

# SAFETY CULTURE ASSESSMENT TOOL

*An Overview*

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## OVERVIEW

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The prevailing health and safety culture within an organisation i.e. the way it approaches health and safety issues, is a major influence on the health and safety related behaviour of people at work. The development of a positive safety culture is important if high standards of health and safety are to be achieved and maintained

**The Safety Culture Assessment (SCA) tool** is an easy to use tool for assessing the shared values within an organisation which influence the attitudes and behaviours of employees, supervisors and managers in relation to health and safety.

It provides an evaluation of whether or not the existing culture emphasizes safety as the overriding priority.

There are four (4) parts to the assessment process:

- Analysis of health and safety related documentation
- Workplace observation
- Employee safety culture survey questionnaire
- Management and Health & Safety Representative interviews

The Safety Culture Assessment tool is designed to help companies determine some important aspects of their safety culture and aid the promotion of employee involvement in health and safety issues.

*Organisations with a positive safety culture are characterised by communications founded on mutual trust, by shared perceptions of the importance of safety and by confidence in the efficacy of preventive measures".*

(HSE's Advisory Committee on the Safety of Nuclear Installations (ACSNI: HSC, 1993)

## The aims of the assessment are:

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- to evaluate the key components of safety culture
- to identify strengths (areas where safety culture is strong and safety performance is highly effective)
- to identify areas for improvement (areas which do not correspond to the indicators of a positive safety culture)
- to recommend strategies for improvement

## **Benefits of the assessment**

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By undertaking a safety culture assessment a company can:

- determine its level of safety culture
- obtain positive and negative aspects of health and safety (H&S) in the workplace
- identify areas for improving H&S management systems
- raise the H&S profile in the organisation
- involve employees in H&S issues
- identify perception gaps (in respect to H&S) between managers/supervisors and employees
- establish a base-line against which an organisation can monitor the impact of interventions designed to improve H&S
- benchmark (compare) H&S results at different sites (multi-national/multi-site organisation)
- provide insurers with a risk measurement level that combines the results of a number of assessment methods
- encourage continuous improvement through recommendations
- assess through employer/employee perceptions the effectiveness of the H&S effort

## **KEY ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE SAFETY CULTURE**

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It is widely accepted that if hazards are to be effectively controlled in the workplace then there needs to be effective management processes in place. Many organisations have learnt that there are limits to what can be achieved simply by using a systems based approach to H&S. Also the use of 'safe systems of work' and 'safe operating rules and procedures' are of little benefit if employees are not committed to their application.

Increasingly organisations are recognising the significant part 'human factors' plays in the maintenance of high standards of H&S. One of the major influences in shaping peoples safety related behaviour is the prevailing H&S culture in the organisation in which they work.

Safety culture is multi-faceted and includes workers views of the importance their employer gives to H&S relative to quality or production output or how committed managers/supervisors are to H&S.

This safety culture assessment tool addresses the people part of H&S.

## **The key elements are:**

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- **Management commitment**

The commitment of management to health and safety leads to higher levels of motivation and concern for health and safety throughout the organisation. It is indicated by:

- the priority given to health and safety
- the resources allocated to health & safety
- the visibility and accessibility of management

- **Involvement**

Involvement of all in the health and safety system, including senior management, supervisors and employees. The involvement of people at all levels within the organisation can lead to shared solutions which in turn can help promote a safe working environment. It is indicated by:

- active participation
- co-operation
- communication

- **Safety competence**

Safety is integrated into all workplace activities; safety rules and procedures are accepted, and the organisation is learning-driven. It is indicated by:

- being a learning organisation
- trust between staff at all levels
- effective and integrated job and safety training
- the existence of realistic and workable safety procedures, systems and rules

