural reorganization—to show how employees question and shape the development of top-down safety initiatives. These are cultural management, cultural reorganization, and cultural awareness (Flores and Haire, 2021).

4.3 Responses from refineries:

Managers and other workers at the refinery reported the following:

In addition to intangible benefits, the company should present safety factors and tangible benefits. Create and implement policies and practices that permeate all business partners and create a work safety culture through innovative interventions. First and foremost, top leaders should emphasize safety rather than production targets. Line management's trust and confidence can be won back through the transformation of such mindsets, and they can become champions for a safe climate and a strong organizational culture. Because, if we think about it, where does the fear factor come from? Naturally, top leaders develop policies and procedures and set the tone for the company culture, which spreads throughout the organization. Results are highly likely if this change is implemented for at least one year.

According to respondent feedback, effective leadership is required to foster an organizational culture that promotes safety. Leaders can protect employees by creating an environment of physical and psychological safety that encourages others to feel comfortable communicating issues and raising concerns. Lastly, Brooke et al. (2020) stated that leaders who promote a positive organizational climate make employees happier with their jobs, reduce burnout, and improve the safety culture as a whole.

4.4 Responses from academics:

Academics provided the following responses:

Risk-awareness and risk-taking are critical components of a positive safety culture. When there is fear and negative peer pressure, human resource (HR) training intervention is required to strengthen the positive safety climate and culture. HR departments could hold team-building exercises to make employees feel more secure and cared for at work. This will help to create a positive safety climate and culture. Continuous efforts by management and employees to improve safety practices are required.

Harvey et al. (2001) emphasized the use of empathy in relation to improving culture in order to increase the efficacy of changes in the safety climate and attitudes. Rio Tinto has identified caring, courageous, and inquisitive leadership as priorities for the whole organization. For real change to happen, leaders must show that they have these values (Broderick, 2020).

4.5 Safety culture: from the workplace to anywhere:

As part of the safety culture education, it was advised to strengthen the colony's positive safety culture among housewives and children, as well as contract workers and security personnel. The recommendations provided stressed the following:

Instead of lecturing, hold monthly sessions on topics such as road safety, individual behaviours, kitchen safety behaviours, and personal risky behaviours.

5. MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many businesses reported that participation from their support departments (human resources, procurement, finance, administration, and CSR) was insufficient and remained low at 16%. This could be because people don't see risks at sites or aren't brought into the long-term plans for intervention by the steering team. To improve the safety climate and overall organizational culture, everyone in the organization must join forces and collaborate. Long-term intervention may take years and will require the participation of all personnel and leadership teams. If, for instance, a company has a total workforce of 1000 people, but only 900 of them are participating in the positive safety climate interventions in terms of risk correction, then the organization has a stronger safety climate improvement of up to 90%.

It is critical to understand that, in order to create a positive safety climate, one must not only correct at-risk behaviors but also appreciate and reward safe behaviors. It is important to note that everyone has the ability to correct unsafe behavior; if one cares about others, they will care about him or her. It is critical to remember and emphasize that an injury is not an isolated separate outcome or hazard; it workplace impacts the entire workplace that must be handled as such (Raeve, 2011). Safer systems alone will not result in safer employees; a strong safety climate supported by a positive organizational culture is required. Long-term supportive safety climates emerge when employees collaborate (NHS, 2019).

Managers must overcome the challenges of institutionalizing a poor safety climate and organizational culture in order to make a difference in the HSE system (Farokhzadian et al., 2018). According to Noor Arzahan et al. (2022), the terms used to reflect safety issues in organizations are "safety culture," "safety climate," and "safety performance." Proactive safety climate and culture are more effective than reactive measures. The effects of the safety climate may be mitigated by safety competence and knowledge.

Across countries, manpower and workload pressures were identified as major areas for improvement (Granel-Giménez et al., 2022). It is suggested that all stakeholders establish a voluntary and/or mandatory error reporting policy and system aimed at identifying all types of errors, near misses or mistakes that may have an impact on the quality of safety care (Kaware et al., 2022). According to Key et al. (2022), following approved procedures is an important part of ensuring safety. Human error, according to experts, is a multi-level outcome of an interaction between the organizational context (culture, resources), supervisory conditions, and working environment (mental and physical state; team coordination). From the director to the contractor, supportive safety brings everyone together and helps them work together to reduce risks.

The pressure to meet a goal is critical for businesses and must be viewed constructively. Fear can only be removed by regularly reinforcing safe work practices, having positive supportive dialogue with employees, followed by empowering workers to voice their concerns to higher-level company personnel via the appropriate channel. According to Qoronbfleh (2021), one of the major contributing factors to adverse events is a poor safety climate and culture. Organizational learning, continuous improvement, and teamwork are all signs of the highest-rated safety climate in all areas. In this respect, a top leader at MNC engineering company noted the following:

We have implemented ISO 45001, but still, accidents are happening at sites, and the at-risk behaviours are 25 percent. This means that it has not been behaviourally implemented. We have not fully increased internal risk control by empowering everyone on the ground. Across all sites, we must all demonstrate compliance behaviours and reinforce safe work practices. Management would provide tools and formats, but it would be up to site personnel to instil a positive safety culture and improve organizational culture throughout the organization.

5. CONCLUSION

Safety climate and organizational culture are outcomes of corporate officers' mandates, but they must be accepted by individuals at all levels. Acceptance is measured in relation to all others who exhibit safe behaviors. Organizational leaders must understand that incidents at the sites can cause shareholders to sell their company shares, thus affecting the company's business stability and growth. So, in order to keep their business and employees safe, employers need to keep putting more emphasis on safety at work and improving and strengthening their organizational culture. According to industry professionals,

- The safety climate and organizational culture of companies have a significant impact on the actions of stakeholders;
- Companies that promote a culture of health, safety, and well-being outperform those that do not;
- Workplaces that lack the long-term intervention of a caring, supportive, positive, interdependent safety climate and organizational culture should be regarded as "non-compliant," because safety systems alone do not keep everyone safe.
- Risk is an unavoidable part of our lives. Every year, nearly 3 million people die globally as a result of common risk factors in their workplace; all of them can be saved if positive and supportive safety cultures are implemented (Azzi, 2022).

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