

# Challenges of Targeting Business Ambitions with Safety Culture Outlook for Corporates

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## Abstract

Employees go home safely daily and return to their jobs safely every day, that's a big result of the safety culture at the workplace. Risks can negatively affect not only internal processes within a company but also business results. Any mistake in managing at-risk behaviours can increase the company's struggle to save business. Successful leaders in 2024 will be those who truly understand employee ambitions. Understanding the core principles of positive safety culture as a behavioural science intervention, the director of operations responded that he would convince his board of directors in this direction, and be very supportive to all plants for the resources required in terms of manpower, finance or infrastructure etc. This paper explored reflections on the hurdles and solutions in the Indian corporate safety culture in the context of fulfilling business ambitions and achievements. The sample included 12 site locations and interactions with 320 managers and 236 contractor staff across Indian locations. Implications and recommendations are discussed using in-depth qualitative data. Major safety hurdles are a Lack of understanding of the risks and their impacts at all levels; Lack of decision-making and its delivery at the managerial levels; Managers at all levels not present in the field rounds; Safety culture is not a personal life practice; Managers plan activities without adequate safety procedures; They hurry up completion of work; Managers think that safety implementation is too long an approach and costly, so they shun it; Safety culture not reaching till the last person; Organisational dedicated mentors are inadequate; Manpower lacks hand-holding in safety culture; and Corporate communication managers are not active in propagating safety culture. Yet it is long-lasting to face challenges of targeting business ambitions with a safety culture outlook.

**Keywords:** Business, Corporates, Culture, Hurdles, Safety, Solutions

## 1. Introduction

Indian literature and almost all religions across the globe have advocated the concepts of non-violence, compassion and kindness for maintaining a culture of psychological safety and mental health for all humanity across nations. In the Indian philosophy, raising safety consciousness is vital for developing a safety culture which can be achieved in four ways as described below: *Buddhi*: using Intellect, logic, and the applied and theoretical knowledge of safety and risk sciences. *Identity*: growing universal affiliation and organisation, international practices on safety culture. *Manas*: positive memory, let the dead of the past be dead. Let the success not failures guide us in safety. *Chita*: achieve

collective pure intelligence about the safety consciousness of manpower in industry and elsewhere. Safety consciousness as linked with employee safety performance facilitates safety management practices and strengthens the safety culture as well (Saleem & Malik, 2022).

The important and challenging aspects of any business execution are its risk assessment as well as safety culture management so that the businesses get going in a smooth way without any adverse effects. Risks can negatively affect not only internal processes within a company and business results but also managerial decisions. There is a relationship between operational performance and business risks and they are related to companies' market position (Virglerova *et al.*, 2022).

Any error or mistake in managing at-risk behaviours can increase the company's struggle to save the business and the interests of its stakeholders and may put the company two years back. Therefore companies who delay the safety culture decisions, or make wrong decisions for their qualified resources, are increasing problems for their management. Safety culture must be an essential part of business strategic goals (Harbans, 2022).

Human errors in working environments can occur. The consequences of such errors can range from wasted time to more serious problems, affecting the safety of people and property (Caterino *et al.*, 2023). Why human error management is so difficult that it can have serious outcomes on the workforce as well as the businesses, is a critical question that needs urgent attention and action.

"In the context of India's rapid economic growth and its integration into global markets, it is crucial that we address safety and labour issues, as non-compliance could lead to non-tariff trade barriers, impeding our growth story," Labour Secretary Arti Ahuja said at the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) awards for excellence in safety systems (Rajora, 2023).

Karen McKee, ICCA President and President of ExxonMobil Product Solutions said, "ICCA has long been a strong supporter and contributor to the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and the industry has achieved significant progress in building capacity on safe chemicals management in developing countries over the years. Yet we know that more needs to be done to ensure that all people enjoy the same high standards of chemical safety, regardless of where they live. Our high-level ambition will show, through action, that we will continue to be a willing partner with all stakeholders to the advancement of the new framework's objectives." Through ongoing innovation in chemistry and the constant improvement of safe chemical management, the global chemical industry makes a significant contribution to a sustainable society: improving human health, protecting the environment, and delivering prosperity worldwide (ICCA, 2023).

