U.S.NRC
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Protecting People and the Environment

SAFETY CULTURE TRAIT TALK

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Trait Talk *was developed to provide you with a better understanding of the nine safety culture traits found in the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC) Safety Culture Policy Statement (SCPS) and how they apply to you—whether you are an NRC licensee, a vendor or contractor employee, an organization interested in the safe and secure use of nuclear materials, or others involved in nuclear safety regulation.* *Please see page 4 of Safety Culture Trait Talk for more information on the SCPS.*

Experience has shown that certain personal and organizational traits are present in a positive safety culture. A trait, in this case, is a pattern of thinking, feeling, and behaving that emphasizes safety, particularly in goal conflict situations, for example, in situations where production, schedule, or just the cost of effort may conflict with doing the job safely. The NRC identified nine traits of a positive safety culture in the SCPS, although the agency recognizes that additional traits may also be important. In addition, please note that the traits were not developed to be used for inspection purposes.

Each Trait Talk includes a fictional scenario based on a different licensee or community. The scenario used in this Trait Talk is based on the gauge user community.

As you read through Trait Talk, consider the following questions:

1. *How does this trait apply to my organization?*
2. *Are there other attributes and examples that better fit my organization?*
3. *What impact does this trait have on the safety culture in my organization?*
4. *How does this increase my understanding of the safety culture in my organization?*
5. *How could I improve the performance of this trait in my organization?*

Respectful Work Environment

One of the traits of a positive safety culture as described in the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Safety Culture Policy Statement.

What Is The Definition Of Respectful Work Environment?

The NRC's SCPS defines Respectful Work Environment as when trust and respect permeates the organization.

Why Is This Trait Important?

Trust and respect are among the most frequently discussed concepts in studies of organizational and safety culture. Trust and respect are fundamental to positive interpersonal relationships and central components of effective working relationships. The nature and level of trust and respect between workers and their managers and supervisors affect all aspects of their relationship and influence their attitudes and behaviors. Studies of organizations have found that trust in management is positively related to employee job performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and engagement in safety behaviors. Distrust of management tends to lower levels of engagement and reduce feelings of personal responsibility for safety.

At an individual level, trust involves the willingness of one person to depend on another person, with a relative sense of security. The perception that an individual is competent, has integrity, and is predictable increases the likelihood that he is trusted and respected. Trust and respect affect the persuasive power of an individual. Efforts to influence others are more likely to succeed when those attempting to influence are trusted and respected. In addition, successful work groups, teamwork, and collaboration require respect for others' opinions and differing views. When differences are respected, they can be a source of motivation and innovation for an organization; lack of respect can destroy trust and weaken safety culture.

At an organizational level, trust and respect instill confidence that the organization is just and fair, which promotes open communication and accurate reporting, enhances organizational learning, and promotes the development of shared perceptions and norms. In studies of safety culture, higher levels of trust and respect are associated with positive safety attitudes, reduced risky behavior, and increased personal responsibility for safety.

Open communication, fairness, and management accountability are the most frequently identified mechanisms that build trust and respect in an organization. Leaders earn trust and respect when employees can see that they are fair, deal directly with problems and issues, and encourage and value all ideas and opinions. A strong safety culture requires mutually respectful, trusting relationships between and within workgroups and between all levels in the organization.

WHAT DOES THIS TRAIT LOOK LIKE?

Respect is Evident: Everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

The organization regards individuals and their professional capabilities and experiences as its most valuable asset. Individuals at all levels of the organization, within and between workgroups, treat each other with dignity and respect. They do not demonstrate or tolerate bullying or humiliating behaviors. Leaders monitor for behaviors that can have a negative impact on the work environment and address them promptly. They ensure policies and expectations are enforced fairly and consistently for individuals at all levels of the organization. Individuals treat decision-makers with respect, even when they disagree with a decision. Leaders ensure facilities are conducive to a productive work environment and housekeeping is maintained.

