MATURE AND WISE OR OLD AND STALE?

7 QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR BBS PROCESS
FOREWORD

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, behavior-based approaches to performance improvement were introduced as a viable workplace safety solution. They found tremendous success and became an integral part of organizational sustaining systems across the world. But over time, a new challenge to this approach surfaced; namely its long-term sustainability and effectiveness—what we call process maturity. Many organizations describe their behavior-based safety (BBS) process as mature when in reality it has simply aged. A truly mature process is one that has achieved full potential, not just tenure.

In the following pages, we present DEKRA Insight’s assessment of the current state of behavior-based safety processes and provide recommendations for creating growth, sustainability, and maturity in your BBS system.
DO WE AGREE ON WHAT BEHAVIOR-BASED SAFETY IS?

Before you can evaluate the maturity of your behavior-based safety system, it’s essential to start with a definition of what we mean. Behavior-based safety (BBS) developed as a way to manage exposure at the working interface: the place where what people do (behavior) interacts with conditions and management systems. Safety excellence is directly related to how effective the organization is at controlling exposure to hazards in the working interface.

While there are many variations in application, our experience holds that there are four essential elements to any BBS process.
1. IDENTIFY CRITICAL BEHAVIORS.
A BBS system measures behaviors that impact safety performance. It sets a standard of what these behaviors look like when performed safely so all employees are aligned on the expectations. Clearly defined standards remove the “opinions” of those who conduct the measurements.

2. GATHER DATA.
The BBS process then measures how often and how effectively employees are performing these behaviors to our standards. Measurement comes through an observation system that must allow for anonymity and openness without fear of retribution.

IF YOU DO A GOOD JOB UP-FRONT PINPOINTING THE BEHAVIORS THAT ACTUALLY CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR INJURIES AND IMPROVE THOSE, THEN YOU WILL GET GOOD RESULTS IN YOUR INCIDENT RATES.

- JESSIE F. GODBEY, JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY
3. PROVIDE FEEDBACK.
A strong BBS process focuses on the successes of employee behavior by providing positive feedback in a specific, detailed way for each safe behavior performed. This reinforcement increases the likelihood of an employee repeating desired behaviors. For all at-risk behaviors, the employee discusses why the behavior was performed in a way that increased exposure and risk, thus identifying if the behavior is enabled (awareness), difficult (system/procedure), or non-enabled (conditions).

4. USE THE DATA TO REMOVE BARRIERS.
Observation data (gathered in step 2) should be analyzed to identify barriers to safe performance and the best means of addressing them. If the data is not used consistently to address all three types of behavior, employees will become frustrated and likely decrease their level of engagement.
Do we have a vision for what our behavior-based safety process could be?

Defining a goal and articulating a vision of your desired future state are crucial elements of a mature BBS process. Your vision should be developed around specific objectives and your process designed with discernable, measurable steps to achieve success. Without a vision, the process can stray off course and become an organizational relic, rather than a driver of improvement.

Understanding the objectives, strengths, and limitations of a behavior-based safety process is critical to long-term success. Here are some things a mature process can bring to your organization:
TOO OFTEN, WE LOOK BACK AFTER MISTAKES ARE MADE, DRAW LESSONS, AND TRY TO CORRECT THE RESULTS. WITH FATALITIES AND ACCIDENTS DOING SO IS TOO LATE. SO WE NEED TO LOOK FORWARD, ANTICIPATE AND PREVENT INCIDENTS BEFORE THEY OCCUR.

-DR. R. ANTHONY HODGE, INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MINING AND METALS

BENEFITS BEYOND INJURY REDUCTION.

Even though many believe an employee-driven safety approach is only suited to reducing injuries, experience has shown there can be many more organizational objectives, such as but not limited to:

- Safety performance improvement
- Increased employee engagement
- Culture change
- Relationship development between workers and management
- Developing trust and respect in the workforce
A HOLISTIC VIEW OF SAFETY.

