



What's Involved in a Full Behavioural Intervention?

ARTICLE No 1

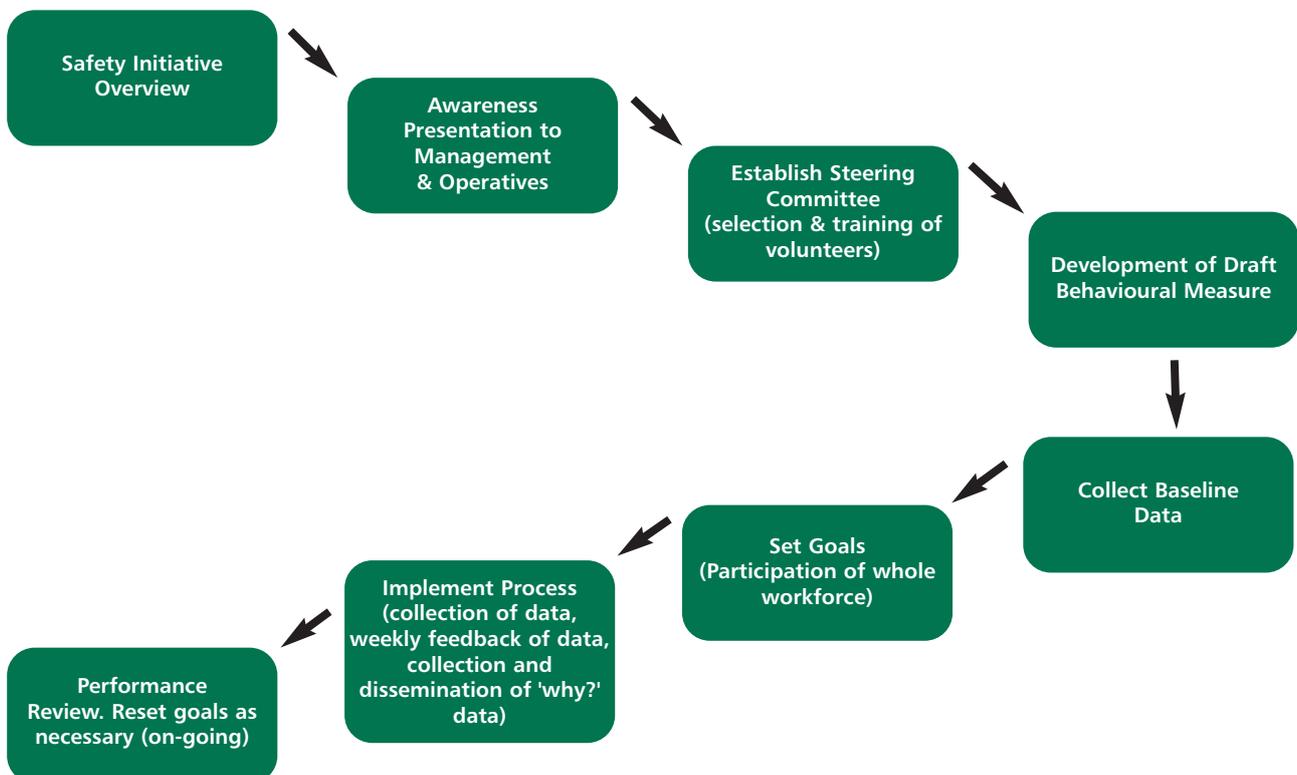
Previous issues of Training Solutions have introduced the basic principles that underpin a behavioural safety process and have explored how this approach can assist in identifying root causes of unsafe behaviour in the workplace. In this briefing we will outline the main stages in a 'full behavioural safety programme' and the role each step plays in the process.

An Overview of a Full Behavioural Intervention

One fundamental concept that underpins a full behavioural safety process is that of scientific measurement with the aim of continual or ongoing improvement. It's the old management idea of 'if you can measure it you can manage it'. Or putting it another way 'if you're not measuring it, you can't manage it'. In simple terms numerical data (in this case about people's behaviour) is used to track improvement towards predetermined goals (as agreed by everyone). If the data doesn't show improvement then efforts are made to find out why things aren't getting better.