A missing or lacking safety culture would lead to concerns such as increased injuries and deaths and more legal issues. Nobody is denying that workplace safety is important, but it's unfortunately common for businesses to ignore its necessity. Americans believe their safety at work is more important than ever, 5,190 fatal work injuries were recorded in the U.S. in 2021. That's an 8.9 per cent increase from 2020, and to make matters worse,

82 per cent of employers stated that they wanted to focus on implementing better health and safety protocols in 2021 (JONES, 2023).

At the enterprise level, first, the change intervention takes place, and then the transformation process continues. In an organisational change process, some residue of culture -1 remains, but in a transformational process, nothing remains of culture -1 to culture - 2. Hence first is a change in organisational behaviour, then a change in an individual. The organisational behavioural structure for change in safety culture triggers change in individual employees or workers (Kaila, 2024).

Business ambitions are impacted adversely due to hurdles and challenges in the safety culture process. Successful leaders in 2024 will be those who truly understand employee ambitions and connect with them for their physical and psychological safety (Noordende, 2023). A study revealed that sustainability remains a business imperative, but current approaches are falling short. Almost one-third (30%) of executives surveyed say they have made significant progress in executing their sustainability strategy up from 10% a year ago but turning ambitions into impact remains a challenge (IBM, 2024). This paper witnesses how can these issues be understood and overcome in targeting the business benchmarks.

## 2. Major Objective

Exploring and contemplating reflections on the hurdles and solutions in the Indian corporate safety culture in the context of fulfilling business ambitions and achievements.

### 2.1 Sample

The present study comprised field visits to 12 site locations, of which 320 managers and 236 contractor staff were sampled. The sampling method utilised was random sampling. Executives, supervisors, department heads, and EHS/HR specialists from the private and public sectors of industry constituted the study sample.

### 2.2 Method

The present article serves as an initial report resulting from a longitudinal action survey that investigated the adoption of safety cultures in a diverse array of organisations. The research involved the participation of industry professionals, who observed the investigator

carry out an action field survey. These research participants had been fostering a culture of behavioural safety conformance at their respective places of employment. Site locations were the industries spanning across India, such as steel, construction, chemicals, oil, gas, and electricity.

In order to gather primary data, ninety interviews, sixty training seminars and thirty focused group discussions were conducted. An extensive discourse that lasted for approximately three years (from 2021 to 2024) was conducted, consisting of in-depth, open-ended inquiries and personal interviews. The topics of inquiry for both interviews and discussions revolved around the challenges that are inherent in fostering a safety culture within the industrial sector.

### 2.3 Analysis

The thematic analysis performed on the qualitative data yielded the subsequent differentiations and parallels pertaining to safety culture, which were categorised into ten overarching themes. The study's implications and findings are outlined in the following section. They are the result of a comprehensive review of the literature concerning safety culture and the perspectives of industry executives representing diverse organisations.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The results of this study are categorised into 10 themes as presented below.

- Lack of understanding of the risks and their impacts at all levels.
- Lack of decision-making and its delivery at the managerial levels.
- Managers at all levels are not present in the field rounds.
- Safety culture is not a personal life practice.
- Managers plan activities without adequate safety procedures. They hurry up the completion of work.
- Managers think that safety implementation is too long an approach and costly. So they shun it.
- Safety culture does not reach the last person.
- Organisational dedicated mentors are inadequate in number.
- Role of Corporate Communications (CC) department in propagating safety culture.
- Manpower lacks hand-holding in safety culture.

1. Lack of understanding of the risks and their impacts at all levels in the organisation: Daily mass communications by managers are needed before starting work. Companies should tailor their risk management processes to these different risk categories. A rules-based approach is effective for managing preventable risks, whereas strategy risks require a fundamentally different approach based on open and explicit risk discussions. Smart companies match their approach to the nature of the threats they face (Kaplan & Mikes, 2012).
2. Human errors: lack of decision making and its delivery at the managerial levels. Daily delivery of decisions is a must with no pending decisions. The taxonomy of human errors describes cognitive biases shown in uncertain, dynamic, and complex situations. Findings indicate that all evaluated factors are at a higher-than-average level and can be considered as the significant factors leading to the occurrence of site accidents attributed to human errors in the UCI. In addition, the top five most significant factors include improper work and safety culture, low level of technology deployed for equipment and safety protection, violation of safety regulations, rushing to do work, and lack of a proper education system in the organization. The results of this study can be useful for producing better-informed decisions by various major industrial practitioners and site safety managers (Chan, *et al*, 2022).
3. Managers at all levels are not present in the field for safety rounds: Managers' compulsory daily time out in the field is critical in building safety culture (Kaila, 2024a). Managers and supervisors must be held accountable by executive management for implementing and enforcing the safety policies for a company. Determine and communicate a goal to reduce the incident frequency rate by a certain percentage within a set timeframe. Set goals for the company as well as each division or department (AEU, 2020). Visible leadership of the top management team in safety culture Transformation must be part of their KRA. Like business Head of SEIL comes fortnightly to the site and conducts BBS mass-communication as well as takes account of weekly reports on BBS implementation progress, which impacts participation of all HODs visibility and accountability in safety culture at sites. Management speeches and frequent field presence must come together for charismatic results in safety, culture and business.

