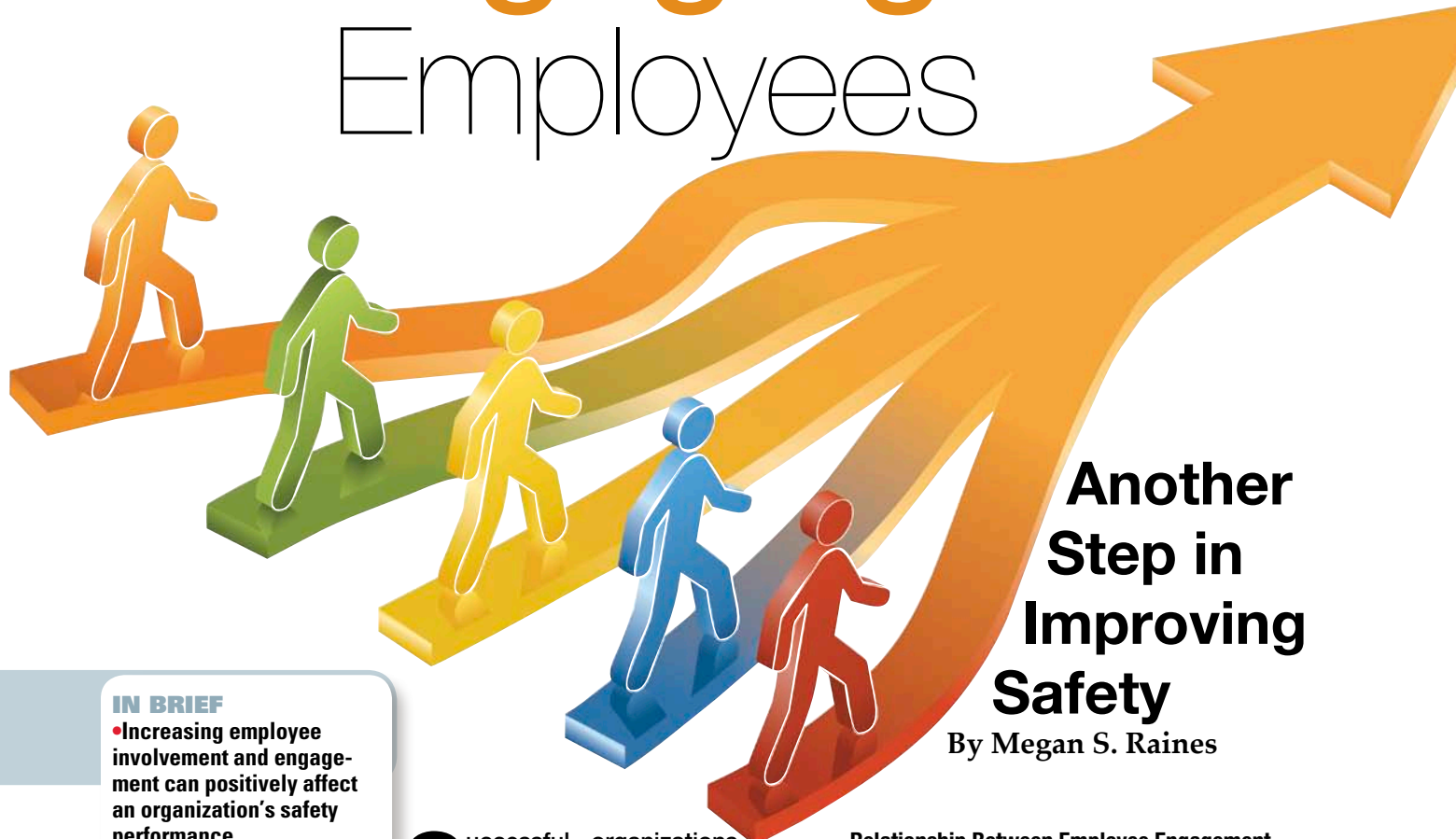


# Engaging Employees



## Another Step in Improving Safety

By Megan S. Raines

### IN BRIEF

- Increasing employee involvement and engagement can positively affect an organization's safety performance.
- SH&E professionals can employ various methods to more effectively engage and involve employees in the safety program.
- Lean manufacturing initiatives provide an excellent opportunity to improve safety and grow employee involvement.

**S**uccessful organizations involve employees at all levels in various aspects of the business and value their input. To create a fully encompassing corporate culture, employees must be involved and engaged and have the opportunity to provide input on changes to their workplace.

