

Building Capacity with Positive Safety Culture

The Wathen Group has significant experience in assessing and creating strong safety cultures with demonstrated results. Our approach is based upon a commitment to create an engaged workforce and measuring results to ensure continuous improvement.

Engaged Employees Lead to Improved Safety Culture and Performance

Culture is defined as the shared values (what is important) and beliefs (how things work) that interact with an organization's structures and control systems to produce behavioral norms (the way we do things around here).

Key Components of Positive Safety Culture

We use a framework for initially assessing the safety elements of the broader organizational culture. The leading industry-wide framework for safety culture is Dr. Reason's which identifies five elements that define an organization's safety culture: informed culture, reporting culture, learning culture, flexible culture, and just culture -- all of which is a subset of the organization's overall culture. We supplement the Reason Framework with observations about eight key components that are in place in organizations with strong safety culture:



- 1) Strong leadership, management and organizational commitment to safety.
- 2) Employee/union shared ownership and participation.
- 3) Effective safety communications.
- 4) Proactive use of safety data, key indicators and benchmarking.
- 5) Organizational learning.
- 6) Consistent safety reporting and investigations for prevention.
- 7) Employee recognition and rewards.
- 8) High level of organizational trust.

An evaluation of the impact of safety culture on quality in over 600 US based organizations in diverse industries revealed that better work methods and reduced absenteeism had contributed to improved organizational performance, while also impacting on product quality. Similarly, construction industry studies have shown that projects driven by safety are more likely to be on schedule and within budget. Major investments in safety across industries not only result in significant reductions in accidents with corresponding increases in productivity, but also lead to increasingly positive attitudes about quality and safety.



Measuring Your Organization's Performance

Taking initiative in understanding your organization's current performance on safety culture offers an opportunity to review the existing situation and conduct careful analysis to support your agency in addressing contributing and root causes, mitigating issues, and implementing strategies for continual improvement.

The purpose of such an initiative can be to self monitor and promote safety to mitigate conditions that can contribute to an unsafe environment; avoid incidents from occurring or escalating; and address possible industry concerns.

Undertaking a review of safety culture and operational safety includes:

Gaining the perception of leadership, management, supervision and field employees about the organization's safety values and commitment and their perceptions about the level of employee engagement in the organization and within their work units,

Reviewing elements of the organization such as training, policies and procedures, accidents/incidents to identify trends, human resources programs and discipline practices,

Understanding the nature of existing culture based on perception and operational procedure to assess its effect on current agency performance.

Case Study

The Wathen Group conducted an assessment of LA Metro Rail's safety culture and a review of the Red Signal Violations (RSV).

Our team:

1. Conducted a series of interviews with various levels of management at LA Metro including members of the executive level, Metro Rail management, and Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) representatives.
2. Facilitated nineteen Metro Rail employee focus groups.
3. Conducted a survey of over 1600 Metro Rail field employees following a previously conducted one allowing for longitudinal view of employees' perceptions.
4. Conducted an extensive document review.
5. Conducted field observations to assess Metro Rail's safety culture and to review the red signal violations over the study period.
6. Made recommendations to address the issues identified in the review.



Key Takeaways / Outcomes

1. Employee engagement does contribute towards an improved safety culture.
2. Improving safety culture is a continuous process and is most effectively addressed with targeted strategies and ongoing monitoring.
3. An organization that is characterized by a learning culture is open to reflection and improvements that helps to raise the bar on performance. We saw in LA Metro an organization that was open to ongoing review and focused on continuous improvement. Since the last employee survey, the strong focus on enhancing their training programs was perceived as improved is an example of efforts to work to improve their operations.
4. The ongoing pressure to deliver service and expand a system can work against a continual review of ongoing operations and safety which an outsider group can help to provide ongoing feedback.
5. Leadership commitment matters in ongoing programs and new initiatives. At LA Metro, we observed Board and leadership commitment for creating a strong safety culture and a willingness to be open to review.

Facilitating Effective Change

Key Tools for Evaluation

Key to *The Wathen Group* approach is a collaborative focus which engages various levels of your organization and our associates, who have decades of experience with facilitation, team building, and mediating differences. Our team includes leaders across transportation, infrastructure, engineering, and technology industries in order to offer the depth and breadth needed to support client needs and achieve objectives.

At the beginning of our efforts, we design a process for identifying contributing factors and strategies for increased positive safety culture, engagement and empowerment towards the support of your organization's strategic goals. With over three decades of experience in the industry, *The Wathen Group* has built, designed and implemented effective safety culture programs for organizations of various sizes.

The timeframe to conduct any review can vary based on the scale, deliverables, and assessments.

Kick Off Workshop with Key Stakeholders

In any new initiative an organization begins, it is crucial to have key stakeholder buy-in and engagement from the start. We typically hold initial meetings with relevant parties and a kick-off workshop tailored for the tasks and overall project goals and objectives. This ensures we hear all desired goals from all relevant departments and align the project to the organization's expectations for outcome(s) for the initiative.



Employee Feedback

We use both focus groups and employee surveys separately and in combination as we work to determine the level of engagement their employees have and to identify the issues facing the organization that can facilitate or hinder the creation and existence of an effective and strong safety culture. Over a third of organizations use focus groups as such forums for a cost-efficient and timely way to assess the environment for the level of employee engagement and identify major issues necessary for developing suitable action plans to address issues that may limit the existence and or creation of a strong safety culture.

Ideally an organization would supplement the focus groups with an employee survey that can offer the opportunity to identify more granular data about employees and work units and to track changes over time of the effect of strategies taken. Such detailed research also helps to identify those work units that are doing well and those that may need some mitigation strategies and support to improve conditions.

Field Observations and Protocol Review

During our engagement we conduct field observations, review safety policies and procedures and safety structures that include various management, field and employee safety meetings, communications and discipline. We may also include a particular focus of the agency under review. In the case of LA Metro Rail, there was an interest to proactively review the red signal violations, a major industry issue.

Benchmarking

Promoting best practices, collecting data to fully comprehend your standing as an organization, and having standards for safety culture goals enhances your efforts not only to deliver exceptional service but to also improve the quality of the talent at your organization. With our broad industry experience and knowledge, we are able to access best practices and options for benchmarking for a client.

Accountability

Accountability—the ability of people to understand what is expected of them, exercise authority, and take responsibility for delivering results—is an important dimension of organizational health. Employees play important roles in reducing costs and increasing efficiency while creating a positive experience for customers and ensuring their safety. Without clear accountability, employees have difficulty rising to these challenges.



A recently completed McKinsey study found that role clarity (clear organizational structures) and personal ownership (a culture of personal responsibility) are strongly correlated with improved accountability.

We have found that working with groups and individuals to ensure clarity of responsibilities and accountabilities with the development of companion metrics that can be translated into performance measures for work units and individuals can most effectively link responsibility and accountability in order to support effective performance and organizational change. Working in such organizations, we have realized improvements in safety and operating performance and customer satisfaction when carried out in such a manner.

Implementation Support

The Wathen Group will work with your organization to support the implementation phase of such assessments. As an experienced change agent, we can help to build organization and individual capacity to make the changes, assist in creating a shared perspective of the changes and commitment for implementing the changes. We recommend holding a workshop session with the responsible parties and key internal stakeholders to review agreed upon recommendations and facilitate the development of action plans and assignment of responsibilities and accountabilities which are monitored for several months for the leadership to instill the changes into the policies and procedures.

