

Building a Safety Culture

Byron A. Ellis – October 06, 2017



Organizations can prevent injuries by creating a culture of safety. Dilley and Kleiner (1996) argued that creating a culture of safety means that employees are constantly aware of the hazards in the workplace. According to Cooper (2001), many managers and safety practitioners do not know what a “safety culture” is. A safety culture integrates safety in all organizational systems. Thus, safety should be a principal and measurable organizational goal, known to all, and with accountability throughout the organization (Safety Management Systems, 2009).

Active involvement of employees with safety on a daily basis is an important indicator of a positive safety culture (Cooper, 2001). One way that management can gain employees’ involvement and commitment for developing a positive safety culture is to set aside time for employee-run monthly safety meetings, where employees discuss safety issues and make suggestions for improvements. Another is top management involvement and commitment in all aspects of safety and health management.

Safety should not be treated as a “bolt-on extra” adding to overhead and production costs with little or no payback. If safety is seen in that light, it will be rejected as a business indicator. Zohar (1980) draws on the notion of “safety climate” to explain the behavior of individuals regarding safety. Climate mediates the relationship between certain organizational characteristics, such as management commitment to safety, the openness of communication links, and the stability of the workforce, and safety behavior (Lyneis & Madnick, 2008).

Thus, management plays a large role in preventing accidents (Lyneis & Madnick, 2008), particularly in their perceived attitudes (Zohar, 1980), concerns (Brown & Holmes, 1986), commitments (Dedobbeleer & Beland, 1991), actions (Cox, et. al, 1998), and support (Gershon, 2000) towards safety. When managers fail to include safety in work tasks, they signal that it is not an important organizational goal.

The organization’s macro strategy emerges from top leadership and cascades down and upwards and addresses gaps, “to be” conditions and should be framed within a measurable framework, such as the balanced scorecard (BSC) developed by Kaplan and Norton (1992). The BSC has four perspectives: (1) innovation and learning, (2) customer, (3) internal business, and (4) financial.

The BSC is suitable for strategy development, performance measurement and goal accountability (Niven, 2003; Lang, 2004). Thus, the internal perspective should include the organization safety goals, such as zero injury.

Figure 1 depicts how the BSC links the organization’s mission and vision to measurable strategies (goals) associated with the four BSC perspectives (Sharma, 2009). Examples of measurable safety goals are:

Goal 1: Zero injury for fiscal year 2018.

Measurement 1: Number of injuries.

Goal 2: Identify one key top management and union officials to champion the change.

Measurement 2: In place by the first quarter.

Goal 3: Establish a steering committee comprised of management, union, and safety staff.
 Measurement 3: In place by the first quarter.
 Goal 4: Develop site safety vision, key policies, and operation plans.
 Measurement 4: In place by the first quarter.

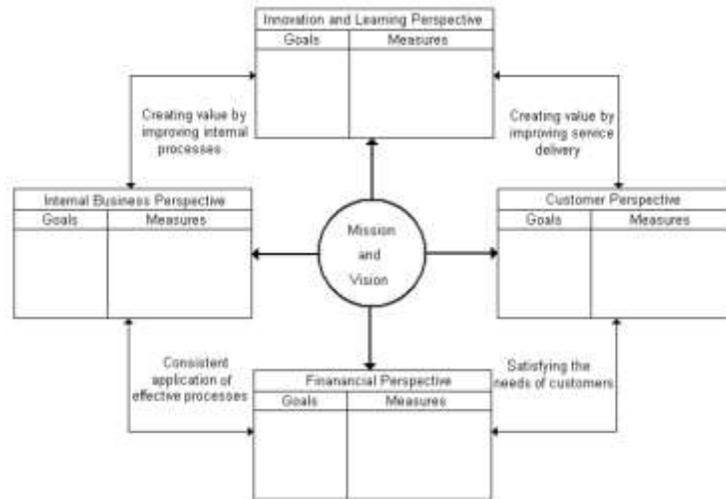


Figure 1 - Perspectives of the Balance Scorecard

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