



Understanding your HSE culture



1.0

Introduction

A solidly implemented health, safety and environment (HSE) management system is an essential basis for good HSE performance. However, outstanding performance and continuous improvement will only be achieved when there is a culture in which the elements of the HSE management system can flourish.

This booklet helps you to develop an understanding of the HSE culture in your organisation.

Using it in meetings and workshops will give you a clear view of the current HSE culture and help you see what better looks like.



1.1 HSE management systems

A HSE management system is a system of rules, policies, and processes for monitoring and managing health, safety and the environment. Typically, an HSE management system will include:

- a policy on HSE management;
- a strategy for its implementation;
- baseline measurements to benchmark HSE performance;
- relevant indicators to monitor performance against the plan;
- targets and activities to drive improvement in HSE performance;
- HSE audits and surveys to assess how well the management system is implemented, and
- a range of ways to involve the workforce in HSE improvement activities.

The implementation of an HSE management system can be assessed in various ways, including audits and self-assessment questionnaires. However, whilst the HSE management system can be implemented without workforce buy-in, having a strong HSE culture is necessary for it to be effective.

1.2 HSE culture

Culture is 'the way we do things around here' – or perhaps 'what we do when no one is watching us'. HSE culture is what we do to manage HSE. It is not just about what we should do (according to the HSE management system), but whether we do it, what we think about it, and whether we go beyond the management system and try to improve upon it.

In a strong culture everyone:

- demonstrates safety as a value;
- is always alert to expect the unexpected;
- fully understands what they should do for HSE;
- is open to new ideas to improve HSE, and
- wants to make a difference and believes their behaviours make a difference for others.

In particular, managers:

- do not just manage, but exemplify genuine safety leadership, and
- see others' perceptions and behaviour as a reflection of their own leadership.

1.3 Culture assessment

Organisational culture can be recognised at five levels of development, from 'Pathological' to 'Generative', as shown in Figure 1. Each level describes how organisations typically behave. In [section 2.0 \(Organisational characteristics\)](#) typical descriptions are given for 23 'dimensions'. During an *Understanding your HSE culture* workshop, these can be used to identify the current culture level of your organisation for each of the dimensions, and to begin to consider ways to improve.



1.4 Setting the scene

Prepare the workshop participants by providing information on the topic of HSE culture. For example, consider whether all participants know what HSE culture is, and whether they have different interpretations of what it means to them. For example, depending on the nature and scope of the organisation's business, they may think about HSE culture/management in terms of:

- process or product safety;
- occupational health and safety;
- service or client safety, or
- safety of contractors and suppliers.

Consider delivering a short presentation at the beginning of the workshop or providing pre-read material to participants. The Energy Institute provides free resources related to HSE culture that may be useful, including a facilitator presentation and animations that explain some key concepts of HSE culture, available at: <http://heartsandminds.energyinst.org/culture>

