

# SHIFTING THE CULTURE

**ANDI CSONTOS** challenges us to move beyond safety maturity models to talk instead about fostering trust and using worker-led problem solving as a way to build trust and shift the culture.

**T**he IOSH Model of Safety joins several existing models in trying to structure and guide our thinking about safety culture and maturity. These frameworks articulate the various developmental stages an organisation may transition through over time and establish a common language that facilitates people's understanding of current and future states.

The typical approach to improving safety culture is to adopt a maturity model, undertake a sentiment survey and identify areas for action. However, to be impactful, users need to understand the context and limitations of their chosen model, ensure it is fit for purpose, and appropriately apply it. The more robust models provide sufficient depth to guide assessment and inform goal development. They define levers for action that, if effectively pulled, will advance maturity and performance.

Organisations also use maturity models for external benchmarking, superficially evaluating themselves against peers as an input into goal setting. They look over the fence and ask, how do we compare to them? instead of asking how does our reality compare with our aspirations?

## ASKING TRICKY QUESTIONS

Redirecting our focus inwards to ask tricky questions and seek brutally honest answers is hugely beneficial. It enables us to gain a deeper understanding of our organisation's choices and how we operate at the core. What are our specific drivers of organisational performance? How do we define a good day or good work? Why do our people make good choices? What are the 'dumb things'

## THE IOSH MODEL OF SAFETY

IOSH has introduced a simple, industry-agnostic tool for assessing and understanding an organisation's safety evolution.

Targeted at the Board level, IOSH has avoided overly technical terms and lower-level safety activities, making its Model for Safety more accessible to a broader audience. It is a helpful conversation starter, especially for Boards or executives of organisations in the early stages of safety improvement.

The Model will be familiar to many health and safety professionals. It is directional and foundational, and it does not deviate from or challenge previous constructs of safety culture.

we do that tie us down? How strong are relationships across our organisation? How do we share knowledge and learn from each other?

Subscribing to the view that health and safety outcomes are manifestations of organisational decision-making and culture encourages us to embrace higher-order approaches to organisational culture and performance and to expand our horizons and thinking beyond the safety maturity models.

But why are we still discussing safety leadership and safety culture? Why are we not discussing trust, power, or ethics?

Exploring the array of current and emergent thinking around organisational decision-making, culture and leadership is enlightening, constructive and challenges our somewhat outdated safety constructs. Research, including that of Paul J. Zak, suggests that we can concurrently improve various outcome areas (including health and safety) by lifting the ceiling on accepted leadership behaviours and fostering trust.

## WORKER-LED PROBLEM SOLVING

One method that cultivates trust to successfully and quickly shift organisational culture (and improve safety outcomes) is worker-led problem-solving. It challenges the myths that culture change is hard and takes time, must be top-down, and starts with a sentiment survey.

To summarise, worker-led problem-solving typically involves:

- Inviting your workforce into targeted sessions to define the operational problem spaces that negatively impact their work, health or safety. This will foster purpose and ownership of improvement areas and recognise contribution.
- Creating a safe-to-fail sandpit within which people have the authority to experiment and solve their operational challenges, define measures of success and develop prototypes.
- Appropriately resourcing solutions that bubble to the surface to

demonstrate the organisations' serious intent and commitment to improvement from the bottom up.

- Sponsoring and coaching people through the process builds organisational capability and strengthens relationships. Enabling workers as solution owners to drive implementation reinforces accountability and establishes the future pipeline of leaders.
- Measuring the impact of solutions and sharing outcomes widely to reinforce organisational learning and the desired, trustful behaviours. ■



A strategist and designer, **Andi Csontos** has 25 years' experience helping organisations to radically and measurably improve HSE performance and

productivity through work design.

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## BUILDING A CULTURE OF TRUST

According to his research into the neuroscience of trust, Paul J. Zak (Director, Centre for Neuroeconomics Studies at Claremont Graduate University) found that compared with people at low-trust companies, people at high-trust companies report:

- 74% less stress,
- 106% more energy at work,
- 50% higher productivity,
- 13% fewer sick days.
- 76% more engagement.
- 29% more satisfaction with their lives.
- 40% less burnout.

You cultivate trust by setting a clear direction, giving people what they need to see it through, and getting out of their way. High-trust companies hold people accountable without micromanaging them. They treat people like responsible adults.

Zak, P. J. (2017). *The Neuroscience of Trust*. HBR

Zak, P. J. (2019). *Trust factor: The science of creating high-performance companies*. AMACOM.



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