

May 2000

Presentation on "Health & Safety Climate Survey Tool" by Norman Byrom, HSE, Bootle.

Norman started by giving the background to the Climate Tool package which was based on a 71 point questionnaire, Guidelines for conducting the survey and Windows Software for analysis of the results. It was possible to customise the questionnaire and to include 8 demographics like Male/Female, Shift type and Age, although these details tended to reduce anonymity.

This diagram shows the various stages which organisations pass through as they progressively improve their accident rates. After the introduction of safer technology, they then address the improvement of safe systems of work. Finally, they attempt to tackle the complex and sensitive issue of the Human Factors which hold the key to "why do people have apparently inexplicable accidents?"

These "Human Factors" embrace Environmental, organisational and job factors, as well as human and individual characteristics, which can influence **behaviour** in a way which may affect health and safety.

An ACSNI report on the influence of Human Factors defined the Safety Culture and thus:-

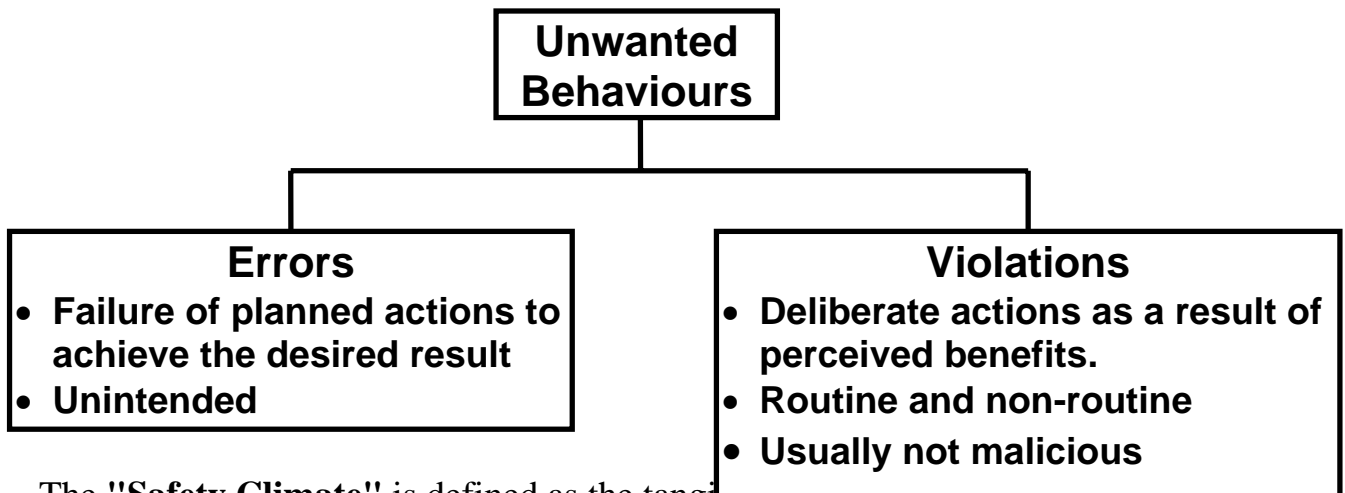
"The safety culture of an organisation is the product of individual and group values, attitudes, perceptions, competencies and patterns of behaviour that determine the commitment to, and the style and proficiency of, an organisation's health and safety management.

Organisations with a positive safety culture are characterised by communications founded on mutual trust, by shared perceptions of the importance of safety and by confidence in the efficacy of preventive measures."

Norman commented that trying to address the human factors was rather like trying to **"nail jelly to a wall"** and that people feel happier dealing with the **'hardware'** of safety, because it was more predictable. He added that there were often several different types of culture in any one organisation at any time.

In the **ideal world**, he continued, a series of defensive barriers were erected between **hazards** and the possibility of an **accident**. In **reality**, however, a series of failures at all levels in the management chain, and all stages of the production process, were capable of punching holes in those protective barriers. In the event of a particular set of failures, or 'holes' coinciding, then the potential for an accident is created.

The "Unwanted Behaviours" in this failure set are the result of human influence which can be analysed as follows:-



The "**Safety Climate**" is defined as the tangible outputs of the safety culture, as viewed by an individual or a group of workers at any particular time. The **Health and Safety Climate Survey Tool** sets out to identify the characteristics of these critical outputs and analyse them so that corrective action may be taken. The 71 Statement Questionnaire examines the following factors:-

- **Organisational Commitment**
- **Line Management Commitment**
- **Supervisor's Role**
- **Personal Role**
- **Workmate's influence**
- **Competence**
- **Risk Taking Behaviour**
- **Obstacles to Safe Behaviour**
- **Permit-to-Work operation**
- **Accident Reporting**

The Survey tool was designed reflect the major factors in HSG65, Successful Health and Safety Management and Norman demonstrated how close the correlation was on a chart.