Traditionally, we have measured safety by the number of injuries an organization suffers over a period of time. Organizations need this measurement as a lagging indicator of performance, but an effective BBS approach measures an organization’s ability to control exposure in the workplace even before an injury occurs. There are several contributors to exposure reduction:

- Knowledge and skills of the employees
- Sound safety processes
- Up-to-date and accurate procedures
- Supportive culture
- Leadership committed to safety performance improvement
- Peers committed to the safety of themselves and others
- Availability of proper tools and equipment
- Safe behavior

EFFECTIVE BBS PROGRAMS LEVERAGE WORKER KNOWLEDGE TO IDENTIFY EXPOSURES SPECIFIC TO THE WORK BEING DONE AND GENERATE A LIST OF CRITICAL BEHAVIORS THAT ARE RELEVANT TO EACH JOB.
IS OUR PROCESS MATURE... OR JUST OLD?

For a behavior-based safety process to be more than just another initiative, it needs the support of committed employees and a culture that reflects leadership’s value for workers’ wellbeing. Creating the kind of culture where safety is a driving value (or isn’t), is something done by leaders through their day-to-day actions, by building trust, respect, and reliability.

When leaders fail to develop the type of culture needed for effective BBS, the process will become sick and feeble. Several symptoms indicate that a process is headed for life support.
BBS [IS AN INTEGRAL] PART OF A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO ADDRESSING PSYCHOLOGICAL, SOCIAL, ORGANIZATIONAL AND ENGINEERING FACTORS IN THE WORKPLACE.

-NATIONAL SAFETY COUNCIL’S JOURNAL OF SAFETY RESEARCH

THE CULTURE HAS CHANGED BUT THE PROCESS REMAINS THE SAME.
BBS processes should include safeguards to ensure anonymity and eliminate opportunities for managers to use safety information to punish employees. Absence of these safeguards can create a lack of trust between workers and management. Successful processes bridge this gap and assist in moving the culture to one where every employee is committed to controlling exposure and feels genuinely valued. If the process does not move forward with employee commitment and a culture that supports it, it will wither and fail.
PROCESS LEADERS ARE FOCUSED ONLY ON OBSERVATION NUMBERS AND NOT ON CONTROLLING EXPOSURE.
The definition of safety is to control exposure for self and others. Observations need to focus on why exposure exists and what can be done to control it. When the focus is only on how many observations are conducted, the quality suffers. The quality of observations and feedback is also critical.

PROCESS DATA IS TREATED AS STAND-ALONE.
The purpose of data analysis is to gain a true picture of all barriers to safety performance improvement. By examining process safety data separately—rather than comparing all available information collectively—an organization may fixate on one area and overlook the true root cause.

LEADERSHIP TOLERATES THE SYSTEM VERSUS BEING ACTIVE ADVOCATES OF THE PROCESSES.
Leaders at all levels need to be aligned on the vision of the effort and on the roles and responsibilities of each level in the organization. Demonstrating leadership by discussing the value of safety, the vision for safety, and focusing on exposure and not just injury numbers creates a culture that cares and is feedback rich.

A FEEDBACK-RICH ENVIRONMENT LEADS TO MORE EFFECTIVE SAFETY CONVERSATIONS ACROSS ALL ORGANIZATIONAL LEVELS.
ARE WE CULTIVATING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A MATURE PROCESS?

Understanding the positive features of mature behavior-based safety and what sets it apart from weaker systems helps us map the path forward to a wiser, more successful, and fully formed BBS process.

Mature processes include the entire workforce in data analysis, education, celebrating successes, safety communication, and encouraging employees to become engaged. Using safety department information, audits, and other teams’ data, and sharing the results in safety meetings, town halls, tailgate briefings, and staff conferences is simply part of their culture. Here are some other characteristics of a mature process:
MATURE PROCESSES FOCUS ON QUALITY.

For a system to become mature, the number of observations are important but should not be the main focus. The main focus should be on the quality of the employee conversations and ensuring the data is accurate to enable barrier removal. This focus on quality means we report numbers, but we talk about the conversations and how valuable it is to discuss safety situations on a daily basis.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IS BOTH A WAY TO KEEP PROCESSES ACTIVE AS WELL AS BEING A PROCESS ITSELF.

