The New Language of Safety: Creating a Culture of Care

By Dr Andrew Sharman and Ravi Shankar

International Institute of Leadership & Safety Culture

Message from Dr. Andrew Sharman, IILSC Chief Executive Officer

At the International Institute of Leadership & Safety Culture (IILSC), we are committed to empowering leaders to create sustainable cultures of care that drive exceptional organisational performance. Our IILSC Insights whitepapers, crafted in collaboration with world-class experts in leadership, culture and workplace safety, offer valuable insights and actionable strategies for leaders and organisations striving to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Through these in-depth resources, we aim to foster collaboration, spark innovation, and equip leaders at all levels with the knowledge and tools to cultivate resilient and high-performing teams. Dive into these thought-provoking pieces to discover how you can influence change, shape safer work environments and build a lasting culture of care within your organisation.

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Executive Summary

The paper highlights the role of effective communication, empathy and trust in building strong safety cultures. Communication is a critical part of leadership in safety, because it drives positive change and fosters a sense of shared responsibility for safety.

By reframing the safety conversation, from compliance to commitment, we shape cultures of care in which safety performance is improved, accident rates are reduced, and a more positive and productive work environment is created.

This white paper explores the evolution of safety leadership to involve a focus on role modelling, engaging teams and building trust. The authors draw from the experiences of large companies to illustrate the difference between success and failure in delivering safety excellence. They then send a call to action to leaders, to set a clear and positive "tone from the top", to ensure safety is valued in both words and actions.

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving workplace, safety is far more than a legal requirement, or an isolated activity handled by the occupational health and safety (OHS) function. It must become the foundation of a high-performing, resilient organisation that prioritises the well-being of every individual and fosters an environment where people feel cared for and valued.

Yet despite the well-understood and generally accepted importance of workplace safety, the statistics are stark—2.78 million deaths per year at work or from work-related ill-health, a number that has remained largely unchanged for decades, until 2023, when it rose to 2.93 million. That is 8,027 people every day, 334 every hour. Almost one fatality every ten seconds. And a further 395 million people sustain a non-fatal work injury each year.

This sobering reality underscores the need for a fundamental shift in how we approach safety. Safety is not merely about compliance or mitigating risks; it is a critical driver of employee engagement, trust, innovation, sustainability and overall performance. When organisations embed safety into their culture, they create environments where people feel supported, protected, and empowered to perform at their best. An organisational culture that has safety at its heart fosters an atmosphere where employees are not just physically safe but feel emotionally and psychologically secure, leading to improved morale, creativity and loyalty. There is, thus, a leadership responsibility to not only do no harm, but a clear incentive also to make positive change.

This paper challenges the traditional perceptions of workplace safety and clearly demonstrates how safety must be deeply aligned with corporate values and core managerial responsibilities. Leaders must view safety as an opportunity to lead with care, set the tone for a shared responsibility, and drive a culture of trust and innovation. By reframing safety as a driver of engagement and organisational success, managers can unlock new levels of performance, contributing to a sustainable, thriving workforce and, ultimately, a more resilient organisation.

'Safety first' – a 'keystone habit' at Alcoa

Introduced to a group of investors and analysts in October 1987, the newly appointed CEO of Alcoa (Aluminium Company of America) – Paul O'Neill – didn't talk about profits or costs or expansion or taxes or business regulation.

"I want to talk to you about worker safety," he said. **"Every year, numerous Alcoa workers are injured so badly that they miss a day of work. Our safety record is better than the general American workforce, especially considering that our employees work with metals that are 1,500 degrees and machines that can rip a man's arm off. But it's not good enough. I intend to make Alcoa the safest company in America. I intend to go for zero injuries."**

Eventually, someone raised a hand and asked about inventories in the aerospace division. Another asked about the company's capital ratios.

"I'm not certain you heard me," O'Neill said. **"If you want to understand how Alcoa is doing, you need to look at our workplace safety figures. If we bring our injury rates down, it won't be because of cheerleading or the nonsense you sometimes hear from other CEOs. It will be because the individuals at this company have agreed to become part of something important: They've devoted themselves to creating a habit of excellence. Safety will be an indicator that we're making progress in changing our habits across the entire institution. That's how we should be judged."**

Within a year of O'Neill's speech, Alcoa's profits would hit a record high. By the time O'Neill retired in 2000, the company's annual net income was five times larger than before he arrived, and its market capitalisation had risen by $27 billion. Someone who invested a million dollars in Alcoa on the day O'Neill was hired would have earned another million dollars in dividends while he headed the company, and the value of their stock would be five times bigger when he left. What's more, all that growth occurred while Alcoa became one of the safest companies in the world.