Safety performance is no exception. Studies have shown a positive link between employee engagement, employee involvement and safety performance. If changes that could affect safety are made without seeking employee input and involvement, it may be difficult to continuously improve safety performance within an organization over time.

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### Relationship Between Employee Engagement, Employee Involvement & Safety

Commonalities can be found in the literature when comparing the numerous definitions of employee engagement. Vance (2006) examines how this term is defined by employers and corporate consultants and concludes:

Though different organizations define engagement differently, some common themes emerge. These themes include employees' satisfaction with their work and pride in their employer, the extent to which people enjoy and believe in what they do for work and the perception that their employer values what they bring to the table.

Employee engagement is directly correlated to the amount of involvement that employees have in their work processes and activities (Lockwood, 1997). Employee involvement in safety is critical to ensuring that they become engaged in the safety aspects of their work and the organization's safety program.

Employee engagement is frequently discussed and studied in the human resources community. Although the measure of employee engagement

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can seem somewhat subjective, it can be objectively measured using employee surveys. Studies have shown a positive relationship between the measured level of employee engagement and business priorities such as higher productivity, better quality and increased profitability.

Fewer studies have examined the impact of employee engagement on SH&E performance. However, those studies show a significant positive correlation between the level of employee engagement and safety performance.

For example, Gallup compared the critical business outcomes of workgroups within more than 125 organizations. This meta-analysis compared workgroups that were in the top-quartile and bottom-quartile in employee engagement measures (Harter, Schmidt, Killham, et al., 2006).

Employee engagement levels were determined by administering a survey that measured overall satisfaction as well as items considered actionable at the supervisor or manager levels, which can predict attitudinal outcomes such as pride, loyalty and satisfaction. According to the study, engaged business units experienced 62% fewer safety incidents than units with lower employee engagement (Harter, et al., 2006).

Erickson (2000) compares results from several studies and concludes that the management characteristic which is most predictive of good safety performance is a positive employee environment. This includes characteristics such as respecting employees, open communication, and employee involvement and participation.

While Harter, et al. (2006), and Erickson (2000) compare results across different studies and, thus, across different organizations, one can find numerous published examples of individual organizations that have seen improved safety performance after implementing programs to increase employee engagement.

One such example was described in a Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Foundation report. In this report, the Molson Coors beverage company saved \$1.7 million in safety costs during 2002 by strengthening employee engagement. Engaged employees were five times less likely than nonengaged employees to have a safety incident and seven times less likely to have a lost-time safety incident. In addition, the average cost of a safety incident was \$392 for nonengaged employees, but only \$63 for engaged employees (Vance, 2006).

In another example, Connecticut Light and Power (CL&P) implemented a safety workout program to solve identified safety problems and other issues. This method emphasized employee involvement at every level, and included the formation of cross-functional teams to solve problems and address issues. After the first year, CL&P experienced a 27% reduction in lost workday injuries and a 34% reduction in preventable motor vehicle accidents. The initiative also resulted in increased employee buy-in, involvement and improved relations across the organization (Bolger, 2004).

Another company implemented an employee involvement model. This 12-step process emphasized teamwork and employee involvement in safety. Communication increased, and cooperation and commitment between union and management was at a high level. In the first year following the intervention, the company reported a 70% reduction in lost workday cases (from 10 cases to 3) and a 100% reduction in safety violations as measured by a consultant (50 violations versus 0 violations) (Ariss, 2003).

These examples do not conclusively demonstrate a strict cause-and-effect relationship between employee engagement and safety performance. However, when considered in conjunction with the related research on the topic, it is difficult to overlook the potential impact of employee engagement on safety performance.

Turning employees from simple followers into active participants in the safety processes can strengthen the level of their engagement and ultimately will benefit the organization and the employees. The organizations in the cited examples used different methods to involve and engage employees, and all achieved significant improvements. Therefore, the method of involvement does not appear to be crucial as long as employees are actively participating.

Employee involvement is recognized as a key requirement of an SH&E management system because of its strong relationship to safety performance. In fact, to obtain OHSAS 18001 certification, an organization must demonstrate that employees participate in specific aspects of the safety management system. This includes development and review of SH&E policies and objectives, and consultation when changes affect employee safety and health (BSI, 2007).

