

# **BEHAVIOURAL SAFETY**

QBE ISSUES FORUM MAY 2008



# INTRODUCTION

## BEHAVIOURAL SAFETY

“Promoting safe behaviour at work is a critical part of the management of health & safety, because behaviour turns systems and procedures into reality”.<sup>1</sup>



It is estimated that in up to 80% of work related accidents the employee's behaviour or their acts or omissions is a contributing factor.

HSE research<sup>1</sup> concluded that proprietary and in-house behavioural safety processes improve safety when implemented effectively. One study reported an 85% improvement in accident rates.

Successful behavioural safety programmes require senior management commitment, suitable resources and effective planning to ensure they fit in with your organisation's culture and health and safety management system.

QBE supports clients who decide to implement behavioural safety processes and this Issues Forum discusses the key elements of successful behavioural safety programmes, with practical advice on how to implement one and the pitfalls to avoid.

# WHAT ARE BEHAVIOURAL SAFETY PROGRAMMES?

Behaviour based safety programmes tend to focus on the observable and measurable behaviours critical to safety at a particular facility. They promote desired behaviours by introducing positive reinforcement and feedback for behaving safely. They should not be confused with inspections and audits of the workplace for unsafe conditions.

Behavioural safety programmes should not be seen as a "quick fix" and prior to any programme, organisations should satisfy themselves that the key principles of managing health and safety such as policy; organisational arrangements; planning and implementing; measuring performance; auditing and review are in place.

Naturally, the support, commitment and competence of the management team will be critical to success. Introduced well, behavioural safety programmes should:

- Engage significant workforce participation
- Improve management visibility
- Target specific unsafe behaviours
- Collect behavioural safety observational data
- Use data to measure safety performance and drive improvements
- Consider human factors within safety improvements
- Provide focussed feedback to all employees
- Enable unsafe acts to be promptly acted upon

With a focus on observable practices and targeting personal behaviour, behavioural safety programmes may be particularly effective at improving use of personal protective equipment, use of correct tools, manual handling techniques and improving slip/ trip incidence through housekeeping etc.

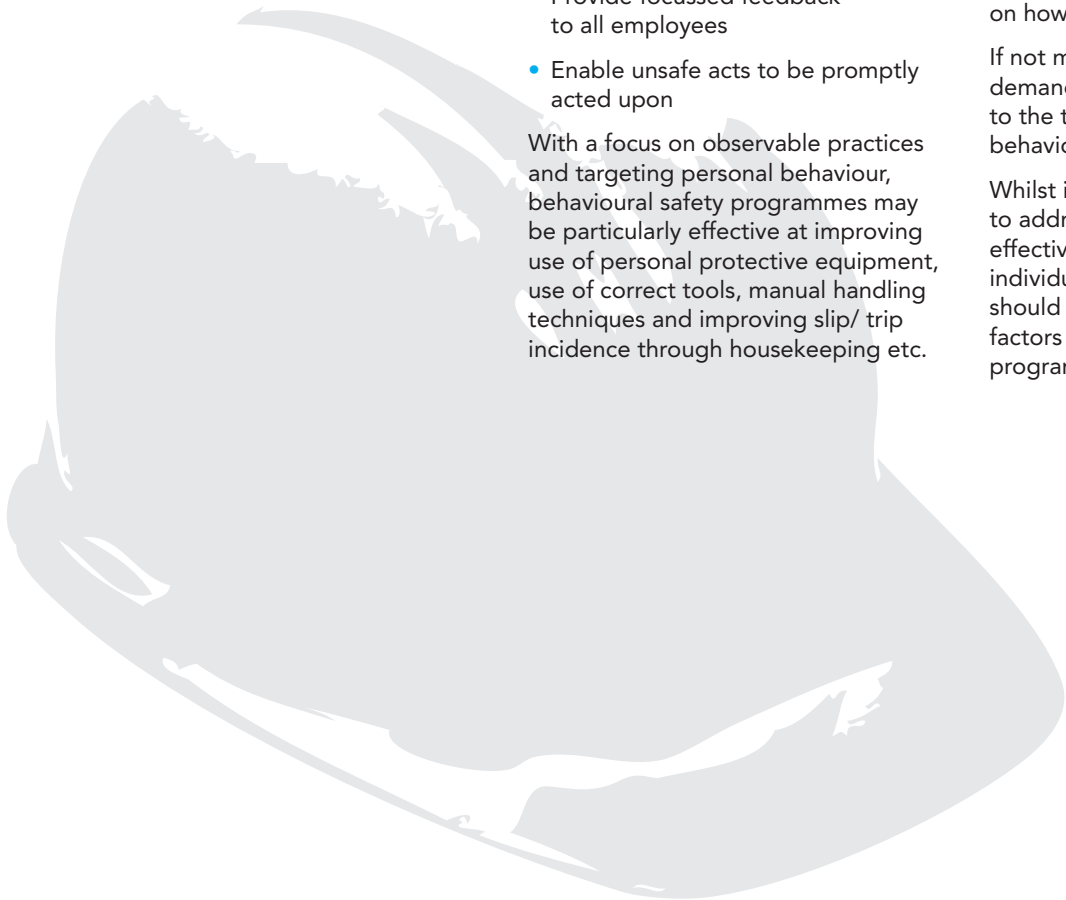
## HOW DO BEHAVIOURAL SAFETY PROGRAMMES RELATE TO HUMAN FACTORS AND HUMAN FAILURE?

