Research Committee Update

Achieving a Culture of Safety

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Many of us have spent our careers trying to understand human performance principles or behavior-based safety. The moment we think we have it figured out, something or someone in our space of work does the unthinkable and before you know it, lives can forever be changed. As professionals, the next step that we tend to take when our world gets turned upside down is to try to figure out the "why" and vow never to allow an event to negatively change another family or work team again.

Does that description of a utility line clearance safety culture sound familiar to anyone? It certainly does to me and many of my peers that sit on the UAA Safety Committee. For the last couple of years, we have challenged ourselves as an industry team to try to figure out a way to measure a culture of safety. Why is that important, you ask? Simply stated, measuring a culture of safety can be challenging. With that said, the committee decided to take one of the UAA's core values—safety—to the next level by trying to define, or create, a simple self-assessment tool that helps individuals, companies, and organizations understand what success looks like as it relates to their "culture of safety." The purpose of this article is an attempt by your UAA safety committee to help you, as a member leader, manager, executive, or owner to measure (or self-assess) your safety culture.

We can all probably think of a few safety metrics (e.g., TICR, Lost Cost per Hour, etc.) that we used to measure safety successes or failures within a period of time. We certainly do not want to take

anything away from the value of those metrics. However, the bigger question seems to be how do you effectively measure a safety culture? Tim Walsh with Davey Tree Expert Co. is on our committee and puts it this way: "Although the easiest type of metric to focus on are the lagging indicators, they are not a true measure of culture. Good safety performance is an outcome of a good culture, but isn't a true measure of it. Focusing on leading indicators and culture assessments is the best way to identify the level of the safety culture within any organization."

Improvements really have to start with *why* before reaching to *how* to fix most complex problems. I would certainly classify measuring or understanding where you or your organization is, from a cultural perspective with regards to safety, as a complex problem.

"There are a lot of indicators to let you know that you have a strong safety culture instilled," said Afton Stanko, Wright Tree Service. "I believe the most recognizable one is when you see everyone from the ground up aligned with your safety culture, getting involved in safety issues, and playing a meaningful role in the process. When you see everyone actively engaged in safety, and are comfortable reporting safety problems, they don't just have a check-the-box kind of attitude and truly care about the safety of themselves and others."

In your professional opinion, what components would be indicators (leading or lagging) to a safety culture? That is the question our safety committee

struggled with for more than a year. We wanted to not only answer that question for ourselves, but also attempt to answer that question for the benefit of our membership and the larger industry.

Embedded within this article is the UAA's first version of a self-assessment tool that is intended to help the user *assess* and *measure* their culture of safety within their company or organization.

Industry safety professionals and leaders have weighed in on the topic of *assessment* and identified several attributes that are critical to a culture of safety. We narrowed our focus down to three broad categories that help define a safety culture: leadership, quality control, and safety compliance. From these categories, we derived a number of different sub-attributes. The sub-categories are ranked as either an absolutely necessary part of your program or as a best management practice (BMP) that is not always necessary, but recognized as attributes of a highly effective safety culture.

The matrix provided also has a measurement component to it. The end user should self-assess and rank each attribute to a culture of safety by color:

Red: not existing

Yellow: marginal compliance

Green: industry leading

Once ranked, you will have a visual measurement, by color, of your safety culture with a goal of mostly

green checks and no red ones. Lastly, the matrix also includes space for the end user to take notes that identify anomalies and partial compliance with each attribute. The benefit of taking notes with your assessment is that you can reassess periodically for improvements.

"What I find to be the most powerful and rewarding action to take is to communicate the need and successes of our safety culture directly to employees," said Mark Kimbrough, Townsend. "Face-to-face, one-on-one, listening and following up with the employee, learning from them and what they do to be safe on the job while on the job with them. Every time I go out to the field to do trainings, audits, and interfacing with the employee, I can see in their eyes that they appreciate that management is supportive and cares for their safety culture. I also take away new ideas from the employees to improve our overall safety culture!"

With all of that said, if I were reading this article for the first time, I would have additional questions as to why we thought certain attributes were important to a culture of safety. One of those questions might be approximately half of the attributes listed have to do with leadership. Why does leadership have such a great impact on a culture of safety? Bob Urban with ACRT said, "Leadership from board/ owner level down to field operations is what I think of when the word 'leadership' is used in this context."

Keith Pancake with ACRT said, "Good leaders are easy to follow. Strong leaders have a willingness to set ego aside and allow others to share knowledge on subject matter that they may be more familiar with. Leaders also have to readily admit that they are fallible and willing to grow from shortcomings. A good leader is ready to take ownership in every aspect of the company's safety culture."