Alcoa focused on one keystone habit – 'safety first' – which set into motion a chain reaction that helped other good habits take hold. 'Safety first' required the fast communication of incidents for them to be addressed and repeat incidents avoided. It required the development of an internal messaging platform. This facilitated open communication, employee engagement, transparency and a culture of continuous learning. The 'safety first' mindset spread throughout the organisation, fostering improvements in openness, reporting and learning from mistakes. This keystone habit caused many other behaviours to change for the benefit of all.

Excerpted with permission from The Power of Habit, Duhigg C. (Chapter 4: Keystone Habits, or the Ballad of Paul O'Neill)

Re-framing the safety conversation: From compliance to commitment

The world of work is rapidly transforming, often setting the safety challenge in a new context every few years. Safety professionals have kept pace by innovating solutions and approaches. More often than not, however, these innovations are expressed in terms of processes, regulations, governance and reporting; the language of compliance. In reality, it needs to be about engagement, communication and understanding; the language of commitment.

THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS WHY THIS RE-FRAMING IS NECESSARY.

From task to ownership:
When safety is seen merely as a compliance task, it becomes a check-the-box exercise. But when framed as a commitment, safety evolves into a core responsibility where everyone takes ownership. Employees engage more deeply when they see safety as integral to their role, not just an external obligation.

Reactive vs. proactive:
A compliance-driven safety approach is often reactive, only addressing problems when they arise or when mandated by law. A commitment to safety is proactive, focusing on anticipating risks, preventing incidents, and continuously improving safety practices to safeguard both people and operations.

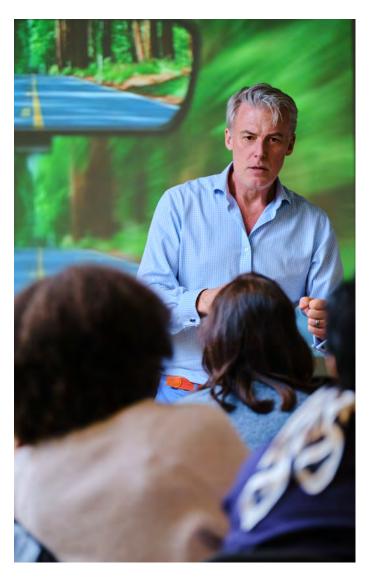**Short-term fixes vs. sustainable culture change:**
Compliance-driven safety programs focus on minimising risk to avoid penalties, often resulting in temporary solutions that don't address root causes. A commitment to safety drives a deeper cultural shift focused on continuous improvement, open communication and the well-being of employees, supporting both employee health and organisational growth.

Stagnation vs. initiative:
A workforce committed to safety takes initiative, shares ideas, and collaborates to improve processes. This commitment leads to a safer, more innovative work environment, where employees feel free to take risks, knowing their safety, and that of their colleagues, is a shared responsibility. Ultimately, this enhances overall organisational performance.

Finally, a critical opportunity in re-framing safety from compliance to commitment is overcoming the negative perception often associated with the OHS function. In many organisations, OHS is seen as a regulatory, bureaucratic function that primarily enforces rules and imposes restrictions. This perception can lead to resistance, with employees viewing safety as a hurdle to productivity rather than a vital component of organisational success.

By shifting the focus from compliance to commitment, we not only elevate the role of OHS but also transform it into a proactive, collaborative force that drives continuous improvement and engages every employee in creating a safer, healthier, more productive work environment. This re-framing is essential for breaking down silos and ensuring that safety is seen as a shared responsibility, rather than just a function to be managed by specialists, thus fostering a deeper, more enduring connection to safety practices, active participation, and leading to a culture of care and continuous improvement.

The Deepwater Horizon Disaster

On April 20, 2010, the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig, operated by BP, was conducting exploratory drilling in the Macondo oil field, located deep in the Gulf of Mexico. As the crew was preparing to seal the well, a massive surge of natural gas escaped, causing a blowout. The gas ignited, resulting in a violent explosion that tore through the rig. Despite the crew's desperate efforts to control the situation, the fire raged for hours. Tragically, 11 workers lost their lives in the explosion, and the rig itself sank two days later. The blowout led to an uncontrollable oil spill that lasted for 87 days, releasing an estimated 4.9 million barrels of crude oil into the Gulf. The disaster caused immense environmental damage, devastating marine life and coastal ecosystems.