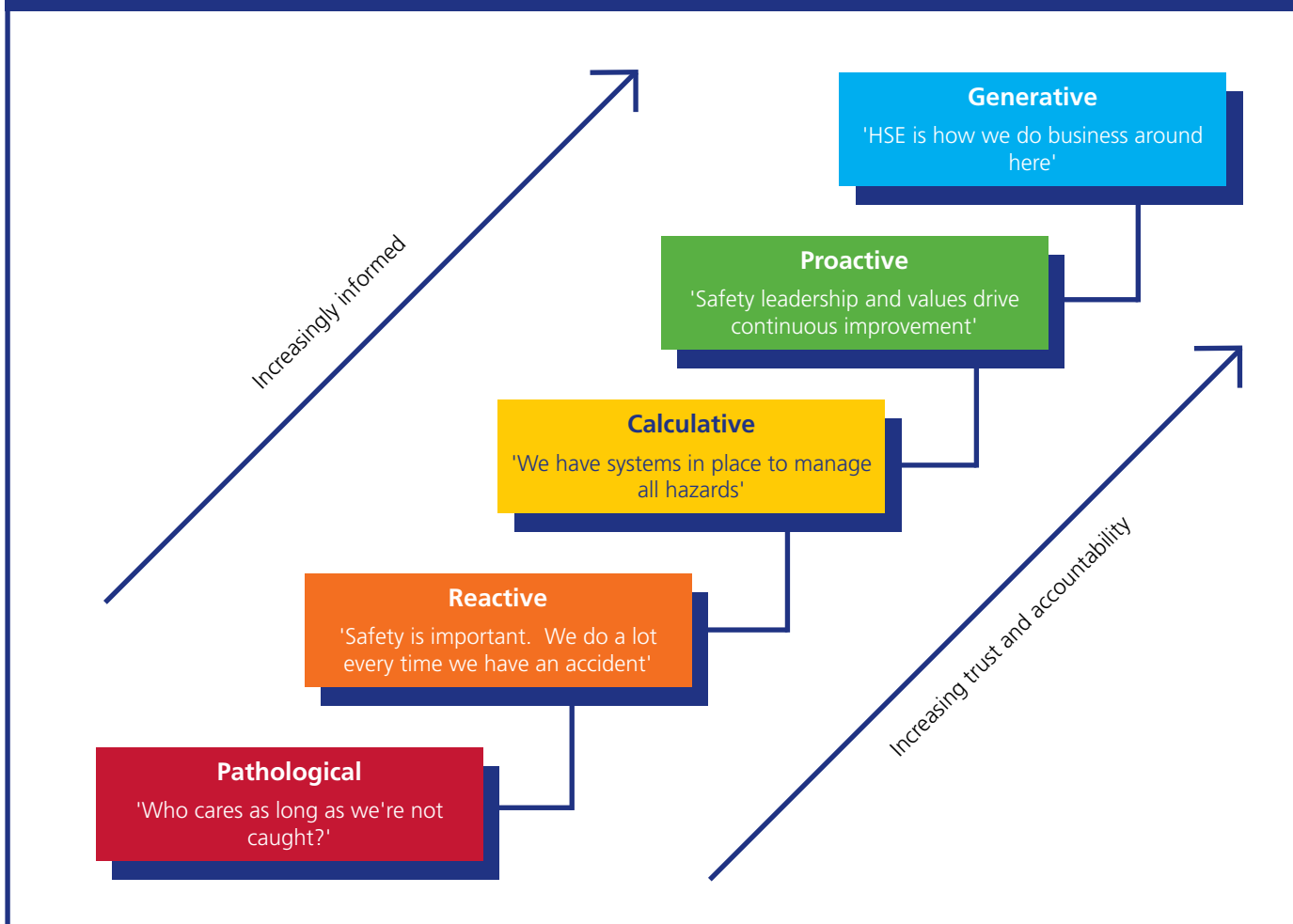


1.5 Next steps

The purpose of this workshop is to raise awareness of HSE culture, generate good discussions about the level of the HSE culture in your organisation, and identify specific issues that can then be addressed directly to improve that culture. The Energy Institute's Hearts and Minds *Making change last* tool can be used to plan and support culture change by ensuring people's buy-in and engagement with the improvement actions.



Figure 1: The HSE culture ladder



Workshop: step-by-step instructions

- Set up a workshop with 10-20 people from similar occupational levels – avoid having participants' line managers/supervisors present as it will prevent open and honest sharing of their perceptions. If participants have different levels of knowledge about HSE, consider how this might affect the discussions and how much scene setting will be required. You will need three to four hours to complete this workshop.
- Provide everyone with a copy of this booklet (these can be reused). Pre-select which cultural dimensions to use, based on what is relevant to the organisation. Use the same set of cultural dimensions for all workshops where you want to compare results.
- Introduce the concept of HSE culture and the culture ladder. Describe the aims of the workshop and explain that we want to understand and improve the culture.
- Briefly discuss with participants what HSE means to them, in the context of their work or business (e.g. personal, process, product, office, contractor safety etc.).
- Ask each person to do the following:
 - Individually, carefully read the descriptions for each of the pre-selected dimensions from the **organisational characteristics (2.0)**.
 - Thinking about your own part of the organisation and your own experiences, for each dimension select one description that most closely matches your experience of how the organisation 'does things around here'.
 - Skip a question if you know nothing about that dimension (but try to answer as many as you can).
 - The descriptions are generic and so will not perfectly match your experience. If you cannot decide between two descriptions, pick the one that is lower on the culture ladder.
 - Mark your choices on the score sheet and hand this to the workshop facilitator when done.
- As facilitator, input the results for each person into the provided spreadsheet (downloadable from <http://heartsandminds.energyinst.org>).
- Present the results to the group and ask: Where did you place yourselves, and why?
- Select those dimensions where most people chose proactive or generative. These are the things we do well. What can we learn from these? (Keep this brief – or omit this step)
- Select those dimensions where most people chose pathological or reactive. These are things we most need to improve. There will probably only be time to discuss three or four dimensions. Ask the group to share experiences and examples of how these things are typically done in the organisation (people may not agree with each other!). Make a record of the discussion.
- Decide as a group which three or four dimensions to prioritise for improvement. Form three or four sub-groups. Ask each group to look at one of these dimensions and to identify potential specific actions that could be taken to improve HSE culture in that area.

