



The Benefits of Participating in a Safety Culture Assessment

A strong safety culture bolsters all aspects of performance, including safety, service and efficiency. Having a strong, positive culture is helpful particularly in decentralized working environments like the railway industry. Employees largely work unsupervised or in small teams and must therefore be properly supported by their leaders and safety systems.

The Railway Association of Canada's (RAC) safety culture assessment process has enabled several Canadian railways to identify opportunities and to implement initiatives which have made a positive impact to strengthen their safety culture.

The RAC has worked with experts to develop a safety culture assessment process which is available to its members, along with credible practitioners to support implementation.

Please contact [Ben Chursinoff \(bchursinoff@railcan.ca\)](mailto:bchursinoff@railcan.ca) for more information on completing a safety culture assessment through the RAC.

An organization's safety culture is comprised of more than "what we do around here". Safety culture can be considered the shared attitudes, values, beliefs, behaviors, perceptions and assumptions around safety in a workplace. Although behaviors and attitudes can be readily observed, it is much more difficult to observe the underlying beliefs and assumptions driving the culture. Safety culture is important to understand as it sets the tone for how our safety management systems will work in practice. The best management system, standard or policy can be put in place, but without the right culture supporting it, employees can still work in an unsafe environment.

Seeking the help of an objective, third-party perspective to facilitate an assessment can be beneficial for understanding and learning about safety culture. The Railway Association of Canada maintains the **Safety Culture Improvement Initiative** for member companies. Through the initiative, member companies have access to a confidential safety culture assessment that is delivered by credible practitioners and through a methodology tailored for railway companies in Canada.

The assessment process can be customized depending on the number of staff employed at the railway. An assessment can also include: perceptual surveys, interviews, focus groups, and a review of safety policies and procedures at the railway. Each assessment provides an important opportunity to work with practitioners to identify pragmatic actions that can improve a railway company's safety culture. This includes access to guidance material and "best practice" documents produced by railway companies.

Benefits associated with participating in a safety culture assessment include:

- Having an opportunity for the workforce to provide honest feedback about safety which will help to inform what improvement opportunities there are.
- Developing a platform to discuss important issues that affect workplace safety. This happens through participation in the assessment and also through identified actions from feedback such as having employee-led groups or joint groups.
- Increasing employee ownership of safety activities and associated responsibilities (as the opportunities identified for improvement are highlighted by employees and they are involved in implementation).
- Developing trust between organizational levels.
- Developing an open communication forum between employment levels.
- Learning how to integrate knowledge from previous safety incidents or near misses into organizational safety systems and workforce communications.
- Development of an internal safety culture baseline that will help to track improvements and progress.

By understanding the current state of a railway's safety culture, a organization can learn how to improve and create a safer, more positive working environment.