



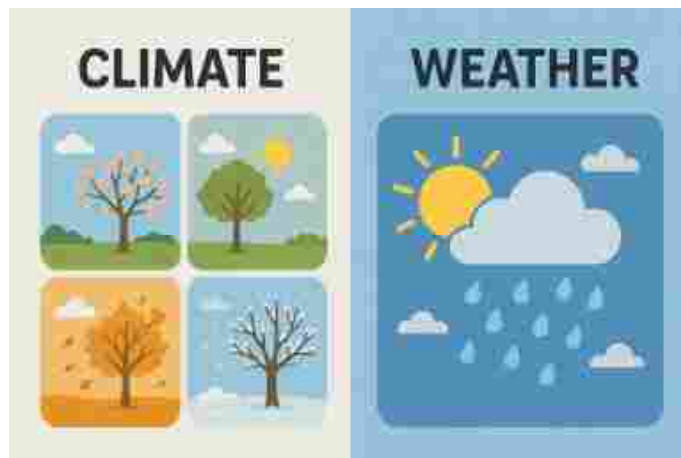
Safety Culture VS Safety Climate: It's All About Leadership

There are frequent conversations in the health and safety community around the concepts of Safety Culture and Safety Climate, akin to the climate versus weather debate. Some discussions border on arguments, and even their existence is questioned in more extreme quarters. vPSI has years of experience and many publications and presentations on the concepts and makeup of safety culture and climate. What we have learned through our work is that while there may be disagreements on terminology, the debate is a matter of semantics as it always comes down to leadership. Culture and climate exist based on organizational expectations, and those expectations and context are set by leadership.

Safety Culture and Safety Climate are not inherent characteristics of any company, as a piece of paper that establishes the legal existence of an entity does not also lay the foundation for the culture of the company around any aspects including safety. What we can see as company characteristics, however, are tangible and intangible leadership practices that consistently drive and support expectations around risk and safety. Further, the ways in which leaders engage employees around safety can often influence the behaviors that

are evident throughout the organization.

The expectation of leadership has always been argued as starting with the C-Suite. However, it truly starts with the Board of Directors (BoD), or equivalent, for an organization. This group holds the C-Suite accountable for all critical metrics of performance and ensures that organizational risks including safety are addressed. Without BoD interest and engagement, the C-Suite manages the risks as they see fit, and oversight may be weaker.



The BoD should be overseeing the execution of performance improvement strategies and ensuring that audits and investigations of significant incidents are conducted, and that appropriate corrective actions are created and implemented. Senior executives should monitor performance and create strategies to improve management of risk to lessen the chances of injuries, spills, or other failures.

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Mid-level management would then execute the strategies and routinely report up to the senior executives. Front-line managers are involved in the execution and the investigation of incidents. Finally, employees should be involved in all aspects of the strategies and responses to incidents, including the investigations, to provide a mechanism for engagement and ownership.

Developing operational and functional leaders is one of the steps a company can take to lead efforts in employee engagement, strategy development and execution, and improve performance including safety performance.

Enhance your safety and leadership skills!



Our next Safety Leadership Workshop is scheduled for May 20-21, 2025 in Houston, TX. Contact us to book your seat now!

The Pros and Cons of Learning Teams in the Workplace



In recent years, learning teams have become a favored tool in the workplace, gaining traction as a collaborative, system-focused alternative approach to incident investigations and in learning from normal, successful work. Rooted in Lean thinking and currently popular as a result of increased interest in Human and Organizational Performance (HOP) and Safety II principles, learning teams are designed to help organizations understand work as it is actually done—not just as it is imagined on paper or fantasized in some remote corporate glass tower. Like any approach, however, learning teams come with both strengths and limitations. Understanding these can help leaders determine when and how to use learning teams effectively.

What Are Learning Teams?

The learning team process brings together people closest to the work, often including frontline employees, supervisors, engineers, and support staff, to explore how work normally gets done, and what factors contribute to success or failure. Unlike traditional “root cause” investigations that seek linear causes or assign blame, learning teams aim to build a richer understanding of the system, its variability, and its resilience.

Key features of learning teams include:

- **Focus on understanding operational reality:**

Learning teams aim to understand the actual, “blue line” reality of how work is done, rather than the planned or “black line” version.

- **Facilitated conversation:**

A facilitator (often an external 3rd party like a vPSI Group, LLC consultant) guides the conversation, ensur-

ing a safe and inclusive space for all team members to share their perspectives.