Behavioural safety programmes are a proactive way to encourage desired behaviours and should be considered for introduction, once effective health and safety management systems are in place.

Within your health and safety management system you will have undertaken risk assessments and should have considered "human factors" i.e. how do the demands and ergonomics of the job; the attitude and skill of the individual and the cultural aspects of your organisation impact on how the individual may behave?

If not managed effectively, these demands and influences may lead to the types of "human failure" or behaviour within figure 1.

Whilst it is possible and desirable to address these behaviours through effective assessment of the job, the individual and your organisation, you should also consider these human factors within any behavioural safety programme you introduce.



# TYPES OF HUMAN FAILURE

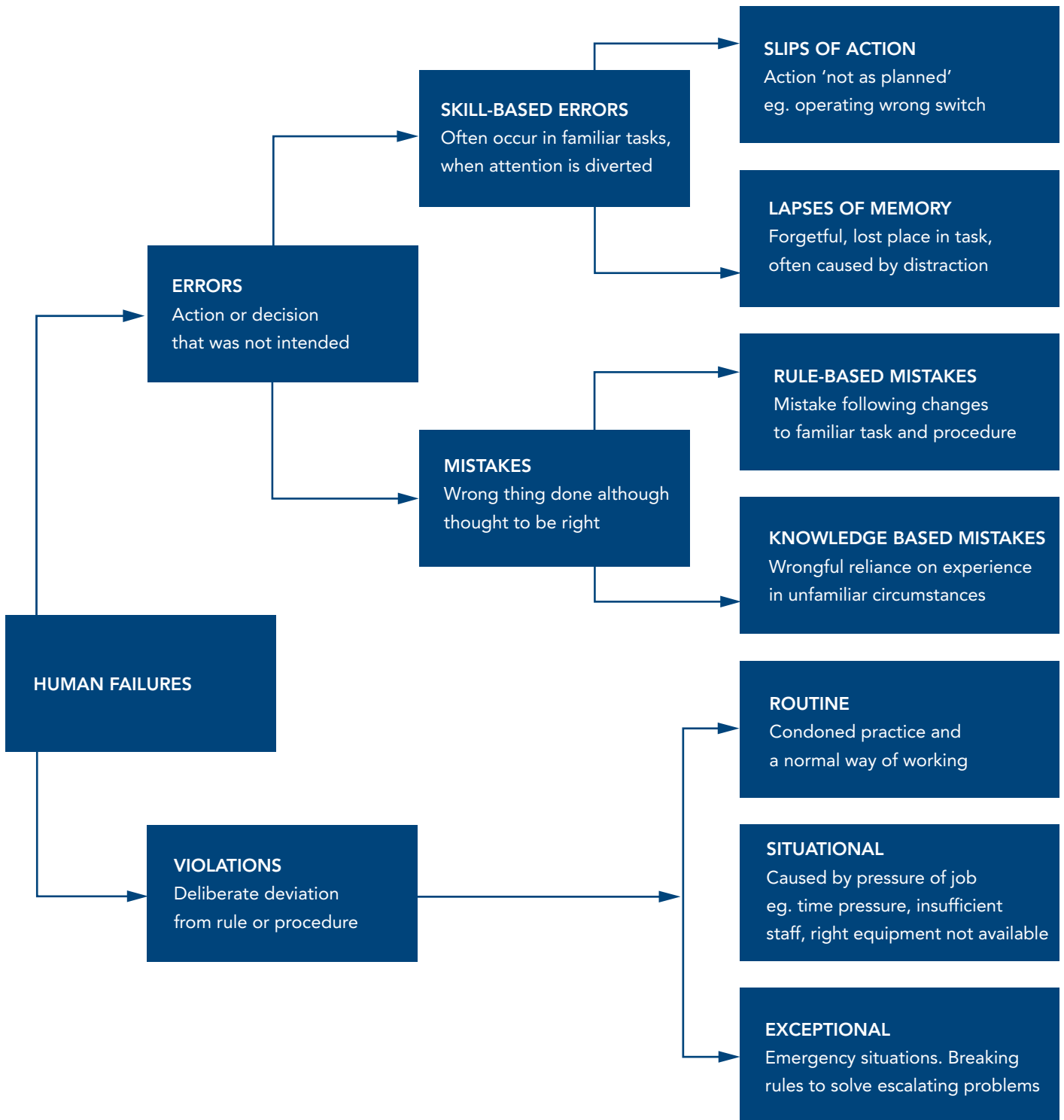


Figure 1: Types of human failure

# IMPLEMENTING A BEHAVIOURAL SAFETY PROGRAMME

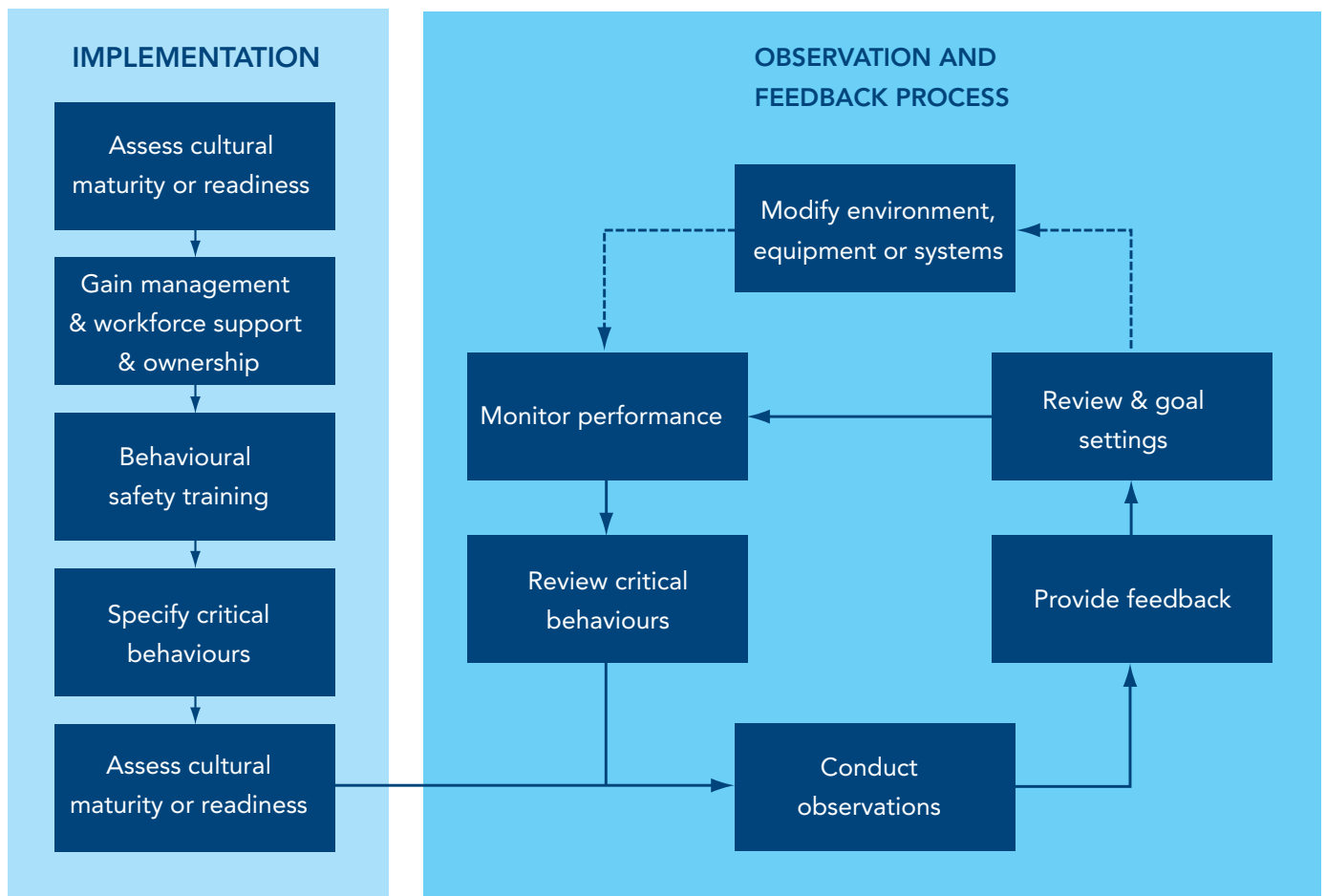


Figure 2: Key elements found in behavioural safety programmes