Similarly, OSHA Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP) must involve employees in SH&E management in at least three meaningful, constructive ways (OSHA, 2008). This involvement is paired with management commitment as the first cornerstone of VPP, which is often regarded as the most important component of the program (Bennett & Deitch, 2007).

Similarly, ANSI/AIHA Z10-2005 places employee participation in the same category as management leadership within the total safety management system. Again, this is regarded as the standard's most important section (Manuele, 2006). Management commitment and leadership go hand-in-hand with employee involvement; both are critical to the success of any safety management system.

### **Engaging Employees in Safety**

For employees to feel that they are engaged in the safety process, the organization must generate several factors:

- employee involvement;
- consideration of employee ideas
- communication;
- positive feedback;
- respect.

### ***Employee Involvement***

Employee involvement in safety changes should be initiated as early in the project as possible. When evaluating options to modify work processes or equipment, ask employees for their opinion. The final decision must satisfy all regulatory and organizational requirements to ensure a safe work environment, but in many cases, multiple approaches can meet these requirements. Those preferred by employees should receive priority when feasible, while also considering cost, timing and other important business needs.

### ***Considering Employee Ideas***

Employees must feel that their ideas and opinions are valued and will be taken seriously. They should be encouraged to generate ideas and express opinions regarding workplace safety. When they do so, they must feel that the organization values this input and will evaluate and act on it as feasible.

When employee ideas are implemented, give the originator(s) proper credit and recognition. When an employee presents a safety concern or suggestion, s/he should receive follow-up communication on the status of that concern or suggestion, even if the organization decides not to implement it.

### ***Communication***

Communication relating to safety must flow freely through all levels of the organization. Safety-related communications must be clear and concise, and employees must understand their responsibilities. Explain why safety changes are needed.

In addition, employees must be aware of the process to express a safety concern or to communicate suggestions for improvement. A simple avenue for communication must be present, and employees must know whom to contact. The process cannot be cumbersome or slow.

### ***Positive Feedback***

Safe behavior should be encouraged and rewarded. This can be accomplished using formal or informal methods, or a combination of both.

### ***Respect***

Employees must be treated with respect. Safety-related interactions must preserve personal respect, even in disciplinary situations.

Leadership support is critical to foster an environment that supports these factors. This extends to safety personnel. Employee perceptions about organizational commitment to safety are often based on their interactions with safety personnel.

Management (including safety personnel) who effectively involve and engage employees when reviewing potential workplace modifications can make a significant difference in the success of such projects (Machles, Bonkemeyer & McMichael, 2010; Groover & Spigener, 2008).

However, when management and safety personnel do not involve and engage employees, culture change is unlikely (Bolger, 2004). Employees may feel that management does not care about

their well-being, and may view SH&E professionals as safety cops who simply implement and enforce management initiatives and do not truly help employees. Employees may comply with safety rules most of the time, but they may believe that safety slows them down and makes their jobs more difficult.

In organizations with healthy corporate cultures, employees are aware that management (including safety personnel) is genuinely interested in them. In such a setting, employees will respond with innovative thinking, suggestions and decision making that can benefit the organization (Erickson, 2000). A mutual respect will more likely occur when management, including safety personnel, can engage employees.

### ***Employee Involvement***

Management can involve employees in an organization's safety program in various ways:

- Encourage employees to voluntarily participate in safety committees and emergency response teams. Teams should meet regularly and encourage participants to freely express their ideas and suggestions. Participants can be assigned roles to increase their involvement, such as coleading a project along with a management representative.

- Invite employees to participate with management in formal safety incident investigations, including development and implementation of corrective actions that may affect their job tasks.

- Conduct brainstorming sessions with employees when developing solutions to identified safety issues or hazards. For example, before developing a procedure on how to safely perform a task, gather affected employees to discuss their perspectives of possible hazards and feasibility of solutions.

- Solicit employee ideas and opinions when developing job hazard analyses, risk assessments and similar documents. Ask them to identify potential hazards and help develop protective measures.

- Establish a formal employee suggestion program that encourages suggestions relating to safety improvements. Whether tangible rewards are part of the program, employees who submit a suggestion that is implemented should be recognized for their contribution.

- Allow employees to participate in or conduct workplace safety inspections. Invite them to share results in a safety committee meeting, management meeting or similar venue.

- Involve employees in behavior-based safety observation processes.

- Hold shift huddle meetings on a daily or weekly basis and focus on safety with the entire workgroup. Discuss relevant safety items, but allow individuals to comment or offer suggestions regarding their safety in front of the group or one-on-one following the meeting.

