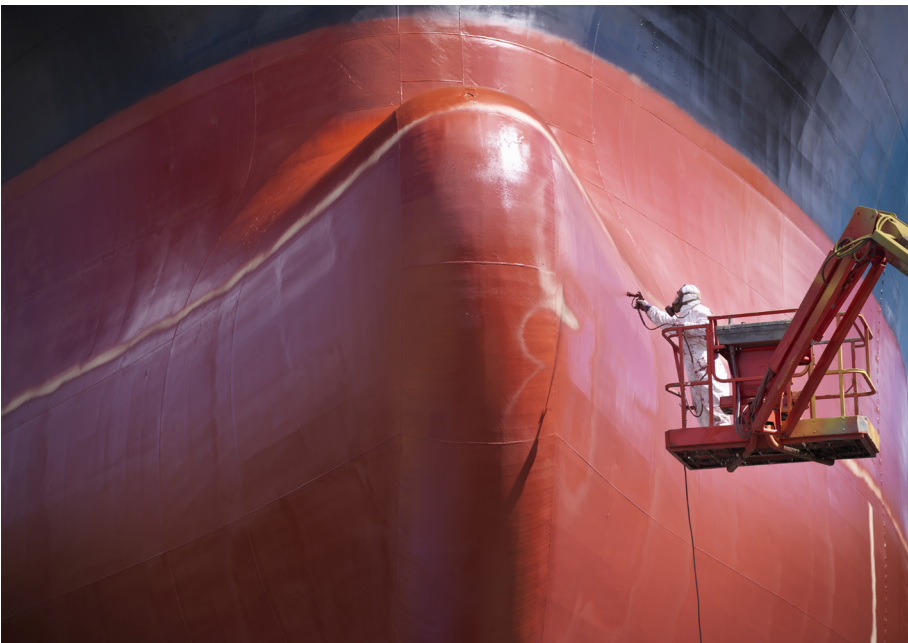


The Value of a Safety Culture Survey

Laura Hedley, Senior Occupational Psychologist at the OPC, shares work around a safety culture survey with a global, maritime client that can be a useful ongoing tool to review and improve an organisation's safety performance



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At the end of 2022, the OPC was approached by V, a global shipping business, to design and implement a bespoke Safety Culture Survey (SCS) across their entire organisation. V is an independent global leader in ship management and marine services. They are based in 30 countries, have over 40,000 employees and operate in every ocean. Their operations encompass ship and crew management, crew and technical services, as well as additional marine services including supply chain and specialist marine insurance. The OPC was approached because of their independence, safety specialism and their non-maritime background. V's senior team wanted to understand their current safety culture and how they could continuously strive for improvement in relation to safety culture; safety behaviours, safety practices and safety performance.

The aim was to engage as many employees as possible to provide their views, opinions and experiences about safety in their workplaces – ashore and onboard vessels. To create an initial benchmark view of safety opinions from which to corroborate and influence their existing safety initiatives; as a new empirical source to help generate new safety initiatives, as well as identify any areas for safety improvements.

The survey

Using OPC Assessment's Safety Culture Questionnaire (SafeCQ) tool, as a base, Laura Hedley, Senior Occupational Psychologist at the OPC worked with the V team to create a bespoke survey that has twelve building blocks about safety and safety culture. The survey was specifically designed to be anonymous and inclusive – enabling all V employees from across V's entire geographical and operational diversity

to take part – providing open and honest feedback without any concerns.

The questions were designed to be as easy as possible and quick to complete online or via an interactive pdf. To further encourage employee engagement the OPC conducted, collated and analysed the entire survey, ensuring impartiality and employee anonymity and confidence. The survey answers were a simple seven-point agreement scale.

At the end, there were some optional, free-text, opinion questions. Over 3,000 employees left valuable comments that have been analysed for themes for review by the V. HSSEQ team. This is a long-term investment plan for V with the aim of repeating the SCS annually for three years, and then potentially on a rolling programme. The second wave of the survey is already well under way for 2023.

A positive start to the Safety Culture Survey for V.

Overall, there was a good response for the SCS amongst V employees. Over 9,300 employees completed the survey. Initial response rates were encouraging for a first time undertaking of the SCS. They



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Attitude to Safety is about how well employees feel enabled, valued and motivated to engage with safety matters, training and working practices. Managers with strong safety leadership are essential to the success of this building block. An organisation with strong safety culture is where everyone, whether an operative, functional manager, divisional director or an office clerk all feel responsible and accountable for safety performance in their area.

Control over safety is about employees feeling they have charge and responsibility over their own safety, and that of their colleagues. Safety control is also about whether they feel they can influence and impact on their personal, divisional and overall business safety performance.

Recognition and openness to safety can be explained by how openly safety issues may be dealt with; how managers may approach a safety incident with employees and the outcomes and resolution of an incident – epitomised by a ‘blame vs a learning’ culture. A safer organisation is an open one, that encourages open, honest discussion about safety performance with managers and peers alike, that is free from fear of reprisals. This includes a belief that incidents will be managed in a fair and just manner. ‘Whistleblowing’ may be encouraged, as well as recognition for good safety performance.

Management involvement in safety – a healthy organisational safety culture is where everyone feels ownership and responsibility for safety issues. Regardless of function, level of responsibility or seniority, employees see that all managers care about and prioritise safety, doing so through strong safety leadership. Effective managers are accessible, approachable and active in both raising safety concerns themselves or they readily support in resolving them for, or with employees. In addition, a good safety leader will not compromise task completion time or profitability over the safety of their team employees.

can provide an initial view of how well employees are already engaged with a safety agenda in their organisation. It also bodes well for future surveys where there’s still room for further employee engagement. As the SCS is repeated in the future, employees already engaged are also likely to be more confident in raising more challenging safety concerns.