When it comes to personal accountability and safety compliance, how does an individual's accountability figure into a culture of safety? Richard Zito with ECI

said, "Employee ownership of the safety culture defines accountability. Employees should be encouraged to talk to co-workers about safety, observe one another's safety performance, and comment on safe and unsafe performance. That includes reporting near misses and good catches without reservation or fear of retribution. However, it must be recognized that safety is a condition of employment. Fix the problems...not the blame! And lastly, understand that it is important to recognize safe performance. Recognition is reinforcement."

Chris Gaston with Wright Tree Service agreed with Zito: "Once leaders and teammates are accountable to themselves for their own safety, the safety culture will become contagious throughout the work place and become second nature to your team."

So what does the UAA think about training or quality control and assurance from an operational excellence perspective, and how does training have an effect on a culture of safety? Phil Graham with BC Hydro said, "It can be a double-edged sword. Too often, training is mandated as the corrective action for an incident, even when the root causes do not point to a lack of knowledge or skill at all. When training is required, it must be effective. The material and tools can be great, but without great delivery, it is wasted. If the training is meant to improve or establish skill levels, it has to be training to fluency rather than just training for awareness."

Last, but certainly not least, everyone should agree that communication is the key to success. UAA subject matter experts think that communicating effectively to your team(s) about why a culture of safety is important to your company's mission is also critical to your success. "Meetings and conference calls are valuable tools for communication," said John McLamb, Asplundh Tree Expert Co., "but face-to-face conversation with field team members seems to be the most effective. Especially when you can share a true story of a life altering event that occurred as a result of a poor safety culture."

"They don't care what you know until they know that you care," said Mark Kimbrough with Townsend Tree. "I believe that leadership must show a genuine interest in our personnel prior to imparting any safety-related coaching or guidance. Do I know anything about their personal life? Their children? Do I remember their name from prior visits? Do I care?"

Pancake shared this simple but true thought on the subject: "Transparency throughout all forms of communication establishes trust in the process of cultivating the organization's safety culture. It is very important that their safety, the safety of their co-workers, and the effect that safety has on the company's ability to continue to conduct business is something that remains in the forefront of every communication."

We have all been given the ability to choose. "Openly sharing safety opportunities for continuous safety improvements with the entire team helps enhance your culture of safety," said Gerry Breton with Lucas Tree Co. That is exactly what the UAA is trying to do here. We by no means think this attempt at measuring a culture of safety is perfect. We do, however, feel like this attempt is a good starting point for a discussion. Please take the time to use what we have offered, and more importantly, add to it. Join us in committee, Trees and Utilities Conference, or even on LinkedIn or Facebook social media chats with your feedback and suggestions. The choices we all make around safety and the culture in which we choose to promote and work will define us all in the future!

We consulted with the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) which is a trade association of 2,300 tree care firms and affiliated companies and was established in 1938 as the National Arborist Association. Additionally, we pulled material from the following resource around leadership: Willink, J., & Babin, L. (2015). Extreme ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs lead and win (First edition). New York: St. Martin's Press.

Attribute Definition	Explanation and Records	Absolute or BMP	Threshold Definitions			Notes
Quality Control						
Does your company have an on-boarding or orientation process for every new employee?	Validation of past experience and training.	Absolute				
Does your company implement a formal training program that qualifies employees? (The program may be career track, work-task, equipment-operation based, or a hybrid, but should cover employee/work duties up to and including the crew leader position.)	OSHA requires documentation of training. Qualification type, on-going training is a good way to meet requirements. It also can provide some level of liability protection.	Absolute				
Does your company's formal training program include implementation of an OSHA 1910.269 compliant EHAP-type program?	OSHA requires employer-certification of line clearance tree trimmers (those who will work closer than 10 feet to an electrical hazard).	Absolute				
Do your training programs focus on fluency or awareness as a result?	Do you have programs in place to validate skills before training progresses to next tasks or steps?	BMP				
Quality Control / Safety						
Does your company have a job site hazard control training program identifying potential risks and impacts?	E.g., tree risk assessment, terrain hazard assessment, traffic assessment, etc.	BMP				
Regulatory - OSHA (Applies to companies with 10 or more total employees)						
Does your company have a job site hazard control training program identifying potential risks and impacts? impacts (e.g., tree risk assessment, terrain hazard assessment, and traffic assessment). Does your company file OSHA 300 series of forms, including 300 log and 301 incidence report and post OSHA 300A log Feb. 1–April 15 of every year?	Fines for failure to post OSHA 300A records are common (e.g., company calculates an incidence and DART rate).	Absolute				