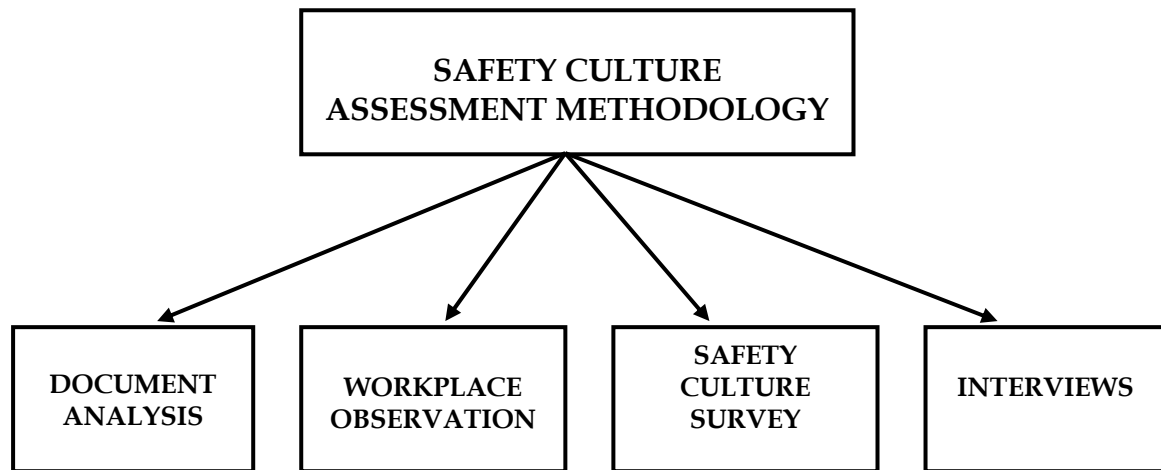
## **Assessment Methodology**

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In the Safety Culture Assessment Tool these three key elements will be assessed using four methods.

As surveys alone may not give an accurate picture of the safety culture within an organisation, a variety of methods are used to assess the same key elements which gives a more comprehensive picture and allows verification of the results from each section.

The assessment goes far beyond the policies and safety management systems as they exist on paper, which may not reflect actual practices.



## METHODS

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### Document analysis

A review of the company's health and safety documentation and written records for key safety culture indicators.

Assessors will assess specific elements according to set criteria and give a score from 0 - 5 as follows, with guidance notes given.

- 0 Not done
- 1 Done poorly / seen as unimportant / little evidence of
- 3 Done acceptably / seen as important / some evidence of
- 5 Done exceptionally / seen as very important / good evidence of

Here the assessor is reviewing and analysing documents related to the company's H&S effort and includes:

- Minutes of H&S committee meetings
- Staff performance reviews
- Purchasing (stores) records.
- Consultants reports
- Audit reports
- Hazard registers
- Training records - including induction training etc.

## **Workplace observation**

Observation of safety culture performance indicators in the workplace, covering all work areas (including informal questions to staff/supervisors).

Assessors will tour the workplace to observe key indicators under each of the key safety culture elements where appropriate, including informal questions to supervisors and employees to verify both the observations and the survey data.

Assessors will assess specific elements according to set criteria and give a score from 0 – 5 as follows, with guidance notes given.

- 0 Not done
- 1 Done poorly / seen as unimportant / little evidence of
- 3 Done acceptably / seen as important / some evidence of
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Here the assessor undertakes a visual assessment of the workplace and questions workers/supervisors on their perceptions of the working environment.

The visual assessment includes:

- Hazard registers
- Workplace layout and cleanliness
- PPE usage and storage
- Environmental conditions
- Condition of plant/equipment/buildings etc.
- Safety information displayed in general and at workstations
- etc.

## **Safety culture survey**

Survey of all or a sample of employees/supervisors in the organisation, using a 28-item questionnaire on key aspects of safety culture.

The survey is designed to assess each of the key elements described above, in the form of statements which capture the important aspects of the element. Workers rate these statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Example statements are:

1. When there are changes to procedures or tasks, we feel we are properly prepared and ready
2. I am encouraged by my colleagues to report any safety concerns I may have
3. Most health and safety rules are practical and make sense

The survey is anonymous and also has several open-ended questions to allow employees to record their own views and concerns about specific issues affecting them.

## **Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews with management and on-the-floor managers/supervisors, covering the key elements of management commitment, involvement & safety competence.

The responses collected will supplement and verify the documentation review, the workplace observation and the questionnaire results.

