



SAFETY LEADERSHIP

A Systematic Approach to Safety Improvement: PSFV Framework

The journey to safety excellence is not paved with quick fixes but with deliberate, data-informed strategies.

Shawn M. Galloway

Throwing programs at problems is never an effective approach to improving safety. However, knee-jerk reactions to undesirable events or performance are evident in many well-intentioned organizations. This reactive approach often leads to short-term fixes that may temporarily mask issues but fail to address the underlying root causes. Rather than implementing hastily devised programs or policies, organizations should develop strategic, well-researched initiatives that align with long-term goals and are informed by data-driven insights.

By fostering proactive problem-solving and a continuous learning culture, organizations can ensure that their efforts to improve safety result in genuine, lasting change. This requires a commitment to understanding the complexities of safety challenges and engaging the appropriate stakeholders in creating a cohesive strategy tailored to their unique environments while supporting the overall business trajectory.

Lasting improvement requires a plan that necessitates a strategy. A strategy demands focus, which should create value validated through data and perceptions. I call this the **PSFV (Plan, Strategy, Focus, Value) Framework**. To navigate this journey, organizations must adopt a systematic approach that highlights planning, strategy, focus and value through data-driven insights. Each of these components plays a crucial role in ensuring that improvement efforts yield tangible benefits for both the organization and its people.

The Necessity of a Plan

“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” —Benjamin Franklin

At the heart of any successful initiative is a solid plan. Improvement initiatives require clear objectives and a defined pathway to achieve them. Without a well-structured plan, efforts can become fragmented and lack direction, resulting in inefficiencies or failure to achieve intended outcomes.

Crafting a Strategy

“Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.” —Sun Tzu

A plan is only as effective as the strategy it is based on. Strategy provides the essential framework of choices and trade-offs that an organization makes to capture and deliver value. This involves making informed decisions that balance short-term gains with long-term goals. A well-defined strategy should focus on aspects that drive value within the organization while considering the available resources and capabilities.

The Role of Focus

“You can focus on things that are barriers or you can focus on scaling the wall or redefining the problem.” —Tim Cook

While strategy outlines the road map, focus hones the organization’s attention on what truly matters. To create meaningful improvements, organizations should concentrate on specific areas critical for success. This means prioritizing initiatives that not only address immediate concerns but also sustainably improve both safety performance and the occupational and safety culture.

Creating Value Through Perception and Data

“What gets measured gets managed.” —Peter Drucker

Value creation is fundamental to the improvement process. However, value must not only be genuine; it must also be perceived as such by all stakeholders within the organization. To ensure this perception, ongoing verification through data collection and analysis is vital. Engaging with the workforce to understand their perceptions of value can lead to greater alignment and satisfaction, ultimately enhancing morale, engagement and productivity.

Strategic Focus in Safety Improvement

To achieve meaningful safety improvements, a strategic focus on two critical areas is necessary:

- 1. Improving Safety Performance:** This entails identifying the most effective measures to reduce and prevent incidents and improve safety practices. Organizations must analyze leading and lagging indicator data, and implement targeted interventions, keeping the most important thing, the most important thing.
- 2. Enhancing Occupational Culture:** Safety culture is a component of the overall occupational culture. A culture that values and prioritizes safety over cost, schedule and production is crucial for maintaining consistent safe practices. Organizations should foster a work experience where safety is prioritized in day-to-day leadership decisions and actions, and employees feel accountable for voicing concerns and contributing to safety strategies.


Guiding Questions for Decision-Making

To maintain clarity and focus in the pursuit of safety improvements, it's essential to consider three guiding questions:

1. **What actions would most directly improve safety performance and occupational culture?** This question encourages organizations to engage in critical thinking about their current practices and identify actionable steps for improvement.
2. **What strategies would sustainably enhance the safety system's ability to prevent and recover from human error?** Understanding the systems that support safety can help organizations build resilience and adapt to new challenges.
3. **How will you ensure that the focused areas foster a perception of value across all levels of the workforce?** Engaging with and obtaining feedback from customers and consumers of safety improvement efforts ensures that initiatives resonate and effectively meet their needs.

A structured approach to safety improvement—rooted in planning, strategy, focus and value—through data-driven insights is essential for organizations seeking to foster a culture of safety and resilience. By prioritizing identified areas for enhancement and using guided questions to inform decisions, organizations can cultivate environments that not only comply with safety standards but also enhance the overall workplace culture.

The journey to safety excellence is not paved with quick fixes but with deliberate, data-informed strategies. By embracing the PSFV framework, organizations can not only build a foundation for immediate improvements but also reinforce a sustainable path toward future resilience. This approach requires intentional planning, strategic acumen, focused efforts, and continuous measurement of value and perception.

As organizations commit to this systematic journey, they will discover that true safety is not just a goal, but a vital aspect of their organizational DNA. The pursuit of safety excellence becomes more than a compliance exercise; it evolves into a shared vision  inspires trust, empowers employees and drives the organization toward enduring

success. As we adopt these principles, the real question is not whether we can improve safety, but how far-reaching the positive impact of our organizational culture can ultimately be.

About the Author

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Shawn M. Galloway is CEO of [ProAct Safety](#) and an author of several books, including *Bridge to Excellence: Building Capacity for Sustainable Performance*. As an award-winning consultant, adviser, leadership coach, and keynote speaker (including at *EHS Today's* **Safety Leadership Conference**), he has helped hundreds of organizations within every primary industry to improve safety strategy, culture, leadership, and engagement. He also hosts the weekly podcast series Safety Culture Excellence. For more information, call (936) 273-8700 or email info@ProActSafety.com.

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