- When evaluating changes to brands/types of PPE, hand tools or similar items, allow employees to test samples before making a final decision. For example, if three different types of safety glasses are being considered, obtain samples of all three

and distribute them to select employees as a trial. Ask which type they prefer and why.

- Get involved when other functional groups (e.g., departmental leadership, quality, lean teams) are changing equipment/machinery, workstation layouts or processes. Often, such changes affect safety. Ensure that the organizing group involves appropriate employees in changes, particularly those that could affect safety in the work area.

- Hold informal discussions with individual employees to gauge opinions on safety and ask whether safety staff can provide tools to help them work safely.

### **Compiling Employee Ideas**

To compile employee ideas, safety personnel must have a relationship with employees that enables trust and two-way communication. One way to foster such a relationship is to interact with employees regularly, not just when a safety concern arises or an injury occurs. Show genuine interest in their tasks and how they perform them.

Such nonthreatening dialogue helps build a relationship between employees and SH&E staff over time. Employees may volunteer ideas and concerns to safety personnel that they otherwise may not. These discussions also help SH&E personnel learn new information about the operation and gather ideas for safety improvements. Creating a culture of engaged employees and working toward world-class safety can only be achieved when there is a high degree of trust in the business. Such trust is established one employee at a time (Hafey, 2010).

Employees want to believe that their employer cares about their safety and well-being, and they also want to feel that their opinions matter and that their voices are heard. Management should not overlook the wealth of knowledge that employees can contribute.

However, it may be difficult to gather this information from employees if they do not feel that their ideas will be valued and thoroughly investigated. Most SH&E professionals have dealt with employees who are frustrated and angry because they have mentioned safety hazards, issues and/or suggestions yet felt they were ignored. Such feelings are caused by lack of visible action and a lack of follow-up. The employee assumes that his/her idea was ignored, which creates reluctance to speak up in the future.

This also may translate into the employee believing that the organization does not truly care about his/her safety, and that the safety program is just a paperwork or management exercise with no real value. When this occurs to multiple employees over time, it degrades the culture because employees do not feel engaged.

Several steps can be taken to change this view:

- Actively seek employee safety concerns and ideas for safety improvements in both group and individual settings. Some employees will not speak up in front of a group but may introduce an issue in an individual discussion, and vice versa.

- Track these concerns and ideas to closure. This

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can be accomplished in several ways, including on departmental boards.

- Investigate and take action on concerns and ideas within a reasonable time frame. Take appropriate measures to mitigate employee safety concerns, and implement employees' ideas where feasible.

- Involve the original suggestor(s) when possible during implementation of their ideas and, as noted, recognize their contributions (unless they ask to remain anonymous).

- Thank employees for their input. Positive feedback from management in response to employee suggestions results in higher safety performance (Erickson, 1997).

- Follow up with the employee(s) who originally brought up the concern or suggestion. If their ideas were implemented, ensure that the implementation was satisfactory. If implementation is planned but not yet complete, explain the completion timeframe. If their ideas will not be implemented, explain why and allow the employee to ask questions or appeal the decision.

When performed consistently, these steps will, over time, change employees' opinions of the safety program and increase employee engagement. This leads to trust.

### **Rules Violations: An Example**

A similar process can be used when addressing employees who violate safety practices. In most cases, such an encounter should go beyond simply telling the employee to correct his/her unsafe behavior. Initiating a discussion and asking the right questions may lead to understanding the reason for the violation that is not immediately obvious.

Consider this example: An SH&E professional observes an employee using a knife to open boxes. He is not wearing cut-resistant gloves, even though a coworker suffered a cut the previous week from performing the same operation without gloves. The SH&E professional knows that the incident was discussed in the safety meeting with all employees, and wearing gloves is a requirement that was reinforced in the meeting and is enforced by the supervisor. The supervisor is not immediately available. How should the SH&E professional handle this situation? Consider these two approaches:

**Scenario 1:** The SH&E professional informs the employee that he is violating the glove safety rules and that the infraction will be reported to his supervisor who may issue discipline.



**Result:** The employee grudgingly puts on the gloves whenever the SH&E professional or supervisor is present, but takes them off when he thinks no one is watching. He may grow to resent the SH&E professional as well as the safety program, which he believes is not effective because the underlying issue was not addressed. The safety professional did not engage the employee.

