

Promoting a
Positive Railway
Safety Culture



Promoting a Positive Safety Culture in European Railways

1. What is Safety Culture?

Cultures, as shared patterns of thinking and acting, develop when people interact and have to accomplish something together.

Safety culture refers to the interaction between the requirements of the SMS (safety management system), how people make sense of them, based on their attitudes, values and beliefs and what they actually do, as seen in decisions and behaviours.

Sustainable safety performance requires the alignment of structural (SMS) and cultural aspects within an organisation.

A positive safety culture is characterised by a collective commitment by leaders and individuals to always act safely, in particular when confronted with competing goals.

When integrated into the design of operational activities, safety facilitates business.

To understand safety culture in an organisation, specialists and researchers have developed models, which usually involve a set of attributes of a positive safety culture. Figure 1 constitutes one example of such a model.

Figure 1: Safety Culture Model

Based on recent work of the Institute for an Industrial Safety Culture www.icsi-eu.org



2. Railway Safety Culture in Europe

Railway safety culture models should take into account the impact of the organisation's environment and risk regulation regimes. As examples, they identify contractor management and relationships with safety authorities as important features.

Figure 2 illustrates this chain of influence in the European railways: decisions and behaviours at each level of the system may impact the safety culture of the organisation, whether this relates to a railway undertaking, infrastructure manager, entity in charge of maintenance, manufacturer, contractor...

3. What are the Benefits of a Positive Safety Culture?

Based on RSSB (2015) www.sparkrail.org

- Reduction in operational risk through more comprehensive risk assessment and improved understanding of work place conditions and risk by all levels in the organisation
- Reduction in workforce injuries by removing hazards identified through increased near miss reporting
- Reduction in unsafe acts and conditions through improved workforce engagement and leadership development
- Reduction in costs related to workforce injuries, unsafe actions and conditions
- Improved performance through a better understanding of work place conditions
- Improved and more efficient SMS, with procedures and rules better fitted to what should be done
- Improved corporate image

The Railway Safety Directive Article 29 states that the Agency evaluates the development of a safety culture by 16 June 2024. Article 9(2) requires infrastructure managers and railway undertakings to develop a culture of mutual trust, confidence and learning through the SMS. These ideas are brought forward in the Common Safety Method on Safety Management System Requirements and associated guidance for assessing single safety certificates or safety authorisations.

Figure 2: Contributing Levels of Safety Culture



4. Where to Start to Improve Safety Culture?

Any organisation wanting to improve its safety culture should implement a strategy supported by the top management.

To develop the strategy, a safety culture assessment gives a good basis for identifying cultural strengths and weaknesses.

Even without an assessment, there are lots of ways to improve one or more of the attributes of a positive safety culture. Some suggestions:

- Understanding and celebrating what is going well already

- Positive reinforcement, through visible rewards for safe behaviours
- Developing a simple system for sharing safety concerns
- Using procurement and contract terms to emphasise safety when working with contractors and suppliers
- Defining and communicating expectations for managers on safety leadership

Whatever your role, you can contribute to improving safety culture. Together, you will need to find out what's right and what works for your organisation.

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For more information, please search for safety culture in the following websites:

- www.era.europa.eu
- www.uic.org
- osha.europa.eu
- www.sparkrail.org
- www.icsi-eu.org
- www.skybrary.aero
- www.iaea.org

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