Dimension	Pathological	Reactive	Calculative	Proactive	Generative
<p>E</p> <p>What are the consequences for non-compliance?</p>	<p>There are few rules about HSE, and those that exist are not enforced.</p> <p>Rule breaking is overlooked, unless something goes wrong - then the 'rule breaker' is disciplined or dismissed.</p> <p>Disciplinary action is mainly seen as a way to protect the organisation from liability.</p>	<p>'Workarounds' are quietly tolerated, as long as nothing bad happens, but obvious rule breaking is not acceptable, especially if an incident has happened recently.</p> <p>People who break rules are either assumed to be incompetent and sent on a training course, or assumed to be reckless and dismissed.</p>	<p>There is a set process for dealing with non-compliance. Its application is rigid and formalised.</p> <p>There are standard actions for the person involved, ranging from discipline to coaching, depending on the category of non-compliance. Actions are sometimes perceived as being unfair or inappropriate.</p>	<p>There is a formal process for dealing with non-compliance, with fair consequences for the individuals involved.</p> <p>It is recognised that people want to do a good job. Non-compliance is usually due to poor quality procedures. These are reviewed and improved.</p>	<p>Individuals feel they are held to account in a fair way.</p> <p>When non-compliance does happen, those involved are considered to be the best people to fix the gap in the system that led to the non-compliance.</p>
<p>F</p> <p>When do people intervene in unsafe situations?</p>	<p>People look out for themselves. They only intervene in the most dangerous situations.</p> <p>Colleagues hide unsafe working practices to protect each other from being disciplined by management.</p>	<p>Colleagues are told they should intervene in unsafe situations, especially after there have been recent incidents. However, they do not consider intervening at the time, or worry how colleagues will react.</p> <p>Unsafe situations are often ignored.</p>	<p>People are asked to make a certain number of safety interventions and safety observations to meet the organisation's HSE targets.</p> <p>The number of interventions and observations is more important than their effectiveness. Interventions are sometimes confrontational and badly received.</p>	<p>There is genuine care for colleagues and this compels people to intervene in unsafe situations.</p> <p>People are trained on how to intervene (or receive intervention). Interventions usually lead to constructive discussions on how to do things better.</p>	<p>The level of care for colleagues is very high. It feels like a family where everyone looks out for each other.</p> <p>Intervention is rarely necessary, and always provides a welcome chance to work together and resolve potential HSE issues.</p> <p>The quality of conversation is very high.</p>
<p>G</p> <p>What priority is given to operational safety? (i.e. safety of your primary operations, whether that is drilling for oil, operating trains, or flying aircraft, etc.)</p>	<p>Production and cost reduction are the only priorities. Safety is seen as a cost.</p> <p>The principle is to do things as cheaply as possible while avoiding prosecution.</p>	<p>Keeping operations going is the number one priority.</p> <p>While cost reduction is important, money will be spent to fix safety issues to comply with legal requirements or in response to an incident.</p>	<p>The priority is implementing the HSE management system.</p> <p>Managers talk the talk about operational safety, but don't always walk the walk, especially when production or cost targets are not being met.</p>	<p>Operational safety is a high priority. There is open dialogue about how operational safety and other priorities are managed.</p> <p>The resources and time committed to achieving operational safety are ring-fenced and protected from other demands.</p>	<p>Operational safety is an unquestioned core value. It is understood that both business excellence and safety excellence are achieved with the same actions.</p> <p>The organisation refuses to place other performance objectives above operational safety.</p>
<p>H</p> <p>What is the role of the HSE department?</p>	<p>If there is an HSE department it has little power or status and it only gets involved after an incident occurs.</p>	<p>The HSE department is seen as a career dead-end or the place to work just before retiring - once in, it is hard to get out. They are advisors who run safety meetings.</p> <p>They are seen as a police force.</p>	<p>The HSE department is large with status and power. It spends a lot of time analysing data, and preparing reports and guidance. It is seen as a separate function to other business operations.</p> <p>Its staff have deep subject matter knowledge and (usually) non-operational backgrounds.</p>	<p>The HSE department is an important specialist function. Its advice is trusted and sought by the line, including senior leaders.</p> <p>A period in HSE management is seen as career enhancing, and many senior leaders have HSE experience.</p>	<p>The HSE department has equal status with all other departments. Senior leaders must have HSE experience.</p> <p>The role of the HSE department is to provide expertise, coaching and specialist support to the operational managers who have the day-to-day responsibility for HSE.</p>

