



Overcoming the Plateau

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Behavioural safety is probably the biggest growth area in the field of safety management. It is also certainly the most innovative development of recent times and has allowed a large number of companies to overcome the notorious plateau in safety performance reached when all other 'traditional' safety approaches have been fully implemented. Companies such as Chep UK - the pallet distributors - have seen their transgression rates halved within months of introducing a behavioural programme

What is behavioural safety and why is it different?

Behavioural programmes focus on specific behaviours that lead directly to accidents. For example, forklift trucks being driven with their forks raised or being parked incorrectly. Other behaviours might address manual handling techniques, PPE and general housekeeping.

Behavioural practitioners develop accurate measures of the most important of two dozen or so key behaviours at a given site. They then train observers to take accurate measurements to help progress the site towards specific goals. Rather than reacting to accidents, behaviourists pro-actively target the key behaviours that lead to accidents before the accident or near-miss happens

What about attitudes?

Huge amounts of research show that attitudes are notoriously difficult to change or even to measure. Behaviourists simply aim to improve behaviours and are happy to let attitudes take care of themselves (in the short term at least).

Another fundamental difference with the approach is that goals for improvement are set - and reset when needed - solely by the work force, in a process of continuous improvement. Indeed, the whole is controlled and driven by a Steering Committee of operatives (with perhaps a single manager present for support and advice).

As well as collecting hard data, observers are also trained to discuss transgressions with operatives, with the aim of finding out why they are occurring. It may be simply lethargy, but more often the behaviour itself is a symptom of a more fundamental cause. This might, for example, be lack of awareness of risk (a training issue), unavailability of correct equipment, or poor operating systems. What the observers are looking for are the real underlying obstacles to improvement in safety performance. Importantly, a "no name, no blame" approach is rigorously enforced.

The managers' role

They have only one: to support the initiative by providing time for the operatives to take measures and to action enough of the practical suggestions collected by observers, to make them feel their efforts are worthwhile. When a behavioural intervention fails - as they sometimes do - this management failure is almost always the reason.

If you'd like to read a longer introduction to behavioural safety go to:
www.rydermarsh.co.uk/articles_index.html/article_12.pdf

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