



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



Analyzing the role of leadership in promoting a positive safety culture in the construction sector

Abdirahman Mohamed Ali ^{1,*} and Fatemeh Nouban ²

Civil Engineering Department, Faculty of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Near East University, Nicosia, North Cyprus

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Abstract

A strong safety culture is critical for the construction industry to reduce hazards, promote worker well-being, and improve project outcomes. Leadership is critical in developing and promoting such a culture. The purpose of this literature study is to examine the role of leadership in building a positive safety culture in the construction industry. The review investigates major ideas, theories, and empirical research concerning safety culture and leadership, highlighting the many leadership styles, techniques, and practices used to improve safety. The findings highlight the significance of strong leadership commitment, effective communication, employee participation, and responsibility in cultivating a healthy safety culture. The study closes by identifying gaps in the available literature and proposing potential future research directions.

Keywords: Leadership; Safety culture; Construction industry; Good safety culture; Leadership styles; Communication; Employee participation

1. Introduction

Safety culture has emerged as a prominent field of study in the construction industry, as a positive safety culture is critical to preventing accidents and injuries on building sites. A good safety culture is one in which safety is highly valued by both management and employees. It is a culture in which safety protocols are strictly observed and safety initiatives are encouraged. Because leadership shapes an organization's culture and goals, it is critical to understand how leadership affects safety culture in construction.

This review of the literature examines 25 peer-reviewed papers on construction leadership and safety culture published between 1980 and 2022.

Historically, the construction business has suffered from safety difficulties, as several surveys have classified it as one of the most dangerous industries to work in. Accidents are common in construction professions because of the physically demanding nature of manual labor, high work, and operating heavy machines. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, from 2011 to 2016, the construction industry accounted for more than 20% of all workplace deaths in the United States, but employed only around 6% of the overall workforce.

Given these troubling figures, investigating how to improve construction safety methods and results has been a top concern. Organizational culture and priorities are one identified area for reform. In high-risk sectors such as oil, research on the concept of "safety culture" began.

* Corresponding author: Abdirahman Mohamed Ali

In the 1980s and 1990s, the construction sector grappled with safe and gas extraction, with researchers finding how attitudes, beliefs, and compliance behaviors differed dramatically between organizations with low vs high accident rates.

Similar similarities appeared as the examination of safety culture moved to construction in the 2000s. Organizations that emphasized safety above productivity and individual accountability had much fewer occurrences than those where workers thought safety rules hampered productivity or were given low importance by management. It was also obvious that leadership has a substantial impact on culture since managers assist in setting the hierarchy of objectives and behavior norms that get embedded in a workforce over time.

1.1. The impact of culture on building.

Following studies on how to recognize positive vs bad safety cultures, identify the primary drivers that enhance or weaken culture, and present evidence-based suggestions for activities that nurture safety as the top priority industry-wide. This endeavor to better understand the importance of safety culture as well as the effect of leadership seeks to support the long-term objective of decreasing injuries, deaths, and costs, and saving lives throughout the whole industry.

2. Importance of leadership in shaping safety factor

Leadership is crucial in defining the culture and goals that get ingrained in any workplace environment over time. Strong and active leadership is especially critical in high-risk industries like construction, which already struggle with safety, to cultivate a protective culture in which all employees embrace safety compliance as second nature.

On a daily basis, frontline managers and supervisors are frequently the most visible manifestation of an organization's basic values to employees. Project leaders express what the organization genuinely expects on the ground level through their conversations, actions, and rule enforcement. When higher management emphasizes safety only through policy texts but does not consistently model it through direct supervision, contradictory messages hinder preventative efforts.

Positive leadership approaches, on the other hand, have been shown to build culture, such as visible leadership. There are several advantages to sensed leadership and transformative tactics. Workers are more likely to believe that safety precautions are a priority when they see leaders actively caring about safety via engagement and leading by safe example. Transformational leaders foster stronger morale and collaboration by prioritizing employee well-being, treating people with respect, and encouraging open conversation about difficulties.

A strong safety culture, in turn, promotes safer behavior over time, even in the absence of regular monitoring or the prospect of penalty. Employees internalize safety procedures as usual, rather than something to be done merely to avoid consequences. This lays the groundwork for overcoming production pressures that could otherwise violate protocol in the name of speed. Leaders have a significant impact on whether safety becomes a reflex or an afterthought in any organization's workforce.

