

# SAFETY CULTURE ENRICHMENT: *Why Take the Circle Route?*

By **DONALD J. ECKENFELDER**

**T**he relationship between a positive organizational culture and positive safety performance is unequivocal." So says Gardner in "Benchmarking Organizational Culture: Organizational Culture as a Primary Factor in Safety Performance" (26). In "Breaking the Safety Barrier: Implementing Culture Change," Simon and Leik state, "Safety culture change truly works" (24). Although I agree with these statements, I disagree with the authors regarding the best path to effect change.

In these articles, once the basic tenets are stated (all of which I believe are accurate), the discussion focuses on what safety professionals have been doing all along. Essentially, these articles suggest comprehensive attitude surveys followed by what is essentially improvement in traditional safety programs and processes. While such activity will produce change—and improve safety culture—it is not the most effective, efficient path. It is the circle route safety professionals have always taken, with a few new wrinkles and perhaps a better-documented attitude survey. In my opinion, there is a better way.

In "The Architecture of Safety Excellence," Hansen provides an illuminating bridge metaphor. (See Hansen's article in this issue, beginning on pg. 26.) The foundation on one side of the bridge over losses or undesired outcomes is programs and training; on the other side, it is culture and values.

This metaphor is on target—it perfectly describes how an effort to provide a loss-resistant environment works. All large bridges must have firm foundations on both sides, then be built to meet in the middle. The problem with most loss prevention processes is that a firm foundation of programs with training are constructed on one side, then culture is allowed to develop as a result of the programs, training, and later technical processes, compliance and behavior-based approaches to safety. As a result, the culture and values foundation is often built on sand.

**WORLD-CLASS ATTRIBUTES**

If world-class safety is the goal, the first best activity is to define attributes that exist in organizations which produce world-class results. Once this is achieved, one must determine what beliefs and val-

ues will lead to acquisition of those attributes. Then, the precepts must be stated, concepts taught and leading by example practiced at all levels. Obviously, it is also necessary to formulate creative ways to constantly reinforce and remind all involved what has transpired.

Some start this process with a high-priced benchmarking exercise designed to define these desired attributes. Such a study is not necessary, however. Most veteran safety professionals can easily define these attributes based on their experience. In addition, some large organizations (e.g., Allied-Signal) have already done the benchmarking. Finding the results should not be difficult—although they are, in essence, described here.

Various publications have exposed shortcuts to safety culture enhancement (including Eckenfelder's *Values-Driven Safety*, "It's The Culture, Stupid" and "Professional Prosperity: The Narrowing Road"). These sources outline plans to construct the culture and values bridge foundation on concrete pilings instead of sand. In addition, they contain a maturity grid based on 10 values that will lead to a culture which will produce a world-class safe-

**FIGURE 1 Beliefs & Values Matrix**

Essential Attributes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTALS
<b>Safety Values</b>															
1. Do it for the right reason.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	14
2. See it as part of the whole.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	14
3. Recognize there is no end.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	14
4. First, it is a people business; things are a distant second.	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13
5. Put the right person in charge.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	14
6. Use a yardstick everyone can read.	X	X	X		X			X	X	X	X		X	X	10
7. Sell benefits—and there are many.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	14
8. Never settle for second best.	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13
9. Be guided by logic, not emotion.	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13
10. Empower others rather than seek after support.	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	13
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>132</b>

ty effort. (To review the matrix, see *PS*, June 1998, pp. 34-35.)

To demonstrate the clear relationship between attributes resident in a loss-resistant organization and the beliefs and values found in organizations that have achieved excellence in safety, a correlation matrix is useful. To begin, essential attributes of loss-resistant environments are:

- 1) Each employee takes responsibility for safety.
- 2) Safety is integrated into the management process.
- 3) The presence of the full-time safety professional is limited.
- 4) An off-the-job safety and health effort is in place.
- 5) Safety and other training are seamlessly integrated.
- 6) Compliance comes naturally.
- 7) Programs and technical processes have history and occur naturally.
- 8) There is a bias against gimmicks.
- 9) Leadership sets the example; safety is never taken lightly.
- 10) A recognizable safety culture is in place.
- 11) The focus is more on process than statistics.
- 12) Negative findings are treated expeditiously.
- 13) The few safety professionals have stature.
- 14) Safety is seen as a competitive edge, not overhead.

