2.2 Evaluate factors influencing safety behaviour across organisational levels

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Introduction

Safety behaviour refers to the actions, decisions, and attitudes demonstrated by individuals and groups that influence health and safety performance within an organisation. It encompasses how employees follow procedures, identify hazards, report incidents, and respond to risks during their daily work. Safety behaviour is not determined by individuals alone; it is shaped by organisational leadership, workplace culture, communication, management systems, and the overall work environment.

An organisation with a positive safety culture encourages employees to take responsibility for safety, communicate openly about hazards, and continuously improve working practices. Conversely, poor leadership, ineffective communication, or weak management systems can encourage unsafe behaviours and increase the likelihood of accidents.

This section evaluates the factors influencing safety behaviour across organisational levels by examining:

1. Organisational, leadership, and behavioural influences on safety performance.
2. The role of communication, trust, and reporting culture.
3. The interaction between systems, culture, and individual behaviour.
4. Barriers and enablers to safe working practices at different organisational levels.

1. Organisational, Leadership and Behavioural Influences on Safety Performance

Organisational Influences

An organisation establishes the environment in which safety behaviours develop. Its policies, management systems, resources, values, and priorities influence how employees perceive the importance of health and safety.

Positive organisational influences include:

- Strong OHSES policies.
- Adequate staffing and resources.
- Effective risk management systems.
- Regular training and competence development.
- Fair and consistent procedures.
- Commitment to continual improvement.

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Negative organisational influences include:

- Production pressures overriding safety.
- Poor maintenance of equipment.
- Inadequate training.
- Insufficient supervision.
- Weak safety management systems.

When organisations consistently prioritise safety, employees are more likely to adopt safe working behaviours.

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Leadership Influences

Leadership is one of the strongest influences on safety behaviour. Employees observe and often imitate the attitudes and actions of managers and supervisors.

Effective leaders:

- Demonstrate visible commitment to safety.
- Lead by example.
- Allocate sufficient resources.
- Encourage employee participation.
- Recognise safe behaviours.
- Address unsafe practices promptly.

For example, if managers consistently wear the required personal protective equipment (PPE), employees are more likely to follow the same standard.

Poor leadership can create a culture where safety is viewed as less important than productivity, resulting in increased risk-taking and non-compliance.

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Behavioural Influences

Individual behaviour is influenced by factors such as:

- Knowledge and competence.
- Experience.
- Motivation.
- Attitude toward risk.
- Fatigue.
- Stress.
- Peer influence.
- Personal values.

Even well-trained employees may behave unsafely if they are under excessive time pressure or believe unsafe shortcuts are accepted.

Behaviour-based safety (BBS) programmes seek to encourage safe behaviours through observation, feedback, coaching, and positive reinforcement rather than punishment.

Critical Evaluation

Strengths

- Strong leadership promotes a positive safety culture.
- Organisational commitment improves employee confidence.
- Positive behaviours reduce accidents and improve productivity.
- Leadership visibility encourages workforce engagement.

Limitations

- Behavioural programmes may overlook system failures.
- Leadership commitment may vary across departments.
- Organisational culture takes time to change.
- Individual behaviour is influenced by many external factors beyond management control.

Effective safety performance requires a balance between organisational systems, leadership, and individual responsibility.

2. Role of Communication, Trust and Reporting Culture

Importance of Communication

Effective communication ensures that employees understand hazards, procedures, responsibilities, and organisational expectations.

Communication should be:

- Clear.
- Timely.
- Accurate.
- Two-way.
- Consistent.



Common communication methods include:

- Safety meetings.
- Toolbox talks.
- Training sessions.
- Safety alerts.
- Digital dashboards.
- Notice boards.
- Incident briefings.

Good communication reduces misunderstandings and improves compliance.

2. Role of Communication, Trust and Reporting Culture

Building Trust

Trust is the foundation of an effective safety culture.