## CULTURAL MATURITY & READINESS

Prior to commencing a behavioural safety programme you should have an established health and safety management system e.g. in line with HS(G)65, "Successful Health and Safety Management" or BS8800 or OHSAS18001. A positive safety culture will also exist in your organisation e.g. senior manager commitment, competent managers leading by example and effective lines of communication and trust within the organisation.

## MANAGEMENT & WORKFORCE SUPPORT

Management and workforce ownership and support for the behavioural safety process is vital for success of the programme. An effective way of gaining support is to engage employees in the process of selection of the behavioural safety programme and its implementation.

You should consider either a full time programme co-ordinator or set up a steering group. Steering groups should include respected staff members who are representative of the entire workforce. It is particularly important to involve two groups, namely first line supervisors and, where applicable, union safety reps as research<sup>1</sup> has shown their involvement is more likely to result in success.

## BEHAVIOURAL SAFETY TRAINING

Whatever programme you develop, training in behavioural safety techniques will be required. A training plan for steering group members and subsequent observers will need to be developed. The nature of training should include human factors, identifying critical safety behaviours and communication skills to assist with individual and group feedback.

## SPECIFYING CRITICAL SAFETY BEHAVIOURS

Your behavioural safety programme will define its objectives and identify the critical safety behaviours (CSB) it will address.

Analysis of accident records can identify the CSB that will have the greatest impact on reducing your accident frequency. However, relying solely on accident records has the limitation that infrequent but CSB may be excluded. Your choice of CSB could also be influenced by reviewing staff turnover; absenteeism; task based risk assessments and safe operating procedures; quality of workmanship; near miss and dangerous occurrence reports; audit reports and discussion with the workforce or feedback from employee questionnaires.

Once you have determined the CSB to be observed, checklists should be developed, for completion by trained observers.



## ESTABLISHING A BASELINE

A baseline is often established during the initial period of observations to establish the current level of safe behaviours for the critical behaviours identified. This baseline is useful to measure the programme's success in changing behaviour.

