



Learning Team Facilitators: In-House vs. Third Party

One of the recurring considerations in meetings such as Learning Team Events is the choice of facilitator: should the role be performed internally, or is there value in engaging an external (third-party) facilitator?

While this may initially appear to be a logistical decision, it has a meaningful influence on the quality of learning that emerges. Facilitation is not a neutral role; it shapes the direction of inquiry, the tone of the conversation, and ultimately what is revealed about how work is performed.

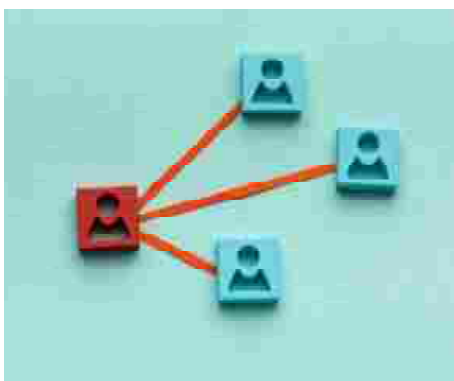
External facilitators can significantly enhance the effectiveness of a Learning Team in certain contexts. Their independence from the organization's structure and day-to-day operations allows them to approach the work with fewer preconceptions. This often enables a more genuinely curious stance and supports deeper exploration of how work is actually carried out.

The presence of an external facilitator can also strengthen psychological safety. When the facilitator is not part of the organizational hierarchy, participants are often more willing to speak candidly about challenges, trade-offs, and system constraints. These insights are critical to understanding normal work and enabling meaningful organizational learning.

In addition, external facilitators can challenge assumptions more freely, maintain focus on learning rather than premature problem-solving,

and manage group dynamics without the influence of existing relationships. They may also bring valuable perspectives and practices from other organizations and industries.

The use of a third-party facilitator can be particularly beneficial in situations where confidence in the integrity of the process is important, such as high-risk events or those subject to increased scrutiny.



That said, external facilitation should not be viewed as a substitute for developing internal capability. Sustainable learning requires organizations to build and maintain their own facilitation capacity over time. The intent is not to outsource learning, but to ensure that the right conditions exist for it to occur.

Choosing the Right Approach

The decision between internal and external facilitation should be made deliberately, with consideration given to the context and objectives of the Learning Team.

Engaging an external facilitator may be appropriate when:

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- The event involves high risk or significant consequences
- The subject matter is sensitive or potentially contentious
- There is a need to enhance trust, neutrality, or credibility
- Participants may be hesitant to speak openly
- Internal facilitators have prior involvement or potential conflicts of interest
- Specialized facilitation experience is required

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vPSI: Always Ahead of the Curve...

Measuring SIF Learning for >25 Years

Using HOP Concepts in Investigations for >20 Years

Patented Online Hazardous Energy Based JSAs in 2013

What will we think of next?



What's Your Favorite Type of Riskwashing?



vPSI Co-Founder and Director Norman Ritchie recently delivered the opening keynote at the 2026 ASSP Gulf Coast Chapter Safety & Health Summit. The title of his talk was "Riskwashing Is All

Around Us: Why It's Bad, Why It's Unavoidable and How to Minimize It ". As he concluded, he used Slido to ask participants a simple question:

"What's your favorite type of riskwashing?"

The answers came back thick and fast, and did not disappoint. While the responses varied in their details, common threads covered such nuggets as:

- "Safety First"
- Goal Zero
- Posters and banners
- Safety moments
- Near-miss quotas
- Stand-downs
- "We're a family" messaging
- Safety alerts with no action



It struck that this wasn't criticism from outsiders; the call is coming from inside the house! This was the system we operate describing itself, and it is largely self-inflicted.

From a Human & Organizational Performance (HOP) perspective, riskwashing is interesting, not because it's wrong, but because it's revealing. It shows yet again where Work as Imagined \neq Work as Done, signals are being treated like controls, and metrics are standing in for understanding.

Most riskwashing starts with good intent:

- ✓ Show commitment
- ✓ Raise awareness
- ✓ Track performance

But over time, something shifts and we forget that these activities don't actually influence how work context design and the tasks themselves are conducted in reality. The result is that there's an appearance of risk reduction rather than it being real (and BTW, the people actually doing the work know the difference). What do you think this does to the reputation of the safety function, the organizational culture / climate? Nothing good is the answer. And there's also a bottom line impact to consider: riskwashing often incurs considerable direct resource cost and increases bureaucratic friction.

The hard truth is that you can't eliminate riskwashing, it's an emergent property of how organizations try to manage a complex risk environment. You can, however, respond to and manage it differently. A few shifts that help:

- ◇ Don't treat slogans and campaigns as solutions
- ◇ When a metric looks good, ask what it might be hiding
- ◇ Be brutally honest in eliminating performative / token safety actions
- ◇ Move from "how many?" to "how well are we learning?"
- ◇ Don't communicate risk without visible follow-through
- ◇ Spend more time understanding work as it's actually done

Instead of asking "How do we stop riskwashing?", a better question might be: "What is this telling us about how our organization really works?"

