



A Review of Behavioural Safety Schemes in the U.K

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Behavioural safety: is it right for you?

Behavioural safety has grown in popularity over recent years. At the behest of a chemical manufacturer, Greenstreet Berman Ltd completed a survey of experience with behavioural safety schemes at a sample of UK manufacturing sites. The aim was to provide a more robust body of information to help the company decide whether or not to implement a behavioural safety scheme, and if so, whether to adopt a commercial package, or stick to bespoke initiatives. The findings are of equal value to other firms considering this option.

Survey findings

Half of the sites surveyed by Greenstreet Berman reported significant improvements in accident rates. Sites also identified other benefits such as increased workforce involvement in terms of health and safety, and visible management commitment. The poorer results from some sites were apparently related to a mixture of implementation difficulties and concerns over whether Behavioural safety was the right solution to the firm's problems.

Positive features

Behavioural safety schemes can:

- Provide employees with a clear understanding of what comprises safe Behavioural;
- Stimulate workplace discussion of health and safety and provide a practical method (that the workforce can handle) by which the workforce can become engaged in safety;
- Provide a forum for discussion with management about health and safety, and a route by which workplace concerns can be raised;
- Provide a focus on health and safety and motivating internal goal attainment;
- Stimulate management commitment by displaying a performance graph against which they are judged, especially if a baseline score is displayed;
- Provide a vehicle for more effective staff-supervisory interaction - with coaching and feedback on how to work safely;
- Provide a vehicle by which management can demonstrate their concern for safety;
- Provide a measure of "leading indicators" of safety.

Downsides

Reported concerns include:

- Schemes tend to focus on slip and trips types of risks that are observable and repeated;
- If the scheme is implemented at a time when there is a lack of employee-management co-operation and poor safety management arrangements, it may exacerbate conflicts;
- A potentially unsustainable level of management support and backing is required;
- Schemes that rely on external support to administer the scheme can fail once the consultants withdraw, unless site ownership exists;
- Professional staff are less comfortable with the idea of behavioural observation;
- All schemes are restricted to observable behaviours, and hence do not cover lone working;
- Schemes, originated in America do not always translate well into the British culture;
- If supervisors lack safety leadership skills they can fail to provide effective feedback;
- The no blame nature of schemes does not provide a solution to "persistent" offenders who are resistant to peer pressure.

Feedback suggests that behavioural safety schemes are best suited to managing common observable behaviours that do not fall within the remit of standard operating procedures, especially personal safety related behaviours, such as wearing of PPE, where unsafe behaviour arises from peer attitudes and impractical working arrangements. In these circumstances Behavioural safety schemes allow the firm to "operationalise" its behavioural norms in a way that facilitates and encourages people to apply them to activities that are "unregulated".

It is important to note that the design and implementation of behavioural safety schemes varies significantly. Accordingly, it is simplistic to critique behavioural safety as a single entity. Key observations regarding specific types of schemes mentioned by respondents include:

Inventory driven schemes:

- Inventory driven schemes will by definition only address those items on the checklist - this may omit safety procedures, non-repetitive accident causes, infrequent tasks etc. Some users have found difficulty in applying these schemes to cover behaviours linked to major hazards or to compliance with safety procedures, such as electrical isolation work.
- Inventory driven schemes may not "make people think" - and instead lead to them to score points on the scheme, but otherwise fail to adjust unsafe behaviours.

Stop and talk schemes

- Stop and talk schemes can appear too personalise and confrontational, individuals are in danger of feeling victimised or persecuted;
- If the scheme relies on observer judgement to denote what is "safe" behaviour, there is ambiguity and conflict, with some people feeling that the scheme is inequitable;
- Difficult to manage the process as, for example, a reduction of STOP cards could mean improved performance, or equally that the scheme is not being used.

Graphical; versus non-graphical displays

- Graphical feedback of results can provide a motivator for the company, however it may also lead to points scoring and competitiveness without improving the underlying performance.
- A benefit of schemes applying performance scores is that they provide visible indicators of success or failure.

