



HOW TO IMPROVE

**THE SAFETY CLIMATE IN
YOUR ORGANIZATION**

INTRODUCTION

Safety training can help employees become safer, but if an organization doesn't have insight into how individuals contribute to the safety climate, even the most extensive safety program will deliver limited success. Similarly, companies that don't know exactly how safe or unsafe they are put themselves and their employees at risk.

Only organizations that take a comprehensive view of the overall safety environment will be able to achieve long-term, sustainable improvements. How can you assess the current safety climate of your organization and your employees' safety awareness? Your organization can start by looking at the entire enterprise, then move down to individual and team safety assessments as well as safety coaching to improve results and engagement through safe work practices.

Personality impacts behavior. Is a worker panicky or strong? Defiant or compliant? By focusing on people and not systems, your organization can achieve actionable results that are centered on individual accountability.

CREATING A CLIMATE OF SAFETY MUST ACCOUNT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

Traditionally, safety solutions have focused on equipment, videos, checklists — everything but the people who use the equipment, watch the OSHA videos and take the safety tests. Workers in high-risk occupations appreciate the role an individual plays in creating a safe environment, says Ryan Ross, Vice President of Consulting for Hogan Assessments. "In my work in manufacturing, I've heard workers say, 'I just won't work with that person, because he/she is unsafe' and I've been told by police and firefighters about peers who may be great co-workers but not the kind of person you'd want for backup." Creating a climate of safety requires organizations to focus on people, not systems.



Individual personality drives behavior, but this is often the forgotten component in safety programs. This crucial component is measurable and actionable. Rather than purchase a new safety program or different equipment, organizations can benefit more from an approach that will help them understand and modify the behavior of the people who work for them and that will create an environment in which safety is integral to the organization.

“MOST MANAGERS HAVE A MENTAL LIST OF THE EMPLOYEES WHO THEY BELIEVE ARE MOST LIKELY TO CAUSE AN ACCIDENT.”

— RYAN ROSS, VICE PRESIDENT OF CONSULTING FOR HOGAN ASSESSMENTS

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Progress in workplace safety and organizational health will advance more quickly by structuring the topic into three components:

- ▲ **Worker personality:** “Most managers have a mental list of the employees who they believe are most likely to cause an accident,” says Ross, who has extensive experience working with chemical refineries and is an expert on the implementation of personality assessments. Research shows that the factors that cause managers to label some workers safe and others a work-safety risk can be quantified, using a highly reliable personality assessment tool. And insight into likely safety behavior is invaluable in the hiring process.
- ▲ **A culture of worker engagement:** Organizations that involve workers in the process of creating a safety environment will have much greater success. Craig Pourciau, a partner with SSA Consultants, recalls an accident at an industrial worksite in which a worker fell and was injured because his rope wasn’t tied off properly. What concerned and mystified the manager even more than the employee’s error was the fact that numerous co-workers saw that the man wasn’t tied properly but felt no sense of urgency. “The company’s program was working well,” Pourciau said. “But the problem is that many safety programs are stuck at 95 percent efficiency. What they need is a process to address the final 5 percent.” Workers want to know that leaders are aware of the real safety issues that surround them throughout the workday and must see that everyone, regardless of their rank in the organization, is a member of an overall safety team.
- ▲ **Organizational leadership:** Creating and maintaining a holistic safety environment requires leaders to know what workers’ safety perceptions are at all levels of the organization. Additionally, management must ensure that safety initiatives are consistent among all levels of the organization. Integrating a safety mind-set into the culture extends to the supervision and coaching that management provides with regard to regular work duties, so that worker development includes safety.



