

What's your view on the term "safety culture"? For some it is a vague and ill-defined concept, but for many professionals in the safety arena it is a powerful enabler and predictor of safety for their people...



Safety Culture and Engagement Survey

Case study – safety culture at AE Smith



Defining safety culture

Safety culture describes an organisation's overall commitment to workplace safety. It's closely linked to an organisation's employee culture. Importantly, when measured effectively, it helps to understand the gaps that exist between an organisation's safety systems and how well they are being implemented at the team and employee level.

AE Smith's commitment to safety

AE Smith, the largest privately owned mechanical services contractor in Australia, is absolutely committed to safety. They have a highly developed safety program with clear procedures, training and measures of performance. They also contract external safety experts who conduct an independent third party safety audit of their procedures and practices to ensure they comply with Australian Standards.

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Even so, the AE Smith Board and Executive team were keen to better understand their safety culture. While their safety systems had helped reduce incidents to very low levels, it was a challenge to move lower. To take the next step, they engaged Insync Surveys to quantify staff attitudes towards their key safety systems to get the big picture of their employees' day-to-day approach to safety at work.

As Nick Daley, AE Smith's National Safety Manager, explained: "post incident reports were very powerful, giving us a snapshot of an individual's attitude, but they didn't deliver a full picture across the board. Before our Safety Culture and Engagement Survey (SCES) with Insync Surveys, we didn't have a way for staff to describe their experience of the safety systems in place and how they felt they were being put into action in individual branches, teams and their daily work."

Measuring safety culture

As AE Smith demonstrates, it's important that organisations focus on past safety incidents to learn from safety lapses and try to prevent them happening again. However, as many companies are finding, this focus reduces serious safety incidents over time but doesn't predict hidden issues at a team level. Insync Surveys' safety survey uses innovative lead indicators to uncover hidden issues from an employee's point of view, which may help to prevent future incidents.

AE Smith and Insync Surveys used the SCES to survey 700 people and gain a better understanding of overall workplace safety culture. Flyers, eye catching posters and toolbox meeting information packs were ways that Raymond Lee, AE Smith National Marketing Manager and survey champion, promoted the survey roll out. As a result, AE Smith achieved an excellent response rate of over 80% – well above the 65% industry standard participation rate.

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Taking decisive action

AE Smith used employee feedback and recommendations from Insync Surveys to make a number of adjustments to safety systems and approaches.

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Nick Daley says: “using Insync’s results helped us tailor training initiatives for each branch by identifying some improvements that employees had highlighted. We invest a lot in our overall systems but this feedback helped make them even better as we simplified safety procedures that some people found too complex.

“We also launched a new national safety management meeting with better communication from our people back to the business. For example, more meaningful action lists with local ownership and deliverables are now used.

“We adjusted the focus to catch people doing the right thing.”

“Another initiative is improving our established Safety Bucks Program. We adjusted the focus to catch people doing the *right* thing. Positive safety behaviours are nominated by workmates now and this emphasis has made a real difference.

“Finally, we have enhanced our ‘Positive Performance Indicators’ that support line managers to keep improving health and safety standards among their direct reports. A more focussed list of safety accountabilities and behaviours for all managers is now provided and the feedback has been very good.”

Where to from here?

For AE Smith, the Safety Culture and Engagement Survey is the right approach for their ongoing safety journey. Undertaken at specific junctures, it helps to look beyond the strong safety systems already in place and uncover new areas for improvement at an employee level.

About AE Smith

AE Smith is a BRW Top 500 Private Company with a team of more than 700 people in 10 offices throughout Australia. AE Smith delivers practical solutions in air conditioning, building services, energy efficiency and onsite power. Established in 1898, AE Smith remains proudly 100 per cent Australian owned and operated.

For more information visit www.aesmith.com.au

About Insync

Insync is a leading provider of stakeholder surveys and consulting, focused on improving organisational culture and employee engagement. With nearly 50 staff in Melbourne and Sydney, we are the largest Australian provider of our type.

Our team of industry specialists have extensive experience in logistics, human resource management and organisational development at a local, regional, national and global level.

We are committed to helping you improve safety and operational performance. Our tools allow you to benchmark your performance against a database of almost one million responses collected during our 20 year history.

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