Line-Management driven schemes

- Line Management driven schemes where line management carry out the method can place significant demands on management time, that may not be practical in a minimum manning environment,
- Supervisor driven schemes may not (by definition) generate workforce involvement or ownership of safety
- There is a risk that the schemes convey the impression that the workforce is at fault.

The survey also provided insights into those aspects of behavioural safety that appeared to have a significant effect. This understanding of how behavioural safety works should enable firms to develop their own bespoke approaches. This is of particular value where "off the shelf" approaches do not meet the needs of a company. The feedback from firms suggests that effective behavioural safety schemes operate by:

- "educating" people on what comprises safe behaviour and reinforcing this by continual feedback and coaching;
- providing a workable definition of safe behaviour that people can apply to their tasks;
- removing barriers to working safely;
- providing motivation through goal-setting and feedback;
- demonstrating management's commitment to safety;
- improving co-operation and communication; and
- changing employees perception of management commitment to safety.

Thus, behavioural safety appears to work mainly by improving staff-management communication and educating people in a practical manner, rather than by a process of "cognitive dissonance" (creating the situation where there is a mismatch between what people wish to do, and what they are compelled to do). One important implication of this is that interventions should focus as much on the management style and employees'(conscious) perceptions of the firm's safety expectations as on "habitual" behaviour. Indeed, there is some evidence that many of the outcomes achieved by behavioural safety schemes can be equally well achieved by other less "packaged" approaches such as safety orientated "quality circles" and effective safety leadership. Many of the features of behavioural safety are analogous to "standard good leadership" and "good staff assessment and performance feedback". However, these less packaged approaches require input from firms for their development, whilst behavioural safety schemes are, to varying degrees, predefined.

Is it the scheme or the process of development that matters?

A number of sites stated that the "fine-tuning" and implementation greatly affected the success of the behavioural modification process. It was reported that bespoke schemes tended to create greater levels of ownership due to the high level of site involvement in developing them, and that they provided a better fit with the organisation due to the process of tailoring the scheme to the site's specific needs.

It was also reported that many of the problems associated with behavioural schemes are rooted in employee-management fears, resource conflicts, failing to adapt the scheme to focus on the firm's problem areas etc. If the scheme is implemented prematurely, without effective consultation, inadequate "tuning" and with inadequate attention to "enabling" processes (such as training supervisors in coaching skills), its impact can be blunted.

This highlights the over-riding importance of how the firm approaches the selection, development and implementation of a behavioural intervention.

Conclusions

Overall the findings from this review revealed that in many cases Behavioural Safety Initiatives worked and reduced accident rates. The companies where the initiatives were ineffective had organisational culture problems (e.g. workforce loathe to get involved in the initiative; management not committed to safety) or no safety management framework to support the behavioural safety initiatives. The Appendix to this article provides a set of key questions that should be considered when deciding whether or not to go down the route of behavioural safety. In considering these questions, it should be recognised that behavioural safety may not address the safety culture issues at your site, may be premature or unsustainable. It is also possible that, even if behaviour safety is relevant, a less "packaged" approach may achieve the same outcomes, especially as site participation should help generate ownership of the solutions. If the answers to the questions go against the option of behavioural safety, experience suggests you should consider other options, such as broader organisational change initiatives, or delaying implementation until the appropriate groundwork has been completed.

Selection and implementation questions

Will a behavioural safety scheme address the safety problems facing your organisation?

In answering this question it should be noted that behavioural safety schemes:

- do not necessarily address and resolve wider safety culture problems;
- do focus on the observable behaviour of the workforce and hence do not directly address the attitudes and behaviours of management;
- do not necessarily overcome employee-management co-operation problems;
- presume that management are committed and competent in the field of safety, and;
- presume safety management arrangements are reasonable;

Behavioural safety schemes are best suited to common observable behaviours, where unsafe behaviour arises from peer attitudes and impractical working arrangements rather than wider cultural/organisational problems.

Would a "scheme" succeed better than a less packaged approach at your firm?