**Scenario 2:** The SH&E professional approaches the employee and expresses his concern that the worker could be injured should the knife slip. He reminds the employee that another worker was recently injured doing the same task, and respectfully engages the employee in a discussion about glove compliance and not meeting expectations.

**Result:** The employee does not feel as threatened by this exchange, and indicates that he is not wearing gloves because the correct glove size is out of stock. He states that he understands the importance of wearing gloves and he wants to wear them, but he feels that wearing the wrong size can increase the potential for injury even more than wearing no gloves. The SH&E professional thanks him for the information and assures the employee that the correct size gloves will be obtained.

The SH&E professional works with the supervisor to ensure that the gloves are available and a system is put in place to prevent recurrence of this problem. The safety professional then follows up with the employee to explain what actions were taken, and reminds him of the process to follow if he cannot find the correct PPE.

Following this exchange, the employee will more likely respect the safety professional and feel that the company truly cares about his safety. Going forward, he is happy to wear the gloves, and is more likely to report other issues that could jeopardize employee safety because he knows they will be addressed.

This is a basic example, but safety professionals encounter such scenarios on a regular basis. How these situations are handled can help or hinder safety efforts. Involving employees and engaging them in their own safety by valuing their ideas, rather than simply telling them how to work safely, can and will result in more engaged employees and thus improve safety performance.

### **Communication**

Effective communication is critical to the success of any safety program, in particular when changes to processes or procedures may affect worker safety. For communication to be effective, it must result in an understanding of the changes and a willingness to comply.

The communication should convey the reason for the change and any expected business impact. It must be clear and concise, and provide an avenue for asking questions that may arise. If changes are not communicated in this manner, employees may not understand why the change is important to their safety. They could view the change as a management initiative that slows them down without providing any real benefit.

Frustration could result if employees do not feel

that effects on their job tasks have been identified and considered. When employees understand the rationale for change and believe that all relevant factors have been considered, they are more likely to comply with the changes. This will be further improved by involving employees before finalizing a decision to change a process or procedure.

### **Positive Feedback**

Management and safety staff should provide positive feedback, formally and informally, to employees who perform their jobs safely.

At a minimum, leaders should regularly thank employees (as individuals and in groups) for their efforts to work safely. Over time, acknowledging people who work safely will help mitigate the common misconception that safety personnel are simply safety police. Behaviors followed by positive reinforcers (such as the simple act of thanking someone for wearing a hardhat when using a crane) will result in a higher likelihood of the behavior being repeated (Geller, 1994).

### **Respect**

When a violation occurs, it must be addressed in a manner that preserves personal respect. Even though it may seem rudimentary, SH&E personnel should explain why the behavior is unsafe and what harm could occur as a result of such actions. Use specific examples to which the employee can relate (when possible) to make the discussion more memorable.

For example, if an injury occurred in a different department last month as a result of the same unsafe act, sharing that story with the employee makes a more lasting impression. Keep the discussion factual but demonstrate genuine concern that the employee could injure him/herself or others. Expressing concern about the employee's personal safety and health helps create a better impression regarding management's concern about employee safety, and prevents the employee from perceiving the discussion as a personal attack.

### **Engaging Safety Personnel in the Business**

An effective safety professional is knowledgeable not only of the SH&E aspects of a business, but about all aspects of the business. Safety personnel should actively seek knowledge of other aspects of the business and how they relate to safety. By understanding the flow and operation of all departments, safety programs can be better tailored to fit the needs of the entire organization. Such knowledge also helps ensure that SH&E staff can have more meaningful discussions about safety with employees.

Safety professionals also must be aware of organizational targets in other functional areas, as these could ultimately affect safety. When safety conflicts with other business priorities, employees may feel pressured to compromise safety. For example, if safety compliance could cause the organization to miss a productivity target, employees may find ways to work around safety requirements in order to maintain their productivity standards.

**Photo 1****Photo 2**

**Photo 1:** When the point of operation was opened, it exposed a gap approximately 2-in. high and several inches wide under the moving area. The machine had no guard to prevent hand/finger injury during operation.

**Photo 2:** The guard allows the angle iron to slide into place underneath the guard, while completely preventing the operator's hands or fingers from entering the point of operation.

Safety need not conflict with other organizational goals, however. Developing solutions to resolve potential safety issues, while taking into account both employee safety and other business requirements, will likely result in a solution accepted by all involved.

