



The Evolution of Engaging Employees: Kaizens to Learning Teams

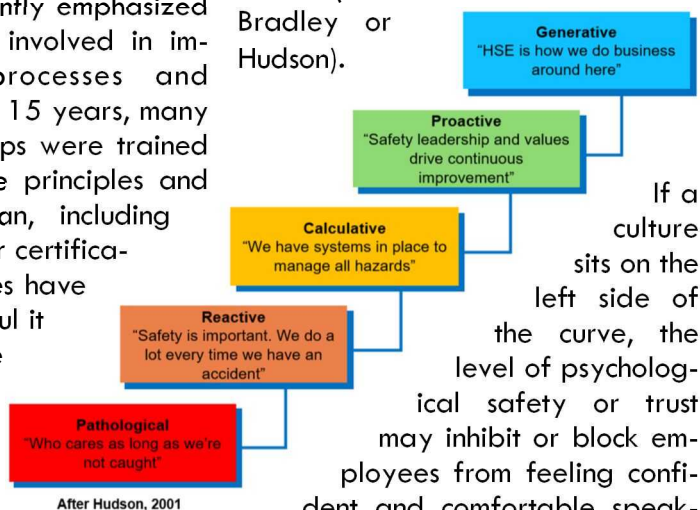
The concept of employee-driven quality teams can be traced back to Deming and Juran in the mid-20th century, with Total Quality Management (TQM), Quality Improvement Plans/Processes (QIP), and Quality Improvement Teams (QIT) becoming widely known in organizations by the mid-1980s. Training on TQM across various organizations consistently emphasized getting employees involved in improving work processes and productivity. Within 15 years, many manufacturing groups were trained and certified in the principles and application of Lean, including Bronze Lean Leader certification. These processes have shown how powerful it can be to involve those who do the work in solving the problems encountered.

The concept of learning teams reflects a broader evolution in organizational thought: improving work through incremental process changes by looking at all aspects, from unplanned events through "Normal Work." The move toward Learning Teams supports the migration from Safety I to Safety II or Safety Differently thinking.

Decades of research by Gallup show that a better-engaged workforce yields superior results across all metrics, from profitability to safety. A strong case can be made that utilizing Learning Teams (or Kaizens, Japanese for "change for

the better") creates an environment where work becomes more efficient through the involvement of those who do the work, combined with the expertise of those who design it.

When conducting a learning teams event for safety, it's important to understand where an organization sits on the Safety Culture Maturity Curve (DuPont Bradley or Hudson).



If an organization sits toward the right side of the curve, it should have the proper foundation to engage employees in a meaningful way during the learning teams event.

As noted above, Employee Engagement is a marker of a successful company. Gallup shows that when comparing companies in the same industry, those with top quartile engagement have noticeably higher

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profitability, lower turnover, and better quality and safety performance than those with bottom quartile engagement. This creates a compelling argument for companies to look for ways to better engage their employees. Learning Teams and Kaizens provide a fantastic mechanism to do just that.

Some of the more typical triggers for an event include HSE or Quality incidents:

- Injuries
- Environmental incidents
- Non-productive time or business interruption
- Product quality problems

Events can also be used to learn from "Normal Work":

- Bottlenecks and resource issues that slow work processes
- Non-value-added activity
- At-risk behaviors driven by the work context
- Activities or issues identified using the "D" Framework

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The Diagnostic Metric You Didn't Know You Needed

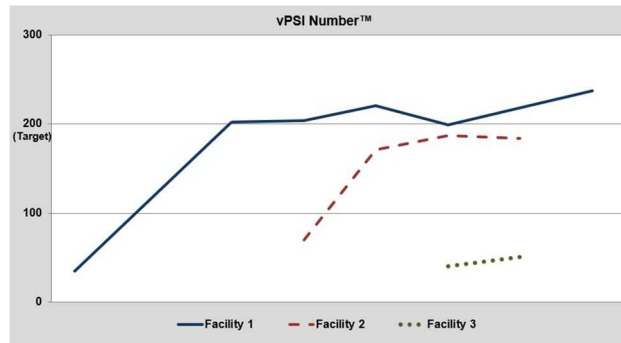
We've written extensively about "bad" metrics and the negative effects they can have on an organization. Never fear though, vPSI doesn't just help organizations recognize problems, we also help them develop and implement solutions to those problems. One of the best kept secrets in the risk and safety realm is that there is a metric that, when applied properly, can tell organizations where to focus their efforts. It's the vPSI Number™, and it's 25 years old this year.

