

Mastering the five core capacities for sustainable safety excellence



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How much value does your safety system bring to your organisation? And what about your leaders and the culture they create? Do you believe your organisation has what it takes to achieve excellence in safety performance consistently?

With over two decades of experience leading companies in various industries, I have noticed the organisations that stand out from their competitors are those actively working towards building the capability to maintain sustainable excellence.

Safety excellence goes beyond just achieving and repeating exceptional results. It involves a deep understanding of how those results were achieved, with a shared mindset that continuous improvement is always possible within the organisation.

This mindset is reinforced by systems in place to prevent accidents, respond and recover effectively when they do occur, as well as mechanisms for proactively learning from deviations to expectations before unwanted events occur.

Organisations must focus on developing five core capacities to achieve sustainable safety excellence. These capacities are essential for creating a work environment where safety is not just a priority but an integral part of the organisational culture.

Let's explore each of these capacities further to understand their role in achieving sustainable safety excellence.

SYSTEM CAPACITY TO PREVENT AND RECOVER

The first capacity to master is the **System Capacity** to Prevent and Recover.

Despite the best-laid plans, deviations and mistakes are inevitable in complex work environments. Great corporations understand this and create systems not only to prevent unwanted events but also to recover swiftly when they occur.

By having robust recovery mechanisms in place, organisations can minimise the severity of incidents and quickly bring operations back to the pre-incident state.

LEADERSHIP CAPACITY

Leadership Capacity is another essential element in achieving safety excellence.

Organisations must invest in developing their leaders, especially those on the front line, to ensure they have the competency and confidence to align their teams with safety protocols.

Effective leaders proactively seek out opportunities to learn from deviations and errors before they escalate into incidents. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement, leaders can better prevent safety incidents and create a safer work environment for their teams.

CULTURAL CAPACITY

Cultural Capacity is crucial to achieving safety excellence because it is the sustainability factor.

It involves creating an environment where new employees are introduced to the desired beliefs, behaviours, and experiences that align with the organisation's safety culture.

In a culture of excellence, team members take responsibility for each other's safety and uphold

safety standards even in the absence of supervision. This means that safety remains a top priority for everyone, regardless of their position or role within the company, making it a core value and how work is performed.

Building a strong safety culture involves acclimating new employees to the written and unwritten rules and the desired beliefs and behaviours.

A culture of excellence goes beyond following rules and procedures. It fosters a sense of camaraderie and mutual support among team members, who actively look out for each other's well-being. This creates a tribe-like atmosphere where everyone is committed to maintaining a safe work environment.

ENGAGEMENT CAPACITY

Engagement Capacity is crucial for creating a sense of ownership and employee commitment to safety. Organisations must create an environment where employees feel empowered to take ownership of safety initiatives and actively participate in activities to improve safety.

When employees feel a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for each other's safety, they are more motivated to uphold safety standards and work together as a team to ensure a safe workplace.

STRATEGIC CAPACITY

Strategic Capacity is essential for ensuring that safety efforts are aligned with the organisation's overall goals and objectives.

Organisations must develop a strategic framework that focuses on creating sustainable value through safety initiatives.

By making strategic choices and tradeoffs that prioritise safety, organisations can demonstrate the value of their safety efforts to internal stakeholders and consumers. This strategic approach to safety management ensures that safety remains a core component of the organisation's long-term success.

These five capacities are interconnected and essential for creating a safe and productive work environment. By focusing on prevention and recovery, leadership, culture, engagement, and strategy, organisations can build a culture of safety excellence where every employee feels empowered to prioritise safety and contribute to a safer workplace.

Investing in these capacities is not only a commitment to the well-being of employees but also a strategic decision that can drive long-term success and sustainability for the organisation.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

To complement the elucidation on the five capacities crucial for sustainable safety excellence, it is important to emphasise the significance of **continuous improvement** and ongoing evaluation.

Developing these capacities is not a one-time task

but a continuous journey of improvement and refinement to adapt to changing circumstances and emerging risks.

Organisations must regularly review and enhance their safety systems, leadership practices, cultural norms, employee engagement strategies, and strategic frameworks.

By seeking opportunities for improvement and implementing changes based on lessons learned from incidents or near-misses, organisations can continuously enhance their safety performance and culture and remain agile in dealing with the uncertainty of the future performance of the work.

ONGOING EVALUATION

Ongoing Evaluation is equally important in the quest for safety excellence. Organisations must establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the efficacy and perceived value of the efforts to prevent injuries and incidents and continuously improve the culture.

Regular audits, inspections, safety performance indicators, and feedback mechanisms can provide valuable insights into the safety programme's strengths and weaknesses, enabling organisations to make data-informed decisions and adjustments as needed.

By overlaying continuous improvement and ongoing evaluation into the development of these five core capacities, organisations can ensure that they remain proactive, responsive, and adaptive in addressing new safety challenges.

This iterative approach to safety management fosters a culture of learning, innovation, and resilience.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable safety excellence requires a commitment to continuous improvement and ongoing evaluation while working to master the five core capacities.

By embracing a culture of continuous learning and adaptation, organisations can more effectively improve safety performance and create a workplace where every employee is empowered and feels psychologically safe to prioritise safety, report injuries, concerns, and mistakes made, and contribute to creating a safer work environment.

Continuous improvement and ongoing evaluation serve as the pillars that sustain the foundation of safety excellence, ensuring that organisations remain resilient, proactive, and successful in their safety endeavours.

As you embark on this journey of mastering the five core capacities, know that it is through these pillars that you can achieve and sustain safety excellence and ensure the well-being of all who are a part of your organisation.

You can create a workplace where safety is not just a priority or a situational value but a way of life.



Figure 1: Five Core Capacities for Sustainable Safety Excellence