

SAFETY CULTURE

WHAT IS THE SAFETY CULTURE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS AND HOW DOES IT WORK?



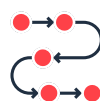
The safety culture improvement process helps to provide an organization with insight into their culture. Looking into your own safety culture is comparable to looking into your own individual personality - it's very difficult to see yourself objectively without the help of those external to us. We struggle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

By engaging in an improvement 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 improvement process enables organizations to more clearly pinpoint their safety strengths and also their opportunities for safety improvement. After several years of research and working with railways on their safety culture, RAC's approach to the safety culture improvement process includes the following steps:



The first step is planning and design.

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



Developing an action plan is the fourth step.

The action plan will be informed by the results from the methods or tools used 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.



Collecting information is the second step.

The safety culture improvement process methods or tools used will depend on what size the organization is. RAC offers: reflection meetings, 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.



Moving forward is the fifth and final step.

RAC encourages keeping communication open after the improvement process by scheduling check-ins to ensure that the organizations have all resources necessary to continue their improvements after the process. Safety culture is a journey where ongoing initiatives build strength progressively. Organizations also have the opportunity to conduct a follow-up improvement process of their safety culture in the future.



Understanding and sharing results is the third step.

Once the in-house team has an understanding of what the results tell us about the culture, the results can be communicated to the broader workforce.

The safety culture improvement process 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 RAC, please contact [Julia Desmarais \(jdesmarais@railcan.ca\)](mailto:jdesmarais@railcan.ca).



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THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING THE SAFETY CULTURE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS



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

An effective safety culture bolsters all aspects of performance, including safety, service and efficiency. Having an effective safety 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.

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

Please contact **Julia Desmarais** (jdesmarais@railcan.ca) for more information on the RAC's safety culture improvement process



An organization's safety culture is comprised of more than "what we do around here". **Safety culture is the shared attitudes, values, beliefs, behaviours, perceptions and assumptions around safety in a workplace.** Although behaviours 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 a safety culture improvement process 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 the confidential safety culture improvement process that is facilitated by credible practitioners and through a methodology tailored for railway companies in Canada.

The improvement process can be customized depending on the number of staff employed at the railway. The improvement process can include: reflection meetings, perceptual surveys, interviews, focus groups, and a review of safety policies and procedures at the railway. Each improvement process 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 the safety culture improvement process 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 process' reflection meetings, focus groups, and/or interviews, which provide participants the opportunity to identify actions.
- > 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 will learn how to improve and create a safer, more effective working environment.