Understanding your HSE culture

Understanding your HSE culture is a workshop-based tool to assess your organisation against the HSE culture ladder (Figure 1). The discussions that this will encourage are the first step towards helping put in place a plan to improve the culture.

Put simply, it is not enough to have an HSE management system in place if people are not interested in using and improving it. That interest manifests itself in the HSE culture - the 'way we do things around here'.

The first step to improving the culture is to recognise your own culture and to see what better culture looks like.

New edition

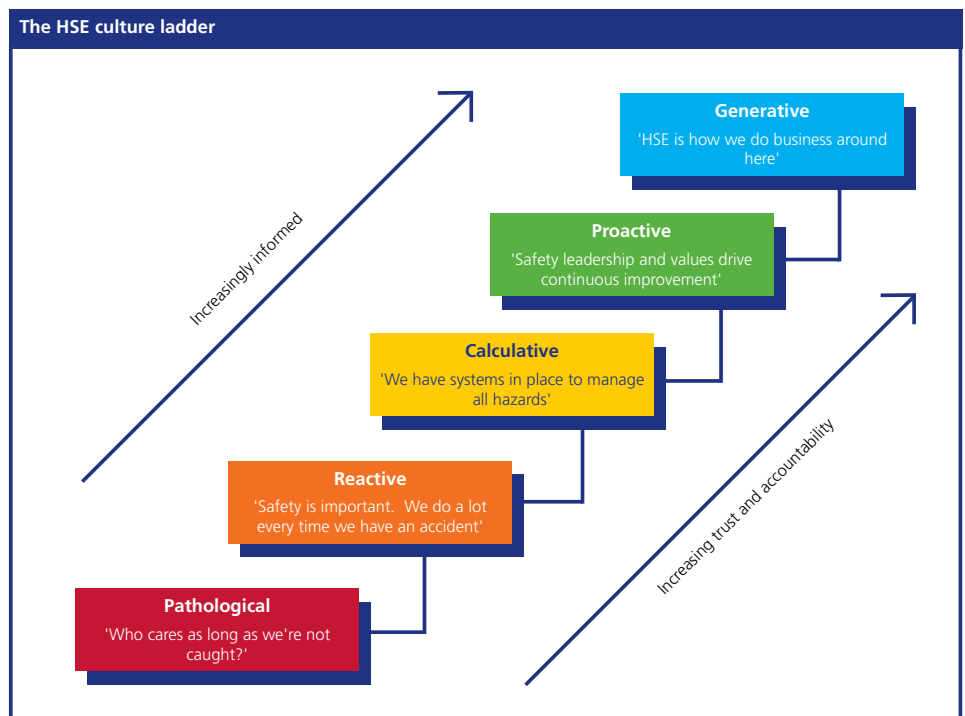
Since its publication by the Energy Institute in 2004, the world-renowned *Understanding your HSE culture* tool has been applied to improve HSE culture and HSE management in hundreds of organisations in many different types of industry.

Proceeds from the sale of the Hearts and Minds toolkit are used to fund the latest university research and to update the toolkit.

This new edition of *Understanding your HSE culture* was produced in 2018 and makes a number of improvements, including improving the culture descriptions and adds new questions related to process safety.

The following icons are used to help you find your way around this tool:

	
About the tool	Theory
	
Facilitator notes	Personal actions
	
Group tasks	Other resources



For more information please visit:
www.energyinst.org/heartsandminds

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