

SAFETY CULTURE IN THE RAILWAY INDUSTRY

Information Brochure



Railway Association
of Canada



Safety culture is of paramount importance as identified in past statutory reviews of the **Railway Safety Act¹**. As part of its **Safety Culture Improvement Initiative**, the **Railway Association of Canada** has been supporting its members to assess and strengthen **organizational safety culture**.

The purpose of this document is to support the understanding and dissemination of safety culture information. It is available for use by The Railway Association of Canada (RAC) members as a communication tool to augment knowledge and awareness of safety culture and its benefits.

HOW DOES SAFETY CULTURE RELATE TO OTHER SAFETY INITIATIVES SUCH AS SAFETY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (SMS)?

In simple terms, safety culture does not replace SMS or any other safety initiative because it constitutes the foundation and environment which enable safety programs and initiatives to be successful. The best Safety Management System, standard or policy can be put in place, but without the right culture, its full benefits cannot be achieved. **An effective safety culture supports the safety of Canada's railway employees, the public and communities.**

What is Safety Culture?

Safety culture consists of the individual and group attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours related to safety in the workplace. An effective safety culture includes these important elements:



**LEADERSHIP
COMMITMENT**



**TWO-WAY
COMMUNICATION**



**EMPLOYEE
ENGAGEMENT**



**LEARNING
CULTURE**



**A FAIR AND
JUST CULTURE**

1: <https://tc.canada.ca/en/legislative-reviews/railway-safety-act-review-2017-18/enhancing-rail-safety-canada-working-together-safer-communities>

THE IMPORTANCE AND BENEFITS OF A STRONG SAFETY CULTURE

Safety culture is critical in the railway environment because employees work mostly unsupervised, or in small teams, and must therefore be committed and motivated to independently make the right decisions to manage risks, protect the public and the environment, while servicing customers safely and efficiently.

An effective safety culture engages and aligns all levels of the organization to bolster all aspects of performance, including safety, service, and efficiency.

Further, the learning element of safety culture builds on experience and employee engagement to enhance safety by building on strengths, while learning from incidents and opportunities, thereby building resilience which reduces risk and the likelihood of accidents.

The railway industry is committed to creating an effective safety culture and supporting their employees through their leaders and safety systems.

An effective safety culture not only enhances workplace safety – it impacts overall safety and business performance and is essential to ensuring the safety of Canada's railway employees, the public, and communities.



THE SAFETY CULTURE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

RAC's safety culture assessment process has enabled several Canadian railways to identify their strengths and opportunities, and to implement focused initiatives which have made a substantial positive impact to strengthen their safety culture.

The benefits of participating in a safety culture assessment are outlined in the following RAC brochure, '[The Benefits of Participating in a Safety Culture Assessment](#)' (available on RAC safety culture webpage).

The safety culture assessment process builds on the foundation established by the collaborative work carried-out between regulators, unions, railways, and their association following the *Railway Safety Act Review of 2008*. The assessment process is anchored around the five safety culture elements reviewed earlier and takes on a rigorous, multi-method approach. The assessment itself consists of a perceptual survey and focus groups which are facilitated by the RAC Team and implemented with the support of an organizational in-house team. The in-house team is comprised of both management and labour employees - this should include operational/departmental leaders as well as safety committee members. The assessment process identifies the strengths and opportunities of a company, thereby enabling the development of a focused action plan to strengthen safety culture and to set in motion a journey of continuous improvement.

Over the past decade, the RAC has worked with experts to develop a comprehensive safety culture assessment process which is available to its members, along with access to credible practitioners to support implementation and follow-up.

The safety culture assessment process is available to RAC members (refer to end of document for RAC contact information).



THE SAFETY CULTURE IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY

Canada's railways dedicate significant effort and resources to improve their safety performance through investments in safety management systems, training, infrastructure, and leading-edge technologies. However, an effective safety culture is the catalyst which enables all these elements to achieve their full potential.

Creating an effective safety culture is about ensuring that an entire organization – from top to bottom – is on the same page when it comes to safety. It's about making sure everyone shares the same values, attitudes, competencies, and patterns of behaviour relative to safety. It's also about ensuring that everyone feels comfortable speaking up if they are aware of hazards, or have suggestions to improve safety.

Although many Canadian railways have led the industry in several safety aspects over the past decades, the safety culture improvement journey is a more recent initiative where many railways have leveraged the assessment and improvement process offered by the RAC.