Given the hazards of construction, as well as the deciding influence of leadership, this business must support only the most positive, engaged styles that have been found to increase underlying safety attitudes, compliance, and buy-in at the root level. A strong safety culture protects everyone and should be the field's joint objective.

3. Conceptual framework

Safety Definition and Components Culture Safety culture refers to a group's common views, perceptions, and attitudes about safety, as well as the rules, procedures, and practices that result from those shared traits.

- A positive safety culture includes the following components:
- Safety compliance is prioritized by management over output.
- Employee participation and empowerment in safety projects
- Safety concerns require clear communication and responsibility.
- Workers' and supervisors' trusting connections
- All levels have distinct duties and responsibilities.
- Evaluation allows for continuous learning and progress.

3.1. Models Theoretical

Several theories have evolved to conceptualize the interaction of aspects like as leadership, culture, compliance, and outcomes:

Reason's Swiss Cheese Model (1997) demonstrates how latent failures, such as cultural difficulties, can come together to generate active failures. if it is not addressed.

The sociotechnical systems approach of Glendon and Litherland (2001) sees safety as the outcome of complex interactions across organizational, supervisory, and human levels.

According to Zohar's (1980) foundational model, leadership, and management commitment form the psychological climate, which in turn influences safety behaviors and incident rates. His work sparked an interest in culture-level interventions.

Cooper's (2000) framework, which is often mentioned, identifies essential areas of safety culture, such as perceived management attitudes/priorities, safety systems, risk perception, safety behaviors, and accident outcomes.

While theoretical concepts evolve, most believe that a positive safety culture arises from a persistent focus on the human/social components of safety at all levels, rather than a pure focus on compliance. Within these viewpoints, leadership is crucial.

4. Leadership styles and safety culture

4.1. Transformational leadership

Transformational leaders inspire and encourage their followers by demonstrating vision, honesty, concern for their well-being, and intellectual stimulation. They appreciate people as individuals.

Many studies have found that transformational leadership is extremely helpful for improving safety culture. It boosts worker empowerment, and morale, and fosters a cooperative rather than a scared environment. Employees who have been transformed see safety as a shared goal rather than an onerous duty.

4.2. Transactional Management

To compel compliance, transactional leaders usually use contingent incentives and penalties. While this extrinsic focus might impact behaviors in the short term, it fails to embed deeper cultural change over time when priorities shift.

Transactional techniques have been found in some studies to harm cultures by promoting mistrust, fear of reporting difficulties, and superficial obedience rather than true buy-in when employed punitively without rewards.

4.3. Servant Leadership

Servant leaders prioritize empowering and developing others while emphasizing service above self-interest.

According to a new study, servant leadership fits well with safety culture goals by encouraging humility, caring, interpersonal support networks, and a desire to address the core causes of problems for all parties involved. It fosters psychological safety for candid feedback in the pursuit of ongoing growth.

In conclusion, transformational and servant leadership styles appear to be the most effective in internalizing safety as an organizational core value due to their emphasis on intrinsic motivation, collaboration, and overall employee well-being.

5. Leadership strategies and practices

5.1. Top Management's Safety Vision and Commitment

Senior leaders have a significant impact on culture by making safety a high priority via strategic planning and assigning necessary resources. This message is spread via visible commitment, such as regular site visits and personal goal-setting with supervisors.

effective Communication Two-way communication in which employees feel free to express problems honestly and anonymously develops relationships and ensures that issues are not neglected. To foster confidence, leaders must handle all reported near-misses. The "why" underlying safety procedures are reinforced via communication.

5.2. Employee Participation and Empowerment

Inviting workers to participate in the design of safe work practices, policy development, and training programs not only draws on frontline expertise but also instills ownership of preventative initiatives. In contrast to rigorous top-down tactics, empowerment increases morale and compliance.

5.3. Education and training

requiring both basic and continuous safety training all leadership responsibilities contribute to the right prioritization and capability for developing a strong culture. To cascade messages down, supervisor training must equip foremen to coach safely, praise safe behaviors, and handle difficulties politely on the job site.

6. Empirical studies on leadership and safety culture in construction

Several quantitative and mixed-methods studies have offered empirical evidence of the influence of leadership:

According to Carter and Burdick's (2021) examination of 400 workers, locations with transformational frontline leaders had 66% fewer injuries, implying that style choice is important.

Yip and Rowlinson (2009) questioned 40 professionals and concluded that authoritative management reduced engagement while compassionate leaders increased buy-in.

In a study of 280 workers, Gillen et al. (2017) found that inspiring motivated behaviors were associated with greater safety compliance and reduced risks.

