STRENGTHENING PROCESS SAFETY CULTURE THROUGHOUT LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER´S VULNERABILITIES

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ABSTRACT: A fundamental approach to any program that targets the implementation of a process safety culture is to work within reality, going beyond procedures and compliance. To facilitate the emergence of the unspoken is essential to stimulate the dialogue among leaders that brings about their vulnerabilities and opens new perspectives to address them effectively. This paper presents a pilot program designed to increase the Process Safety Leadership Culture in a Brazilian Energy Company. Based on a benchmark made within the industry and in andragogic principles, the program created a trust ambiance among peers and inspired leaders to recognize and share their vulnerabilities, as well as to take actions towards the strengthen the role of being a safety culture leader.
KEYWORDS: andragogy, dialogue, leadership, safety leadership culture, trust, vulnerabilities.

INTRODUCTION

A lot has been said and written about Leadership Process Safety Culture, but there is a gap between what the compliance procedures dictate and what managers really do. When it comes to the Brazilian Energy Industry, the pressure leaders are under in order to achieve the results they are expected to can be considered significant. How to balance the production challenges with a safety culture that must be among the core values of the operation? Are these factors compatible?

The pilot program entitled '*Strengthening Process Safety Culture*' dealt with reality, using andragogic approaches to bring about the complex factors forty managers face in their routine, such as the existence of several levels separating top managers from the operational team, privileging safety over production goals, and being an effective representative of the Company´s policies. All these factors can jeopardize the safety culture from becoming stronger every day.

This paper describes the implementation of a methodology designed to create a safe environment, in order to build trust among participants and at the same time, make them reflect and dialogue about how they can evolve from compliance to commitment.

In the coming sections, we will present the central concepts used to develop the program – Culture, Safety Culture and Leadership - exploring its implication on an actual work environment.

In the sequence, we will talk about what it takes to make the unspoken, unwritten rules emerge. From there, how we stimulated the increase in the self-conscious level as well as in the collective one, building a matrix entitled 'Personnel Influence on Safety' to diagnose how one really sees himself concerning his leadership in safety culture.

We will then present the method used to address the issues managers pointed out, in order to transform the discussions into actions to strengthen the safety process leadership culture.

In the conclusion, we will present our findings and discuss possible future approaches to amplify the safety leadership culture further.

SAFETY CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP: DEFINITIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

There are many possible definitions for culture. Taylor (2015) says culture has to do with the behaviour patterns that are encouraged, discouraged or tolerated over time in an organization. Schein (2015) says that culture is "the total sum of everything an organization has learned in its history in dealing with the external problems – which would be goals, strategy, how we do things – and how it organizes itself internally."

Since we humans are gregarious social beings, we are naturally wired to fit in with our community. We use our perceptions to read what the tribe accepts and we adapt by behaving accordingly, because we want to fit in and be rewarded. Therefore, we reinforce the existing norms. This process is perpetuated over time; established behavior influences the behavior of new employees and so on.

Most cultural sources are non-verbal. Taylor (2015) says it is a myth to believe that culture reflects the values statements that are declared in the company's annual reports. Most commonly, the statement will be the organization´s intents, not the culture as it actually is.

If we want to change culture, it is necessary to have a clear direction and a focused, effort-driven leadership to lead people towards the goal culture. Culture has to do with what is encouraged and allowed. For Taylor (2015), three major sources send cultural messages: behaviours - of other people, especially important, recognized ones; symbols - artefacts, events and decisions that are meaningful to the community; and systems - mechanisms that manage people and tasks.

In this sense, culture has to do with the manifestation of what is valued in the organization.

According to Lafraia (2014), culture shapes reality. Cultural lenses structure the perception of the people involved in the organization.

When it comes to safety culture, its meaning may vary from one organization to another, or even in different departments of the same company. It is perfectly possible to have diverse lenses that translate the meaning and the importance of safety practices in diverse ways.

OGP, in its 452 Report (2013), says that a positive Safety Culture has to do with a culture in which safety is a core value for everyone who works in the organization, and it is pursued in an everyday basis. In order to build a Safety Culture, there are factors that must be considered, such as "leadership commitment to safety; employee involvement and motivation; responsibilities and accountability; production and bottom line pressures versus quality issues; and actions, or lack of action, to correct unsafe behaviours and unsafe conditions"; among others.

In order to build a consistent safety culture, leaders must educate their teams by demonstrating, by their practices, that some policies are fundamental. Safety culture should use this lens, rather than a command and control opaque one. Leaders must educate people to understand why safety is a core value that concerns the most precious gift: one´s life.

Safety culture is not about only following the rules, but making the team understand that the rules serve a greater principle. This approach can influence values and beliefs and change the individual and team´s behavior. The challenge leaders face is to conciliate the educational role with the policeman role, guaranteeing that compliance is required and everyone in the organization, starting by himself, values that as an unnegotiable principle.