4. Safety culture is not a personal life practice of employees and workers: Make safety culture a family experience. Invite family members to be involved in safety awareness at the site/plant office. Fernandes, Aloysius (2022) wrote “I learned about the concept of Safety Culture so deeply that it has become my permanent habit wherever I go. So, Safety culture is the set of shared attitudes, beliefs, and practices demonstrated by workers at all levels of the company. So, it’s like a positive safety culture connects everyone in the company around a common goal to measurably reduce near misses and incidents. It goes beyond following safety procedures and rules. This was not only followed on the site but it was followed even in my camp (Laffan Global Village), during Travelling, Transportation, Dining halls, and Tents. I was impressed by the strict measures of maintaining social distancing inside the bus and wearing a Seat Belt which is compulsory and you will find it on every Seat. So, let’s take an example, if a visitor or any person forgets to wear PPE or shows any unsafe behaviour, then the group of individuals who are at the location will intervene or convince the person positively by keeping the three Golden words in mind of ‘Comply, Intervene and Respect’ to ensure he is safe by wearing proper PPE. The group or community following the safety measures will definitely change the behaviour or attitude of the person who is non-compliant with the safety measures. Out of the context example is that one rotten mango can spoil the whole mango in the basket but let’s make it Vice Versa, A group of people following the Safety rules will definitely change the perception of an Individual”.
5. Managers and leaders plan activities without adequate safety procedures. They hurry up the completion of work (Lal, 2023). Managers must be held accountable to carry out the work with complete safety adherence and achieve a zero-harm culture. Drawing from social system theory, social identity theory, and social exchange theory, a study examined how safety management practices are linked with employee safety performance through safety consciousness and safety climate, and found that responsible leadership serves as a boundary condition in the safety consciousness - safety performance and safety climate -safety performance relationships (Saleem & Malik, 2022).
6. Managers think that safety implementation is too long an approach and costly. So they shun it. Managers must be made to believe consistently by the top management that safety is essentially a long-term approach and incidents are costlier. Accidents at work are still a heavy burden in social and economic terms, and action to improve health and safety standards at work offers great potential gains not only to employers but also to individuals and society as a whole. However, companies often are not interested in measuring the costs of accidents even if cost information may facilitate preventive occupational health and safety management initiatives. The field study carried out in a large Italian company, illustrated technical and organisational aspects associated with the implementation of an accident costs analysis tool. The results indicated that the safety culture implementation requires a considerable commitment by the company, that accident costs analysis should serve to reinforce the importance of health and safety prevention and that the economic dimension of accidents is substantial (Battaglia, *et al*, 2014).
7. Safety culture not reaching the last person is a drawback (Lal & Choueiri, 2023). In this regard, the cultural trend of correction of at-risk behaviours is to be monitored daily/weekly which demonstrates the rate of participation of employees/associates versus total manpower. The fact is that people commit at-risk behaviours as they are not self-aware of the same. Ved Mani Tiwari, CEO (Global Infrastructure Business), Sterlite Power stated that the journey that we started on creating awareness of BBS philosophy has yielded results in line with our expectation that employees at Sterlite Power are able to understand safe/unsafe risk behaviours and are able to create safe environment during work. It has improved communication among people and also the attitude of workmen towards safety (Personal Communication, 2024).
8. Dedicated mentors for promoting safety culture are lacking in organisations. Safety culture mentors must be trained regularly for organisational work culture transformation. Today’s leaders must be dedicated to listening to employees’ voices to shape the industry, as future leaders will be formed by a culture committed to employees’ mental and physical health, safety, professional growth and overall workplace culture. Valuing the significance of promoting a culture that enhances safety mentorship is essential (Frazier, 2024).
9. The role of Corporate Communications (CC) department in propagating safety culture is important in the preparation of safety banners, standees and

