

Positive Health and Safety Culture

Level 3 Health and Safety in the Workplace

Introduction

Having a positive health and safety culture means that everyone in the workplace, including the employer and all employees, is actively and positively adopting the workplace health and safety procedures.

Without the support of staff, health and safety procedures will not be effective. Everyone in the workplace has a responsibility for their own and others' safety and should do everything that they can to ensure safety remains paramount at all times.

This section of the course explains how you can introduce a positive attitude towards health and safety in your workplace.

Topics to be Covered

The topics covered in this section are:

- Health and safety culture
- Establishing a positive health and safety culture
- Safety representatives
- Safety committees
- Consulting employees
- Team briefing

Health and Safety Culture

The Health and Safety Executive says that a health and safety culture is the product of 'positive attitudes, perceptions, competencies, values and patterns of behaviour towards health and safety matters'. In everyday terms, it means **ensuring health and safety is taken seriously by everyone** within the business.

Sometimes, employers and business owners see health and safety compliance as nothing more than a regulatory burden and will only do the absolute minimum.

Unfortunately, this negative attitude is quickly passed down through the company, from managers and supervisors to full-time and part-time employees. Why should they bother if their superiors don't?

The end result is that people's health is put at risk, injuries are common and the business sees a drop in productivity. This is why a positive health and safety culture is essential.

A poor health and safety culture can be created by management who make decisions that put production, services or costs before safety, failing to comply with health and safety procedures, or people simply hiding unsafe working practices.

To create a positive culture, you need:

- Visible management commitment at all levels in the organisation.
- Definition of what a positive culture looks like in the organisation.
- Management and supervisors acting as positive role models.
- Mutual, meaningful and measurable health and safety improvement goals.
- Good knowledge and understanding of health and safety throughout the workplace, backed up by regular training.
- Each person to accept personal responsibility for ensuring their own health and safety.

It's also essential that:

- Everyone believes they have a duty to protect the health and safety of others.
- You take into account health and safety factors in purchasing policy, work layout, processes and job design.
- Health and safety does not compete with priorities for production or cost reduction.
- There is visible evidence that investment is made into health and safety, including the quality of the working environment and equipment provided.
- You have a proactive programme of making improvements and providing solutions before problems arise.
- There is a system that ensures effective communication up, down and across the organisation.
- There is a fair and just disciplinary process for dealing with transgressions.
- There is a structure to ensure meaningful involvement of staff in all elements of health and safety.

Establishing a Positive Health and Safety Culture

Where possible, you should aim to go beyond the legal minimum to create a positive health and safety culture. The foundations for this should include:

- **Establishing a policy:** set a clear direction for the company to follow.
- **Developing an organisation:** put a structure and arrangements in place to deliver the policy.
- **Planning and implementing:** establish, operate and maintain good systems.
- **Measuring performance:** measure performance against the agreed standards to identify where improvement is needed.
- **Auditing:** undertake a planned assessment of how the systems are working in practice.
- **Reviewing:** take account of all relevant experience and apply any lessons learnt.

You also need to have:

- Positive workplace attitudes, from the managing director through to new starters.
- Involvement and buy-in from all members of the workforce.
- Mutual, meaningful and measurable health and safety improvement goals.
- Policies and procedures that serve as reference tools.
- Personnel training at all levels within the organisation.
- Responsibility and accountability throughout the organisation.

Safety Representatives

- The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 request the appointment of safety representatives and prescribe their functions in relation to the employees they represent and their workplaces.
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- A person appointed as a safety representative should, so far as is reasonably practicable, either have been employed by their employer throughout the preceding two years or have at least two years' experience in similar employment.
- The regulations allow for time off (with pay) for safety representatives so that they can perform their functions and undergo any necessary training. This time should be taken during working hours.

The main functions of safety representatives are:

- To investigate potential hazards and dangerous occurrences in the workplace and to examine the causes of accidents.
- To investigate complaints by any employee they represent relating to that employee's health, safety or welfare at work.
- To make representations to the employer on general matters affecting the health, safety or welfare of employees at work.
- To carry out inspections.
- To represent the employees they were appointed to represent in consultations with inspectors of the Health and Safety Executive and of any other enforcing authority.
- To receive information from inspectors.
- To attend safety committee meetings.