Maybe it's time to have someone from outside take a look at what your organization is doing and uncover some hard truths about the level of riskwashing. vPSI consultants can be your Brutal Mirror of Truth.



Poetry Corner

No poster campaigns!
Safety slogans don't save lives.
Even catchy ones.



Safety Culture and Leadership: Is This as Good as It Gets?

In recent interactions, one of our vPSI consultants has observed that there may be a belief that organizations no longer need to discuss Safety Culture or Safety Leadership. While this only represents a few data points, one can't help but wonder if the field truly is there, or if practitioners believe they are as good as they are going to get. vPSI are going to write an article based on crowd-sourced responses to this post around both ideas.

Without wanting to taint opinions, the consultant offers that they have experienced and observed that there is still some way to go with both, and that some organizations are accepting the current state without challenging the need to improve. This could be due to inertia, or it could be due to cognitive biases — Dunning-Kruger perhaps — or something else entirely.

The question posed to the community is whether the industry is as good as it is going to get with Safety Culture and Safety Leadership, or whether there is still work to be done. Email us to give us your thoughts!

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- The organization has limited experience with Learning Teams

Conversely, internal facilitators are often well suited when:

- The event is lower risk and operationally routine
- Strong psychological safety already exists within the team
- Facilitators are trained and experienced in Learning Team methods

- There is value in strengthening internal capability and ownership
- The topic is unlikely to be influenced by internal dynamics

In practice, many organizations benefit from a blended approach. External facilitators can be utilized for complex, high-risk, or sensitive situations, while internal facilitators support routine learning activities and the ongoing integration of Learning Teams into daily operations. Pairing internal facilitators

with external experts can also be an effective way to build capability over time.

Ultimately, the objective is not to favor one approach over the other, but to ensure that the conditions for open, honest, and meaningful learning are present in each situation. Facilitation is one of the key levers available to achieve this.

If you need a facilitator or facilitator training, call vPSI.



At the Podium

vPSI Consultants are frequently called to speak at conferences and other events. Below are some chances to hear one or more of our consultants in the coming months:

- Co-founder and Director Norman Ritchie will be rolling out a new presentation, "How Do We Know HOP Works?" at the National Safety Council (NSC) Safety Summit scheduled for May 6-8, 2026, at the Baltimore Convention Center in Baltimore, Maryland.
- The "How Do We Know HOP Works" discussion continues as Norman Ritchie will be presenting it at the SPE International Health, Safety, Environment, and Sustainability Conference and Exhibition, scheduled for September 7-9th, 2026 at the Abu Dhabi Energy Center in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.
- Norman will be part of a panel discussing, "Complacency: One of the Most Frequently Cited Explanations After Incidents, Yet One of the Least Examined," at IADC HSE and Sustainability Europe, planned for September 22-23rd, 2026, at the Amsterdam Marriott Hotel in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.



KPIs for SIF Learning and HOP Validation

What are vPSI Metrics?

vPSI Metrics are a set of high level Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that present a unique insight into how organizations identify and respond to problems. Sustainable long-term performance improvement is achieved by measuring and rewarding modified behaviors. Each of the vPSI Metrics provides management with actionable information to improve operational effectiveness.

How does all this make my job easier?

vPSI KPIs are independent of actual consequences. Department managers will be accountable only for things they can actually control. This process can be used to more accurately select contractors, business units, or individual managers who are doing the best job of mitigating hazards. Corrective action evaluations reward honesty, develop management skills, and shift the whole corporate culture from punishing those who have problems to rewarding those who identify and correct problems. This encourages employees to actively seek opportunities for improvement, rather than hiding problems.

**Know Where You're Going,
Not Where You've Been**

Where do I get vPSI Metrics?

Typically, they are derived from an analysis of incident reports, but can also come from maintenance logs, learning team events, audit findings, behavioral based observations, complaints, or any combination of these and other processes related to unplanned events and other problems. Investigations produce corrective actions which reveal the quality of the investigation itself.

The **vPSI Number**TM is a high-level KPI that is the product of the following lower level metrics:

- ◇ **Awareness of problems:** knowing about problems in the workplace is key to solving those problems, therefore this metric rewards higher levels of near miss reporting. It includes a filter to weed out those near miss and loss incidents that have no potential for significant impact to the organization or employees.
- ◇ **Quality of solutions:** this metric rewards the development of relevant and effective corrective actions.
- ◇ **Implementation of solutions:** the best solutions in the world are meaningless until they have been fully implemented.

The vPSI NumberTM measures continuous improvement by quantifying the three main components of effective problem solving.

