

Wilkins Safety Group



Weekly Update Newsletter Welcome to this issue –

Welcome to this issue - Friday 14th January 2011 - of our Update Newsletter

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Leading the way with Safety in 2011

Many organisations spend an inordinate amount of time and money attempting to "***measure***" their safety performance. For the most part, they get it wrong. We have explored some of those issues previously, but due to some questions we have been asked by companies over the last two months, we thought it might be useful to look again at encouraging an effective safety culture during 2011.

Consider this. When you are making a judgement about whether it is going to rain or not, what do you base your decision upon? Do you decide whether to go on that day-trip based on what the weather has been like for the last month?

In other words, if it rained yesterday is that the key factor upon which you shall make that critical decision? If it is, then you are basing your decision on something which has happened in the past. Just because it rained yesterday, does not necessarily mean it is more or less likely to rain tomorrow. This is what we call, in the safety game, a "***lagging indicator***".

We don't know about you, but what we tend to do, is look up and about (at the sky) and then maybe look for a weather forecast (be it newspaper, TV, internet, etc.). These are called "***leading indicators***".



Consider this. Why is it that we so easily understand how to apply leading indicators to the behaviour occurring within our day-to-day lives (we probably don't realise it though); and yet struggle so hard when it comes to safety.



Think about this whole question of lagging and leading indicators as being part of a continuum with two poles. As shown below we see an example which describes a couple of well-known lagging indicators at right. You may recall that previously we wrote about how so many businesses get themselves all bent out of shape over these indicators. Again what nearly everyone fails to recognise is that these are what we might call reductionism (exclusionary) metrics. You gauge success by how close these numbers can get to the mythical Zero.

Leading Indicators

Lagging Indicators

Safety Culture

Lost Time Incidents (LTIs)

Fatalities



Consider for a moment the business that has **3 fatalities** in 2009 - let's also give them **22 LTIs** as well, just for good measure. In 2010 they have **6 fatalities** and **9 LTIs**. Now, as a very brief exercise, think about what you would say to the powers that be about your safety program performance in 2010. We can imagine that your eyes may be drawn to the observation that there has been a 100% increase in the fatalities occurring. Does this concern you?

It should!

Though **NOT** for the reasons you might expect. The organisation cited above has almost 150,000 employees scattered around the Globe. When we consider this 100% increase there is absolutely no statistical difference between 3 & 6. If you were to respond to these numbers by throwing buckets of money at the problem of "**increasing fatalities**", you are just as likely wasting that money.

The reason being that despite what you think you see, fatalities have not increased within this organisation. Now we do appreciate how difficult this is to accept. It is made even more difficult when we tell you that the **LTI** numbers also fail to reach any level of statistical significance. So the fundamental question is this:-

Do you want to run your Safety Program founded on emotion or upon sound science?

We have worked with some pretty good business leaders who make the point that "**emotion**" should be left at the door when making the tough business decisions. Whilst we personally struggle with this somewhat hard-nosed approach, it seems to be an unofficial "**standard**" out there. We would certainly suggest, strongly, that **Safety needs to be managed** with a strong focus on evidentiary based practice. Again, we find this too often to be the exception; rather than the rule.

Don't be mistaken by thinking the big global players have got it right. We have seen some of the World's most well-known companies spending many millions on approaches that just don't work.



This does not help when we come across a significant number of what we would call Snake Oil Safety (SOS) Salesman. (Those more concerned about selling their miracle product; than effective process). Does not matter how often you are "**zipped, zapped, or zopped**"; if the fundamentals are not right you're in for a very bumpy ride. All this contributes to huge drains on resources though. The biggest complaint we hear from site safety professionals is the amount of time they spend maintaining the safety system (read number crunching etc. in front of a PC) than they do actually supporting and championing safety behaviour within their business.



When you attend your Doctor you don't want them basing their diagnostic decision making too much on "**emotion**". Imagine the situation where the Doctor does not tell you that your cholesterol is very high, or your pancreas is failing - solely because they were concerned they might hurt your feelings and you might run off to another doctor.

Sounds a bit ridiculous, does it not. There are so many parts of our lives where we want decisions made on sound practice, evidence, etc. when the Doctor finally tells you that have Asbestosis there is ZERO value in revisiting the time you spent working amongst the blue dust. Your past won't help you now. **The only chance you have is to heavily focus on the present and the near future.**

So what does the Science tell us?

For a start it is VERY clear that lagging indicators offer no real advantage at all when it comes to the foreseeability of accidents. What nearly ALL of the peer reviewed scientific literature tells us is; that it is the leading indicators that offer some assistance toward predictability and general organisational health as far as safety is concerned.

Many organisations lack the "**maturity**" to confront their safety culture too directly, so we need to explore less confronting means of exploring the world of Leading Indicators. Think of the process as one of working back from the right hand side of the continuum shown above, and increasingly moving toward the left. A small sample of potential leading indicators that may be worthy of consideration could be:-

- % of jobs for which risk assessments are carried out
- % reduction in exposure hours for hazardous activities
- % of work site inspections carried out against planned requirement
- % of jobs with hazard assessments
- % of tool box talks with a health element
- % of permits to work reviewed and controls found to meet health requirements
- % of planned training courses completed

We are going to be brave and ask you to come up with the common element in regard to all the indicators defined above - and almost all leading safety indicators actually have the same one.

Have you got it...? No, it is not that they are "**leading indicators**" - told you that already. It IS that they are expansionist (inclusionary) metrics. What this means is that, unlike their lagging cousins, leading indicators are best in-place as the number increases. When it comes to the leading safety indicators the more you see the desired operations/behaviours the better.

Now here is a CRITICAL point (please don't miss this one).

Whilst this system is almost universally used (even though it remains universally flawed); there is a wide range of leading safety indicators. The decision as to which leading indicators shall add the most value to your business is not a simple one. There are many factors that shall influence the successful integration of leading safety indicators within a business, not the least of which is the underlying safety culture that is present. It is true that there might be a few that might be thought of as having an universal appeal, although as the maturity of the business improves so too does its ability to accommodate some of the discerning leading safety indicators.

The underlying fact taken from this should be; **You and Your Organisation**. What are you doing about safety and your company safety culture?

By being proactive and **LEADING** the way in encouraging good safety practises; incidents, accidents and fatalities will reduce. This will be reflected in the attitude of your staff and hopefully in their overall performance.

We can help you **LEAD that change in 2011**, just email our office info@jonwilkins.co.uk or call us on [01458 253682](tel:01458253682) and enquire about training, audits or systems. We are here to help.

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If you would like to discuss any of the issues highlighted in this newsletter, then drop an email to Jon on jon@jonwilkins.co.uk or call the office [01458 253682](tel:01458253682)



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