In order to develop a strong safety culture, some elements must be considered (OGP, 2013):

ELEMENTS OF A STRONG SAFETY CULTURE

- an informed culture: the company has quality data concerning safety and uses it well;

- a reporting culture: people feel they can report safety concerns without worrying about being punished;

- a learning culture: the organisation actually learns from its unsafe conditions and changes them, banning any equipment, practice or whatever takes place that hazards safety;

- a flexible culture: the company changes its command chain if necessary to adapt;

- a just culture: people understand what is acceptable and unacceptable. What is not tolerated is dealt fairly.

For Peter Drucker (Cohen, 2018), leadership can be defined as the lifting of a man's vision to higher sights. Throughout leadership, people perform in higher standards, they are inspired and evolve in multiple levels.

When it comes to safety leadership, we can quote Ram Charan (2007) when he says that "a leader who does not produce other leaders is not a great leader." A safety leader should act in a way to enhance in everybody´s minds and actions a safety leadership commitment.

In order to make it possible, it is crucial that the leader himself is aware of his beliefs and constantly monitoring his behaviours. It takes time and a lot of effort to build a strong safety culture. Despite that, a safety culture is fragile and easily threatened by wrong messages. (OGP, 2013)

In the next section we explore the method used to address self-consciousness about safety.

CREATING A TRUST ENVIRONMENT THAT FAVORS SAFETY PROCESS LEADERSHIP CULTURE

According to Malcon Knowles, who develops the paradigm of andragogy, adults have a learning style characterized, among other factors, by changing one´s concepts according to new experiences one lives; the pursuit for autonomy; increasing one´s own motivational level to match the social role assumed; and acquiring knowledge to immediately solve practical issues (Muresan, 2013).

Considering this practical approach, we began the program to strengthen safety leadership culture by making each participant reflect on its daily practices concerning management, as well as the safety implications involved in routine decisions.

To start this reflection, we did a benchmark and decided to invite a senior top manager from another company in the Energy Industry to give a testimony. He made an honest statement about his team perception of his management practices. Concerning safety process, he mentioned that he realized that, in order to influence people, he must first change himself. He then shared with an amazed group of participants some practical examples of safety interventions he changed in his auditing procedures, for example, in order to be coherent with the message he wanted to pass forward.

The testimony had an impressive impact on the managers. A remarkable phrase that was repeated by managers was: "*Simplify. Be the Powepoint. Less Presentations, More You.*"

After the testimony, there was a presentation on the invited company's safety philosophy, about its journey into safety leadership. The practical steps mentioned were followed by videos with managers from different parts of the world talking about the way they see safety culture benefits.

With that background environment set, we forwarded to a self-perception diagnosis. The goal was to stimulate the increase in the individual conscious level as well as in the collective one. We used a matrix entitled 'Personnel Influence on Safety' that was obtained in the benchmark process with the above mentioned company.

It aimed to diagnose how one really sees himself concerning its leadership in safety culture. It involved two dimensions: the personal influence towards oneself; and the personal influence concerning other people´s safety.

The figure below illustrates the matrix:

Figure 1. Personal Influence on Safety Matrix

We used the Self-perception as a tool to promote reflection and consciousness. We asked the participants to fill in the matrix in two different papers: one in his scrapbook (explained below) and another one on a plain sheet to hand over to the program facilitator. All the matrices were compiled and the result is shown in figure 2. As indicated, most participants initially evaluated themselves as influencing more themselves than others.

The coordination staff evaluated the matrix result as requiring attention from the participants. The staff observed the fact that some managers attending the program were obese, others worked extra hours, and most of them had reported having trouble balancing personal and professional life. Therefore, to promote deeper self-reflection, the consultant who was facilitating the program posed some questions to the participants regarding personal care. The remarks made were an invitation to honestly look at oneself and feel if the level of personal influence corresponds to what one would recommend to a loved person. Quoting Brené Brown (2015), the consultant said "Treat yourself like someone you love. Do you do it on a regular basis? Do you put yourself first?" Those remarks made some participants change their self-evaluation.

The intention was to call leaders ´attention to the fact that genuine influence on safety starts with their own safety, and goes beyond process or operational safety. To be legit and truly be a safety leader, one should take good care of oneself.
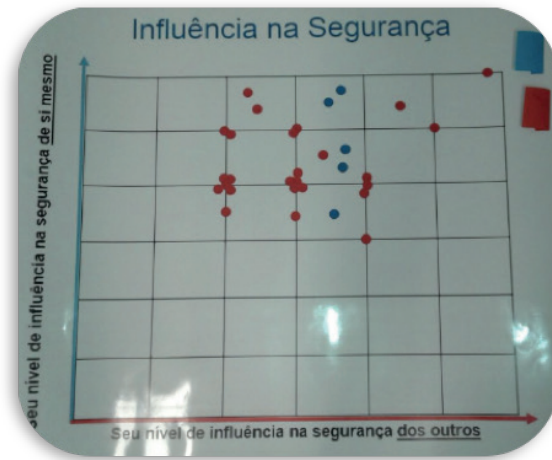

Figure 2. Compiled Personal Influence on Safety Matrix with the results from all the participants

We also developed a scrapbook that was given to each participant as a job-aid material to be used both during the program and after. The content of the scrapbook followed the program plan and was an invitation to self-analysis. The participants had special pages to do some journaling about what they had just listened to or dialogued about. There was also a special page dedicated to register insights. Figure 3 illustrates the scrapbook.

