

## CORPORATE CULTURE AS A TOOL TO IMPROVE SAFETY CULTURE

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### Abstract:

The aim of the article is to explain interconnectivity between corporate culture and safety culture, which aim to utilize motivation to prevent work accidents and other unwanted events in an enterprise. The article deals with ways how to improve approaches to Occupational Health & Safety, OH&S, at work place through proper direction of corporate culture. It introduces internal and external determinants of corporate culture, which have a significant effect. The article introduces common features of corporate culture and safety culture as an element of the OH&S management system with emphasis on system effectiveness. The final portion of the article presents the hierarchy of needs model, which may serve as a basis motivating employees to follow safety and health rules at work place.

**Key words:** corporate culture, safety culture, motivation to be safe

### INTRODUCTION

A new approach to Occupational Health & Safety Management puts emphasis on work organization, focus on systematic approach, which deals with safety, keeping in mind aspects that deal with work. The main focus is a person, his/her behaviour and how he/she creates complete work culture. An important point of the new approach to OH&S is choosing a management approach that requires that all employees participate in issues that deal with OH&S. Management's success and effectiveness depend on whether people have clearly outlined responsibilities, whether their scope of work is clearly defined within a specific systems 'culture, which ensures that responsibilities don't overlap [1]. The quality and level of employees' safety, "work" life and health in a wider context, represent culture, employer's and the state's social and economic maturity. Continuous improvement of approaches to OH&S can be supported by social governmental policies and by active involvement of both social partners when solving questions regarding OH&S, whether individually or in cooperation [2].

Corporate culture is a reflection of the way a company is run and it can, together with safety culture, help effectively improve employee's approach to work performance with respect to safety and protection of workplace health. Aside from strict adherence to regulations set out in OH&S, it is important to motivate employees so that they embrace policies that deal with OH&S as „their own“. The article looks at interconnectivity between corporate culture and safety culture, which through motivation aim to improve employees' attitude towards work injuries and other unwanted episodes in an enterprise.

An integrated approach to safety culture is gaining importance. Safety culture in an enterprise can be characterized as a result of individual and group values, attributes, understanding, competence and behaviour of various levels

of management as well as of management style and quality of safety management in an organization.

### DETERMINANTS OF CORPORATE CULTURE

Corporate culture is how employees act and behave in an enterprise. It is based on values, norms, expectations and opinions which all employees accept, acknowledge and use. Highly developed corporate culture is very important for clarifying and simplifying performance of various developmental activities performed by human resources. Corporate culture is manifested by:

- *peoples' behaviour* – how management treats employees; how employees behave amongst themselves, in regard to work performance; how people identify with the enterprise and with its goals; whether employees have personal and professional respect; what role play trust and overall atmosphere in an enterprise; how customers are treated;
- *communication* – what kind of access to information have individual employees; how decisions are made; whether employees can bring forward new ideas; whether they can negotiate with management;
- *overall impression* – how is an enterprise perceived from outside; by its trustworthiness and competence; what is the first impression when one enters the enterprise, layout, equipment, employees' clothing, etc.

Experience shows that success of an enterprise does not depend on its technical knowledge and technology, information systems, on developed marketing strategy or on its organizational structure, but it is based on a symbiosis with enterprise's corporate culture [3].

We understand enterprise's determinants as all that considerably influences corporate culture. Development and change of culture in an enterprise is mainly affected by people. In addition to people, it is influenced by a number of important factors, which cannot be omitted. Factors that

**Table 1**  
**Classification of internal and external determinants from corporate culture [4]**

Internal determinants	External determinants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– company history – founder’s influence, company age, stage of development;</li> <li>– company size;</li> <li>– company’s property;</li> <li>– company’s legal structure;</li> <li>– field – profit level,;</li> <li>– use of structure and processes;</li> <li>– dominant technology;</li> <li>– company strategy;</li> <li>– management’s performance and intentions – quality of managing impulses;</li> <li>– employees – mentality, education, attitude towards personal growth, etc.;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– market position;</li> <li>– speed of market feedback – competitors;</li> <li>– character of culture of higher levels – history, country’s mentality, corporate culture of the mother company;</li> <li>– geographical disconnection – regional influences;</li> <li>– economic system;</li> <li>– social system;</li> <li>– political preferences;</li> <li>– legislation;</li> <li>– ecology;</li> <li>– level of research and development in the field</li> </ul>

influence corporate culture could be divided based on numerous viewpoints. However, the most important viewpoint is origin. Based on origin, we divide determinants into internal and external (Table 1). Internal factors originate from the enterprise and they are the most important factors that naturally develop from development of corporate culture and they can be influenced directly. External factors, since a company is an open system, are factors that affect an enterprise from the outside and these cannot be influenced by the enterprise, specifically, an enterprise can influence them only partially [4].