-THOMAS KRAUSE, LEADING WITH SAFETY
ROUTINE ACTIVITIES ARE ROUTINE.
In a mature process, several activities should be conducted on a routine basis without drama to get them completed. Items such as conducting team meetings, having agendas for all meetings, sub-teams working together, sharing data, developing and implementing action plans, training new hires, coaching observers, communications, and reporting to leadership is the normal way of doing business.

WORKGROUPS CUSTOMIZE THE PROCESS.
We all can agree that maintenance department employees and lab employees (for example) face different challenges in a BBS system. Mature processes recognize the different challenges and adapt the process to meet the demands, while staying consistent with the principles of the process. Adapting the process to departmental needs increases the likelihood of employee engagement and ownership, and long-term success.

WHAT ATTRIBUTES ARE YOU SEEING IN YOUR PROCESSES? WHICH ONES DO YOU LACK? ONCE YOU DETERMINE WHERE YOU ARE ON THE SCALE OF MATURITY, WHAT CAN YOU DO NEXT TO CLOSE THE GAP?
ARE WE FOCUSING ON EXPOSURES OR INJURIES?

A mature process is one that measures exposure before incidents rather than results after them. To be able to measure exposure, organizations must understand what creates it, how to identify it and recognize when it changes, and be able to develop solutions to control it.

Exposures = vulnerabilities. Advanced BBS systems ensure employees speak openly about worksite vulnerability and stop work when risk is imminent. Workers are only as effective as their leadership is in supporting them. Leaders are responsible for removing hazardous conditions and ensuring employees have the tools to work safely. Three elements can have a significant impact on employee exposure and risk.
Systems and Procedures.

If an organization’s systems and procedures are not well thought out and highly functioning, employees will not rely on them. A simple example is using vending machines for PPE. If employees continue to see the vending machines are out of a certain item, they will begin to take shortcuts to get the job done without them. This makes safe work “difficult.” In other words, desired safe behaviors are within the employees control but more difficult to perform.
MANAGEMENT OF CONDITIONS.
Conditions could be both physical (plant issues) and environmental (weather changes). If the physical conditions are not addressed, they will continue to expose employees even though the employees are aware of the exposure. This is an example where safe behaviors are “non-enabled.” That is, they are outside of the employee’s control to change.

DECISION MAKING CRITERIA.
Statements such as “I’ve done that a hundred times and never got hurt” are common when employees are asked why they performed a behavior in a way that increased the probability of injury. Understanding exposure helps employees make decisions that limit the probability of injury. Awareness of risk is an example of “enabled” behavior—employees are enabled to work safely if they are aware of the level of exposure and risk to injury.

INCLUDING EMPLOYEE INPUT IN PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT IS CRUCIAL TO CHANGING THE COMPANY’S MINDSET FROM A FOCUS ON INJURY TO ONE ON EXPOSURE.
Are We Measuring the Right Leading Indicators?

Leading indicators are measures of variables that can be shown to have a statistically valid, predictive relationship to injury frequency. They allow organizations to take proactive measures that prevent injuries, remove hazards, and mitigate exposures.

A mature BBS process has established measurements that indicate whether the company is making progress, stagnating, or veering from the target. Leading indicators are critical to ensure the process stays within its stated principles and is bringing the organization’s vision to life. Leading indicator measurements could be but are not limited to the following:
QUALITY OF THE CRITICAL BEHAVIORS CHECKLIST AND DEFINITIONS.
Measure behaviors that impact a specific location, job, or task. Ensure that all employees understand the standard of what safe behavior looks like. This increases the employee’s ability to recognize exposure and have open conversations when exposure changes.

QUALITY OF OBSERVATIONS.
Measurements need to include quality of the data, distribution, and focus of the observation process. Developing solid strategies that fit the specific workgroup being observed can ensure the quality of the process.