The vPSI Number™ is a measure of an organization's ability to find significant learning opportunities, come up with actions to take advantage of those opportunities, and then implement those actions. Not coincidentally, those are the elements required to solve problems, and we have devised measurements around each of them that then roll up into the vPSI Number™. These metrics give organizations not only a barometer to understand where they are in their continuous improvement efforts but also a diagnostic tool that tells them what they need to change to be better:

The Awareness Index assesses how good the organization is at recognizing good quality improvement opportunities; it's essentially a ratio of significant no-consequence or near miss unplanned events to total significant unplanned events. The word "significant" is important here; not all risks and opportunities are worth learning from and the vPSI Metrics were developed from day one with a risk based filter to ensure that only valuable learning is counted (think SIF, PFI STKY, etc). If the Awareness Index is low, the organization needs to do better at finding out about problems before they result in harm. This might mean establishing an anonymous reporting system for employees to disclose problems in the organization. Or it could be setting up Learning Teams that focus on learning from normal work.

The Solutions / Planning Index (SPI) is a measure of how good the organization is at solving problems. It's a weighted average of action quality scores across a given population or business unit. The vPSI System gives each action that comes out of a Learning Team, Incident Report, audit, or other finding one of four pos-

sible quality scores: Type 0s are proposed activities that are not corrective actions at all, i.e., they are missing at least one of the essential qualities of a corrective action (appropriate assignment, reasonable schedule, and relevance to the problem). Type 3s are permanent and systemic corrective actions and represent organizational learning and continuous improvement. A Type 1 is a short term local corrective action, whereas a Type 2 will be a broader temporary fix. If the SPI is low, the first step is to find any incidents where all the activities are Type 0 and come up with actual corrective actions to the problem surfaced in the incident. Next is reviewing the reports that don't have a Type 3 solution to see if there is any way to encapsulate the learning on an ongoing basis.



The Implementation Index is the percentage of solutions in place and operational. If this score is low, the organization has to simply implement the corrective actions already devised and upgrade any reports with no real corrective actions.

The product of these three is the vPSI Number™. If the three indices are improved, the vPSI Number™ is improved – and more than that, the organization is improved because real problems were surfaced and solutions found and implemented.

If your organization is interested in finding out how they would score, simply reach out to us for a baseline assessment. Fair warning though, as this is measuring things most organizations don't pay attention to, we've never had a baseline assessment score in the optimal range of >200...or even in the median range of >100. Never fear though, as demonstrated the measurements inherently include simple methods for improvement.

vPSI Group, LLC, making the world a better place, one client at a time.

What is Intelligent Safety?

Article submitted by guest writer Lance Beloney of SGT Global.

Intelligent Safety (IS) is the integration of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), the Internet of Things (IoT), and big data analytics into autonomous safety management. It is a systematic approach to safety management that integrates these technologies into daily operations. IS continuously monitors the environment, collects high-quality data, and analyzes conditions in real time without relying on human observation.

Using cameras, sensors, and connected systems, IS predicts, detects, and mitigates risks preemptively and in real time. It automates routine safety tasks, delivers immediate insights to the point of work, and reduces the variability of human judgment. IS adapts to all industrial workspaces. From construction to mining and manufacturing to refineries. By transforming raw data into actionable intelligence, IS creates a more proactive, adaptive, and resilient safety culture.