The incident became a watershed moment in global safety and environmental policy. Two reports, the Baker Report and the Reilly Report, were commissioned to investigate the causes of the incident. While certain technical issues in the drilling industry were cited, both reports emphasised the leadership failure and the lack of a strong "tone from the top" as central to the causes of the disaster.

The Baker Report emphasized that BP's leaders did not create a culture where safety was ingrained in decision-making, and instead, there was a focus on cost-cutting and efficiency. This led to the adoption of risk practices and a failure to address known safety concerns. The Reilly Report echoed these findings, criticising BP's senior leadership for fostering a culture of complacency and failing to set a clear safety-first tone. The reports identified that leadership did not provide sufficient governance, allowing a focus on short-term operational goals rather than long-term safety and risk management. This lack of leadership commitment to safety and poor decision-making from the top contributed directly to the blowout and the subsequent environmental disaster.

Both reports called for a cultural shift within BP and the broader industry, stressing the need for stronger leadership in prioritising safety and managing risk, ensuring that such a tragedy would not happen again.
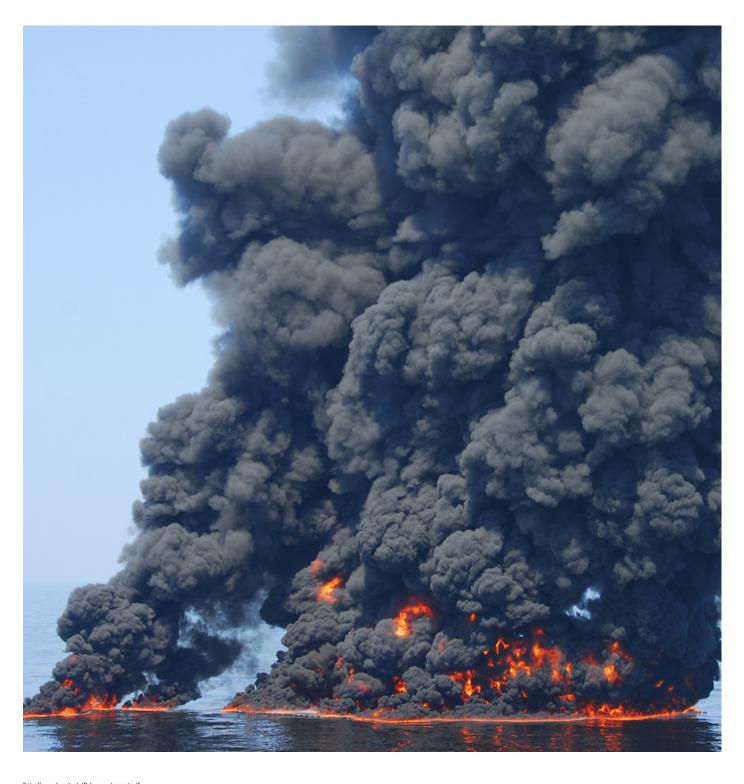
Workplace safety has long been the subject of discussions in organisations around the world, from the boardroom to the shopfloor. Traditional safety approaches often focus on compliance, risk management, and avoiding accidents through rules and regulations. However, as the Deepwater Horizon story reveals, this mindset can fall short, especially when leadership fails to set the right "tone from the top." In a tragic irony, it later transpired that the day before the accident, senior leaders from Transocean, the rig's owners, had visited the site to celebrate several years without a significant safety issue. The learning here is abundantly clear: the absence of accidents does not necessarily mean the existence of safety.

The Deepwater Horizon disaster underscores the critical need to shift from simply preventing accidents to creating a culture of safety. The leadership at BP, as identified in both the Baker and Reilly Reports, fostered a culture where safety was treated as a secondary concern, undermined by cost-cutting and efficiency goals. This reactive, compliance-driven approach failed to address deeper systemic issues and ultimately contributed to the disaster.

Where organisations typically fail in improving safety performance is that they are more often reactive than proactive. Dwelling on past incidents and trying to prevent recurrence rather than looking to the future to effect positive change. Whilst learning from accidents is arguably useful, this approach is counter productive on it own. The accident investigation, and the inevitable head-rolling, become an end in themselves, lulling business leaders to sit and wait for the next bad thing to occur, and counting the days since the last accident event.