## **RESULTS ANALYSIS**

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### **Document analysis and Workplace Observation**

The results will be in the form of the overall standard achieved, shown as a percentage of the total possible score for all applicable items. The report for these sections will give:

- the standard achieved
  - strengths
  - comments
- critical issues identified
- recommendations

### **Safety culture survey**

The results of the safety culture survey (questionnaire) can be analysed and presented in several ways:

- detailed breakdown of the results, including mean ratings for the questionnaire items and for the three key elements
- comparisons between supervisors/team leaders and workers if appropriate (For example, the percentages of staff who agree and disagree on certain questions or elements can be compared, as shown below [figure 1]).
- comparisons between departments, divisions or sites if appropriate (For example, if there are a number of distinct departments or job categories, it is possible to compare responses from staff across these departments, as shown below [figure 2]).

- comparisons between other individual variables if appropriate (eg length of employment, age)

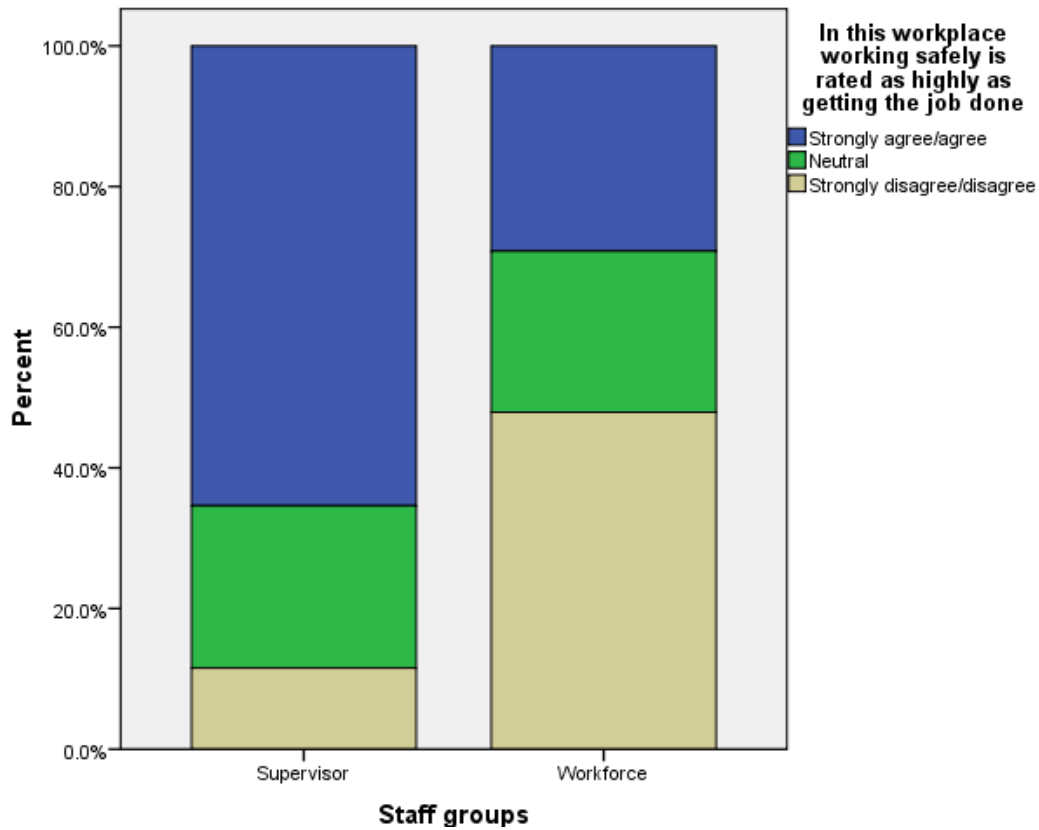


Figure 1: Comparison of survey statement results between supervisors and workers

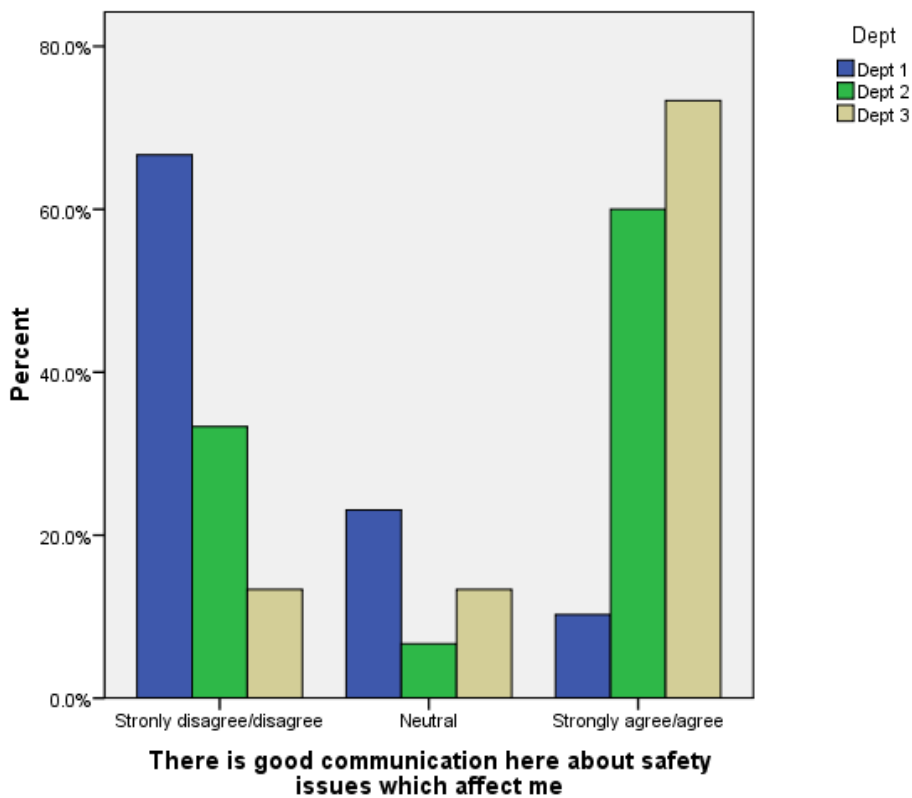


Figure 2: Comparison of survey statement results between departments

**Survey results can be tailored to specific needs of the organisation if required.**

## **Interviews**

Results from the interviews are presented as an overall assessment, based on the scores achieved compared to the assessment guidelines, with comments on particular strengths and critical issues identified.

**An overall safety culture assessment** will be constructed from the results of the four tools (document analysis, workplace observation, safety culture survey and interviews). These analyses will collectively contribute to a comprehensive description and assessment of the safety culture of an organisation.

As the same key elements of safety culture are assessed using four different methods, any differences noted in the results for the same element will be identified.

