Can a company really measure its own Safety Culture?

Natasha Perry, Principal Consultant, DNV GL, Palace House, 3 Cathedral Street, London, UK, SE1 9DE
Martine Berg Hannevik, Leadership Development Consultant, DNV GL, Veritasveien 1, Høvik, Norway
Sarah A. D. Grøndahl, Head of Group HSE & Management System, DNV GL, Veritasveien 1, Høvik, Norway

The concept of ‘Safety Culture’ is no longer reserved for safety consultants, academics or the higher levels of senior management; it has become a well-known term that is used by a wide variety of people to describe and explore the way organisations manage safety and respond to risk. With more and more organisations becoming familiar with the concept, it is not surprising that companies are looking less to external consultants to help them assess their Safety Culture, and more to themselves to carry out their own internal Safety Culture evaluation. In January 2015 DNV GL embarked on a project to assess its own Safety Culture to understand more about why a series of undesirable events had occurred and to develop interventions that would help put a stop to them. However, in reality, was this a wise idea? Can a company really measure its own Safety Culture? Although leaving external consultancies behind and going it alone would appear an attractive proposition initially, can you really get the results you need to make robust long term safety improvements? This paper explores the issues surrounding a number of biases inherent in self-assessment, including the methodological approach taken to self-assessment in order to help remain objective and impartial during data collection and analysis, the lessons learnt whilst directly tackling sometimes sensitive safety issues during interviews with colleagues and whether the typically ‘anonymous’ nature of Safety Culture measurement can still be maintained even though people know each other. This paper charts the process of Safety Culture self-assessment. It considers ways to mitigate against some of the main pitfalls, such as biases in the interpretation of ‘uncomfortable’ findings. It also attempts to conclude whether or not self-assessment really is a possibility if an accurate and meaningful assessment is genuinely sought; or whether turning to an external body to assist is actually more effective in the long term.

Keywords: Safety Culture; Safety Culture self-assessment; biases; objective; impartial; anonymous.

Introduction

The term ‘Safety Culture’ can be traced all the way back to the Chernobyl accident in 1986. Since this time the concept has grown hugely in terms of the importance industries and organisations place on it as a key factor in the execution of good safety management and the prevention of incidents and accidents. With such a high priority placed on Safety Culture it is not surprising that more and more companies seek to assess and strengthen their own Safety Culture in an effort to actively manage safety risks. In January 2015 DNV GL did exactly this; it embarked on a project to assess its Safety Culture to understand more about why a series of undesirable events had occurred and to support the development of interventions that would help put a stop to them. However, rather than choosing to commission a specialist contractor to undertake the assessment on DNV GL’s behalf, it made the bold decision to assess its own Safety Culture. This paper describes the process of self-assessment undertaken by DNV GL, the technical issues encountered during the main phases of the assessment work, the potential benefits and pitfalls of the self-assessment approach and what a company can do to strengthen its approach to self-assessment. Overall, the paper attempts to address the question: can a company really measure its own Safety Culture?

Approach taken to Safety Culture Self-Assessment

The self-assessment team

DNV GL operates in more than 100 countries with a workforce of around 15,000 professionals. It provides classification and technical assurance along with software and independent expert advisory services primarily to the maritime, oil & gas and energy industries. It also provides certification services to customers across a wide range of industries. The business is divided into five main business areas: oil & gas, energy, maritime, business assurance, and software, as well as support functions within a global shared service centre (GSS) and Group centre. Each business area operates largely independently. The team created to conduct the Safety Culture assessment consisted of two project managers; a communications specialist; a steering committee (led by the Chief Human Resources Officer); an ‘expert’ group (nominated by the steering committee and the Chief Executive Officer’s (CEO’s) from the six different business areas and including HSE experts from each business area) and a technical project team of consultants. Most notably, the technical project team came from different parts of the DNV GL business and were selected on the basis of their technical knowledge and competence in the field of Safety Culture assessment and improvement. Additionally, the technical team included four MSc Psychology students from the University of Oslo, Norway.

The methodology applied

The Safety Culture self-assessment methodology applied consisted of five phases, as follows:

- **Phase 1: Review of the main organisational risks** – the main health and safety risks and challenges in DNV GL were identified, as well as all the relevant stakeholders for the project, to ensure that the results were representative and owned by the most relevant stakeholders in the company.

- **Phase 2: Development of the ‘envisioned’ state** – a description of how a world class Safety Culture would ‘look and feel’ was developed with the help of internal and external research and decisions were made on the key dimensions of a strong Safety Culture.
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Approach taken to Safety Culture Self-Assessment

In Phase 3 of the project work, the project team used a methodology that consisted of five phases, as follows:

- **Phase 3: Assessment of where DNV GL currently is with regard to Safety Culture** – a description of how a world class Safety Culture would be different to the current state – the level of Safety Culture as per the site

Phase 4 of the project work was the last phase of the project, and it was completed in January 2016. The final phase developed a Safety Culture strategy, which was developed with the help of internal and external research and decisions were made on the key dimensions of a strong Safety Culture.

The methodology applied

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- **Phase 4: Analysis of the gap** – the project team evaluated each of the seven safety culture dimensions in terms of reality, compliancy, and maturity levels.

- **Phase 5: Development of the ‘target’ state** – a description of how a world class Safety Culture would look like, and understanding what the main priority for the envisaged state should be.

This feedback suggests that by interviewing someone you know, you may end up assuming a level of knowledge about an interviewee I did not know.