such things where branding happens. Definitely, it helps if the corporate team propagates about BBS. It will sound like a leadership call. At Sembcorp, all safety communications are taken care of by the safety department. However Corporate Communications help in designing EDMs or Videos. At Air Products: The corporate communications department is conducting an employee behaviour related improvement/development program. At Afcons, SOP and Policy are formed by the Corporate office by the MD and HSE head. At ONGC, safety videos are prepared by CC. Safety briefing videos for every building in every conference hall across India are played before the start of every meeting. CC plays an active role in organising International and National Safety conferences. CC plays a main role in National Safety Day celebrations across organisations in Safety Week which includes BBS. At IOCL, Corporate communications play a role in the circulation of publishing daily news matters across the country wherein all safety matters covered BBS.

10. Manpower lacks hand-holding in safety culture. The managers trained as safety culture mentors must handle the entire manpower to spread supportive safety culture down the levels. Handholding is an important skill whereas micromanagement could be a curse. Great leaders understand the importance of handholding when the team needs it badly. Handholding is effective when it is sought by the team. Micromanagement is imposed handholding. Energy gets infused in handholding whereas it gets drained in micromanagement. Leaders have to practice the skill of handholding but they should get out soon rather than micromanaging. It is important to inspire the team through mission and excite it through vision. Appropriate structure, systems, periodic reviews, and refinement can help reduce micromanagement (Patil, 2020).

## 4. Conclusions and Implications

**The cultivation of safety culture** has evolved into a pivotal facet of overall safety progress, drawing increased attention from a variety of businesses across the globe. There is a practical perspective on mitigating accidents through the establishment of enterprise safety culture, as well as greater emphasis on theoretical considerations, specifically focusing on the impact of safety culture atmospheres within enterprises on employees (Wen *et al.*, 2024).

All CEOs expect their plants to give maximum output, this expectation is fulfilled when CEOs fulfil expectations of their plants, and then their expectation becomes a reality and there develops a sense of mutual trust that guarantees the growth of a company and its business ambitions crop up for serving the nation with the manpower working without an injury in a mutually caring culture.

Monitoring trends of positive safety culture is necessary to fulfil business ambitions as below.

- Monitoring weekly trend of increase in number of observers per site/plant/cluster.
- Monitoring weekly trends of increase in number of spot-corrections by observers.
- The number of rewards presented to the best safety observers by the top management each month.
- Linking safety culture to the HSE scorecard of the company.

Employees go home safe daily and return to their jobs safely every day, that's a big result of the safety culture at the workplace. Discuss behaviours of observations amongst each team member every day. Inspire and challenge observers for their actionable involvement. Change is there but new workers behave safe and rewarding and recognising their contribution to a safe workplace are the challenges. Team leaders are mentors of safety culture but everyone must become an observer of at-risk behaviour.

Employers have to aim high to be global in safety standards and culture to be global in business. The safety culture board team need to be a solution provider on the ground. Corporate leadership looks at the larger socio-familial context of their own employees so that no one gets injured on any single working day. Leadership's visible presence on the ground for inspiring a positive safety culture. The finer role of corporate leadership is to seek inspiration from grassroots leadership and also support for change. Human errors often hurdle the safety culture which can be managed by the concept implementation of a Totally Safe Organisation (TSO). In a safety culture, human errors are not punished, as they are seen as opportunities to improve and learn from underlying system problems.

A sustained safety culture is not only behaviour-based but also value-based, a corporate value which is a long-term intervention. Management must talk about business as well as risks while they interact with plant

managers in terms of planning and implementation. The management must emphasise the positive relationship between a sustainable corporate safety strategy and stakeholder perceptions that bring advantages to business performance (Hristov *et al.*, 2022).

Safety culture is becoming increasingly popular in many industries to reduce the risk of major disasters and workplace accidents. The three countries that contributed the most to the literature on safety culture research were the USA, China, and Australia. The subjects with great popularity in the safety culture, as determined by keyword frequency, are safety climate, safety performance, safety, safety management, and human factors (Yalçın, 2024).

Safety hurdles and solutions in fulfilling business ambitions are summarised in Table 1.

