
WHAT IS A SAFETY CULTURE ASSESSMENT

AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

A safety culture assessment helps to provide an organization with insight into their culture. Looking into your own safety culture is comparable to looking into your own individual personality - it's very difficult to see yourself objectively without the help of those external to us. We struggle to see our own blind spots because we live and breathe within our own culture every day.

By engaging in an assessment process with the expertise of the Railway Association of Canada (RAC), a baseline understanding of safety culture can be built. Having this perspective from the assessment process enables organizations to more clearly pinpoint their safety strengths and also their opportunities for safety improvement.

After several years of research and conducting assessments, the RAC's approach to safety culture assessment includes the following steps:



1. The first step is **PLANNING and DESIGN**. Mapping out the entire assessment beforehand is helpful in understanding what will work best for the specific organization and how to get the entire workforce engaged in the process. This step includes ensuring buy-in from senior management, creating an in-house team to guide the assessment and future improvements and developing an appropriate communication plan.



2. **COLLECTING INFORMATION** is the second step. The assessment methods or tools used will depend on what size the organization is. The RAC offers: surveys, focus groups, interviews, observations and document analysis. Collecting this perceptual information from the workforce helps to create a picture of what the safety culture looks like.



3. **UNDERSTANDING and SHARING RESULTS** is the third step. Once the in-house team has an understanding of what the assessment results tell us about the culture, the results can be communicated to the broader workforce.



4. **DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN** is the fourth step. The action plan will be informed by the results from the assessment and will focus on top opportunities. Following through with the action plan is very important, as it will be the way to demonstrate to the workforce that their input matters. Continually communicating about plans and progress for the action plan with the workforce is also important.



5. **MOVING FORWARD** is the fifth and final step. The RAC encourages keeping communication open after the assessment by scheduling check-ins to ensure that the organizations have all resources necessary to continue their improvements after the assessment process. Safety culture is a journey where ongoing initiatives build strength progressively. Organizations also have the opportunity to re-assess their safety culture in the future.

Assessing your safety culture can help to identify areas of safety improvement. Acting upon these improvements will not only contribute to a more positive safety culture but a more positive organizational culture as well. This will bolster all aspects of performance including safety, service and efficiency.

If you would like more information or have an inquiry about safety culture assessments through the RAC, please contact Ben Chursinoff (bchursinoff@railcan.ca).