

Contributor – CIF

Leadership is an essential part of a health and safety management system because attitudes to safety and health are determined by top management. Often, the best leadership approaches are those that affect others' attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, without need for formal authoritative means. This is at the core of health and safety management, whereby every worker, irrespective of their role, is empowered (and possesses a duty of care), to protect their own safety, health and wellbeing, and of their work colleagues.

How to Ensure Safe Behaviours

According to EU-OSHA, "Occupational safety and health (OSH) systems are designed to identify and minimise risks at the workplace. The effectiveness of such systems also affects business performance, either in a negative way if these systems are cumbersome or bureaucratic, or positively if they are well designed and function effectively. To have a positive impact, OSH systems need to function smoothly, in tune with rather than in contradiction to the overall management of the company and the delivery of production targets and deadlines." The advice offered is to ensure:

1. Effective and strong leadership
2. Involvement of workers, to benefit from their constructive engagement
3. Ongoing assessment of approach, and regular reviews.

According to the Health and Safety Authority, two approaches have been predominantly used to influence or change behaviours in order to better focus on workplace safety; these are:

Behaviour-based safety – this focuses on the identification and modification of critical safety behaviours. This approach seeks to classify behaviours which led or might lead to errors, regardless of whether accidents ultimately resulted. It uses Operant Conditioning (the use of consequences to modify the occurrence and form of behaviour) and Reinforcement Theory (shaping behaviour by controlling the consequences of the behaviour) as its guiding principles.

Culture-based approach – this focuses on an organisation's safety culture and climate. Safety climate refers to an individual's perceptions whereas safety culture refers to an employer's beliefs and values. This approach looks at how management practices and policies shape and influence safety behaviour and operations for effectiveness. Cultural change approaches are more 'top down' and entail safe work practices, hazard control, and incident reporting to drive a safety focus.

Standardised Approach to Risk Assessment Method Statements

The Construction Safety Partnership Advisory Committee (CSPAC) has developed a standardised Risk Assessment Method Statement (RAMS) template and guidance to help employers plan and manage work activities safely, in a manner that ensures consultation and feedback on the planned work with employees. The CIF was heavily involved in its development and endorses its adoption across the sector; emphasis is placed on worker engagement in the planning of work, to ensure safe work practices.

The RAMS and Guidance are freely accessible to download via the HSA's BeSmart.ie educational platform: <https://www.besmart.ie/news/article/144/new-standardised-risk-assessment-method-statement-rams-guidance-and-template>