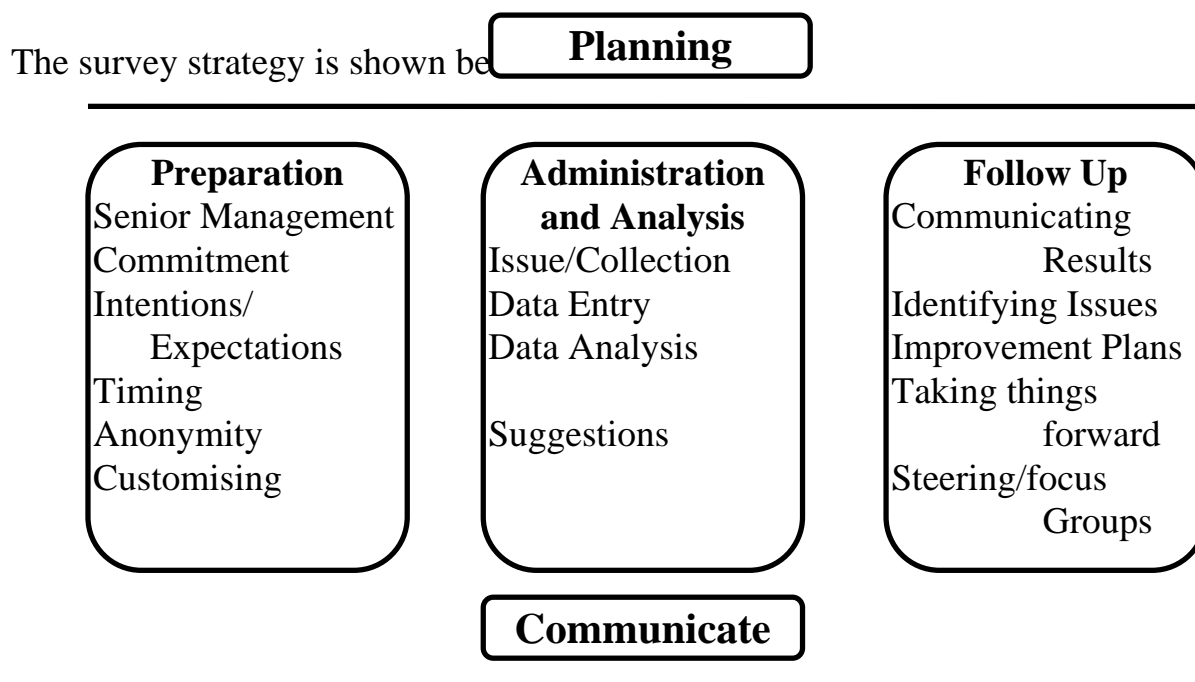
Some obstacles to safe behaviour could be caused by poor safety procedures or instructions, or safety rules that are not really practicable. Where significantly hazardous work is controlled by a **Permit-to-Work** system this very system that is supposed to protect workers can cause serious delays and conflicts which pressures people to violate safe practice. Norman cited an example of a chemical plant which operated an 'excellent' PTW system where authorising signatures were monitored and found to be on 98% of the documents for work. However, when the person writing the permits was questioned, his work load was such that he was fully occupied writing all day and only 'tried' to visit the jobs to check what was happening 'on the ground'. A classic case of "**Good People in a Poor System**".

Norman warned of the danger of using the Safety Climate Tool if managers lacked the prior commitment to implement the results rigorously. It was counter productive to raise expectations with the introduction of the high profile technique,

only to 'let them down' afterwards. In such circumstances, it would be better not to have tried the technique at all!

The secret of the tool is in the timing and the advance preparation for the follow up actions at the end. For instance, now would not be a good time to introduce it in the Rover Group! Questionnaires should be issued in briefing sessions, when it has been found that success rates of 99% have been achieved. Safety Committees and Safety Representatives can also play a crucial role in the build up to the survey.

The tool is also capable of being customised for the questionnaire to be used at different, discrete levels in an organisation, depending on the problems experienced.



Norman said that the benefits were that the survey tool:-

- Gives sensitive information on opinions
- Motivates Safety Committees and Safety Representatives
- Is a 'Bottom Up' survey
- Stimulates discussion

BUT

- Lack of equipment could destroy it
- There is a danger of obtaining too much information - identify instant winners for implementation quickly

Norman concluded by saying that the cost of purchase for a single site firm was only £200 - the greatest cost being in management time and implementation costs.

Members' Questions

Richard Forster of Galliford asked if it was possible to survey employees and contractors at the same time. Norman replied that it was - two firms had already done it in the construction sector with an 80% response rate.

Richard went on to ask if it was as useful in low risk activities. Norman said that it was not intended for use in offices because there was a high proportion of 'neutral' opinions. These results should not be mixed in with high risk activities.

Barry Wilkes of Sandwell Healthcare NHS Trust asked if it could be applied in small companies. Norman replied it could not, because one person could represent a large proportion of the strength of opinion. As a general rule, the minimum size would be 25 people and a case study had been prepared for one site of that size.

BHSA Chairman, **Harry Jakeman** asked if there was any merit in giving respondents a centre option. Norman commented that there was, as anyone who was not 'for' a statement was against'.

Peter Evans of CGU Insurance asked if the questions were balanced and Norman replied that they were. Even if you could say "I expected that answer", he added, this was valid information about opinion in the workplace. He then quoted sue Cox, the well known behaviouralist from Loughborough University, who said "Their perception is their reality" and, therefore the tool is valid.

As there were no further questions, the Chairman closed the meeting and thanked Peter Woolgar from HSE Midlands and Norman for a very interesting and thorough presentation. The members responded in the normal manner.