



Future principles of safety excellence

Safety thinking needs to evolve when many of us “experts” have been preaching the same gospel to challenge beliefs and behaviors. For two decades, an effort has been underway with clients to help people think differently. Some of the common principles followed by the best safety experts today are: 1. People are part of the solution, not the problem; 2. Safety is more about what we are doing than about the results themselves; 3. We cannot define success by the absence of errors, injuries or incidents; 4. Safety improvement efforts occur because of doing it for the right reason and to benefit others, not because of a regulatory requirement.

All progress begins by thinking differently. We must mature our thinking if we want to achieve improved results.

In my 2015 book, “Forecasting Tomorrow: The Future of Safety Excellence,” I made seven predictions that would become standard practice for those searching for excellence. With each passing year, all show signs of becoming true. So, now the thinking must evolve once again.

Below are the 10 safety excellence prin-

ciples we should collectively work on to make them common ways of thinking across organizations by 2030:

1. We define excellence by the ability to achieve and repeat great results and evidence of profound insight into what generates the results, with a shared mindset across the culture that further improvement will always be possible.

2. We define success in operational terms that make sense to the workforce. The definition focuses on what performance would commonly explain the results.

3. Our definition of success in safety (corporate or operationally) is perceived as becoming antiquated every five years.

4. Safety efforts are part of a comprehensive, long-term strategy that concisely communicates where we are going, what success looks like, where we are today, our strategic priorities to close the gaps and how we measure progress, as well as containing the roles and responsibilities for everyone in the company.

5. The world is three-dimensional and so are our measurements. Balanced scorecards

are an introduction to this, not the finale. We measure drivers of performance, the value derived from efforts and our results.

6. The multi-year, comprehensive safety strategy advises, protects and ethically supports the business’ trajectory strategy. It doesn’t compete with it.

7. Everyone sees themselves as actors in the safety strategy. They know their part, roles, responsibilities and expected results, and behave accordingly.

8. Because safety is operationalized in line leadership, perceptions of the safety professionals have evolved from the grunt (paper-pusher) to the guardian (program owner) to the guru (subject matter expert and strategic adviser).

9. Safety performance and cultural improvement efforts are driven by data and perceived as valuable by the customers and consumers of our safety improvement efforts.

10. Safety is truly a core value and advises the business’ growth and continuity. Safety reports directly to the most senior officer and regularly updates the board of directors on the risks to the business, strategy

and progress scorecard.

Consider sharing these safety excellence principles with your leadership team. How the principles are received and agreed upon will indicate the maturity of safety excellence thinking and where you are on the safety excellence journey.

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