For other purposes, other criteria for division can be used, such as the following:

- tangible determinants – company’s property, equipment,
- intangible determinants – owners’ intentions, management’s intentions,
- influenceable determinants – employees education level, company legal structure,
- non-influenceable determinants – age of the company, country’s mentality.

#### ENTERPRISE’S UNDERSTANDING OF SAFETY CULTURE

Safety culture is understood as an integral part of corporate culture and it is reflected in implementation and workings of the OH&S management system. It is important to understand that implementation of an OH&S management system at an enterprise is a tool that can increase work effectiveness, work organization and can optimize work processes. Ability to sustain a functioning system is a factor contributing to a company’s. Despite a rule that states that implementation of an OH&S management system needs to be voluntary, based on some legislative specifications that are in place, this rule imposes implementation of some measures, which are simultaneously elements of an OH&S management system.

Management of an enterprise is, within the scope of its managing capacity, responsible for overseeing OH&S, environmental protection, operation and maintenance, safety of manufactured products, as well as for ensuring that offered services are made in accordance with appropriate legislative regulations [7]. Members of top management directly influence corporate culture and at the same time

create conditions for implementation of safety culture in an enterprise. The result of successful implementation of safety culture in an enterprise is outlined in the following principles:

- OH&S must be a part of the company’s strategic development;
- Prevention must be a priority and it must be incorporated in management’s corporate activities matrix;
- Responsibility for functions within OH&S cannot be delegated. They must be an integral part of top management’s activities;
- Employees’ life and health are a priority and are taken into consideration before management makes any decisions;
- The OH&S management system must also incorporate measures for “third” parties;
- Focus must be on minimizing human and material damage;
- OH&S must be a priority in terms of all technological and other corporate processes;
- All employees are required to follow measures that stem from the OH&S management system;
- Create conditions for continuous improvement of OH&S systems and of their effectiveness [5].

During their research of basic elements of safety culture, authors Lebecki and Martyka [6] came to the following conclusions:

1. Safety culture of a society is a factor that determines the process of managing safety at its enterprises which makes that it decides of the state of safety of the physical work environment (safety level of techniques and technologies applied) as well as “quality” of their safety management systems.
2. Safety culture at an enterprise is a set of individual and group values, attitudes and behaviour patterns which determine the safety level of its employees’ behaviours.
3. Safety culture of an enterprise determines the safety level prevailing at it in a direct way (by its material products) or in an intermediate way (mental level) (Fig. 1).

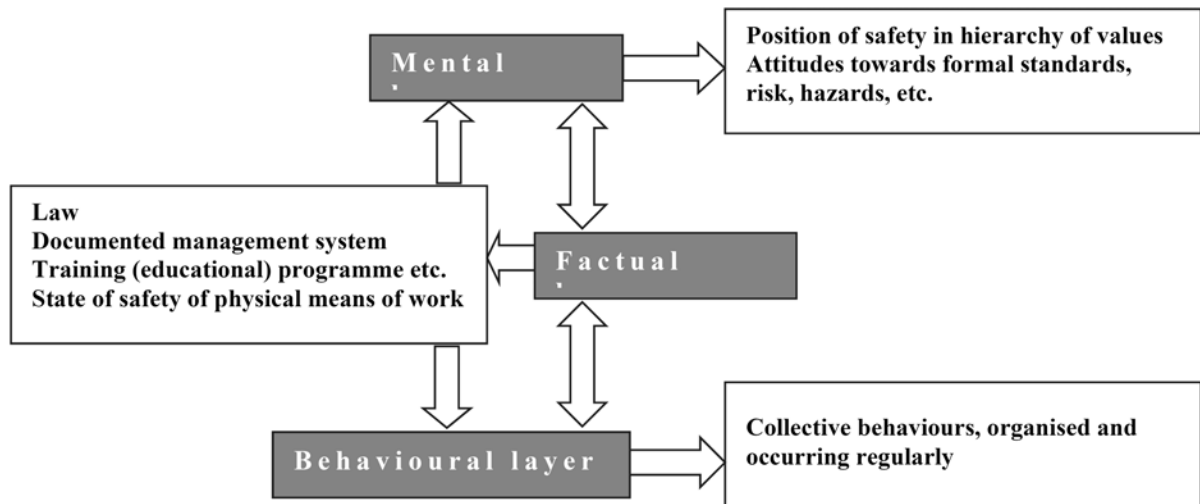


Fig. 1 Layers and elements of safety culture [6]