It is much easier to engage employees when the safety professional is also engaged in the business, with a good working knowledge of the tasks involved and business goals that affect day-to-day priorities. The safety professional also will be more effective when developing recommendations that improve safety while maintaining or improving other aspects of the business.

For example, a situation at Comau Inc. (a global company that designs, manufactures and integrates custom tooling and equipment) demonstrates the power of employee engagement and its effect on safety and other business priorities. A machine designed to perform various metalworking functions, including coping, was being used to cope various sizes of angle iron stock (Photo 1). It had foot-pedal actuation that allowed the top portion of the machine to move downward to cope the stock. When the point of operation was opened, it exposed a gap approximately 2-in. high and several inches wide under the moving area. Although no injuries had been reported, the machine had no guard to prevent hand/finger injury during operation. This machine was used frequently and any changes could have affected the operation.

Area employees mentioned the lack of guarding as a concern. When determining how to reduce or eliminate the hazard, the safety manager met with the machine operator and others who were knowledgeable of the operation, explained the hazard and outlined some possible mitigation options.

Traditional fixed guarding, two-hand controls and presence-sensing devices (e.g., light screens) were proposed. However, because of the tasks involved and the machine's design, the operator explained why none of these solutions would be effective or feasible.

The safety manager realized that a guard which did not meet the needs of the business would likely be removed or bypassed. She challenged the operator to design his own method of eliminating the hazard, after explaining the safety requirements that would need to be incorporated into the design. She also indicated that she did not want the design to

negatively affect productivity or quality if possible, but only to improve the safety.

The operator quickly developed a design that was later fabricated in-house (at little cost) with the help of another employee. Photos and a description of the new guard were sent to the machine manufacturer, which approved the use of the guard.

The guard is an ingenious twist on a standard adjustable guard design (Photo 2). It allows the angle iron to slide into place underneath the guard, while completely preventing the operator's hands or fingers from entering the point of operation. It is permanently affixed to the machine, and is adjustable only underneath the top surface to allow for two preset sizes of angle iron.

Not only did it eliminate the risk of a hand/finger injury, it also increased productivity more than 15%; eliminated the need to rework some angle iron due to part movement; decreased the change-over time by more than 90%; and eliminated an ergonomic issue of having to hold the angle iron in place during operation.

These improvements were the result of engaging employees and allowing them to provide input on a solution. The result is a safe machine that is also more productive and produces higher quality parts.

The operator was happy to use the new guard (which is still in use) and was proud that his ideas helped make his job easier and safer. The company recognized his ingenuity through the company suggestion award program and his design was featured in a company newsletter. After this, some of his coworkers were inspired to develop ideas for other safety improvements that were implemented and helped further improve safety.

### **Using Lean Initiatives to Foster Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement becomes even more important during times of organizational change, in particular for process changes that affect the way that tasks are performed. Lean manufacturing initiatives are increasingly used to changes the way that organizations do business, and often result in modified processes and procedures to improve efficiency.

Lean initiatives take many forms, but they generally are undertaken to reduce various types of waste. Lean is often applied in a manufacturing environment, but also can be extended into office areas (Taubitz, 2010).

Photo 3



In addition to eliminating clutter, team members, including employees who use the workstation, engaged in much discussion on how to solve a safety issue related to storage of heavy bricks on the station.

Photo 4



SH&E professionals must be involved in such initiatives to ensure that safety is an integral part of the lean activities. Lean initiatives are excellent opportunities to improve safety by taking advantage of the employee involvement inherent in such initiatives. According to John Garis, president/owner, Garis Safety Training:

I find safety to be very compatible with the lean process. In fact, I have a sense that lean can be used to elevate the overall safety aspects into that realm that we as safety professionals have talked about for decades—that is, the engagement of everyone from senior executives to department managers, to line supervisors and finally to the hourly staff into the safety process. . . . (As cited in Manuele, 2007)

The notion that injuries and safety incidents should be regarded as a waste is gaining traction in the literature (Manuele, 2007; Main, Taubitz & Wood, 2008; Hallowell, Veltri & Johnson, 2009). However, if this belief is not embraced by the organization, safety may be “leaned” out of the process. This issue is described in depth in ANSI B11.TR7 (2007).

In other literature, Main, et al. (2008), describe a situation where a lean team removed point-of-operation guarding from a machine in order to improve cycle times. The safety director was not involved in the project, but only witnessed the result and was perceived as inhibiting process improvements when he insisted that the guards be reinstalled.