Employees are more likely to:

- Report hazards.
- Raise concerns.
- Suggest improvements.
- Participate in investigations.
- Follow management guidance.

when they trust that management will respond fairly and constructively.

Trust develops through:

- Honest communication.
- Consistent leadership.
- Fair treatment.
- Visible management commitment.
- Employee involvement in decision-making.



2. Role of Communication, Trust and Reporting Culture

Reporting Culture

A positive reporting culture encourages employees to report:

- Hazards.
- Near misses.
- Unsafe conditions.
- Unsafe behaviours.
- Environmental incidents.

Reporting allows organisations to identify risks before accidents occur.

A Just Culture supports reporting by distinguishing between:

- Honest mistakes.
- At-risk behaviour.
- Reckless behaviour.

Employees are not punished for genuine errors but remain accountable for deliberate violations.

Critical Evaluation

Benefits

- Early identification of hazards.
- Improved learning from incidents.
- Greater employee engagement.
- Better decision-making.
- Increased organisational trust.

Challenges

- Fear of blame may discourage reporting.
- Poor communication reduces employee confidence.
- Language barriers may affect understanding.
- Inconsistent management responses weaken trust.

Without trust, even the best reporting systems may fail to identify significant risks.

3. Interaction Between Systems, Culture and Individual Behaviour

Understanding the Relationship

Safety behaviour results from the interaction of three interconnected elements:



Systems

Systems include:

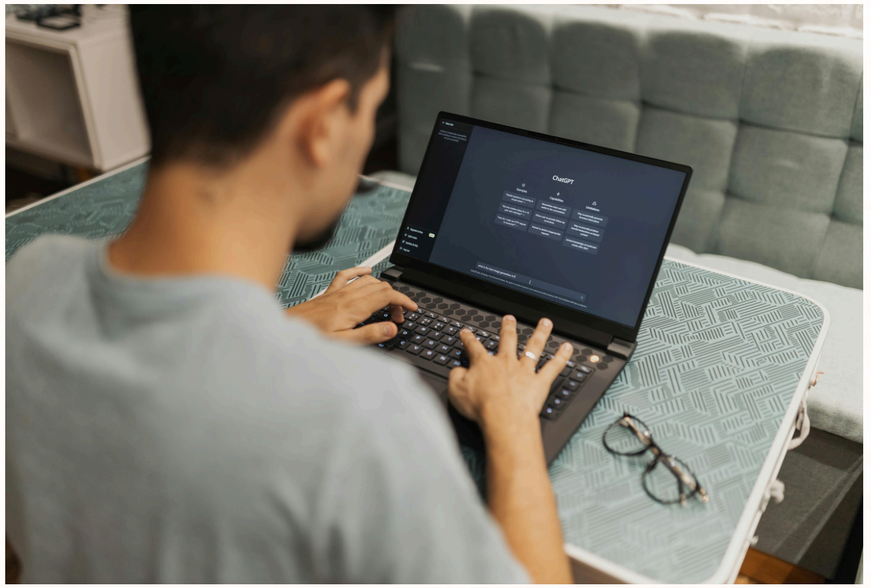
- Policies.
- Procedures.
- Risk assessments.
- Training.
- Audits.
- Emergency plans.
- Permit-to-work systems.

3. Interaction Between Systems, Culture and Individual Behaviour

Systems establish how work should be performed safely.
Culture
Culture reflects:

- Shared beliefs.
- Organisational values.
- Leadership expectations.
- Workplace norms.
- Employee attitudes.

Culture influences whether people choose to follow systems.



3. Interaction Between Systems, Culture and Individual Behaviour

Individual Behaviour

Individuals make daily decisions regarding:

- Compliance.
- Hazard recognition.
- Reporting.
- Risk-taking.
- Teamwork.

Behaviour determines whether systems operate effectively in practice.



Example

A company develops an excellent lockout/tagout procedure (system).
Managers consistently reinforce its importance (culture).
Employees follow the procedure correctly before maintenance work (behaviour).
The interaction of all three components produces safe outcomes.
If any component fails, safety performance may deteriorate.

