The absence of events is not the presence of safety

THE HEARTS & MINDS OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP

AIRPORT SAFETY WEEK 24

BRIEFING

One of the biggest misconceptions in safety management is that if there are no accidents or incidents, everything is safe. This is a fraught assumption in general and in particular in the area of psychosocial safety, where unsafe conditions may be hidden and difficult to identify.

A mature safety culture involves a proactive approach to identifying risks, improving processes, and fostering a Just Culture where employees feel comfortable reporting potential hazards and near-misses.

To assess and improve safety maturity, organisations often use the Du Pont Bradley Curve, which maps out different stages of safety culture maturity, from reactive to generative. The aspirational goal is to create an airport where safety is fully integrated into all operations and all people, regardless of job title, employment status or experience, take personal ownership of safety outcomes.

Airports, with their complex operations, need to continuously evolve their safety culture to work towards their this maturity. The presence of strong operational systems, policies, and regular audits is essential, but vigilance, engagement, and continuous learning are what is going to help you move forwards.

The Du Pont Bradley Curve is a great model to use to assess where your safety culture is up to on the maturity journey. Notably it may be the case where different parts of your airport operation are at different parts of the curve. This is entirely normal however, it is worth reflecting on the point that you are probably only as strong as your weakest link.

DuPont Bradley Curve
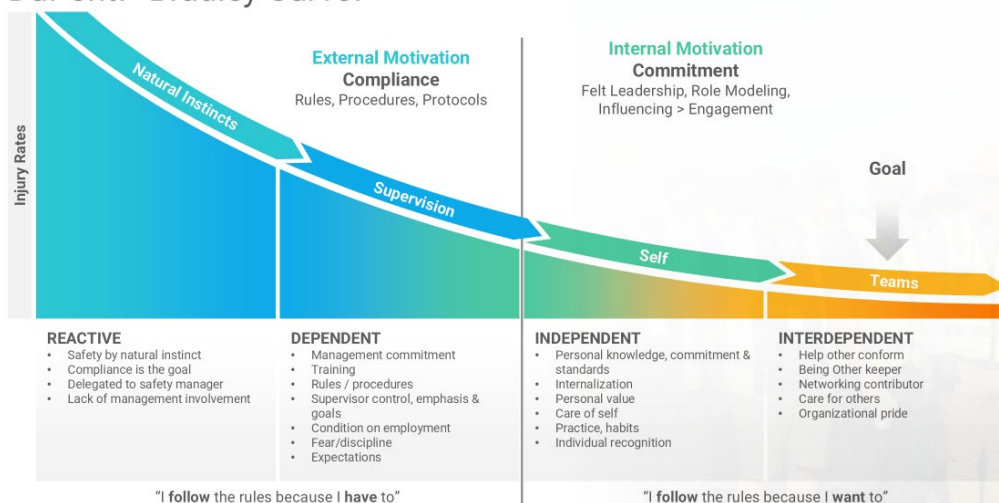
The goal for airports should be to move as a community from a dependent or independent safety culture to an interdependent (generative) one, where safety is part of everyone's DNA.

CALL TO ACTION

1 **Be fair dinkum**
Evaluate your current safety maturity
Where is your airport community on the Bradley Curve? Are we reactive, dependent, independent, or yet generative? Discuss with your teams and determine what strategies and behaviours can be implemented to continue to drive forwards.

2 **Foster a "Just Culture"**
Review how we respond to errors and near-misses. Are we creating a safe environment for reporting? How can we improve this to encourage more open communication?

3 **Encourage team ownership of safety**
Empower employees to take responsibility for their safety and the safety of their peers. Continually reinforce that safety is everyone's role, not just management's. And that Safety Culture is not something that is given to you, it is as a result of individual choices continuously made.

4 **Focus on a hunger for learning**
Regularly review incidents and near-misses within the airport and the wider aviation industry. Discuss with humility and curiosity, looking to learn lessons and adjust safety strategies accordingly.

STORYTELLING
GLOBAL EXAMPLES OF SAFETY MATURITY
Shell's example of moving forward on safety maturity

Shell is a strong example of a large, complex organisation that used the Bradley Curve to evolve its safety culture over time. Historically, Shell's safety culture was dependent, where safety measures were primarily enforced through top-down management directives. Employees complied with safety protocols but largely did so to avoid consequences rather than out of personal commitment to safety. Shell observed the limitations of this approach by looking at their own organisation as well as being curious about safety maturity in other organisations.

Consequently, Shell set out to transition towards an interdependent safety culture, where the desire was for all employees and contractors to take ownership of both their own safety and the safety of their workmates – irrespective of seniority, role, employment status or geographical location.
The Bradley Curve was instrumental in this shift. Shell leadership committed to moving beyond compliance-based safety efforts by introducing initiatives such as Goal Zero, which emphasises zero incidents and zero harm. Just Culture was also integrated, promoting an environment where all workers are expected to report hazards and safety concerns. This shift encouraged workers to act not because they were told to, but because they cared about the well-being of their team. Their Worker Welfare program also focused on psychosocial safety and ensured that people's safety went beyond building workplaces that ensured physical well-being; it also emphasised mental wellness.

Shell also invested in advanced safety technologies, such as real-time monitoring of offshore rigs and automation of high-risk tasks, further reducing potential hazards. This was coupled with regular safety training, leadership involvement, and company-wide safety audits to ensure that the shift towards an interdependent culture was always forward moving.

You can read more about Shell's safety approach here:
https://www.shell.com/sustainability/safety.html

AUSTRALIAN AIRPORTS ASSOCIATION

AIRPORT SAFETY WEEK 24

Questions for Team Discussion

1. Where do we currently stand on the Du Pont Bradley Curve? How can we improve our position?
2. What steps can we take to deepen our Just Culture and encourage more open reporting of safety issues?
3. How can we make safety ownership a core value for every employee, not just management or specific departments?