Opinions are Valued: Leaders ensure that the bases for operational and organizational decisions are communicated in a timely manner.

Individuals are encouraged to voice concerns, provide suggestions, and raise questions. Differing opinions are respected.

The organization encourages individuals to offer ideas, concerns, suggestions, differing opinions, and questions to help identify and solve problems. Leaders are receptive to ideas, concerns, suggestions, differing opinions, and questions. The organization promotes robust discussions, recognizing that differing opinions are a natural result of differences in expertise and experience. Individuals value the insights and perspectives provided by quality assurance, the employee concerns program, and independent oversight organization personnel.

High Level of Trust: Trust is fostered among individuals and work groups throughout the organization. Leaders promote collaboration among work groups.

Leaders respond to questions and concerns in an open and honest manner. Leaders, sensitive to the negative impact of a lack of information, share important information in an open, honest, and timely manner such that trust is maintained. They ensure that status and important work milestones are communicated throughout the organization. Leaders acknowledge positive performance and address negative performance promptly and directly with the individual involved. Confidentiality is maintained as appropriate. Leaders welcome performance feedback from throughout the organization and modify their behavior when appropriate.

Conflict Resolution: Fair and objective methods are used to resolve conflicts.

The organization implements processes to ensure fair and objective resolution of conflicts and differing views. Leaders ensure conflicts are resolved in a balanced, equitable, and consistent manner, even when outside of defined processes. Individuals have confidence that conflicts will be resolved respectfully and professionally.

WHAT IS A SCENARIO IN WHICH THIS TRAIT COULD PLAY A ROLE?

An authorized gauge user was conducting on-the-job training for a new employee on the licensee's practice of placing the portable density gauge inside the extended cab of a pickup truck when staying overnight at a hotel, as is often required when working at temporary job sites. During this on-the-job instruction, the new employee stated that simply placing the gauge case inside the extended cab of a pickup truck would only provide one barrier, the locked vehicle door. The new employee suggested the gauge case also be secured to the inside of the pickup truck. Since the authorized gauge user conducting the on-the-job training had many years of experience, he discounted the new employee's comment as inconsequential.

Several weeks later, one of the licensee's gauges was stolen from the cab of a pickup truck parked overnight at a hotel. The new employee, now an authorized gauge user, stated that he placed the gauge case inside the extended cab of the pickup truck, as previously instructed, and locked the vehicle's doors using the key fob as he walked inside the hotel. The side window of the pickup truck had been left in a partially raised position. Since there were no signs of forced entry, it was concluded that the theft was a crime of opportunity and that the thief may have simply unlocked the door by reaching inside the vehicle through the window. Once the thief was inside the vehicle, the unsecured gauge case did not delay or deter the thief's removal of the gauge. The new employee notified management of the theft and informed them that he had raised a concern involving the failure to secure the gauge case to the authorized gauge user who had provided his on-the-job training. Because the on-the-job trainer discounted the new employee's recommendation to secure the gauge case to the inside of the pickup truck, the new employee explained that he did not feel it would be appropriate to go around the trainer to raise the concern directly to the radiation safety officer or management.

As a result of this incident, the licensee conducted an analysis and determined that the root cause of the violation was the licensee's failure to fully understand how to implement the requirement of securing the gauge. The licensee's practice was focused on the visibility of the gauge case as opposed to properly securing the gauge case. A contributing cause of the incident was the licensee's employee leaving the passenger side window in a partially open position. The new employee again stated he did not feel that it would be respectful to the trainer if he continued to question the practice since the trainer was senior to him, and he did not feel he could trust the radiation safety officer or management not to provide negative feedback to the trainer.

Thinking about the scenario discussed above, consider the following questions:

1. How does this scenario apply to the safety culture trait Respectful Work Environment?
2. What kinds of communications would have reinforced safety as the overriding priority?
3. How could this situation have been handled differently, and what might have been the outcome?

WHO CAN I CONTACT WITH A QUESTION OR SUGGESTION?