- **Diverse perspectives:**

The team typically includes individuals from different roles and levels within the organization, providing a rich understanding of the work.

- **Emphasis on learning and improvement:**

The goal is not blame but to learn from events, identify areas for improvement, and implement changes.

- **Co-creation of solutions:**

The team collaboratively identifies solutions and potential improvements, ensuring buy-in and ownership from those closest to the work.

Pros of Learning Teams

1. Worker-Centered Insights

One of the main advantages of learning teams is their emphasis on the lived experience of workers. Because they involve the people doing the job, learning teams generate nuanced, ground-level insight into how systems function in real life. This helps identify gaps between “work as imagined” by planners and “work as done” by practitioners.

2. Psychological Safety and Trust

Learning teams are typically conducted in a blame-free environment, which encourages openness and honesty. By focusing on learning rather than fault-finding, organizations can create a culture of trust. When people feel safe to speak up, they are more likely to share meaningful details that can drive improvement.

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The Five Ds

vPSI Group has successfully used this technique to quickly gain valuable and actionable feedback from 400 front-line workers in under 30 minutes:

- Difficult
- Dangerous
- Different
- Dumb
- Dope

The Pros and Cons of Learning Teams in the Workplace

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3. Systemic Understanding

Rather than isolating individual errors, learning teams highlight systemic interactions: how policies, tools, environmental conditions, pressures, and organizational decisions influence behavior. This broader lens helps leaders make better-informed changes that target the system rather than individuals.



4. Proactive Application

While learning teams are often used after events, they are equally powerful when used proactively to explore how work is done successfully under varying conditions. This helps organizations build resilience and anticipate potential weak points before something goes wrong.

5. Engagement and Ownership

Because learning teams include frontline voices and encourage collaboration, they can increase workforce engagement. Participants often leave with a greater sense of ownership over their work environment and are more committed to implementing improvements.

6. Alignment with Lean Thinking

Learning teams align with Lean principles by emphasizing frontline-driven problem solving, continuous improvement, and reducing waste. They focus on process from the worker's perspective and identifying inefficiencies. Like a value-stream map, they help pinpoint pain areas for targeted problem solving.

Cons of Learning Teams

1. Time and Resource Intensive

Learning teams require planning, facilitation, and often several hours of time from multiple people. For organizations stretched thin or operating in fast-paced environments, this can be a tough sell. Unlike a quick investigation checklist, learning teams demand patience and presence.

2. Quality Depends on Facilitation

The effectiveness of a learning team often hinges on the facilitator. Without a neutral, well-trained facilitator

who can manage group dynamics, keep conversations constructive, and guide the process toward insight, the session can lose focus or fall flat.

3. Ambiguity Can Be Uncomfortable

Unlike traditional investigations that deliver a clear “cause” and recommendations, learning teams often reveal complexity and nuance. This can frustrate leaders who expect neat solutions or quick fixes. The

value lies in understanding patterns, not assigning blame, but that mindset shift isn't always easy.

4. May Challenge Hierarchies

Learning teams level the playing field by treating all participants as equally important contributors. While this is a strength, it can also be a cultural shock in hierarchical organizations where deference to authority is the norm. Without leadership support, this may limit psychological safety.

5. Risk of Superficial Implementation

As learning teams become more popular, there's a risk of them being adopted as a checkbox exercise without the proper philosophical foundation. When the process is applied superficially, without intent to learn and improve systemically, it can breed cynicism.