The Main Steps in Full Behavioural Intervention

That's the theory, and no doubt you are already aware of this process. But what specifically is involved? Figure 1 (below) shows most of the main steps of a full behavioural intervention.



The process begins with an overview to 'find out where we are' and to identify potential obstacles and opportunities to a successful intervention. The overview might be conducted by using a commercially available 'Safety Climate Questionnaire' such as is available from HSE. Alternatively an in-house version might be used. For example, Rank Hovis McDougal have their own safety climate questionnaire which they use before any safety initiative. Typical findings of this type of survey might be that communications about safety are problematic, that the view of the management and operatives diverges greatly - or that the existing culture within the supervisory level might be a problem for any empowered-based initiative.

Once the scene is set the process of gaining the involvement of the workforce, a fundamental principle of behavioural process, begins with an awareness presentation. The aim of this session(s) is to explain to everyone what's going to happen, why, and to invite comment. This has a symbolic value of inclusion and dissemination of information. It also confronts any cynicism of 'we've heard this sort of thing before'. The aim is to emphasise that behavioural safety really is different, that front line ownership is real and that no blame (or blame) really does apply. The outcome of this step is, hopefully, a suitable number of enthusiastic front line volunteers who will form the steering committee.

The steering committee is as the name implies the body that plans, directs and oversees the whole process. It's important that it is made up of largely front line employees who represent a reasonable cross-section of the workforce. At this stage these committee members will receive training in the fundamentals of behavioural safety along with the specific skills they will need to make it happen, eg, presentation techniques.

One of the first tasks of the steering committee is develop a behavioural measure. This involves drawing up a list of up to 30 or so key behaviours that the intervention will focus on and measure. For ease of measurement this list will be grouped into no more than a handful of categories (eg Housekeeping, PPE & Plant and Equipment). Each of these behaviours will be defined specifically and will be observable to the naked eye. Items that cannot be defined specifically in words - eg 'overalls should not be overly impregnated in oily waste' - will be illustrated with photographs. Where unsafe behaviours happen very quickly - eg crossing hands whilst using an air powered nail gun - videos might have to be made for training purposes.

As well as finalising the measure, Steering Committees also need to undertake the following:

- setting up control procedures to ensure enough measures are taken - and that they are suitably randomised
- setting up communication procedures to ensure qualitative information is passed on to the appropriate individuals - and that responses to these suggestions and ideas are passed promptly back to the workforce
- designing feedback charts and deciding on their location.

Once the list of key behaviours has been defined, baseline data is collected via direct workplace observations. At this stage observers are recruited and trained in how to assess safety behaviour in the workplace. However, the steering committee members will also act as the observers to speed the process along. The process involves making random workplace observations of their colleagues at work. On the basis of their list of definitions they score the 'behaviours' they observe as either safe or unsafe - there's no in-between. For each behaviour sufficient observations will be made to provide a realistic % safe score.

This baseline information is then presented back to the entire workforce in a session(s) that involves participative goal setting. The idea is to say 'okay, this is where we are now, what do you think the level of safety behaviour should be/can be?' Behavioural safety specialists say that these goal setting sessions are very important, if only for their symbolic value. Even if people do not take 'full ownership' of the goals, or even speak at the session, it is important that they are fully briefed about the behavioural initiative. If nothing else, being given the genuine opportunity to contribute or dissent removes the opportunity to make excuses or dismiss the initiative at a later stage. Once the behavioural goals have been agreed, the initiative is ready for widespread implementation. At this stage additional observers can be trained. Typically between 10 and 20% of the workforce will act as observers. Clearly, the more observers the greater the workforce involvement in the intervention and therefore the greater the commitment to its success. The observations of workplace behaviour are, and must be, taken on a random sample basis. This minimises the chance of any sampling errors. The results are then collated and simple graphs produced. These graphs are then placed in prominent positions (notice boards, newsletters, etc.) to provide feedback to everyone concerned.