On the one hand, any of the features of "behavioural safety are analogous to standard" good management" (such as coaching, constructive performance feedback, consistent reaction to undesirable behaviours) and could in theory be integrated into day-to-day ways of working. On the other hand, a packaged scheme may be a more practical way of drawing staff, supervisors and management attention onto safety.

Will the scheme address the behaviours/factors that pose a concern?

For example:

- Inventory schemes are in danger of focusing on observable and obvious unsafe "behaviours", such as failing to hold on to banisters on stairs, rather than dealing with more complex issues such as procedure compliance;
- Many schemes focus on occupational hazards rather than major/process hazards.

Inventory schemes focus on repeated behaviours and hence may not drive behaviour in infrequent tasks/activities, or accidents where there is little commonality.

To what extent can safe behaviour be pre-defined?

Inventory based schemes require behaviours to be defined. Stop and talk schemes do not require safe behaviour to be pre-defined as it relies on the observer's judgement. In these schemes it forces individuals to consider what constitutes "risky" behaviour, and consider the standards required for individuals to remain safe.

Do you wish to generate a general shift in safety attitudes or are you happy to confine yourself to a pre-defined set of behaviours?

There is a risk that the effect of inventory driven schemes is restricted to inventoried behaviours with no or little cascade effect on un-checked behaviours. There is a danger with these schemes that they simply operate on the obvious, highly visible infractions (such as PPE, running etc.) as opposed to other less visible unsafe behaviours.

Are you ready to provide and sustain (for a number of years) the level of commitment required to support behavioural safety?

This may take the form of management time, staff time for meetings/observations, and swift response to request for equipment etc. improvements. Effective behavioural safety systems require both time and money which management need to be both aware of, and committed to.

Pro's and con's of alternative schemes

Scheme	Pro's	Con's	Comments
BST Bapp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee problem solving Provides feedback to staff on what constitutes at risk behaviours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anecdotal evidence of unsafe behaviour at sites. No graphical feedback/scores Originally designed for US culture and not considered appropriate for UK 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BST provided back-up support beyond the original courses Reportedly inflexible approach
Ryder Marsh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower initial cost Ideal for tailoring for multiple sites and environments Accentuates the positive Driven by the shopfloor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaves a lot of work for the firm to modify and tailor approach to its own needs Workforce did not want to be perceived as a management spy. Resource commitments substantial to make observations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best suited for firms able and willing to commit time to tailor the approach Importance of partnership between workforce and management to carry out observations cost-effectively.
B-Safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Off the shelf means you do not have to develop it Good graphical feedback and employee driven Can "tick off" and discontinue observation of behaviours when scores are good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Places high demand on workforce time in minimum manning scenario Doesn't pick up irregular behaviours contributing to accidents Doesn't appear to generate wider compliance with safe operating practices outside of checked behaviours. Doesn't resolve wider cultural problems. Need to keep it vital and maintain its profile with long standing use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best suited for regular observable behaviours not covered by normal procedures/supervisory checks A good cultural fit for the UK.
DuPont STOP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can cover irregular activities Can cover hard to define safe behaviours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative management intervention. Confrontational No baseline measurement Top down approach causes cynicism Condescending, simplistic & Americanism. Can allow ambiguity in definition of what is safe behaviour. Supervisor driven places high demand on management time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many firms modify STOP and apply it in conjunction with other schemes to cover "hard to define" activities. ASA may exemplify how best to do this. STOP may generate thinking rather than inventory driven compliance.
J Ormond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps demonstrates effective safety leadership A coaching exercise explaining to the workforce the consequences of unsafe behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervisor driven places high demand on management time. Not employee driven Problems with data management Danger that the process becomes routine and custom and practice/habitual unsafe acts are unseen and therefore ignored. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be implemented with higher level of employee involvement.
Bespoke Schemes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Made "STOP" positive and became "Go" High degree of ownership Lower costs and not dependent on external support Fine tuned multiple approaches Provides a measure of success appropriate for a large multi-site organisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Union problems and no buy-in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reported big impact on accidents that were mainly slips and trips. Safety manager had training and time to develop bespoke system.

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