Recommendations for improvement or remedial actions will be given based on the information that emerges. This will enable the company to build an action plan based on the findings.

It is important to ensure that any deficiencies identified are addressed, prioritised and have specific agreed targets for implementation which are monitored and evaluated.

A key benefit of the assessment is to generate discussion between workers and management on the findings, therefore it is important to provide feedback to all staff on the results.

## **General information**

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- There are two options for the use of the Safety Culture Assessment Tool:
  - **Option 1: Full Safety Culture Assessment**  
All four parts of the tool are used (document analysis, workplace observation, safety culture survey and interviews) to provide a comprehensive assessment of the safety culture of the organisation
    - ❖ Comprehensive training may be provided on the use of the tool for internal use
    - ❖ Person(s) administering the tool will be independent of the site being assessed

- Option 2: **Safety Culture Survey only**

This option allows for an initial self-assessment of the safety culture in an organisation from the perceptions of staff. The survey may provide information about how perceptions vary across different departments or disciplines. It is not intended to be a comprehensive assessment as in the full SCA, but provides a starting point to evaluate the priority given to health and safety in the organisation.

- ❖ Guidelines are given for undertaking the survey
  - ❖ Completed surveys are forwarded and a full analysis of results undertaken and report presented
- The tool can be customized, if necessary, to fit the needs of particular sites or organisations.
  - Pricing is dependant on company size

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