Figure 3. Pages from the Scrapbook used to stimulate self-consciousness and to plan actions

EXPOSING AND ADDRESSING VULNERABILITIES

Control Room

We will now present the method used to address the issues managers pointed out, in order to transform the discussions into actions to strengthen the process safety leadership culture.

We prepared a special control room, where we designed a pathway decorated with images of accidents from the company and from the industry, and the number of fatalities. We also put an alarm sound playing during the route and videos showing accidents. These resources were intended to create an emotional ambiance to take the analysis to another level.

Figure 4. Picture of the Control Room and example of poster from accident used to decorate it.

Besides the planned journey passing several industry accidents, the Control Room was decorated with red material, to create an atmosphere of urgency. After going through the posters and watching the videos, the participants were invited to give their testimony of accidents they´ve been through.

The group tone got emotional as some of them shared unpleasant stories they had lived. The goal of inducing the reflection to an in-depth level was successfully achieved.

After that point, the participants went back to the regular room and dialogued about some questions that were in their scrapbook. The questions were related to the *Elements of a Strong Safety Culture* preconized by OGP (2013), mentioned in section 2 of this paper.

The methodology privileged social interaction among participants and the active listening of each other's considerations. Below is the list of the questions addressed to the participants.

Questions to Reflect and Dialogue:

1. Am I able to influence my operational team?

2. How many hierarchical levels are there between the operational team and me? To what extent does my speech actually makes sense to them?

3. How much of what is said by the operational team do I believe genuinely applies to me? Do I believe I receive good quality feedback?

4. Of the security actions implemented in my management, do I receive direct feedback on the effectiveness or otherwise of its implementation?

5. What degree of tolerance do I accept as a leader, regarding violations of safety standards?

6. Do I, as a leader, make it mandatory that the urgent inspection recommendations are executed immediately?

7. Do I, as a leader, take every opportunity to motivate, mentor and develop my team to enhance individual safety awareness and safety leadership?

8. Do I praise when I see a safe behavior?

9. Do I perform Behaviour Audits in a protocolled way, to meet the Scorecard, or do I do it because I believe in the effectiveness of what can arise from it?

10. Is Safety a value or is it a Priority for me as a leader?

11. Do I have the courage to step in and stop an activity when I see someone at risk? Do I always intervene?

12. Do my behaviours as a leader have safety as a foundation?

13. When I find that the environment is unsafe, do I privilege safety over other goals?

14. Safety comes first in my management?

15. How do I, as a leader, ensure that safety in my management is dynamic enough to ensure continuous improvement in operational procedures?

16. Thinking Safety as a chain, how can I, as a leader, be an effective link between operations and the company policy?

Results

In order to capture the precious discussions and share insights among the participants, in the final part of the workshop there was a collective presentation based on what each small group discussed about the questions above. Each group had to have at least one delegate, and others could participate if they wanted to.

Some of the findings reported were, for example: "*I have to go to the platform more often*"; "*Behaviour audits can be very useful, I should profit more from them*"; "*There are too many levels between my operational team and I. I have to get together with them on a regular basis.*"

After sharing insights, all managers filled in the Personal Influence on Safety Matrix again. The group reported that, this time, the self-perception was lower, since many managers realized they need to invest more efforts and more quality time in Safety, in both dimensions – with oneself and towards others.

After that, each participant revised and complemented his individual action plan (figure 3). They also wrote a personal commitment as a Safety Process Culture Leader.

At the very end of the program, we asked everyone to do a check-out by sharing with the entire group one action of the action plan. This intended to create a deeper commitment, as well as possible insights to others. Also, it was a practice that could be used with the managers team.

According to the group evaluation, presented in the word cloud below, the program succeeded in strengthening the safety culture in leaders, who mentioned as the top benefits from the program: (*Safety as a*) Value; Communication; Life; Commitment; Example; Integration; Consciousness; and Synergy.

Figure 5. Evaluation: Word cloud containing the managers´ perception about the contribution brought by the program to participants.

CONCLUSIONS

The feedback given by the program´s participants was encouraging. It indicated that testimonies from partners, combined with relevant questions based on the daily problems managers face concerning safety, created a trust ambiance among managers.

The activities planned based on andragogic approaches favored dialogue and in-depth self-analysis. The use of the same instrument (Personal Influence on Safety Matrix) twice, as well as the individual scrapbook, facilitated the self-consciousness process and lead managers to review their initial assessment and to elaborate an action plan.

Leaders play a decisive role in strengthening the safety culture in the organizational world. Bringing about their vulnerabilities and having honest conversations with peers definitely helps managers to find ways to evolve from compliance to commitment.

Strengthening the safety leadership culture is a process that does not come to an end. It is an on-going process that must be continuously taken care of by leaders who value life and put safety first. Future projects that aim to implement effective actions in Safety Culture should take into consideration the company´s culture, as well as daily operational problems and safety as a core value to preserve life and business.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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