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The far-reaching effects that one worker can have on people, corporations and the environment are staggering. There are far too many examples of workplace accidents that came about as the result of an individual's behavior, but here are a few well-known examples:

- ▲ A Metrolink commuter train crashed head-on into a Union Pacific freight train in Los Angeles on Sept. 12, 2008. The crash killed 25 people, and wrongful-death lawsuits are expected to cost Metrolink \$500 million. The cause: The conductor was busy text-messaging.
- ▲ The Exxon Valdez oil tanker crashed into a reef in Alaska's Prince William Sound on March 24, 1989, spilling 10.8 million gallons of oil, costing Exxon \$2.5 billion. The cause: The ship's master left the controls.
- ▲ A large crane collapsed in Manhattan on March 15, 2008, killing seven and putting several others in critical condition as it smashed into nearby buildings. The rigging contractor and his company have been charged with manslaughter. The cause: Workers are believed to have used inadequate rigging.¹

REACHING EVERY LEVEL OF THE ORGANIZATION

Success lies in a comprehensive approach. Employees need to understand how personality influences behavior and how behavior influences risk. Armed with this knowledge, it's possible for organizations to do what was previously elusive: actually predict and influence safety behavior.

The goal is creating Safety Climate Awareness at every level of the organization:

- ▲ **The organization must be dedicated to improving safety beyond simply ensuring compliance and must see that employees receive feedback about the level of safety within the company.** Furthermore, the company must regularly communicate its expectations and regulations regarding safety issues; it must connect with employees on issues of safety. Encouraging the growth of a positive safety culture is also a strategy for reducing mental stress (e.g., anxiety and fear) typically experienced by workers in high-risk work environments.²

1 Baranauckas, Carla. "Crane Topples in Manhattan, Killing at Least 4 People." The New York Times. March 15, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/15/nyregion/15cnd-crane.html>

2 Barling, J., Iverson, R., Kelloway, E. (2003). "Accidental Outcomes: Attitudinal Consequences of Workplace Injuries." Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 8(1), 74-85

Case Study: Manufacturing Company

At a small Midwestern manufacturing company, Hogan gathered safety data from 32 assembly-line workers whose tenure was at least one year. The workers assembled small appliances, inserting and tightening screws and bolts, aligning appliance components, connecting electrical wires and inspecting final products for proper use and potential malfunctions. Hogan looked at workers' compensation claims filed over the past two years.

Hogan compared data for 15 employees who had filed workers' compensation claims with data for 17 employees who had not filed such claims. Based on the assembly-line workers' assessments, Hogan calculated safety scores and compared those in the low safety group to those in the moderate and high safety categories.

Predictor Outcome	Safety Outcome		
	Claim	No Claim	Pct. With Claim
Low Safety Group	9	4	69.23%
Moderate and High Safety Group	6	13	31.58%

Results, illustrated in the above table, show that 69.23 percent of individuals in the low safety group filed a workers' compensation claim, compared with only 31.58 percent of those in the moderate and high safety groups. Using the Safety Report to hire only people who scored in the moderate and high safety categories would have resulted in a 53.81 percent decrease in workers' compensation claims.

- ▲ **Managers need to be able to recognize risk-prone employees and have the tools to coach them.** Frontline supervisors can be taught how to give workers performance feedback about safety behavior arising from personality.
- ▲ **Workers who understand and recognize the personality traits that spur their behavior have a much greater ability to control their actions.** If a worker is aware, for example, that they tend to overestimate their abilities, they know going forward that they have to keep the behavior that arises from this belief in check, which enables them to remain vigilant to safety concerns. Each worker also needs to know whether their co-workers are safe and are aware of risks.

Case Study: Freight Transportation Company

Hogan obtained assessments from 58 truck drivers either prior to or during employment. These drivers’ jobs required them to transport freight to clients, record quantities loaded and delivered, and read various gauges and meters. Hogan specifically examined “at fault” accidents. The base rate of accidents for 10 employees in the sample was 17.24 percent. The remaining 48 employees in the sample had no recorded accidents.

Based on the drivers’ assessments, Hogan calculated safety scores and compared those in the low safety group with those falling in the moderate and high safety categories.

