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Safety climate and the influence of leadership: 
A study of safety climate and the influence leadership training has on employee perceptions of health and safety.

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Business Studies in Human Resource Management

At Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Christopher David Brooks
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Abstract

The aim of this study is to understand the influence leadership has upon safety in the workplace as seen through the eyes of its employees. This research was undertaken in the Island City of Singapore and associated with a business owned by a Multi-National Corporation, (MNC), operating locally. The research was carried out as a reflection of the organisations safety climate, through a professionally available questionnaire mechanism.

While research and theory contend that safety culture is enduring and possibly more difficult to assess, it is recognised that safety climate is measureable and is considered to be a reflection of safety culture. Theory also contends safety climate as being a snap shot of the organisations ‘mood’ at a single point in time and therefore has a short shelf life. It is also recognised that the background to this study is done acknowledging the continued debate surrounding the understanding and definitions associated with the concepts organisational culture & climate, safety culture & climate.

Leadership theory and research points out the importance of leadership on employee behaviour and motivation. The organisations’ senior leadership underwent intervention training provided by the author based upon leadership theory of a transformational style and workplace best practice. A Safety Climate questionnaire was provided to the participating employees of the MNC business and was repeated following a three-month interval. The study was quantitative, longitudinal and comparative in nature. The participating employees forming a control group and an intervention group. Following the leadership training the Senior Leadership was associated only with the employee intervention group. Safety climate analysis was undertaken with the findings being a result of questionnaire responses. Prior to the research it was expected that the results of the research would provide useful future guidance for organisations and their leadership. The author believed that the study would help organisational leadership better understand and make full use of the influence they have. This knowledge would in turn provide leadership the requisite emphasis to improve workplace safety and employee’s perception through the influence leadership holds.

The study’s hypothesis was that a discernible difference should be noted between the ensuing assessments due to improved leadership and the understanding of the influence it holds. The improved leadership influence will be reflected in employee’s perception of management and workplace safety as captured in the safety climate questionnaire.

It was believed that this research should help provide the organisation greater understanding of both an organisations safety climate, and leadership culture. Through this research the organisation should also recognise the role leadership influence plays
and that the utilisation of safety climate assessment can be a useful and predictive tool. That its use can play a part in the organisations endeavour to reduce workplace injuries and help reduce the associated escalating financial cost to both employees and the organisation of such injuries and loss.

The outcome from the study found a positive correlation to the research question and hypothesis with the safety climate results indicating a positive improvement for the intervention group associated with the leadership influence, as a direct consequence of the intervention training. The safety climate measurement improved significantly for the surveyed dimension of Management Commitment and the other management specific areas. The Safety Climate Index improvement for the dimension of Management Commitment alone increased by 41.03% and an overall increase of 16.95% across all of the nine survey dimensions.
Preface and Acknowledgements

This thesis was completed with the valuable support of a number of people.

I would like to especially thank a number of close colleagues who patiently coped with my many questions and requests for assistance. While I cannot name them individually because of the confidentiality nature and restrictions associated with company controls these folk provided important support including language translation of the safety climate questionnaire.

I would like to thank Brendan Doyle and Global Safety Index, (GSI). Brendan Doyle and others from Global Safety Index provided technical support including the provision of the Safety Climate and Leadership questionnaire. GSI also allowed me the use of their specialised analytical software for which to run the questionnaire results upon. I am very grateful to Brendan for his encouragement and patience throughout this project.

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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>EH&amp;S</td>
<td>Environmental, Health &amp; Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSI</td>
<td>Global Safety Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>Human Resource</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSE</td>
<td>Health &amp; Safety Executive</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labor Organisation</td>
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<td>International Trade Compliance</td>
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<td>LSI</td>
<td>Leadership Safety Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>MNC</td>
<td>Multi-National Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>OHS</td>
<td>Occupational Health &amp; Safety</td>
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<td>OHSA</td>
<td>Occupational Safety and Health Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>People Based Safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCI</td>
<td>Safety Climate Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>WSHi</td>
<td>Workplace Safety &amp; Health Institute</td>
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