6. Local Learning

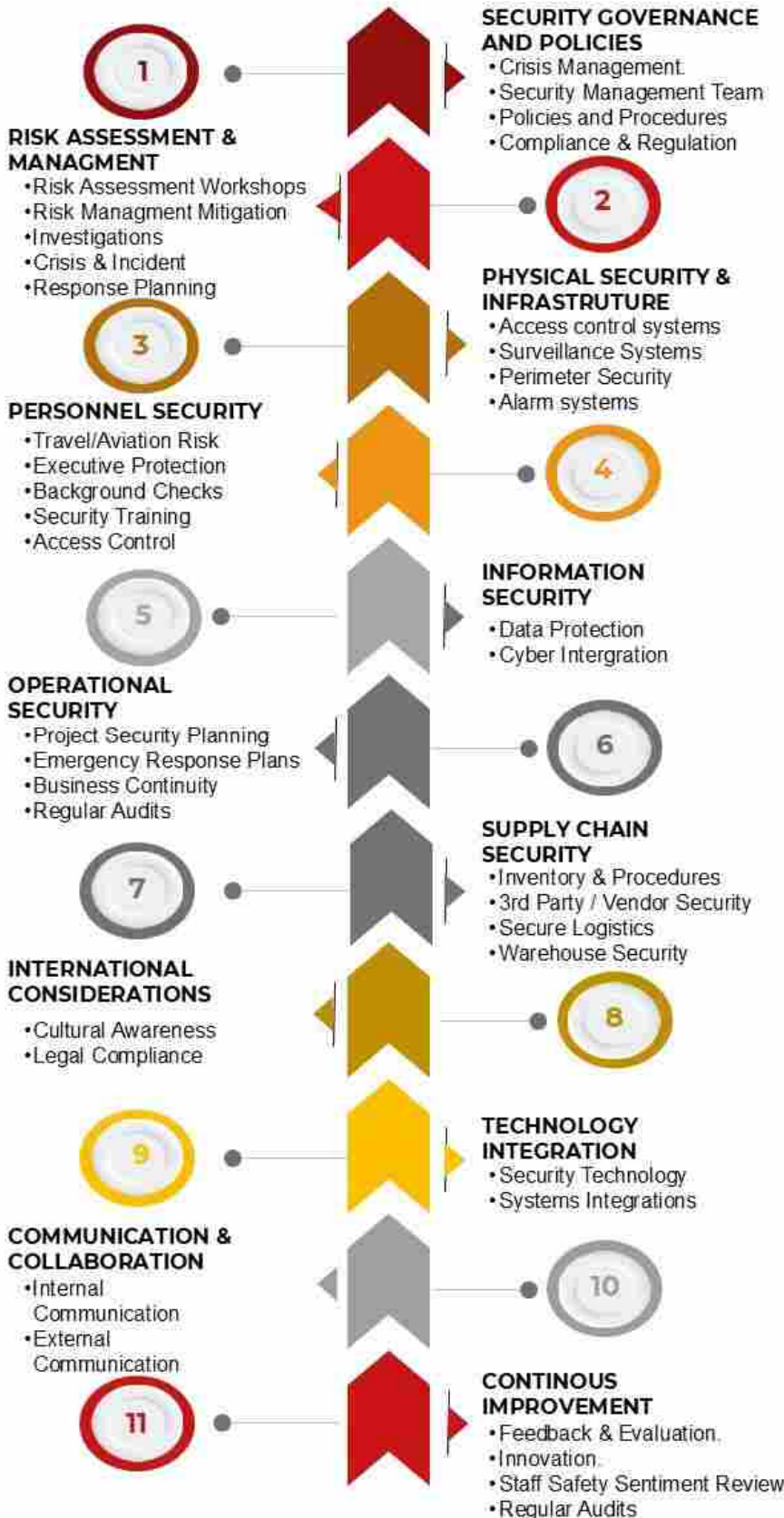
Learning teams may also encounter a common Lean challenge: generating organization-wide change (Type 3 improvements in vPSI terms) from their low level in the hierarchy. Without leadership commitment and clear mechanisms to share learning, the benefits of a learning team can remain localized and fail to drive broader advancement.

Conclusion

Learning teams offer a powerful, people-centered approach to understanding complex work and improving organizational learning. They foster trust, uncover systemic issues, and empower employees. However, they require time, skilled facilitation, and cultural readiness to be effective. When used thoughtfully and with genuine curiosity, learning teams can be a transformative tool for improving both safety and performance.



CORPORATE SECURITY FRAMEWORK



In today's dynamic environments, vPSI understands that integrating Health, Safety, and Environment (HSE) risk management with Corporate Security is essential for a robust, unified defense strategy.

While HSE risk management safeguards worker well-being, environmental compliance, and operational up-time, corporate security protects against physical, cyber, and procedural threats. Together, they create a powerful synergy: closing gaps in emergency response, mitigating site vulnerabilities, and reducing risks to personnel, assets, and organizational reputation. This collaboration not only ensures regulatory adherence and faster incident resolution but also cultivates a culture of proactive resilience.

By enhancing its Corporate Security consulting services with HSE-aligned expertise, vPSI delivers a comprehensive risk framework designed for threat anticipation, crisis agility, and long-term operational integrity—securing people and other assets, and ensuring enterprise success.