When lean teams recognize the importance of safety and actively involve safety personnel in workplace changes implemented during lean activities, the result will likely be a lean and safe workplace where employees and safety personnel are engaged in their work activities.

To see how this can be applied, consider the lean manufacturing initiatives implemented at Comau Inc. Similar to many organizations, Comau is using lean principles to continually improve specific operations and areas within its manufacturing locations.

The core of the lean initiative is Kaizen workshops designed to generate significant targeted improvements in a designated area over a span of a few days. The workshops involve personnel from

many different disciplines, including lean and quality experts, manufacturing leadership, supervisory and administrative personnel, facilities maintenance/machine repair, and a cross-section of affected employees.

Participation is voluntary but encouraged for employees who will be affected by the changes resulting from the workshops. During the workshops and subsequent implementation of the resulting changes, employees who do not formally participate in the Kaizen event are consulted to ensure that their opinions and ideas are considered.

Safety personnel are also invited to attend the workshops, and often participate and/or are consulted on safety-related matters by workshop teams. SH&E is considered an integral part of the Kaizen workshops, and teams are asked to consider how to make their work areas safer. Employees are encouraged to share ideas, and all ideas are discussed with the entire group to determine which will be implemented. Safety is also discussed when proposing improvements to ensure that changes will not negatively affect safety.

In contrast, improvements in job design and layout have been found to improve employee safety and reduce strain during job tasks. For example, relocating commonly used items close to the work area not only improves productivity, but also may improve ergonomics by minimizing reaching or bending motions, or reducing how far objects must be carried.

During the Kaizen workshops, the team discusses and documents standardized procedures. This is another opportunity to incorporate safety into the process. Team members discuss the various methods for accomplishing tasks and agree on a best method to incorporate into the standardized procedures. This includes safety requirements as well as methods to accomplish the task in a safe manner.

Complementing the Kaizen workshops is a focus on 5S activities (to clean, organize and standardize the workplace) in all areas. 5S can be used to improve housekeeping and organization and can positively affect productivity and safety by reducing trip hazards, and ensuring that items are stored safely and that tools and equipment are easily accessible.

The amount of employee involvement in every stage of the process is key. Suggestions and ideas generated by employees often are given priority and are frequently implemented. While this intense involvement and input can improve many aspects of business performance, safety is one component that can reap substantial benefits.

Employees involved in these activities will not only likely comply with changes to safety processes, but also take ownership and promote them to co-workers. Participation by safety personnel, including



hands-on activities with the team such as scrubbing and sweeping, helps strengthen the trust and the relationship between employees and safety personnel. Feedback from employees who have participated in the lean initiatives has been positive, and many have volunteered for additional projects.

Photos 3 and 4 provide an example of an improvement based on a Kaizen workshop at Comau Inc. Photo 3 shows the original state of a cluttered workstation. Photo 4 shows the workstation layout after the workshop, as designed by employees in the area. Not only is it well-organized and clutter-free, but it also solves a safety issue that employees identified. Heavy blocks were often placed on the bottom shelf of the workstation, which increased the potential for an injury when lifting them from that level. In addition, the blocks were not contained, and due to their configuration, they could fall over if bumped.

Team members, including employees who use the workstation, engaged in much discussion on how to solve this problem. This discussion resulted in an employee-designed holder that contains the blocks on the top level of the workstation. The holder organizes the blocks so the heaviest are located closest to the operator to reduce reach and, thus, improve ergonomics.

Affected employees were pleased with this solution, which they designed and which made their jobs easier and safer. This setup remains in use because the employees were involved and offered input into the solution. Again, the actual methods used are not as important as the fact that employees and SH&E professionals are actively involved in the process.

## Conclusion

Employee engagement is a powerful concept that can be used to improve many business measures, including safety performance. The level of employee engagement is a direct result of the level of involvement that employees have in their work processes and activities.

To engage employees in the safety program, management must involve employees when making decisions that could affect their safety. Employees can become directly involved in safety processes in many ways. For example, they can participate in safety committees, conduct safety inspections and test samples of proposed PPE.

Ideas and feedback from employees regarding their safety must be valued and acted on as appropriate, including follow-up with the employee. Safety communications must be clear and concise and include the reasons changes are being made. Employees need to be given positive feedback when they work safely, and should be treated with respect at all times.

Regardless of the method used, involving and engaging employees in the safety processes will likely result in higher safety performance and an improved corporate culture, which will benefit both the employees and the organization. **PS**

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