It is the employer's duty to consult the safety representative and to provide them with facilities and assistance. Every employer must consult their safety representatives in good time with regard to:

- The introduction of any measure which may substantially affect the health and safety of employees.
- Arrangements for appointing or nominating people in accordance with the regulations.
- Any health and safety information required to be provided to employees.
- The planning and organisation of any health and safety training required to be provided to employees.
- The health and safety consequences for employees after the introduction of new technologies into the workplace.

Safety representatives are entitled to inspect the workplace, or part of it, if they give their employer reasonable notice in writing, and if they haven't inspected the workplace in the previous three months.

They may also carry out more frequent inspections with agreement of the employer.

Where there has been a substantial change in the conditions of work - because of the introduction of new machinery, or if new information has been published by the Health and Safety Executive relevant to the hazards of the workplace since the last inspection - the safety representative, after consultation with the employer, is entitled to carry out a further inspection of the part of the workplace concerned.

Safety Committees

If an employer is asked to establish a safety committee, it should be established in accordance with the following provisions:

- The employer should consult with the safety representative who made the request.
- The employer should post a notice stating the composition of the committee.
- The committee should be established no later than three months after the request for it.

Consulting Employees

If you have employees who are not represented by safety representatives, then the Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996 require you to consult those employees in good time on matters relating to their health and safety at work and, in particular, with regard to:

- The introduction of any measure which may substantially affect the health and safety of those employees.
- Arrangements for appointing or nominating persons in accordance with regulations.
- Any health and safety information you are required to provide to those employees.
- The planning and organisation of any health and safety training you are required to provide.
- The health and safety consequences for employees after the introduction of new technologies into the workplace.

You should either consult employees directly or through elected safety representatives.

Where an employer has been consulting safety representatives and then decides to consult employees directly, they must inform the employees and the representatives.

It is the duty of the employer to provide information. When an employer consults employees directly, they must make available such information as is necessary to enable employees to participate fully and effectively in the consultation.

This applies equally where consultation is with representatives of employee safety.

The functions of representatives of employee safety are:

- To make representations to the employer on potential hazards and dangerous occurrences in the workplace which affect, or could affect, the group of employees they represent.
- To make representations to the employer on general matters affecting the health and safety at work of the group of employees they represent.
- To represent the group of employees in consultations at the workplace with HSE inspectors.

Furthermore, the employer should:

- Ensure that each representative is provided with appropriate training and meet any reasonable costs associated with such training, including travel and subsistence costs.
- Permit representatives to take time off, with pay and during normal working hours, to perform their functions or undergo training.

Team Briefing

Health, safety and housekeeping should be included in all team briefs. To demonstrate the importance to employees, it is a good idea to have health and safety as the first item on the agenda. This helps to develop a positive attitude towards health and safety.

Discussion could cover:

- Have you had any accidents or near misses in recent weeks? For example, slips, trips or falls, working at height or manual handling injuries.
- What were the causes of these accidents?
- How could they be prevented?
- What measures can be put into place to prevent them re-occurring?
- Is the accident book up to date?
- Are there any personal protective equipment issues for your team members?
- Are any training updates needed?

Exercise

Are the following statements true or false?

A positive health and safety culture means that everyone within the business takes health and safety seriously.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> True	<input type="radio"/> False
A poor health and safety culture is often created by employers who put costs and services before employee safety.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> True	<input type="radio"/> False
Everyone in the workplace has a duty to protect the health and safety of others.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> True	<input type="radio"/> False
Safety representatives must fund their own training and perform their functions outside of work hours.	<input type="radio"/> True	<input checked="" type="radio"/> False
Safety representatives are entitled to inspect any part of the workplace if they give you notice in writing.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> True	<input type="radio"/> False
Health and safety information should be left out of team briefs.	<input type="radio"/> True	<input checked="" type="radio"/> False

Summary

In this part of the course, you've learnt the importance of establishing a positive health and safety culture in your organisation. A positive culture means that everyone is working together to improve health and safety and feels confident in applying the control measures required.

If this isn't established, then health and safety measures fall by the wayside, productivity drops and employees' safety may suffer as a result.

Safety representatives can be appointed to represent the health and safety of employees in the workplace. Their role is to investigate complaints about health and safety, carry out inspections and attend safety committee meetings. If employees are not represented by a safety representative, then employers must consult them directly on matters relating to their health and safety whilst at work.