Practical Steps to Improve Process Safety Culture – Case Studies and Lessons from the Process Industry

Rick Curtis, Herzl Marouni, Ken Hanchey, San Burnett, Steve Arendt
ABS Consulting

ABSTRACT

Some companies wonder why they keep experiencing the same process safety problems. Others wonder why they seem to have plateaued in process safety performance. Culture has also been a contributor to major accidents – so called organizational accidents.

Culture is the individual and organizational “DNA” that represents our tendency to want to do (1) the right thing in (2) the right way at (3) the right time, (4) ALL the time – even when if no one is looking. The safety culture that exists in a refinery or company is the result of all the actions - and inactions - in institutional/workforce memory.

We have analyzed process safety/HSE culture for over 20 companies and determined their culture weaknesses by comparing workforce opinions gained via survey and interviews with HSE performance deficiencies using the following CCPS culture framework:

1. Establish process safety/HSE as a core value
2. Provide strong leadership
3. Establish and enforce high standards of performance
4. Formalize the process safety/HSE culture approach
5. Maintain a sense of vulnerability
6. Empower individuals to successfully fulfill their HSE responsibilities
7. Defer to expertise
8. Ensure open and effective communications
9. Establish a questioning/learning environment
10. Foster mutual trust
11. Provide timely response to process safety/HSE issues and concerns
12. Provide continuous monitoring of performance

We have applied this in dire situations following major accidents where it was clear that the company had process safety problems. We have also applied this approach to companies having current good performance, but who believe they have “hit a plateau”. This paper will present examples results, lessons learned, and remedies for typical culture weaknesses that have led to these persistent performance problems.