

*Insight* aims to provide useful information, links and tips in the areas of Risk Management, Occupational Health and Safety, Business Continuity Management, and other areas relating to management systems and corporate governance.

This issue:

- Tips for developing a sustainable safety culture
- Reducing risks to workers from stress
- Managing safety for an aging workforce

## Tips for developing a sustainable safety culture

There's a lot of jargon and hype around the term "safety culture" which can have the unintended detrimental effect of undermining a valuable concept.

Pared back to bare bones, what it really means is to make changes to the way things are done in an organisation, until everyone, from top to bottom, is engaging in positive behaviours that support safety. When this is achieved, good safety performance is no longer reliant on chance events, but instead is the result of everyone behaving safely by default, without having to think about it i.e. "the way we do things around here".

This is a fairly simple concept, but of course planning and implementing the steps to the end goal is a little more complex, and provides fertile ground for false steps.

Some of the things that can go wrong in the most well-intentioned safety culture program include:

- Using negative reinforcement
- Focussing too much on compliance alone
- Applying the program at the wrong stage of the organisation's maturity
- Using the wrong incentives, such as rewards for production targets that might encourage short cuts, or rewards for low LTIs that might encourage under-reporting
- Encouraging a culture of tough peer pressure
- Failing to set up robust safety measures to return useful data with suitable frequency
- Inadequate follow up on safety, such as only responding to incidents and not to concerns and suggestions
- Failing to give recognition to good safety behaviour
- Placing too much emphasis on lag indicators (such as accident statistics) to the detriment of lead indicators (such as safety training).



Any or all of these factors can result in safety improvement initiatives working for a while, but then plateauing and falling back. Making efforts to counteract these common problems will assist in achieving your safety culture improvement goals and sustaining that improvement over time.

In addition to addressing the list of obstacles above, strategies that can assist in the development of a sustainable safety culture include:

- Honestly assess practices – check that safety processes actually achieve the safety outcomes that were intended
- Consult – usually the people doing the job are the best ones to identify how it can be done more safely, and engaged workers are more likely to cooperate
- Respond positively and publically to safe behaviour – this will reinforce and make the desired behaviours habitual
- Provide leadership – senior management must clearly define their expectations of all workers, and then all leaders must consistently model and reinforce safe behaviour, leading by example
- Measure progress – regularly measure safety behaviours and safety results to check that progress is being made

Please [contact QRMC](#) for more information.

## Reducing risks to workers from stress

It is widely recognised that a stressful work environment can result in a range of negative impacts on both workers and the organisation.

Workplace stress can prompt a range of impacts including anxiety or depression, reduced concentration,

substance abuse, poor problem solving skills, bad decision-making, and impacts on home life and relationships.

For the employing organisation, these effects on workers can result in a decline in overall organisational productivity and performance. Employee turnover can also increase, further impacting on productivity, recruitment and training costs.



In tackling this problem, it is critical for organisations to consult appropriately with workers before imposing stress-reduction initiatives. Without consultation, incorrect assumptions can be made about what factors are causing workplace stress, and despite all the best intentions, employers could exacerbate the stress rather than improve it.

Some of the common causes of work stress include high workload demands, role conflict, poor communication and unsuitable leadership, but identifying the precise causes must be done in consultation with those affected using a methodology that encourages workers to be open and honest

Once this is (sensitively) done, employers can develop stress-reduction strategies to address the specific issues. Strategies can range from changing the work environment and/or processes, through to better equipping the workers to manage the stressors, and assisting workers with treatment and recovery from the impacts of stress.

Please [contact QRMC](#) for more information.

## Managing safety for an aging workforce

We are hearing on a regular basis these days that the population, and hence the workforce, is aging. Whilst governments struggle with the policy settings required to ensure a healthy economy and a viable health system under these changing demographics, little attention has been given to the “on the ground” impacts to small and large businesses.

If workforces will become, on average, older than the norm for which work processes and equipment were set up, the risks of workplace injury can be expected to increase. An obvious focal point for these impacts relates to musculo-skeletal injuries from undertaking manual tasks, but there are also risks for those in sedentary occupations.



Less well recognised than physical impacts is the potential for the risk to also incorporate psychological injuries, like anxiety or depression, as a result of work expectations that fit poorly with older workers’ past training / experience and work/life balance requirements.

In preparation for this changing work landscape, employers should consider appropriate risk treatments. These will likely include:

- Conducting a survey to gather data on current and predicted worker age ranges
- Evaluating the physical and psychological requirements to establish a functional capabilities statement for each organisational position
- Assessing the workforce against the functional demands
- Provide the necessary interventions – workplace modifications, education and training, provision of health (and mental health) support etc.
- Monitoring the impacts of these interventions.

Employing organisations both large and small who pay attention to these matters as the community’s age demographics evolve will reap the benefits of a loyal, well-educated and experienced workforce.

Please [contact QRMC](#) for more information.

QRMC Risk Management Pty Ltd © 2013

*The material contained in this publication is in the nature of general comment only and neither purports, nor is intended, to be advice on any particular matter. No reader should act on the basis of any matter contained in this publication without considering and, if necessary, taking appropriate professional advice regarding their own particular circumstances.*