Aligning and Integrating Safety as a Value

Construction companies in partnership with workers are responsible for ensuring that jobsite hazards are eliminated or at least minimized. These partnerships are most effective when they exist within a positive safety climate.

> The **safety climate** on a specific construction project refers to managements' and workers' shared perceptions of the adequacy of the safety and health programs and the consistency between the organization's espoused safety policies/procedures and the actual conditions at the jobsite. It is the combination of safety climates from multiple organizations including the project owner, construction manager/general contractor, and subcontractors and it may be influenced by local conditions such as project delivery, scheduling, planning methods and existing norms amongst involved trades.

For an organization to develop and maintain an effective and stable safety climate, management and owners need to align and integrate safety throughout its activities to ensure that safety is not treated as less important than any other function of business practices. This is done by embedding and integrating safety-related language and responsibilities into policies and procedures, including performance evaluations, and clearly and consistently communicating safety as an expectation. Commitment to safety is also demonstrated by never compromising it for the sake of productivity. Employees of companies that do this perceive safety as a core company value rather than an additional burden or diversion from "normal" operations. The perception that safety will not be compromised is integral to achieving a positive project or organizational safety climate. Which of the following best describes your company?

UNINFORMED →	REACTIVE →	COMPLIANT →	PROACTIVE →	EXEMPLARY
Safety is considered to be a cost; a necessary evil. It is not integrated within policies/procedures. Primary focus is on productivity. There is an inadequate budget for implementing safety activities. Belief is that construction is inherently dangerous and nothing can be done to change it. Bids include a budget for OSHA fines. Accidents are viewed as human error and are punished.	Safety is inconsistently communicated as a priority. When a project falls behind schedule, production becomes valued more than safety. Safety is not valued or enforced when work is conducted on varying shifts or on Saturdays based on the theory that no one is looking (e.g., management, safety professionals, or OSHA). Safety policies are not reviewed routinely for consistency or relevancy.	Minimum OSHA requirements are set as the company standard. Safety indicators focus solely on lagging indicators. Safety meetings are conducted when required.	Company includes safety and health in bids. Subcontractor selection is based on safety and health performance – as well as bid. Safety is not compromised for the sake of productivity. Company uses principles of Prevention through Design (PtD) to reduce hazard exposures and injuries. Routine inspections are completed with items tracked to abatement.	Safety is integrated into policies and procedures, formally and informally, and communicated vertically and horizontally throughout the company. All meetings include, and preferably start with safety. Safety is never compromised for productivity. Regular company-wide safety communications reinforce the culture of safety as a value (newsletters, alerts, leadership messages, safety topics, etc.). Company measures and uses leading indicators to improve safety climate on worksites. Prevention through Design (PtD) is seamless.

How to become exemplary

Review the ideas below and check the short-term ⭕ (1-2 months), mid-term ⭕ (6-12 months), or long-term ⭕ (1-2 years) circle to indicate which you will commit to adopt and by when. *Congratulations, if you've already adopted the idea!*

Idea 1—Integrate safety expectations into policies, procedures, and guidelines to ensure they are aligned with other organizational priorities

It may be that safety is not relevant to all policies and procedures, but it probably is to most of them. By incorporating and integrating appropriate safety language into those that are, organizational members will trust that the company really does value safety, and more importantly values their employees. Of course just writing it down does not make it happen. Adequate training and resources need to be made available to those responsible for implementing safety policies, and ensuring that worker safety is really the primary value.

⭕ —— Already Adopted
⭕ —— Short-term
⭕ —— Mid-term
⭕ —— Long-term

Idea 2—Bring together people from different departments and groups to discuss project related safety strategies

○ — Already Adopted
○ — Short-term
○ — Mid-term
○ — Long-term

A positive safety climate thrives when employees in different departments or groups within an organization (or across different organizations) are given the opportunity to communicate about project-specific safety issues. For example, architects, engineers, construction workers, subcontractor managers, and even human resource employees have different perspectives on project-related safety implications and likely have different strategies for managing them. By bringing all parties to the table to discuss safety during project planning and execution, relationships are built, mutual trust is established, and safety becomes integrated and valued.

Idea 3—Reinforce safety through on-going training

○ — Already Adopted
○ — Short-term
○ — Mid-term
○ — Long-term

Supervisors and workers play an important role in identifying and addressing potential hazards. Ensuring that supervisors and workers receive training to effectively implement safety based on their roles helps everyone better understand their responsibilities for creating safe jobsite conditions. It also indicates that the organization values safety as part of productivity. Supervisor training should emphasize that safety cannot be compromised. It should focus on hazard identification, leadership, and communication skills needed to create and sustain a positive safety climate on the jobsite. Training for workers should equip them to be proactive agents in identifying and reporting potential safety hazards. Workers should also be aware of their right to stop work in cases of serious or imminent danger.

Idea 4—Ensure safety is discussed at all regularly scheduled meetings

○ — Already Adopted
○ — Short-term
○ — Mid-term
○ — Long-term

Incorporate safety issues into production and design meetings, weekly supervisory meetings, and other regularly scheduled management meetings. Start all meetings with a "safety minute". Safety should be the focal point at all on-site, weekly, and daily planning meetings. Train supervisors to carry out safety-focused discussions with workers throughout the day about potential hazards and any close calls/good catches they may have experienced or witnessed. Whenever hazards are identified in any of these meetings they should be promptly addressed and all employees should be informed of how the issue has been or will be mitigated.

Idea 5—Periodically assess if the company's espoused safety-related values are aligned with other values such as productivity, reducing cost, etc.

○ — Already Adopted
○ — Short-term
○ — Mid-term
○ — Long-term

Gathering both quantitative (surveys, audits) or qualitative (informal interviews, focus groups) safety climate data from workers and managers can help determine if there is a gap between what a company says about its safety values and its employees' perceptions. The information can be used to reveal where changes may be needed. Data should also be collected after changes are made to determine if safety climate has improved. Questions can assess the degree to which:

- employees share a proactive vision of safety;
- organizational safety goals are understood;
- accountability is equal and applied evenly at all levels;
- management demonstrates commitment to worker safety and health;
- the roles and responsibilities for implementing safety are clearly defined and understood;
- employees are a part of the safety process;
- safety is valued equal to or greater than production;
- workers feel empowered to stop work if they identify a hazardous situation;
- the principles of prevention through design (PtD) are embraced; and
- safety is integrated into planning and part of everything the organization does.