Creating safety goes beyond preventing accidents—it involves actively engaging and empowering people at all levels of the organisation to take ownership of safety. It's about fostering a culture in which safety is a shared responsibility, and leaders set an example through their commitment to the well-being of their teams. This shift requires leaders to focus not just on systems and processes.

Rather, it requires a stronger focus on people, namely their concerns, their well-being and their involvement in safety practices. A people-focused approach to safety creates an environment of trust, collaboration and continuous improvement, where employees feel valued and empowered to contribute to a safe and productive workplace.

[5]http://sunnyday.mit.edu/Baker-panel-report.pdf
[3]https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-OILCOMMISSION/pdf/GPO-OILCOMMISSION.pdf
[*]'Creating Safety' is a term first coined by Dr Andrew Sharman in his book From Accidents to Zero
(2014, Maverick Eagle Press) and is defined as a forward-focused, input driven mindset and approach
that centers on the creation and achievement of safe behaviors and a safe workplace, rather than the
absence of accidents and a desire to stop accident occurrence.

The role of leadership: Role modelling, engaging teams and building trust

Leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering a culture of safety within an organisation. It is not enough for leaders to simply enforce safety regulations or delegate safety responsibilities to the OHS team. To create a truly safe and sustainable work environment, leaders must take ownership of safety, model safe behaviours, engage their teams, and build a foundation of trust. In doing so, they establish a safety culture that not only reduces risk but also empowers employees to prioritise their well-being and contribute to the safety of their colleagues.

OWNERSHIP AND BEING A ROLE MODEL

The first step in creating a strong, positive safety culture is for leaders to take personal ownership of safety. Leadership is not just about setting expectations; it is about actively living those expectations. Leaders must model safe behaviours at every level, demonstrating that safety is a non-negotiable value, not a box to tick. This means consistently adhering to safety protocols, participating in safety initiatives, and making safety an integral part of decision-making processes. When leaders visibly demonstrate that they personally value safety, they set a tone that reverberates throughout the organisation.

For instance, in industries such as manufacturing, construction or energy, where safety is a constant concern, leaders who are seen wearing proper protective equipment, following procedures, and actively participating in safety drills, send a powerful message. This visible felt leadership is essential for building a culture in which employees feel that safety is important to the organisation and its leadership.

Additionally, leaders must ensure that safety is not treated as a siloed responsibility but as part of the organisational DNA. They should communicate safety as a core value that aligns with the company's vision, mission and performance goals. By integrating safety into strategic discussions and decision-making, leaders show that it is not just a regulatory requirement, but a critical element of business success.

ENGAGING TEAMS

Engagement is crucial in creating a proactive safety culture. Leaders must engage employees at all levels, encouraging them to take an active role in identifying hazards, reporting near misses, and suggesting safety improvements. This engagement goes beyond simply informing employees about safety policies; it involves creating an environment in which employees feel empowered to speak up and contribute to safety solutions.

One effective way leaders can engage teams is by fostering open communication channels. Safety should not be a one-way message from management to staff. Instead, leaders should actively listen to employees' concerns and feedback, particularly from those on the frontlines. Frontline workers often have the most direct experience with potential hazards and can offer valuable insights into practical safety improvements. When employees feel their voices are heard, they are more likely to take ownership of their safety and the safety of others. It transpires that this may not be as easy at it sounds for some leaders. To create meaningful dialogue, leaders must move past questions such as "Is everything safe?" and "Do you have any safety issues?" and utilise open questions that demonstrate a genuine interest and trust in the worker's experience.

Furthermore, leadership should ensure that safety training is continuous and interactive. Engaged teams are better prepared to recognise hazards and react appropriately. Leaders should champion regular safety meetings, workshops and simulations that involve employees in real-world scenarios. This ongoing engagement ensures that safety becomes second nature to the team and that employees feel competent and confident in addressing safety issues as they arise.

BUILDING TRUST

Trust is the foundation of any effective safety culture. Without trust, safety systems can break down, and employees may feel reluctant to report safety issues or suggest improvements. Leaders must establish and maintain trust by being transparent, consistent and accountable. This begins with clear and honest communication about safety issues and challenges. Leaders must be transparent about incidents, near misses and the organisation's safety performance. When leaders openly acknowledge mistakes or areas for improvement, it fosters a culture of learning and continuous improvement.