The result of the above-stated conclusions it that safety culture must become an integral part of corporate culture, specifically, one of its major determinants. Correctly motivated and well informed employees perceive their actions from the work safety stand point as natural and these are beneficial to them primarily from a global as well as from the company's point of view. In addition, they understand that any non-compliance results in work accidents, which cause damage to them directly, as well as to the good name of the enterprise at which they work. Respect for safety rules should be based on a solid foundation of trust in set rules and employees should perceive them as natural and non-restrictive. Internal awareness, created by its corporate culture should lead to this trust. Characteristics of increased effectiveness of the OH&S management should become part of the safety culture. With its natural and informal implementation into values, norms and organisational corporate rules, they can become motivation for following OH&S rules and can prevent work accidents and other occurrences.

**HIERARCHY OF NEEDS MODEL APPLIED DURING DEVELOPMENT OF SAFETY CULTURE**

Corporate culture as a motivational element should create a positive atmosphere in an enterprise and should implement optimal rules of human behaviour. The culture predominantly supports employee's sense of belonging to the company, supports development of company's internal and external potential and helps to create and maintain company's good name. Rules of safe work place and an overall feeling of safety at work, not including potential

illnesses caused by work or an impending work accident, create a calm work environment and stimulate employees. Development of safety culture as an integrated part of corporate culture leads precisely to this.

When defining parameters for safety levels, a large number of enterprises focus only on accident statistics, which don't provide an aggregate overview of safety situations in an enterprise. In order to truly evaluate quality of work safety, it is necessary to answer the following questions:

- Are requirements for safe work correctly implemented and are employees required to follow these?
- Are employees following defined safety rules?
- Are employees continuously exhibiting dangerous behaviour?
- Are members of management setting rights examples with their behaviour by following defined safety rules? (etc.).

It is possible and advisable to use an established model such as the hierarchy of needs model by A. Maslow, which can be applied to OH&S (Table 2) [7] when developing safety culture and motivating employees to be safe. This applied model establishes that all levels of human needs, from basic – physiological to higher – personal and self-actualization can influence employee's approach to safety and health at work place. By understanding individual forms of performance motivation by using OH&S, an employer will gain an effective and informal tool that influences employee's behaviour and can also be utilized when developing corporate culture.

Table 2  
 Transformation of the hierarchy needs model into motivation to follow safety and security rules at work place

Maslow's hierarchy of needs model	Forms of motivation for following OH&S rules
1. Physiological needs (food, water, sleep, feeling of security, etc.)	Create a feeling of safety at work place and medical independence from the work place
2. Safety (to have work of a certain level, professional success, etc.)	Emphasis on safety at work – by acting safely, an employee will not get injured and will be able to continue working
3. Social needs (belong to a society/group and be accepted by it)	Emphasis on an employee as a member of a team, who doesn't want to endanger others with his/her actions
4. Esteem (self-respect, respect by others...)	Emphasis on pride in good work results and on synchronization of work activities with OH&S rules
5. Self - actualization (creativity, self- identification, etc.)	An opportunity to offer suggestions how to improve OH&S

By transforming the hierarchy of needs model into motivation to follow OH&S rules, it becomes a tool for improvement of safety in an enterprise. If various forms of motivation are part of managing processes, they can aid to improve safety awareness, safe behaviour and ultimately continue to decrease number of work accidents. If answers to the group of basic questions (indicated above) are positive, it signifies, that a company is developing and improving its own safety culture and strives to motivate its employees to work safely.

## CONCLUSION

Safety, protection of health at work and working conditions are becoming important factors in the process of company evaluation, directly influencing productivity, effectiveness and quality of work, and company's overall prosperity. Well implemented OH&S rules can prevent irreplaceable losses of human life and health during work accidents, illnesses caused by work and other health hazards cause by work. The economic effect is most noticeable when processes, which lead to improved safety and protection of health at work and improvement of working conditions, also lead to optimization of work processes, to decreased losses, to higher productivity, to effective and better work quality, to enterprise's higher prosperity and to higher prosperity of the entire society. Corporate culture and safety culture should help create informal "safety awareness" in employees by influencing and motivating them to alter their attitude and to follow processes for safety and protection of health at work. In addition to strict adherence to the OH&S rules, it is important to motivate employees so that they view OH&S policies as "their own" and they don't perceive them as obstacles to their work but, on the contrary, identify with them. The article portrays the interconnectivity between corporate culture and safety culture. The article applied the hierarchy of needs model to outline possibilities for motivating employees towards OH&S.

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