*IF YOU DON’T HAVE PEOPLE BRINGING UP THE ISSUES, THEN YOU CAN’T KNOW WHAT THEY ARE AND YOU CAN’T DO ANYTHING ABOUT THEM.*

-MICHAEL MCSHERRY, SAFETY MANAGER FOR US MILITARY CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTOR ECC
QUALITY OF FEEDBACK.
Saying “good job” when praising performance isn’t enough. Quality positive feedback includes specificity about what was done and how the behavior impacted the safety of the employee. We also all have a tendency to give direction when we see someone perform a behavior that increases the employee’s exposure and risk. In a successful behavioral approach, the employee is willing and able to provide information on why the behavior was performed in the manner it was performed.

BARRIERS IDENTIFIED & REMOVED.
Developing a highly functioning system for barrier removal that addresses each of the three types of behavior ensures the processes sustainability and growth. When barriers are identified and removed consistently, employees begin to engage at a higher level and with more enthusiasm. They also begin to take personal responsibility to control exposure for themselves and others.

OPEN DISCOURSE AND UNFETTERED REPORTING WITHOUT FEAR OF RETRIBUTION IS VITAL TO IDENTIFYING AND REMOVING BARRIERS TO SAFE WORK.
WHAT ARE THE SUCCESS FACTORS FOR YOUR BBS PROCESS?

Ensuring that your behavior-based safety process is ripe and not just withering on the vine means identifying critical success factors and measuring them over time. Effective initiatives define a vision and construct a blueprint designed to achieve it. This not only increases the likelihood of success, it also assists in growing the process as maturity develops.

Communicating process standards and principles, involving people in decisions that affect them, and leveraging frontline expertise will foster buy-in and increase workforce knowledge and discretionary efforts. The results are a more motivated workforce able to spot exposure and do what’s needed to keep the organization safe. Besides employee engagement, here are other critical success factors to pay attention to:
**MAKE SURE LEADERS KNOW THEIR ROLE.**
For BBS processes to sustain, each level in the organization should have clearly defined roles to assist in the success of the initiative. Roles and responsibilities must be revisited regularly to ensure that drift does not occur.

**ESTABLISH A COMPETENT STEERING TEAM.**
The team of employees that lead the effort must be engaged, trustworthy, and have the skills and talent to manage the process. Assuring diverse representation and putting the right people in the right positions will ensure the process stays on track, that work is shared, and that reliability is achieved.
PROVIDE ACTION-ORIENTED SKILLS DEVELOPMENT.
Team members must be supplied with the skills they need to perform their roles in an effective manner. Even if employees are trustworthy, respected, and enthusiastic, that does not mean they know how to coach others, run effective meetings and conduct quality training sessions, or perform the many tasks needed to be effective leaders.

USE DATA EFFECTIVELY.
During data gathering activities, employees should be able to provide valuable information on why behaviors are performed in a way that increases exposure and risk. Using this data to remove barriers empowers employees in their own safety and creates a feedback-rich environment within the workplace.

STAY UP TO DATE.
Even though the basic principles of BBS never change, the applications have. We are continually developing new and effective ways to measure process quality that results in better systems for workplace safety. Employees need to understand evolutions in application along with evolutions in exposures.

WITH NEW RESEARCH AND IMPROVED TECHNOLOGY, BBS IS BREAKING THROUGH TRADITIONAL BARRIERS, PROVIDING SOLUTIONS TO SAFETY’S TOUGHEST CHALLENGES.
ACHIEVING SAFETY’S FULL POTENTIAL

Though there are many pieces to an effective organizational safety system, behavior-based safety has proven to be an effective and integral part of many organizations’ toolkits. Effective behavior-based safety assists in transitioning organizational culture from one of compliance to rules to one of commitment to safety. However, as with any safety sustaining system, the process will only demonstrate effectiveness to the level of attention placed on the everyday activities that maintain, sustain, and grow it.

A process thrives when the people leading it develop quality measurements, clarify and perform level-appropriate roles, and use data for continuous improvement.
ABOUT BST

BST (http://www.bstsolutions.com), a DEKRA Insight company, is a global safety consulting and solutions firm headquartered in Oxnard, California. With staff on every continent, BST has helped over 3,500 client sites in 72 countries improve safety performance. BST's work encompasses a range of industries, including mining, petroleum, chemical, metals, paper, food, utilities, railroads, healthcare, and government.

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