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Safety						
Does your company require all safety managers and trainers to be certified as TCIA Certified Tree Care Safety Professionals (CTSP)?	Visit the TCIA website's safety tab for more information about CTSP.	BMP				
Does your company hold weekly, documented safety training meetings?	OSHA requires some form of on-going training. The best practice is to hold at least one tailgate safety type training a week.	Absolute				
Does your company enforce safety policy?	OSHA requires that safety polices be enforced. You need to document enforcement to prove it was done, even if it was done verbally.	Absolute				
Does your company document lessons learned and preventative action plans to prevent reoccurrence of events?	Documenting may include: company communication plan regarding cause analysis for incidents, performance improvement programs, independent review of incidents to validate findings, etc.	BMP				
ANSI Z133 - Does your company provide crew leaders with copies of the standard?		BMP				
Does your company have a corporate safety manual?	This manual should be accessible to all employees.	Absolute				
Is your company a member of the National Safety Council (NSC) either national or local chapter?		BMP				

Attribute Definition	Explanation and Records	Absolute or BMP	Threshold Definitions			Notes
Leadership						
Does the senior leadership have a vision and mission statement and do they demonstrate belief in it?	The only meaningful measure for a leader is whether his team succeeds or fails. Leaders must believe in their mission. Strong leaders also strategically help their subordinates with the knowledge and understanding of why the mission is important.	Absolute				
Do senior leaders mentor junior leaders in your organization?	Sustainable success requires a strong mentorship program. Leaders must train and mentor underperformers.	BMP				
Does leadership support and encourage open and free communication?	Performers must believe in the mission they are being asked to execute, and they must believe and trust in the leader they are being asked to follow. Contributions and innovation are keys to any organization's success.	BMP				
Do leaders believe they are truly responsible for everything that happens within their organization?	Effective leaders demonstrate ownership for all failures.	BMP				
Do senior leaders take credit for team successes?	Successful team leaders make sure junior leaders get credit for team successes because of the example it sets throughout the organization.	BMP				
Do you believe that there is no such thing as "bad teams" just bad leaders?	Leaders must accept accountability for their problems, especially owning the problems that deter performance, and focus on developing solutions as opposed to assigning blame.	BMP				
As a leader, do you enforce standards?	It's not what you preach. It's what you tolerate!	BMP				
As a leader, are you satisfied?	Successful leaders consistently and constantly strive for improvement. Additionally, once this leadership attribute becomes culturally normal, the rest of the team follows suit.	BMP				
As a leader, can you make things simple or do you have to be the smartest person in the room?	Everyone that is part of the task/goal/mission must know and understand his/her role and what to do, even if conditions change. If your team doesn't get it, you have not kept things simple—you must always brief to ensure that the newest/lowest performer gets it!	BMP				

Attribute Definition	Explanation and Records	Absolute or BMP	Threshold Definitions			Notes
Leadership (Continued)						
As a leader, do you have contingency plans in place that anticipate significant challenges you may be confronted with before they happen?	Staying ahead of the curve prevents a leader from getting overwhelmed!	BMP				
What is the ratio of leadership to direct reports? Teams must be broken down into manageable elements (4-6) per designated leader.	Every leader must understand not just what to do, but why they are doing it. If leaders do not understand the "why," they must have the courage and freedom to ask for clarity. What is an appropriate span of control? How many people can one person effectively lead at a mid-management level?	BMP				
Does your corporation practice decentralized command?	Decentralized leadership requires clear, simple, and concise missions.	BMP				
Does your team have a standardized planning process?	All plans must mitigate identified risks. Does your team and supporting elements understand the plan? The best teams analyze their results (post-job briefs) and implement lessons learned for future missions. The most important part of any brief or plan is not how well it is done, but how well it is understood down to the lowest common denominator.	BMP				
Does leadership just flow down the chain of command, or does it flow up as well?	Do leaders own their failures or shift blame? Leaders need to take ownership of failures to ensure teams preform better, and that usually starts by looking in the mirror.	BMP				
As a Corporation/Company/Team, do your leaders feel comfortable under pressure, and act on logic, not emotion?	Leaders cannot be paralyzed by fear and cannot lack confidence in themselves for fear of being outshined by someone else. A leader must never grow so close to a subordinate that one member of the team becomes more important than another or the mission itself.	BMP				