The NRC looks forward to continuing to provide you with information about the traits of a positive safety culture. If you have a question or would like to make a suggestion, please contact the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Office of Enforcement, Safety Culture Team, at external_safety_culture.resource@nrc.gov.

Sources of Information:

1 "Why is this trait important?" was derived, in part, from a literature review (Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS) Accession No. ML13023A054) prepared by Pacific Northwest National Laboratories for the NRC Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research.

2 "What does this trait look like?" was derived from the Safety Culture Common Language effort (ADAMS Accession No. ML13031A343), under the direction of the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation. Panelists from the NRC, nuclear power industry, and the public created attributes of a positive nuclear safety culture, and examples of each attribute that a nuclear power organization should demonstrate in maintaining a positive safety culture. Although these attributes and examples were created specifically for the reactor community, they may also be applicable to various other communities and organizations. For purposes of Trait Talk, the examples were partially rewritten to increase applicability to nuclear as well as non-nuclear communities.

3 "What is a scenario in which this trait played a role?" was developed specifically for Safety Culture Trait Talk for educational purposes only. The scenario is fictional and any resemblance to actual events, people, or organizations is purely coincidental.

WHAT IS THE NRC'S SAFETY CULTURE POLICY STATEMENT?

There are many definitions of safety culture. Most of these definitions focus on the idea that in a positive safety culture individuals and organizations emphasize safety over competing goals, such as production or costs, ensuring a safety-first focus. The NRC's SCPS defines nuclear safety culture as ***the core values and behaviors resulting from a collective commitment by leaders and individuals to emphasize safety over competing goals to ensure protection of people and the environment.*** Experience has shown that certain personal and organizational traits are present in a positive safety culture. The following traits were included in the NRC's SCPS, although additional traits may also be important in a positive safety culture:

Leadership Safety Values and Actions	Problem Identification and Resolution	Personal Accountability
Leaders demonstrate a commitment to safety in their decisions and behaviors.	*Issues potentially impacting safety are promptly identified, fully evaluated, and promptly addressed and corrected commensurate with their significance.*	*All individuals take personal responsibility for safety.*
Work Processes	**Continuous Learning**	**Environment for Raising Concerns**
The process of planning and controlling work activities is implemented so that safety is maintained.	*Opportunities to learn about ways to ensure safety are sought out and implemented.*	*A safety conscious work environment is maintained where personnel feel free to raise safety concerns without fear of retaliation, intimidation, harassment or discrimination.*
Effective Safety Communications	**Respectful Work Environment**	**Questioning Attitude**
Communications maintain a focus on safety.	*Trust and respect permeate the organization.*	*Individuals avoid complacency and continually challenge existing conditions and activities in order to identify discrepancies that might result in error or inappropriate action.*

The NRC's SCPS provides the NRC's expectation that individuals and organizations performing regulated activities establish and maintain a positive safety culture commensurate with the safety and security significance of their activities and the nature and complexity of their organizations and functions. Because safety and security are the primary pillars of the NRC's regulatory mission, consideration of both safety and security issues, commensurate with their significance, is an underlying principle of the SCPS.

The NRC's SCPS applies to all licensees, certificate holders, permit holders, authorization holders, holders of quality assurance program approvals, vendors and suppliers of safety-related components, and applicants for a license, certificate permit, authorization, or quality assurance program approval subject to NRC authority. In addition, the Commission encourages the Agreement States (States that assume regulatory authority over their own use of certain nuclear materials), their licensees, and other organizations interested in nuclear safety to support the development and maintenance of a positive safety culture within their regulated communities. The SCPS is not a regulation; therefore, it is the organization's responsibility, as part of its safety culture program, to consider how to apply the SCPS to its regulated activities.

The NRC's SCPS, which includes the definition of nuclear safety culture and the nine traits of a positive safety culture, can be found on the NRC's Safety Culture Web site. The Web site includes additional safety culture information, as well as the NRC safety culture case studies, which describe how the presence or absence of safety culture traits affects the outcome of the events.