The theory is that over a period of time the results of these observations will show a process of continual improvement, even if it's very gradual. Indeed, there is now a large body of evidence from a wide range of organisations who have implemented a full behavioural intervention that proves this is exactly what happens. However, they often encounter 'plateaus' where the improvement of specific behaviours appears to stall. When this happens the steering committee must investigate and ask 'why? can't our colleagues achieve a significant improvement in safe behaviour in this particular area?' These investigations usually find any number of environmental, task, management or hardware obstacles that prevent their colleagues working safely (for a fuller exploration of this type of analysis of root causes of unsafe behaviour see issue 3 of Training Solutions).

Once these 'barriers' to safe behaviour have been identified the steering committee takes responsibility for removing them if they are easily solved or bringing them to the attention of line management if they can not be.

Experience shows that this type of process often achieves its goal within a matter of months. During regular performance reviews the steering committee will instigate the setting of higher goals if meaningful improvements have been achieved.

Why is this Process so Effective?

There are many possible reasons why this type of full behavioural intervention process has proven to be so effective in a wide range of organisations. If you talk to any member of a successful steering committee they will usually tell you that what they have really achieved is not the attainment of a behavioural goal(s) but rather the introduction of real improvements into the workplace as a result of their 'why' investigations. Critically, it seems that these improvements are what motivates them and their colleagues to keep the whole process going.

Another possible driving force is the Hawthorne effect - by simply focusing on behaviour and measuring there will be positive effects. However, it's generally accepted that this has short-term impact. Alternatively, some feel that the process of participative goal setting in which the entire workforce agree and commit to the goals is the driving force behind a successful intervention. Others feel that goal setting must be combined with the process of feeding back the data to all concerned if the intervention is to work. There's a lot of weight in this argument. It is impossible to learn anything without accurate feedback. Imagine trying to learn to speak without hearing what you have said, or trying to improve your golf without knowing where the shot went. Positive feedback is also very motivating - we all take pleasure in finding out we're improving even if it's only beating our previous record for sit-ups or running around the block (Algera 1990). The effective use of the feedback in occupational settings generally, and with a health and safety context specifically, is minimal. What types of positive feedback to health and safety behaviour does your organisation currently provide? For most, the only feedback is negative - we are told off when things go wrong.

It is also interesting to note the parallels between a full behavioural intervention and the widely discussed need for training evaluation. Both require regular workplace observations of employees behaviour. Maybe a behavioural intervention could provide a framework for certain aspects of your training evaluation? Both processes also require the setting of goals (objectives in training terminology). Perhaps a full behavioural intervention can also provide a vehicle for involving front line employees in the process of setting training objectives?

Case Study One

Removing Barriers to Unsafe Behaviour

A company involved in a full behavioural safety intervention found that air powered nail guns were not being placed on their 'holsters'. The suggestion from the steering committee was that the holsters should be made more user friendly as operatives would 'just leave it (the gun) and crack on' if initial attempts to park their guns safely were unsuccessful. (Pay was closely linked to productivity.) Initially management prevaricated because of the expense, pointing out that 'after all they only need to take a little more care'. Naturally, observation scores stayed at similar levels for weeks. Eventually the investment was made and the holsters were adjusted to more easily 'catch' the nail guns. Within days the observed number of nail guns left out of their holsters had fallen dramatically.

Case Study Two

Beckham, Cantona and Positive Feedback

David Beckham was interviewed during the season that Eric Cantona captained Manchester United to their second double and gave a good example of the motivating qualities of mild, but positive, feedback. He was asked, "How can Cantona be a motivating captain on the pitch - he never seems to say anything". Beckham replied that "If I do something good he'll wink at me - that charges me up for the rest of the half".

**Ryder-Marsh (Safety)
Limited,**
21 York Road, Chorlton,
Manchester M21 9HP,
England

Tel: +44 (0)161 881 8471
Fax: +44 (0)161 862 9514
www.rydermarsh.co.uk
info@rydermarsh.co.uk