3. Interaction Between Systems, Culture and Individual Behaviour

Human Factors

Human factors influencing behaviour include:

- Fatigue.
- Workload.
- Stress.
- Distractions.
- Physical capability.
- Competence.
- Ergonomic design.

Organisations should design systems that consider normal human limitations rather than expecting perfect behaviour.

Critical Evaluation

Strengths

- Recognises safety as a whole-system issue.
- Supports proactive risk management.
- Encourages organisational learning.
- Improves long-term performance.



Limitations

- Relationships between systems and culture are complex.
- Cultural change is gradual.
- Human behaviour cannot be completely predicted.
- Organisations may overemphasise procedures while neglecting culture.

The most successful organisations integrate systems, leadership, and behavioural science rather than relying on a single approach.

4. Barriers and Enablers to Safe Working Practices at Different Organisational Levels

Barriers to Safe Working
Individual Level
Examples include:

- Lack of competence.
- Fatigue.
- Stress.
- Complacency.
- Risk-taking behaviour.
- Poor understanding of procedures.



Supervisory Level
Examples include:

- Inadequate supervision.
- Poor communication.
- Lack of coaching.
- Failure to enforce standards.
- Production pressure.

4. Barriers and Enablers to Safe Working Practices at Different Organisational Levels

Management Level
Examples include:

- Insufficient resources.
- Weak leadership commitment.
- Poor planning.
- Inadequate training programmes.
- Failure to learn from incidents.

Organisational Level
Examples include:

- Weak safety culture.
- Poor governance.
- Inadequate management systems.
- Conflicting organisational priorities.
- Lack of employee consultation.

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Enablers of Safe Working

Individual Level

- Competence.
- Motivation.
- Positive attitudes.
- Personal accountability.

Supervisory Level

- Coaching.
- Visible leadership.
- Regular feedback.
- Effective monitoring.

Management Level

- Strategic commitment.
- Investment in safety.
- Employee involvement.
- Continual improvement.

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Enablers of Safe Working

Organisational Level

- Strong safety culture.
- Effective governance.
- Robust OHSES management systems.
- Open communication.
- Just reporting culture.
- Leadership accountability.

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Critical Evaluation

Removing barriers alone is insufficient.

Organisations must actively create conditions that encourage safe behaviour through leadership, communication, trust, learning, and continuous improvement.
Safety excellence results from strengthening enablers while systematically reducing barriers.

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Practical Scenario

A large construction company experiences an increase in near-miss incidents involving mobile plant operations. An investigation reveals that workers are reluctant to report unsafe conditions because they fear blame from supervisors. In addition, production targets have led to shortcuts and inconsistent compliance with traffic management procedures.

To address these issues, senior management introduces a Just Culture policy, increases visible leadership through regular site safety walks, improves supervisor coaching skills, and establishes anonymous hazard reporting. The company also reviews its work schedules to reduce fatigue and reinforces safe behaviours through recognition programmes.

Within a year, hazard reporting increases significantly, employee trust improves, and mobile plant incidents decline. This demonstrates how leadership, communication, organisational systems, and culture interact to influence safety behaviour across all organisational levels.

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Key Takeaways

- Safety behaviour is influenced by organisational systems, leadership, workplace culture, communication, and individual attitudes rather than by individual actions alone.
- Strong leadership and organisational commitment promote positive safety behaviours by providing clear expectations, adequate resources, and visible support for health and safety.
- Effective communication, trust, and a Just Culture encourage employees to report hazards, participate in safety initiatives, and contribute to continual improvement without fear of unfair blame.
- Safe behaviour results from the interaction of management systems, organisational culture, and individual behaviour; weaknesses in any one area can reduce overall safety performance.
- Identifying and reducing barriers while strengthening enablers at individual, supervisory, management, and organisational levels helps create a resilient and high-performing safety culture that supports long-term organisational success.

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Thank you