The participation was strong across all V. divisions, all levels – from frontline employees to director level, and across all geographical locations with the strongest participation in Asia and Europe.

Once the results of the 2022 survey were in, OPC psychologists analysed them for each of the safety culture building blocks, assessing the views of the global organisation, plus the differing views by organisational function, business sector and geographical location.

The building blocks were rated as high, medium or low performing, based on the grouped views of those who responded to the survey. A low performing area

would necessitate some work and focus to improve this area of safety culture. The survey indicated a strong initial view of safety culture performance across V. with no building blocks being rated as low performing, but there were some opportunities to improve on existing safety activities and therefore to improve safety culture. The OPC also provided insight into any emerging trends about safety and made some recommendations and suggested some possible initiatives for consideration. The end ‘free’, opinion questions were also analysed for specific themes. These are always a rich source of employees’ views, and initiatives for review.

Some detail behind the safety culture building blocks

A key building block is *Safety Profile*. This can be a general indicator of the focus given to safety by an organisations’ managers, and employees’ perceptions about their senior/director level managers’ commitment and prioritisation of safety issues.

12 building blocks associated with a safer culture



Profile of safety	Communication about safety	Safety information	Management involvement in safety
Perception of safety performance	Investment in safety	Access to safety information	Learning from safety issues
Control over safety	Attitudes to safety	Recognition and openness about safety issues	Other factors

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Investment in safety can be typified by physical resources, e.g., PPE, safety signage, ongoing repairs/maintenance works etc., but it also applies to time and people. For example, safety training and the degree to which it's accessible, available, and relevant. A strong safety culture may be evident through time and investment in new initiatives or methodologies that maintain or enhance employee safety as well as the 'back office' activities such as accurate and timely updating of safety protocols. Investment in safety is also the balance between productivity and profitability vs employee safety.

Communications about safety – in the OPC's experience downward communication is typically more apparent than upward communication from employees to more senior organisation levels. A 'safe' organisation needs to have both effective downward and upward communication processes actively working. Poor upward communication processes tend to have a detrimental effect on motivation and organisational learning. In some cases where there's excessive downward communications it can be onerous and stifling for employees. Positive attitudes towards safety communication can be a good indicator of safety performance.

Some initiatives that can help improve safety culture

- Some organisations may have a specific cross-functional HSSEQ committee responsible for safety in the organisation with specific safety adviser divisional representatives. Extending representation outside of just functional and divisional 'safety experts' and across all employee levels – director through to front-line operatives can help to support safety responsibility, impact and communication. It can also drive motivation and engagement for some employees with the kudos this additional responsibility it can bring.
- Investment in new ideas and safety initiatives, or a review of existing methodologies can identify areas for improvements. Sometimes, the employees responsible for the work

'Safety culture can have a significant impact on preventing a major incident.'

area, can have some of the best safety improvement ideas.

- A review of all safety training (involving employees) to ensure it is fit for purpose; identify areas for improvements.
- Corporate employee recognition and reward schemes for either new Safety initiatives or outstanding safety performance.
- Regular process and procedure reviews to check compliance, update to improve, communicate effectively and keep well written records.
- Continuing to build strong safety leadership – the OPC offers a bespoke Safety Leadership workshop for all levels of managers and directors – including both safety-critical operational and non-operational roles. It aims to help test their operational safety focus and behaviours to help look for safety performance improvements.

There is empirical evidence to suggest that safety culture is directly linked to an organisation's safety performance, but more importantly safety culture can have a significant impact on preventing a major incident. The absence of a strong safety culture has previously been implicated in some major rail accidents. Many organisations take their safety culture seriously and regularly undertake safety culture audits. Having them as part of a continuous improvement programme is very advantageous in preventing safety breaches; acting as a catalyst for safety performance learning, identifying hazards and safety improvements – contributing to employee well-being and overall organisational success.

Ian Trebinski, Group Director – HSSEQ at V, said: 'I have worked in partnership with the OPC for several years now, and I've witnessed the value of the SafeCQ

tool in practice. I've experienced it helping international maritime operators and service providers to measure, influence, and improve safety cultures across multiple varying personal and operational cultures. The OPC's manner of engaging colleagues, providing clear and concise insights, and of helping develop and deliver tangible initiatives that frontline workers can connect with and relate to is invaluable. Their involvement is another extremely beneficial toolset that HSSEQ leaders and teams can leverage to improve safety performance and cultural growth over time.'

Laura Hedley sums up by saying: 'It's really motivating and fulfilling to support an organisation with their Safety Culture project. It's a change management project that can influence the whole organisation. Impacting employees' personal safety; functional safety performance and contributing to an organisation's success. V is a leading global maritime organisation, equipping and enabling its seafarers to be future leaders in safety performance. Running an impartial Safety Culture Survey helps corroborate what's already working, provides insight and empirical data for areas that may need some attention; is a catalyst for new initiatives, as well as motivating an organisations' entire workforce to put the 'spotlight' on safety.' 



the occupational
psychology centre



Tel: 01923 234646
Email: admin@theopc.co.uk
Visit: www.theopc.co.uk
Rhona Little – Marketing Manager
marketing@v.group