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interview where they feel they know someone too well and this relationship could bias or influence the direction of the
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Martine Berg Henningsen, Leadership Development Consultant, DNV GL, Veritasveien 1, Høvik, Norway
Sarah A. D. Grøndahl, Head of Group HSE & Management System, DNV GL, Veritasveien 1, Høvik, Norway
Natasha Perry, Principal Consultant, DNV GL, Palace House, 3 Cathedral Street, London, UK, SE1 9DE

The concept of a 'Safety Culture' is no longer reserved for safety consultants, academics or the higher echelons of industry. It is now a term in common use among managers, employees and others who operate in the safety industry. It is not surprising, therefore, that companies are attempting to measure this concept internally, or externally, in order to strengthen their Safety Culture and, more importantly, to tackle any incidents that may occur.

It is difficult to determine how much more about the 'DNV GL model' is that it is that people are now familiar with the concept and its associated benefits. In many organisations, this is due to the increasing awareness that true data collection and analysis can help to identify areas for improvement in Safety Culture. This is particularly true in organisations that have strong Safety Culture practices, where a lack of data can make it difficult to improve upon these practices.

Adaptive management has become a key factor in the execution of good safety management. As a result, the term 'Safety Culture' has grown in importance. In the past, safety management was often viewed as a static process, with little emphasis on the development of organisational culture. However, this view has changed as organisations have begun to realise the importance of creating a strong Safety Culture as a way to improve safety performance.

Introduction

The term 'Safety Culture' can be traced back to the Chernobyl accident in 1986. Since that time, the concept has grown in importance within a wide range of industries and organisations. It is now a key factor in the execution of good safety management and the prevention of incidents and accidents. With that in mind, it is clear that stronger Safety Culture practices are needed to promote an effective and efficient workplace environment.

Another important factor in the assessment of safety culture is the nature of the organisation as it has a known history of safety incidents. This is because organisations that have a history of safety incidents are often more likely to have a stronger and more effective Safety Culture. As a result, organisations that have a history of safety incidents are often more likely to have a stronger and more effective Safety Culture. In such cases, the analysis used evidence from surveys, interviews and data collected from direct observations of the organisation's activities to assess Safety Culture maturity.

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The self-assessment team

DNV GL operates in more than 100 countries with a workforce of around 15,000 professionals. It provides classification and technical assurance services through software and in the field of marine, oil & gas and energy. The organisation is also involved in verification services for a wide range of industries, such as nuclear, marine, maritime, and maritime industries. The business is divided into the main business areas: Oil & Gas, Marine, Maritime, Business and Technical Assurance, and Independent Services, which together cover the full spectrum of safety, quality, and environmental management. The business is divided into the main business areas: Oil & Gas, Marine, Maritime, Business and Technical Assurance, and Independent Services, which together cover the full spectrum of safety, quality, and environmental management. The business is divided into the main business areas: Oil & Gas, Marine, Maritime, Business and Technical Assurance, and Independent Services, which together cover the full spectrum of safety, quality, and environmental management.
However, there was also an alternative view from the gap analysis team. One consultant commented “of course” the
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Andrew Blakemore, Lead Project Development Consultant, DNV GL, Vernemiyen, Y. Havfjordsvei, Norway
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Sarah A. D. Grøndahl, Head of Group HSE & Management System, DNV GL, Veritasveien 1, Høvik, Norway
Marine Berg Mønsted, Lead Project Development Consultant, DNV GL, Vernemiyen, Y. Havfjordsvei, Norway

The Benefits
assessment work, the potential benefits and pitfalls of the self-assessment approach and what a company can do to strengthen
its approach to self-assessment. Overall, the paper attempts to address the question: can a company really measure its own
Safety Culture? This paper describes the approach taken to Safety Culture Self-Assessment on DNV GL’s behalf, it made the bold decision to assess its own
assessments, the potential benefits and pitfalls of the self-assessment approach and what a company can do to strengthen

Assessing the Safety Culture of
organisation. Another consultant agreed that conclusions were bound to be influenced due to the possibly

One member of the project team explained,

Phase 1: Review of the main organisational risks
It helps to provide knowledge of, and access to, relevant information (e.g. accident data, management systems,

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The concept of ‘Safety Culture’ is no longer reserved for safety consultants, academics or the higher levels of

The Safety Culture self-assessment methodology applied consisted of five phases, as follows:

*Phase 1: Review of the main organisational risks— the main team comprised subject matter experts and helped them to
identify and describe the main organisational risks. The team identified all the relevant stakeholders for the project, to ensure that the results were representative
of the most relevant stakeholders in the company.

Phase 2: Development of the ‘envisioned’ state— a description of how a world class Safety Culture would look
and feel. This was developed, with the help of internal and external research and decisions were made on the key
dimensions of a strong Safety Culture.

To complete the assessment, the self-assessment team

The methodology applied

It creates commitment for follow-up by team members and participants.

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Although the benefits are clear, it is important to also consider some of the less optimal aspects of self-assessment; these are

Mathew Berry, Leadership Development Consultant, DNV GL, Veritas Viken, Høvik, Norway

Sarah A. D. Grøndahl, Head of Group HSE & Management System, DNV GL, Veritas Viken, Høvik, Norway

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“To self-assess, I feel that the larger challenge for a company is defining the criteria around what to measure. We used a process of self-assessment undertaken by DNV GL, the technical issues encountered during the main phases of the assessment on DNV GL’s behalf, it made the bold decision to assess its own Safety Culture. This paper presents a range of arguments for and against self-assessment as a way of measuring organizational Safety Culture.

SafetCulture

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