

Behaviour Based Safety

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Introduction

Major Improvements in workplace health and safety standards have been achieved through the better management of safety. In the UK, employees, employers and the Health and Safety Executive have focussed on such issues as safe systems and methods of work, a healthier and safer working environment, and safer plant and equipment. Major advances using this approach have been made in many countries and, as an example, the UK workplace safety record is now one of the best in the world.

However, there are limits to the improvements that can be achieved through the above approach. 'Behavioural Safety' is a way of gaining further improvements in safety performance through promoting safe behaviours with workforce involvement at all levels. It is not a substitute for the important and traditional approach of safe systems of work etc. but rather adds a further dimension to emphasise and draw upon employee involvement and personal responsibility.

This Health and Safety Briefing outlines the approach used in Behavioural Safety.

What is behavioural safety?

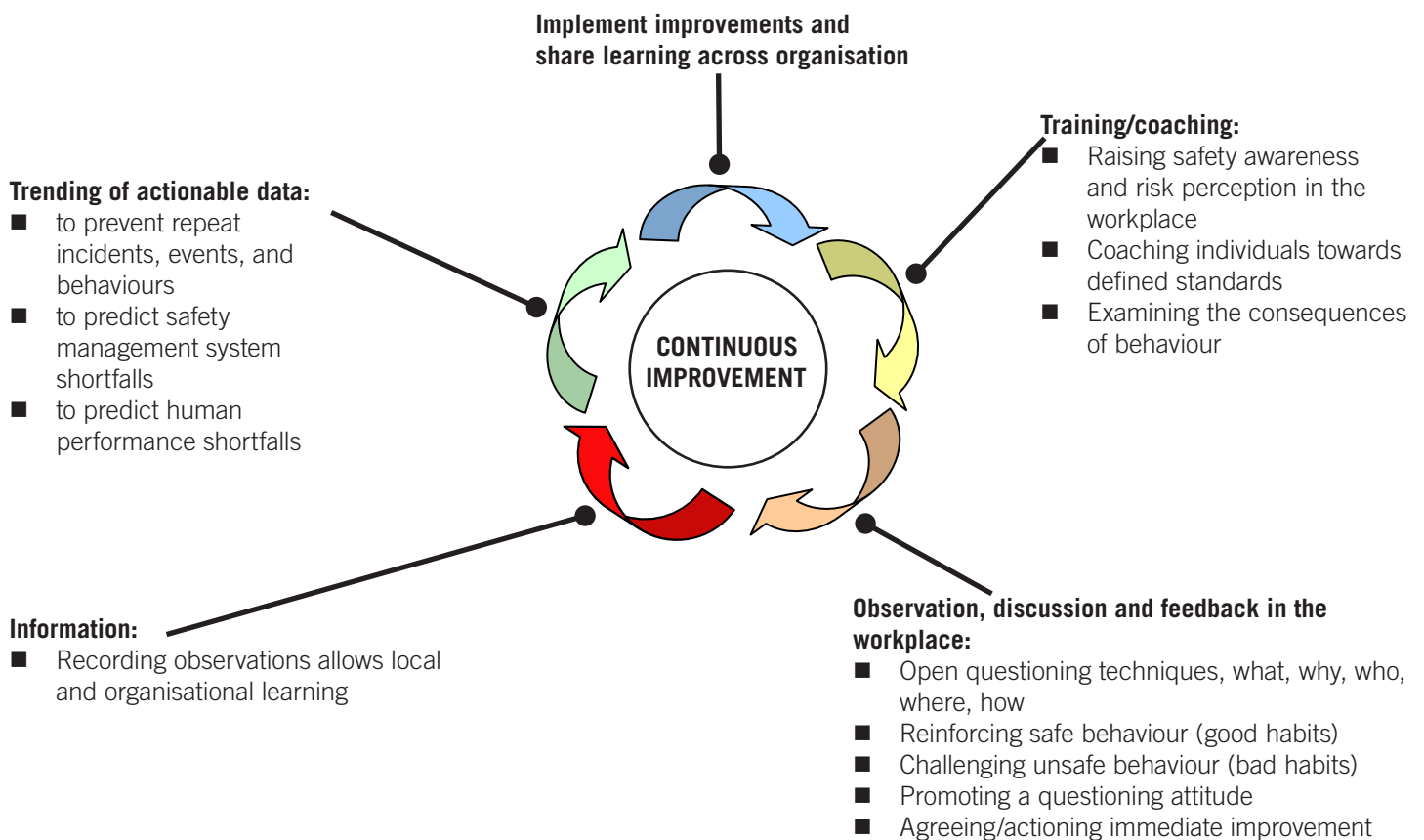
A key process in any journey to safety excellence is the promotion of safe behaviours to reduce accidents and incidents, using good communication of learning with the backing and commitment of leaders. This enables, empowers and encourages employees (including contractors) to organise, control and improve their own safety and that of their colleagues. Employees often have the best solution if we take time to listen. The aim is to instil a questioning attitude and personal responsibility towards health and safety in employees at all levels in the organisation.

As a proactive approach to safety improvement, it aims to provide early warning of potential accidents and incidents by the observation of safe/unsafe behaviour in the workplace. It gives individuals the opportunity to share feedback on safety performance with their peers, encourages involvement in safety, improves awareness, knowledge and perception of risks in the workplace and the importance of human factors. In so doing it operates within an open and just culture which may have wider business benefits.

How is it done?

Members of the workforce are trained as 'observers'. They can be both managers and shop floor employees. Having observed work as it proceeds and discussed with the individuals and teams involved, improvements are made - with support from management. An important aspect is developing confidence among staff (and contractors) to be visible; to question unsafe acts and processes, and to praise, encourage, and share good practices. Gradually more and more participants develop the necessary confidence and skills so that safety becomes embedded within the 'bloodstream' of the organisation and is viewed as a 'natural' part of the workplace which is accepted and encouraged.

Behavioural Safety delivers a selection of tools and techniques within a continuous improvement process:



Behavioural Safety systems will only be effective if:

- All members of the organisation, from top management to the shop floor and workforce representatives, are fully engaged and supportive.
- The system is constantly maintained and is not seen as a 'one-off' or a 'gimmick'.
- The necessary time and resources are made available for participation and follow up.
- The underpinning safety management systems and working environment are also fully maintained.

Some organisations have made substantial improvements in their health and safety performance though using behavioural safety and as this occurs, it can provide added impetus and awareness about what can be achieved.

References and Further Information

- Health and Safety Executive at www.hse.gov.uk/humanfactors/topics/behaviouralsafety.htm
- Institution of Occupational Health and safety (IOSH) at www.iosh.co.uk/behavioural

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For further information about the IET's Health and Safety Policy Advisory Group only, please contact:

Health and Safety Policy Advisory Group Secretary
Policy Department
IET,
Michael Faraday House,
Six Hills Way,
Stevenage.
SG1 2AY
01438 765690
email: policy@theiet.org
www.theiet.org/policy
<http://www.theiet.org/factfiles/>

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