Predictor Outcome	Safety Outcome		
	Accident	No Accident	Pct. With Accident
Low Safety Group	7	12	36.84%
Moderate and High Safety Group	3	36	7.89%

As the table shows, 36.84 percent of low safety individuals had a recorded accident, compared with only 7.69 percent of those falling in the moderate and high safety categories. If this organization had used the Safety Report to hire only those in the moderate and high safety groups, a 79.13 percent accident reduction would have resulted.

The importance of knowing where workers fall on a “Defiant or Compliant” scale — and how to coach them — is no better illustrated than in the 1986 nuclear power plant disaster at Chernobyl. The April 26, 1986, meltdown is considered the deadliest accident in history and happened because the power plant’s operators defied procedure. Low scorers typically defy authority; high scorers tend to follow rules and guidelines.

HOGAN’S APPROACH

Hogan Assessments, an international authority in personality assessment and consulting, created the safety solution as a response to requests from clients, who wanted to add a safety component to their assessment process.

Hogan’s SafeSystem™ components are based on the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI), considered the industry standard for measuring personality in relation to job performance. Based on more than 30 years of research and validation, the HPI is the cornerstone of thousands of active selection and development programs across the globe.

A 15-minute assessment scores each participant’s personality across the following six safety competencies:

- ▲ **Compliant:** High scorers will adhere to organizational guidelines and will be less likely to defy organizational authorities or ignore company rules.
- ▲ **Strong:** High scorers will exhibit confidence in their work and will be less likely to make mistakes by panicking under pressure.

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- ▲ **Cheerful:** High scorers will display emotional control while working and will be less likely to make mistakes by losing their temper.
- ▲ **Vigilant:** High scorers will remain attentive while performing repetitive tasks and will be less likely to make mistakes because of boredom.
- ▲ **Cautious:** High scorers will perform work carefully, avoiding unnecessary risk and will be less likely to make mistakes by taking excessive risks.
- ▲ **Trainable:** High scorers will remain open to new training and development and will be less likely to overestimate their own competence due to arrogance.

Only Hogan's SafeSystem approach enables organizations to pinpoint with such accuracy the safety profiles of their foundation: their workers. Using Hogan's individual assessments based on hundreds of client research projects conducted over 30 years, workers and organizations are able to predict and modify unsafe behavior. The Hogan SafeSystem is made up of three components to build and maintain a culture of safe working practices:

- ▲ **SafeSystem Climate Survey:** Provides critical feedback regarding the existing perceptions of safety at all levels in the organization via a companywide safety score.
- ▲ **Hogan Safety Assessment:** Examines individual participant scores against the six safety-related personality competencies and provides valuable information for hiring and developing candidates with safe work behaviors.
- ▲ **SafeSystem Coaching Process:** This process is designed to accurately identify safe tendencies within an organizational context, providing leadership with the necessary feedback to build and maintain a culture of safe working practices.

CONCLUSION

Creating a climate of safety that raises awareness of the role of behavior can have a significant impact on safety in the workplace.

In the example of the worker falling because he wasn't tied off correctly, the safety manager felt strongly that the organization's safety program wasn't to blame, but he admitted he was at a loss when it came to individuals' behavior, Pourciau said. Organizations don't need another safety program, but they do need a tool to address the missing link in safety programs – a worker's personality. SafeSystem acts as the add-on that will take an organization's safety system to the next level, giving companies actionable, highly reliable insight into this crucial piece of the safety puzzle.

"We're about looking at culture and climate in an organization and helping them see where we can make immediate improvement, whether it be upfront selecting people who are less likely to have accidents in the future and/or remediating, coaching and developing the people you currently have on staff," said Ross. "It's all about strategic self-awareness."

To find out more about the Hogan SafeSystem, visit www.hogansafesystem.com

Hogan Assessment Systems is a global personality assessment provider that helps companies select employees, develop leaders, and identify talent. Hogan specializes in identifying high potential candidates for targeted positions, providing leadership development tools to help emerging leaders realize their full potential, and determining relationships between individual personality characteristics and safety performance. Hogan's assessments can be administered in over 40 languages and are available on a state-of-the-art platform, giving customers accurate feedback within seconds of completion.