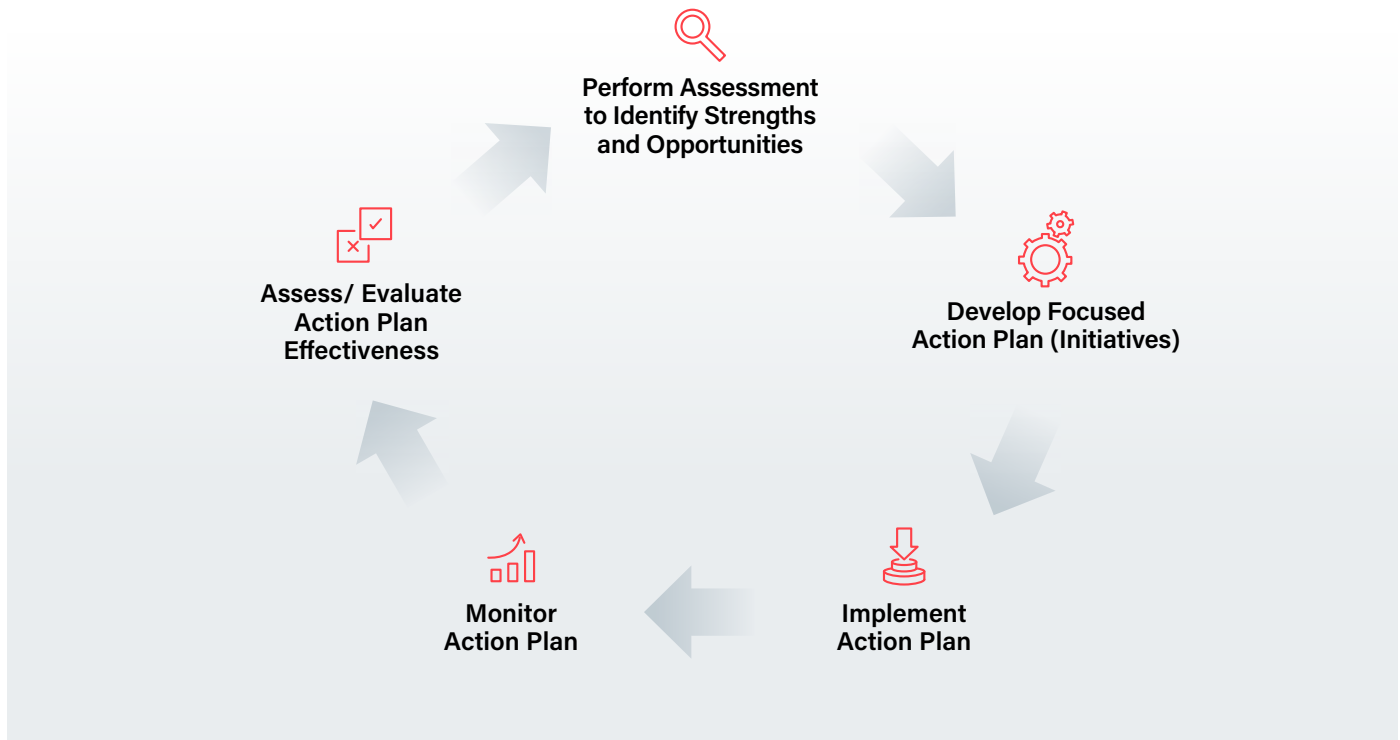
As part of the initiative which launched in 2015, the RAC has developed a safety culture assessment tool in partnership with experts and various stakeholders including the Transport Canada Railway Research Advisory Board.

Each assessment provides an important opportunity to work with expert practitioners to identify pragmatic actions that can improve a railway company's safety culture. This includes access to guidance material and best practices developed by railway companies. The safety culture assessment is the beginning of the journey because it is coupled with action plans and a commitment for the long haul to sustain the improvement journey.

In simple terms, the safety culture improvement journey is driven by the following key principles and activities:

- **An unwavering commitment by railway leaders, managers, and employees to develop an effective safety culture;**
- **Performing a safety culture assessment to identify strengths and opportunities;**
- **Developing and implementing specific action plans and initiatives to build on strengths and address opportunities, with the objective to develop an effective safety culture;**
- **Review progress on a periodic basis to assess / evaluate the effectiveness of their initiatives, and to identify further opportunities;**
- **Pursue the journey with further action plans and periodic reviews / reassessments, with the objective to continually enhancing effectiveness of safety culture.**

SAFETY CULTURE ASSESSMENT AND IMPROVEMENT CYCLE



SAFETY CULTURE TOOLS AND BEST PRACTICES

RAC is dedicated to helping railways foster an effective safety culture since 2015. To support its members, the RAC has created a compendium of safety culture tools and best practices.

The compendium contains an array of tools and best practices that can be utilized to strengthen safety culture, educate individuals in the railway industry on safety culture and provide guidance for facilitating safety culture change.

Resources are available to members through the following link:

<https://www.railcan.ca/members/rac-committees/safety-culture-committee/>

A few examples of resources which can be accessed through this link include:



**SAFETY CULTURE
TOOLS**



**ACTION PLAN
GUIDANCE**



**INFORMATION ON
THE FIVE SAFETY
CULTURE ELEMENTS**



**TABLE OF LEADERSHIP
BEHAVIOURS**

RAC - SUPPORTING MEMBERS IN THEIR JOURNEY

The RAC has been supporting its members to perform safety culture assessments, as well as helping them develop focused actions plans to build on strengths, address opportunities and bring improvement.

RAC support is available to members throughout the safety culture improvement journey.

The RAC has established a safety culture steering committee consisting of members and subject matter experts to support the safety culture improvement journey by refining the assessment process, identifying best practices, undertaking research and development, elevating safety culture knowledge, and engaging external stakeholders. The RAC is committed to this journey for the long haul.

The following testimonials were provided by leaders from member companies who have participated in a safety culture assessment:

“The RAC safety culture assessment provided detailed information and insight on our safety culture which allowed our company to understand our strengths and opportunities. This was valuable in developing pinpointed initiatives which are making a difference”.

- Keith Nordin – Director Operations - SRY Rail Link

“The RAC safety culture team worked with our company management and in-house team while providing support through every step of the assessment process”.

- Stéphane Tardif – Senior Director Safety and Security - GWRR

Please contact Ben Chursinoff (bchursinoff@railcan.ca) for more information on any aspect of the RAC Safety Culture Improvement Initiative.