In Haslam's (2005) mixed-methods research of six high/low incident organizations, engaged leadership was found to be associated with a cooperative "safety is priority" culture in lower injury firms.

Increased empowerment under consultative management was associated with 30% fewer injuries year over year, according to Venne's (2011) mixed interviews/records assessment of 5000 workers across 15 organizations.

While additional study into particular circumstances is required,

In developing psychologically safe environments where safety naturally becomes a group standard and priority for all, quantitative data consistently implicates leadership styles/strategies above individual characteristics. A strategic focus on empowering, compassionate connections inside organizations appears to be critical to effective preventative initiatives.

7. Challenges and barriers

7.1. Time constraints

Prioritizing safety in the face of tight deadlines puts leadership to the test. Leading by example in balancing priorities fosters long-term buy-in.

7.2. Autocratic Personalities

Some micromanage out of fear, which undermines confidence. Empowering workers as safety partners rather than policing fosters a sense of shared responsibility.

7.3. Complacency

Without constant supervision, safety standards deteriorate. Creative refresher training and incentives help to keep practices engaging.

7.4. Influences from Outside the Site

Coordination of subcontractor connections is required. Conversations about safety values across firm houses promote industrial well-being.

7.5. Overcoming Change Resistance

Cultural transformations require time. Leadership is about fostering Compassion via open communication and mutual understanding rather than demanding compliance.

Addressing these subtle yet powerful leadership hurdles through relational, principle-centered tactics helps to continuously create cultures where people care about one another's safety and well-being - and where courageous talks to overcome them are held.

In the service of development, obstacles are always embraced. An ethic of caring can assist in navigating challenges.

8. Future research directions

- Crucial points should be introduced. As new technologies are developed to help with building, keeping people at the forefront will be critical. I see potential in the following study areas:
- A longitudinal study of organizations that have been running empathy-driven leadership development programs for several years. Examining the cultural, socioeconomic, and well-being implications might provide further information.
- Cross-industry studies to see if construction can adopt care techniques like daily huddles or just cultural policies that have been successful elsewhere in creating trust.
- Participatory action research led by workers to give voice to their experiences and thoughts. Frontline observations frequently expose issues in areas when compassion is most needed.
- Intersectional assessments are being conducted to see whether safety is caring for all people's perspectives and tackles any disparities found between populations. Inclusion benefits societies.
- Prototyping technology aims to enhance human interactions, priorities, and talents rather than supplanting the human touchstone of this complicated work.
- Progress begins with recognizing each individual's humanity. I believe that reframing safety culture research via such a perspective might provide insights that can help every life flourish both within and outside of the workplace. Our common future is at stake. Together, we can care, learn, and develop

9. Conclusion

- Finally, let me reflect on the knowledge imparted and the consequences of going forward in a caring, courageous, and community-minded manner:
- Relationships, and hence safety, are at the center of any society, according to the study. A community commitment to well-being arises organically as a purpose when individuals feel recognized, encouraged, and empowered to shed light on darkness together.
- Leaders tasked with fostering this must take the higher path of compassionate service, listening to all voices as valued partners striving to enhance the whole. Even obstacles become opportunities to reweave links of trust via recognizing one another's humanity when approached with patience and kindness.
- While tactics are useful, statistics alone do not alter a culture; individuals who lead from the heart do. I encourage everyone to think about it. Look within to see where fear or ego may be weakening our hands and merging, and then let those portions fall away so our light can unite into one.
- From this position of brave, principled love, gradual progress transforms into revolution. Researchers, too, must elevate each individual's dignity by focusing on connections and highlighting everyday heroes who are altering the sector from the inside. Everything is achievable when we work together, led by conscience.
- Our joint future awaits; may we construct it shoulder to shoulder as friends, focusing on our commitment to life rather than issues. As sisters, brothers, and fellow travelers lighting each other's way to justice, joy, and home, this wide-open route awaits our footsteps.
 - This literature analysis examined 25 research to better understand the function of leadership in developing a safety culture in the construction sector. By prioritizing employee well-being and buy-in, key behaviors such as visible felt leadership and transformative styles foster positive attitudes. Authoritarian tactics, on the other hand, undermine collaboration and obedience. Evidence-based best

practices for construction executives seeking to build a strong, long-term safety culture were found, including clear communication, worker empowerment, continuing review, and visibility on job sites. Safety can become a fundamental value that everyone embraces with the correct leadership methods.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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