Trust is also built through consistency. Leaders must ensure that safety policies are applied fairly and consistently across all levels of the organisation. This includes holding everyone, regardless of rank or tenure, accountable for following safety protocols. When employees see that safety standards are upheld uniformly, they develop confidence in the leadership and feel secure in the organisation's commitment to their well-being.

Moreover, leaders must demonstrate accountability. Building trust means taking responsibility not only for their own safety practices but for the safety of their teams. When safety issues arise, leaders should own the responsibility to investigate, address and prevent future occurrences. This accountability strengthens trust between employees and leadership, creating an environment in which employees are more likely to take responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others.

Leadership plays a central role in shaping a strong safety culture by creating the context in which safety becomes integral to the organisation's operations, culture, and success. Leaders must lead by example, setting the standard for safety behaviours and demonstrating their commitment to protecting their teams. By engaging employees at all levels and fostering a sense of shared responsibility, leaders create an environment where safety is seen as a collective effort. Through transparent communication, accountability and consistency in their actions, leaders build trust and encourage active participation in safety initiatives. This leadership approach not only prevents accidents but also promotes long-term well-being, driving a culture of care and continuous improvement that supports both organisational performance and employee engagement.

L'Oréal -
A world leader in beauty.
And safety performance

L'Oréal, the global leader in the cosmetics industry, exemplifies how a strong commitment to workplace safety can enhance business performance and reputation. Under the leadership of Malcolm Staves, Global Vice President of Health & Safety, the company has implemented comprehensive safety programs that have significantly reduced workplace incidents and fostered a culture of care.

Staves emphasises the importance of visible leadership in safety initiatives, stating, **"The leadership needs to be visible and safety seen as a core value."** This approach has not only improved safety metrics but also contributed to higher employee engagement and satisfaction. By truly valuing safety, L'Oréal has enhanced its brand reputation, attracted top talent and reinforced its commitment to employee well-being. This focus on safety aligns with the company's core values and has been instrumental in its continued success in the global marketplace.

OUT-PERFORMING WITH SAFETY

Workplace safety is often seen as a legal requirement, necessary to prevent accidents and avoid penalties. However, when viewed strategically, safety becomes a powerful driver of business performance and reputation. A strong safety culture leads to tangible financial benefits, improved productivity and a stronger public image.

There are several ways in which companies that value safety tend to outperform their competitors in profitability and brand equity, making safety an essential component of sustainable business success.

1. Reduction in workplace injuries and downtime:

Workplace injuries are costly, not just in terms of medical expenses and workers' compensation, but also due to lost productivity. When employees are injured, their absence disrupts operations, and their recovery may require additional training and resources. By investing in robust safety programs, companies can reduce workplace injuries, which leads to fewer operational disruptions.

2. Improved operational efficiency:

Companies that value safety often experience improvements in operational efficiency. By assessing safety risks, organisations uncover potential inefficiencies and areas for improvement. Addressing these risks often results in streamlined processes, better resource utilisation, and a more conscious risk behaviour. As we have seen in the introduction section of this paper, under the leadership of Paul O'Neill, Alcoa implemented strict safety protocols and instigated leadership-driven employee engagement on matters of safety, resulting in a dramatic and sustained reduction in workplace injuries. This focus on safety not only improved worker morale but also enhanced operational efficiency, which helped the company achieve better financial performance.

3. Attracting and retaining talent:

A strong commitment to workplace safety can also improve talent acquisition and retention, as we noted at L'Oréal. Employees want to work in environments in which their well-being is important and encouraged. Companies that invest in safety are seen as employers of choice, with high employee satisfaction and retention rates.

4. Enhancing brand value:

Companies with a strong safety track record enhance their reputation with customers, investors and the general public. A robust safety culture not only ensures regulatory compliance but also demonstrates the organisation's commitment to employee well-being, which can enhance customer loyalty and brand equity. For example, UPS not only makes a lofty claim — we put the safest drivers on the road — it backs this claim through its world class safety culture, which is evident in its rigorous driver training and fleet maintenance programs. This commitment to safety extends to the well-being of its employees and the reliability of its services. By valuing safety, UPS builds trust with customers who depend on the timely and safe delivery of goods, thereby strengthening its brand.