The Need for a New Safety Model

Industrial environments today are more complex, dynamic, and data-intensive than ever. Construction sites shift by the hour, manufacturing lines run at relentless speed, and energy facilities depend on interconnected systems that leave little room for error. Yet the safety models designed to protect these environments have not evolved at the same pace. They still rely heavily on manual observation, periodic inspections, and human judgment in conditions that change faster than people can track. This creates a widening gap between the risks organizations face and the tools they use to manage them.

That gap is visible in the challenges frontline teams confront on a daily basis. Job-site conditions evolve constantly as equipment moves and new trades arrive. High-risk activities such as crane operations, working at heights, and turnarounds require continuous oversight that is nearly impossible to maintain manually. Legacy behaviors insist on perpetuating the notion that it hasn't happened in years so doing it the risky way is okay. Large projects depend on fragmented workforces with varying levels of training and safety culture. Modern systems generate enormous volumes of data, but teams

often struggle to turn that information into actionable insight.

These realities make one thing clear: traditional safety approaches are no longer enough. Industry is seeking a model that can match the speed and complexity of modern operations. IS fills that gap by using real-time data, automation, and advanced analytics to predict, detect, and mitigate risks as they emerge, creating a more proactive and adaptive safety culture.



The Seven Core Capabilities of Intelligent Safety

A mature IS system is built on a set of core capabilities that autonomously work together to create continuous awareness, rapid detection, and actionable intelligence:

1. **Monitoring:** Autonomously leveraging existing visual and digital infrastructure including cameras, sensors, and mobile devices to gather a constant stream of operational data.
2. **Detection:** Using machine vision and image-recognition models to identify safety and operational issues the moment they occur.
3. **Real-Time Alerting:** Notifying the right people immediately to enable intervention before escalation.
4. **Documentation:** Capturing rich metadata such as time, location, and classification for a detailed, auditable history.
5. **Analysis:** Analyzing structured data to reveal patterns and leading indicators of risk.
6. **Reporting:** Generating on-demand summaries tailored to different stakeholders to support decision-making.
7. **Conversational Intelligence:** Allowing users to ask questions in natural language for instant, context-rich answers.

Together, these seven capabilities transform Intelligent Safety from a monitoring tool into a fully integrated operational discipline, one that continuously learns, adapts, and strengthens the organization's ability to manage risk.



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Normal Work can also include back-office processes:

- Supply Chain, such as procurement or vendor management
- Hiring and onboarding
- Training and competency
- HSE activities driven by company or regulatory requirements

Two of the first critical aspects to setting a learning teams event up for success are identifying the right management sponsor and team members, and having facilitators with experience leading events.

- The scope has to be just right — not too broad or too narrow
- Facilitators must prepare for the event by reviewing the information and data relevant to it

- The team must include front-line employees who do the work, supported by any necessary expertise from those who designed the work
- During the event, enough time has to be allowed for the team to review relevant information and identify, then prioritize, problems
- Soak time is needed to give participants space to reflect and come up with additional thoughts
- Prioritization and solution identification need careful guidance to reduce the chance of group-think or dominant personalities taking over
- Implementation and feedback to the group on actions taken

will reinforce the benefits of the exercise and provide impetus for future events

Many organizations are adopting Human and Organizational Performance (HOP) principles in the way they conduct business. These principles are leadership attributes that help build psychological safety and trust, leading to improved engagement. Learning teams provide a mechanism to engage employees and can help further that trust.

Poetry Corner

Learning teams' outputs only become improvements when action follows.

HOP and Learning Teams Workshops

This modular workshop offers two days of HOP (Human and Organizational Performance) training and one day of Learning Teams optimization training.

Aug. 18-19: 2-Days of Human and Organizational Performance (HOP)

Aug 20: 1-Day of Learning Teams

Attend both for 3 days of intense hands-on training!



Hosts: Norman Ritchie and Tom Knode

Receive instruction in the following:

- The 5 key principles of HOP
- How Human Performance Factors contribute to Unplanned Events
- Solving all types of work problems more effectively
- The value of learning from normal work
- Designing effective learning team meetings
- Tools and techniques for facilitating productive discussions
- Psychological safety and psychosocial safety
- And more!



Visit the event page for more information.