Workplace culture is shifting around the world. A study in the California Management Review found that organisations are becoming more flexible, transparent, supportive and decisive. To adapt to this shift, many safety professionals are turning to emerging communication strategies like humble inquiry that challenge current power dynamics to cultivate better relationships and improve safety results (ASSP, 2023). Corporates must ensure that the managers give daily time-out in the field, connect with workers, make safety culture a family experience, carry out the work with complete safety adherence, believe that safety is essentially a long-term approach and incidents are costlier, trend of correction of at-risk behaviours is to be monitored, safety culture mentors must be trained regularly, corporate communications department must be active in propagating safety culture, and the leaders

must handhold workers daily for safety obedience (Lal & Choueiri, 2024).

Corporates' safety culture vision is the major factor affecting safety management practices. Leaders need to understand that the Ornamental Safety Culture (OSC) is different from a passionate safety culture (PSC). OSC is mostly superficial and may not be effective in the long run, but PSC is deeper and leaders look for ground level behavioural change and transformation among the workers. Observers are trained to be the major nutrition and immune system of safety culture for its sustainability and positive outcomes. On the other hand, when people are multi-tasking, or they have too much work to do in a relatively short time than what must be required, they pass the buck, or they miss something critical leading to fatal incidents. Business managers must understand and make sure this does not happen. Employees and associates need personal experience and discussions with each other, mainly with managers on safety culture to sustain the same. Vision Zero is the vision of a world without occupational accidents and work-related illnesses. The highest priority is the prevention of fatal and serious incidents at the workplace or any place. Research shows that many nations adopting a more holistic Vision Zero / Safe System approach are successfully reducing traffic injuries and deaths. This requires a set of five actions such as advanced risk assessments that form the backbone of this proactive strategy, effective engagement and communication, safety economics - the strategic integration of safety practices with the organisation's economic objectives, the role of safety professionals with

**Table 1.** Safety culture hurdles and solutions in fulfilling business ambitions

<b>Hurdles:</b>	<b>Solutions:</b>
Lack of understanding of the risks and their impacts at all levels. Human errors: lack of decision making and its delivery at the managerial levels. Managers at all levels were not present in the field. Safety culture is not a personal life practice. Managers plan activities without adequate safety procedures. They hurry up the completion of work. Managers think that safety implementation is too long an approach and costly. So they shun it. Safety culture does not reach the last person. Organisational dedicated mentors are lacking. The role of the corporate communications department in propagating safety culture is lacking. Manpower lacks hand-holding in safety culture.	daily mass communications before starting work. daily delivery of decisions, no pending decisions. Managers' compulsory daily time-out in the field. Make safety culture a family experience. Managers must have no option but to carry out the work with complete safety adherence. Managers must be made to believe consistently by the top management that safety is essentially a long-term approach and incidents are costlier. The cultural trend of correction of at-risk behaviours is to be monitored. Safety culture mentors must be trained regularly. The Corporate Communications (CC) department needs to be active in propagating safety culture. Managers must handhold manpower for safety.

a unique combination of open-mindedness and radical empathy, and an urge to re-evaluate and strengthen their foundational safety practices (Harris, 2024).

**Business ambitions of the corporate leaders** and their passion for achieving excellence in safety culture would go together in a sustained manner for zero-harm objectives. Often, organisations achieve business excellence but not safety excellence which constrains the business growth in the long run. This paper makes pathways for fulfilling business ambitions with a safety culture. But it depicts that there is no shortcut to safety culture and it requires a host of actions to safe business. In recent years, the Indian safety and security industry has experienced steady growth, with some segments estimated to be growing 15 to 20 per cent annually. Population growth, urbanisation, industrialisation, and expansion of infrastructure and mass transportation systems are all driving expectations for greater safety and security measures, particularly linked to critical national infrastructure projects. The security systems in India are broadly classified into the following sub-sectors: cybersecurity; electronic security; fire safety, detection, and prevention; road safety; private and industrial security; and personal protective apparel and equipment. The industry is highly fragmented and consists of local manufacturers, system integrators, sub-contractors, regulatory and certification agencies, distributors, consultants, and service providers (ITA, 2024). Though there are challenges and intricacies for sustaining business excellence with a safety culture, nevertheless it is very much possible and feasible by a supportive work culture of compassion, care and commitment. Thus it is long-lasting to face challenges of targeting business ambitions with a safety culture outlook.

## 5. Acknowledgement

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