5. Crisis management and trust:

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6. Investor confidence:

Investors are increasingly concerned with sustainability and corporate governance, which includes how companies manage risks such as workplace safety. Companies with poor safety records are likely to face higher insurance premiums, regulatory fines, and public scrutiny,

[6]UPS. "UPS Has Unmatched Safety Culture." UPS - About Us, https://about.ups.com/us/en/our-company/great-employer/ups-has-unmatched-safety-culture.html. Accessed 11 Nov. 2024.

all of which can negatively impact their financial performance and investor confidence. 3M, known for its innovations in safety equipment, also integrates safety into its organisational strategy, emphasising the importance of employee well-being and operational safety. By demonstrating leadership in safety, 3M enhances its reputation with investors and stakeholders, who view the company as a well-managed, forward-thinking organisation that mitigates risks effectively.

SAFETY AS A STRATEGIC DRIVER

Workplace safety is a key strategic asset that drives business performance and enhances reputation. Companies that invest in safety see reductions in workplace injuries, increased operational efficiency, improved employee retention, and a stronger public image. By embedding safety into their corporate culture, businesses create an environment that values employee well-being and operational effectiveness and understands the link between the two. A strong safety culture not only reduces accidents but fuels productivity, enhances brand value, and fosters trust with customers, employees and investors. In this way, safety becomes a cornerstone of long-term business success and reputation, ensuring a sustainable and profitable future for the organisation.

[7]Knolle, Priscilla. "Culture of Safety: Transformation Through Employee Engagement." *Inside Angle*, 7 Sept. 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20230907223624/https://insideangle.3m.com/his/blog-post/culture-of-safety-transformation-through-employee-engagement/. Accessed 11 Nov. 2024.

The future of Safety — Integrated approach, Technology supported, Leadership driven

In his book Naked Safety , Dr Andrew Sharman critiques the conventional view of safety as a reactive, rule-driven practice that often leads to a culture of fear and compliance rather than care and engagement.

He argues that organisations need to adopt a more holistic approach to safety, where leadership commitment, employee engagement and continuous improvement are central.

ACCORDING TO SHARMAN, SOME OF THE EMERGING TRENDS THAT WILL COME OUR WAY INCLUDE:

· **Integrated systems approach:** Safety operations and management systems will be more fully integrated into operational activities, making safety embedded into all aspects of the organisation's operations. The commonality of language in the various standards like ISO 45001 (Safety), ISO 9000 (Quality), ISO 14000 (Environment) and ISO 31000 (Risk Management), all of which are centred around Plan-Do-Check-Act, will accelerate this process.

· **Focus on leading indicators:** There is a realisation that counting the number of times organisations have failed at safety and reporting it, is neither meaningful at measuring safety, nor effective at motivating action. Organisations will move away from lagging indicators focused on doing less harm (accident/ incident rates, lost time) to leading indicators focused on doing more good (composite Safety Indices comprising of Safety Engagement & Participation, Resource Allocation, Competence & Training, Reporting, Leadership Commitment and Culture).

· **Human capital risk management:** Beyond assessing hazardous operations and assessing workplace risks, the of the safety practitioner will evolve and expand to take responsibility and shape influence over a broader range of people issues, such as health and well-being, ethical business practices, security, travel risk management, corporate social responsibility, reputational risk and beyond.

[8]Sharman, A. 2019. Naked Safety: Exploring the Dynamics of Workplace Safety in a Fast-Changing World. (Routledge).

· **Employees as the solution:** Employees were historically seen as one of the risks to be managed/controlled to create safety in the workplace. Many organisations are now moving to a more 'people-positive' approach. This management philosophy encourages organisations to look at employees as a 'solution to harness'. Where safety behaviour is not controlled by boundaries set by line managers and safety auditors, but direction is given by whoever is best positioned to do so to ensure things 'go right'.

· **Deeper cultural understanding:** Culture, an assembly of values, beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, systems, and risk tolerance, is dynamic and constantly in a state of flux. In a globalised world, with multiple generations at the workplace, organisations will spend significant time understanding their own corporate culture and highlight factors which either enable or hinder progress. From superficial safety climate surveys we will transition to deeper cultural assessments to seek deeper insights into how people think and what drivers their behaviour.

Another significant transformation in the future of workplace safety is the **increasing adoption of emerging technologies** such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), and the Internet of Things (IoT). These advancements promise to reshape safety practices across industries, offering the potential for significant improvements in risk mitigation, operational efficiency, and overall safety outcomes.