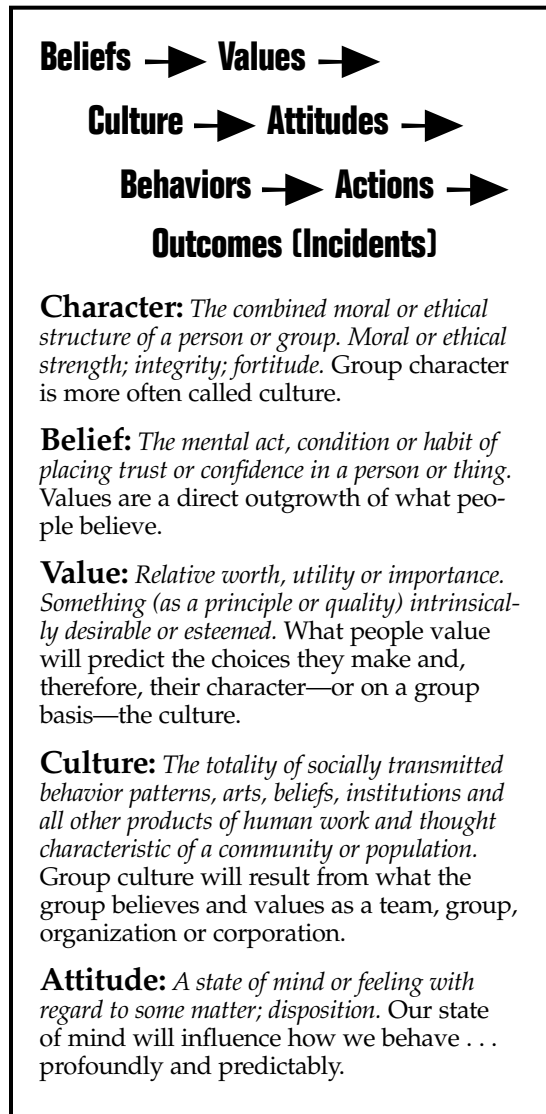
Figure 1 depicts a matrix that correlates beliefs and values which will lead to these attributes. Of a possible 140 hits, this matrix shows that if a company holds the suggested values, 132 hits occur—clearly, the suggested beliefs and values will lead directly to acquisition of the desired attributes. One might say, "Your actions are a moving picture of what you believe." In *As A Man Thinketh*, Allen says, "Man is made or unmade by himself; in the armory of thought he forges the weapons by which he destroys himself. He also fashions the tools with which he builds for himself heavenly mansions of joy and strength and peace."

Groups of people exhibit the same characteristics as individuals. When speaking of individuals, their culture is their character; two or more individuals working together have a culture.

A grid describing maturity against the suggested values and beliefs is essential to the process. Furthermore, an understanding of the relationship between those beliefs and values and outcomes—be it a loss-resistant environment or many losses—must be understood and acted on. Figure 2 describes these critical relationships and provides key definitions.

What people believe will determine

**FIGURE 2**



what their values are. Those values—combined—determine culture. In turn, culture will determine group attitudes. Those attitudes predict behaviors that lead to the desired loss-resistant environment.

An organization can either work downstream on behaviors or upstream on beliefs and values. Either approach produces results. Said another way, a company can either build dams or levies. Over time, levies will be far more costly and will fail when the "100-year flood" materializes (probably a lot sooner). Building dams in the form of working directly on beliefs and values is far more profitable since the true goal is known—the 14 attributes noted earlier.

It is time to work on a sociological approach to safety. It is the future of the safety profession. Let's not continue to take the same old route. There is a better way. If safety professionals shape attitudes upstream by teaching beliefs and values that foretell loss-free outcomes, the results will endure. If safety professionals merely shape attitudes via behavioral manipulation, once the

manipulating stops, results will disappear. If the goal is merely to improve programs, when they get rusty (as they inevitably do), the culture will weaken along with them. However, if safety professionals strive to change people and organizations from the inside out, results will last.

Improving safety programs, training, technical capabilities and regulatory compliance, and implementing a behavior-based approach to safety will enrich a company's safety culture. In my opinion, however, that is simply the traditional path with new jargon and an improved attitude/perception survey. The new way is to recognize the relationship between beliefs/values and outcomes, and deal directly with culture instead of taking the circle route. ■

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