## OBSERVATIONS

The frequency of observations and numbers to be conducted will need to be defined. Observations tend to be conducted by peers rather than by superiors. In general, proprietary and in house systems will create checklists for these observations to be recorded on. You should ensure that the behaviours are clearly described to enable the observer to judge consistently whether someone is behaving safely or unsafely.

## FEEDBACK

Positive feedback is one of the most important elements in the process as this is the positive consequence that is introduced to reinforce safe behaviour. Positive reinforcement should be provided consistently over an extended period of time to ensure that safe behaviours become habit.

Effective feedback requires skill and to be effective for the receiving individual should be done soon after the observation. Positive feedback such as "Excellent work John" can be promoted openly but feedback requesting the individual changes their behaviour is best done in private or could be perceived as punishment.

Graphical feedback such as percentage of behaviours observed as safe should be communicated to the workforce e.g. via meetings and notice boards.

## GOAL SETTING AND REVIEW

HSE research<sup>1</sup> indicated that goal setting increases the amount of behavioural change. Goals need to be realistic and achievable otherwise people may become demotivated.

Some organisations link goal setting to individual's appraisals, bonuses and other safety incentive schemes.

The nature of goal setting may include the required level of participation and number of observations to be conducted and targets for improving the percentage of observed safe behaviours.



## MODIFY ENVIRONMENT

The observation and feedback process may identify unsafe conditions and barriers to why the individual could not behave safely. Often these fall within the human failures listed above. This information should be collected and used to review risk assessments, followed by actions to create safe systems of work.

Prompt feedback to staff on the status/ timescale of such improvements is vital to maintain staff commitment to the programme. To ensure such actions are implemented there will need to be suitable senior management commitment and adequate resources allocated to the programme.

## MONITOR PERFORMANCE

Monitoring improvements in the percentage of safe observations can demonstrate the success of the programme. Where improvements are not being made it is important to investigate this behaviour in detail to identify what barriers exist to behaving safely and to identify the improvements required.

## REVIEW LIST OF CRITICAL BEHAVIOURS

The list of critical behaviours should be revised periodically with new behaviours added or existing ones replaced. This can be done by periodic review of your accident records or following a period when a critical behaviour has become habit and is consistently observed as safe.

## PITFALLS TO AVOID

With effective planning and implementation your behavioural safety programme should be a success. Some common pitfalls that you will need to address include:

- Lack of senior management commitment
- Adverse behaviour created by insufficient risk assessment and creation of unrealistic rules and safety procedures
- The programme is not “owned” by everyone in the organisation
- Insufficient trust between management and employees
- Some “off the peg” or consultant led programmes may not fit well with your organisation’s culture
- Ensure the system is in your own management style, language and presentation
- Observational feedback not seen as fair and just
- Workforce concerns over “spying” or perception of a blame culture

## CONCLUSION

Behavioural safety programmes can be an effective tool for reducing accident frequency.

They will require a concerted effort from both managers and employees and therefore it is essential that suitable planning and resource is allocated prior to the commencement of any programme.

## REFERENCES/ FURTHER READING

<sup>1</sup> Strategies to promote safe behaviour as part of a health and safety management system (Contract research report 430/2002)

Download at:  
[www.hse.gov.uk/research/crr\\_html/2002/crr02430.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/crr_html/2002/crr02430.htm)

Reducing error and influencing behaviour HS(G)48  
HSE Books [www.hsebooks.co.uk](http://www.hsebooks.co.uk)

HSE Website  
[www.hse.gov.uk/humanfactors](http://www.hse.gov.uk/humanfactors)

Behavioural Safety – Kicking bad Habits (IOSH)  
Download at:  
[www.iosh.co.uk/files/technical/Behaviouralsafety%2Epdf](http://www.iosh.co.uk/files/technical/Behaviouralsafety%2Epdf)



## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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Jon Lawrence joined QBE in 2001 and has over 20 years experience within the insurance industry primarily in the field of liability risk management. Jon specialises in health and safety management systems and assists clients to reduce their risk exposures and to mitigate potential losses. He is a Chartered Safety and Health Practitioner and member of IOSH.

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