AI and ML, for example, can analyse large datasets to predict potential hazards before they occur, providing faster, more accurate responses in industries like healthcare, aviation and manufacturing. IoT devices enable continuous monitoring, allowing organisations to track variables such as temperature, pressure or equipment status. These technologies enhance safety by identifying anomalies in real time, forecasting maintenance needs, enabling prompt corrective actions, and even preventing accidents before they happen.

However, while these technologies offer immense benefits, they must be implemented with a human-centered approach. Technology should enhance human decision-making, not replace it. AI, IoT, and machine learning are powerful tools, but they cannot replace the judgment, empathy and oversight provided by humans, especially in high-stakes situations. It is essential for organisations to integrate these technologies in ways that support

human capabilities, ensuring that employees are empowered to make informed decisions based on real-time data and insights provided by these systems.

Moving forward, we will see an upsurge in the number of organisations recognising the fact that safety needs to stop being viewed as an independent process, disconnected from the rest of the day-to-day operations, and instead seen as an outcome of those operations. Safety will be viewed not as an operational add-on, but as something integrated into every element of business thinking and behaviour.

Ultimately, the future of safety lies in creating a culture in which technology serves as an enabler, amplifying the human values of care, responsibility and empathy that are essential for maintaining a safe and supportive work environment.

CONCLUSION: A CALL TO ACTION FOR LEADERS TODAY

Leadership remains as the vital primary route to achieving and sustaining workplace safety excellence. Strong safety leaders will enable excellence by engaging fully with employees, setting clear expectations, encouraging collaboration in pursuit of a shared vision, role modelling great behaviours, empowering team to take action, and creating a transparent, accountable culture.

As we look towards the future, it is abundantly clear that safety can no longer be just a regulatory checkbox; it must become a cornerstone of a high-performance culture and a key driver of long-term success. Leaders at every level, and in every discipline across the organisation, must take ownership of safety, not just as a duty but as an opportunity to model care, foster engagement and build trust. The tragic lessons from events like the Deepwater Horizon disaster remind us that a lack of leadership commitment to safety can have far-reaching consequences.

The responsibility is clear and simple: leaders must foster a culture of care, where safety becomes integral to every decision, process and interaction within the organisation. This visible, felt and experienced commitment to safety will not only reduce risks and improve performance but will also enhance the organisation's reputation, employee engagement and business outcomes. Leaders play a pivotal role in this transformation, driving safety excellence through their own actions, words

and consistent engagement. It's about creating a culture in which safety is not just a requirement but a shared commitment that begins with the tone from the top. In sum, leaders must set a clear and positive "tone from the top", ensuring that safety is valued in both words and actions.

This new language of safety requires leaders to take full ownership by setting a tone of care, trust and proactive involvement. Instead of simply stating, "Let's focus on compliance,"or "Let's get to zero accidents", leaders should demonstrate personal ownership by saying, "Here's why your safety is important to me….", "Here's what I'm doing to ensure you can work safely here every day." Rather than relying on employees to raise concerns, leaders should actively seek out feedback and take initiative: "I've been reviewing our operations, and I want us to revisit this process to make sure we're truly protecting everyone."

Leaders must use language that reflects genuine commitment and responsibility, not merely delegating safety concerns to their teams but actively demonstrating their own accountability. Conversations should be transparent, solution-focused and ongoing.

The time for change is now. Leaders must take ownership, lead by example, and engage their teams to embed safety as a core value that shapes the future of their organisations. By embodying the new language of safety through their actions and words, they can cultivate a culture of care, collaboration and accountability. This transformation will ensure safety is not just a process, but a fundamental value woven into the very fabric of the organisation, driving long-term success.

EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE COULD INCLUDE STATEMENTS SUCH AS:

· "I am personally committed to reviewing our current practices to eliminate risks. I want us to keep refining how we do things. Where do you think we can do better?"

· "Here's what I'm doing to improve safety in our department, and I encourage you to hold me accountable."

· "I noticed a potential risk area yesterday, and I've started making adjustments - let's collaborate on how we can make it even better. I want to hear your experiences please."

· "We are all responsible for safety, but as the leader, I take full ownership of making sure our environment is safe for you. Let's work on this together."

· "I've seen areas where we can improve, and I'm taking steps to address them. I want your input on how we can do this better."

Now is the time for leaders to set the right tone from the top, create a culture of care, and build organisations that embrace safety as a defining value by all.

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