

Successfully Sustaining a Safety Culture through Acquisitions and Mergers

Research by Jonathan Priest

Background

This research project stems from the authors experiences while practicing in industry creating and sustaining strong safety cultures within organisations. The research looks to investigate the transfer of safety culture and systems from one company to another. During the transfer process there are challenges faced by both the organisation and its employees, which influence the perceived success of the transition. The research also looks to identify weaknesses in processes and allow for continuous improvement.

Methodology

In order to effectively analyse culture it was felt that conducting a traditional survey would be too restrictive and the research in this area highlighted that surveys of culture can miss important data and can potentially be inaccurate. The chosen method was to conduct focus groups and interviews and feed the data gained from these through a matrix and a framework to enable analysis of the data to take place.

In total the following sessions were conducted:

- 3 focus groups
- 5 interviews

Aims and Objectives

Aim

To determine how to successfully sustain an existing safety culture during an acquisition and how to manage transition of this culture to the acquired business.

Objectives

- Investigate the measuring of safety culture
- Identify possible correlation between an organisational culture and its safety culture
- Investigate different types of organisational culture and investigate barriers when integrating cultures.
- Determine factors that are required for a successful transition or integration of culture / cultural norms

Results

Communication

Communication issues played a major part in the challenges faced by the organisations. This was in part due to the disconnect between employees and management it was falsely assumed that communication routes were working well. There were also problems caused by communication issues between the acquiring and acquired companies both during and post planning phases. Communication is also important in demonstrating added value brought by the acquisition, which is an instrumental part of the integration process.

Planning

The study revealed that some challenges were caused by the lack of a strong plan with actionable objectives. Communicating the plan effectively to business management and the employees is also key.

Support

The acquired business needs to know where to turn for support. Focus groups identified that there was uncertainty in this area which caused further challenges and complications.

