

>> Safety Measurement: The Dysfunctional Big Picture

Far too often, organizations known for excellent safety performance are surprised by significant events occurring at their sites that result in major property damage, or worse, death. If you are surprised by results, positive or negative, you are not paying attention to the indicators.



Shawn M. Galloway:

Rather than defining safety excellence as a lack of injuries, define it by the actions taken by employees to contribute to safety performance.

Are individuals in your company excited or fearful of safety measurement? Is measurement used to hold people accountable for what they did well, or what they did wrong? When new measurement opportunities are identified, are people eager to participate, or do you anticipate managing resistance to change?

The scenario: Two years from now, you receive an award celebrating the achievement of perfection in the standard measurements of safety performance. The metrics that indicate this are your incident frequency, severity, and costs. You have achieved a year with zero recordables, zero claims and most importantly, not a single minor injury. Zero people were hurt in your organization. Congratulations!

As the recipient of this significant achievement, you ready yourself to receive this award. With the plaque handed to you, the presenter asks the following questions, "What specifically did you do this year to accomplish this result? Do you feel highly confident that you'll achieve the same results again next year?"

MANAGING RESULTS OR PERFORMANCE?

The ability to answer this question correctly and confidently is the mark of true safety excellence and effective leadership. If you are unable to determine what observable performance is occurring to achieve this desirable result, how will it

be achieved year after year? Luck? Luck may be important when choosing lottery numbers, but it is not an effective strategy for high-performing individuals.

Measuring the sustainability of safety excellence is no different than any other area of operational performance. Excellence is sustained when defined by the observable necessary performance, the expected results that follow and the interface between the two. Regretfully, most organizations only measure and manage the results, leading many to solely focus on the goal and ignore the path towards it.

GOALS DEFINED IN THE POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE?

Decades ago, there was a great movement to end world hunger. With such an ambiguous goal, little support and funding followed. Mother Theresa once said, "If I look at the mass, I will never act. If I look at the one, I will."

In the 1980s, a television host walked a little girl in front of the screen and asked the viewing audience to feed the starving child. Charities, known for their ability to solicit discretionary effort, leveraged the ability to show the goal in the positive, making it personal and inspiring discretionary effort. Imagine if this strategy was applied to our goals in organizational safety performance?

Rather than defining safety excellence as a lack of injuries, define it by the actions taken by employees to contribute to safety performance. Then, hold them pos-



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itively accountable for their individual effort and celebrate when success is achieved. Consider the impact on the culture when the goal is defined by fewer injuries, which are, in fact, failures of the organizational systems to protect the injured parties.

"Let's work really hard this year to fail less," becomes the informally spoken rallying cry. Rather than a culture aligned to achieve something, you have a culture working hard to have fewer failures. Would a coach motivate players by saying, "Don't lose any games and we can become the best-ranked team!" I think not.

Organizations never will achieve sustainable excellence in safety when the focus is on what not to do, and the measurements are negatively defined. Measure what you want and celebrate when goals are achieved. When you reward results, you reinforce the performance, both good and bad, that achieved it. Without a clear understanding of which specific performance led to specific results, it is likely that the only correlation is luck.

WHAT TO MEASURE?

Hard data always will be necessary. Most leaders have learned to trust data and hold a very low opinion of anecdotal information. It is no wonder some employees feel their employer only is eager to spend money to address safety concerns following the injury, rather than prior to it. Occasionally, we need to listen to the opinions of staff and employees.

Consider finding yourself in the middle of the ocean and you receive a message that you are halfway to your destination, yet you can see no visible navigation points. This is similar to our often-used lagging indicators. Your frequency rate does little to prescribe the path to continuous improvement once you reach a certain point. It is important to determine how you will ensure you are working your plan, and if your plan is working.

A transformational measurement for one organization can be a point-less metric for another, yet transformation is what is needed. Be wary of offerings that provide a standard list of leading indicator measurements

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MANAGING SAFETY

of behavior, culture, perceptions and activities. What works for one organization will not necessarily work for another company. Moreover, if we desire for workers to have ownership and hold themselves personally accountable for contributing towards the results, those being measured need to at least provide input into the measurements. They also should be privy to explanations of the reasoning and rationale behind them.

Be sure to answer ever-present "What's in it for me?" (WIIFM) question, especially when attempting to measure discretionary effort. Each organization needs to deter-

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mine what measurements are most important for them. This should result from a collaborative exercise with participants from each level in the organization, board of directors included, for optimal effectiveness.

What is the goal of measurement, metrics, programs, observations, audits, etc.? It's not to gather data, but to help focus and align individuals in a direction to achieve safety excellence at work and away. The true purpose of any form of effective measurement is to motivate people, create and reinforce clear expectations, direct both mandatory and discretionary effort and, most importantly, inspire people towards a goal!

Do not get inundated in attempting to identify all the things you could measure and the pathways to obtain the metrics. You will have failed before the measurement begins. As in any measurement, it is not just the quantity, but also the quality. The metrics are important but are not the goal. The goal is ensuring we are doing the right things to create the right culture and providing the right leadership at all levels to result in sustainable safety excellence.

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