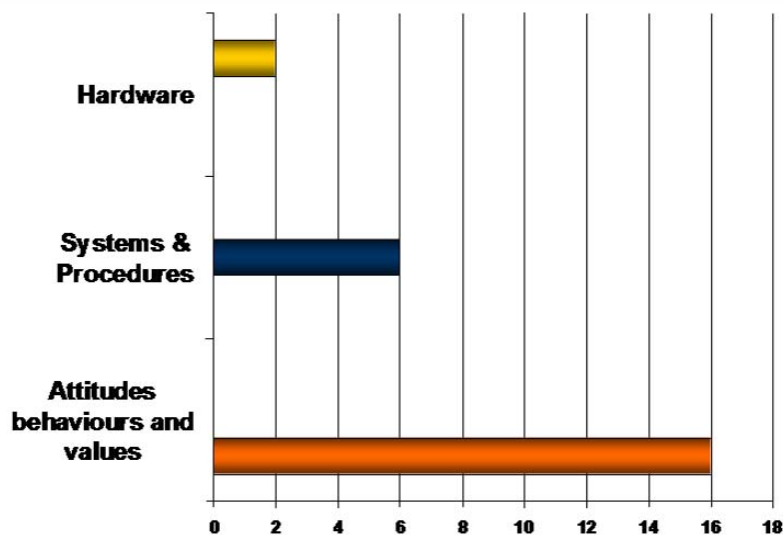


## Safety Leadership and Communication

Occupational Health and Safety relies on far more than just having the right policies and procedures. Working in transport safety, often within industries where health and safety is taken very seriously such as the oil and gas sector it is not uncommon to find what appear to be excellent health and safety systems, that are still failing to deliver anything close to the aspiration for zero accidents. The graph below shows the causation of health and safety issues within one global oils and gas player – very rarely is it the specification or maintenance of the hardware which is at fault, and rarely is it deficiencies in systems and procedures – so what IS it that causes the problem?



*Root causes of incidents*

Good systems fail because of the human element. No-one cuts corners on safety because they want to get injured, they cut corners because of either ignorance of the safe way to do something – a communication issue – or more commonly because they think they can cut a corner and get away with it. Very few people have an accident the very first time they do something unsafe – if we all crashed or got a ticket every time we broke the speed limit, no-one would do it, but because MOST of the time if people speed it has no adverse consequences for them... they do.

So the way to make sure that people adhere to those policies and procedures has to be to win their hearts and minds – which is a communication issue.

Firstly, they have to be able to understand the policy and procedure – is it written in plain English so that they can easily understand it? Is it as brief as it can be without losing meaning, so that they can read it without it taking too long, and have a chance of remembering it when they have finished? Is it written at a level they can understand? In fact do you even know what their reading ability is? How do you communicate it to them? Is it just through the written word, or also pictures, videos, verbal briefings and discussions? How do you cater for those who do not have English as a first language?

Once the systems are right, AND easily understood, your problems are over, right? Wrong. Then people still need motivating to do the right thing, unless it is also the easiest thing... So the other thing you need is safety leadership. Your staff have to be really convinced that safety really IS important to you. That takes a lot more than just saying so once in a while. For example, how many of your managers are measured on performance and have that as a target in their personal development review (or whatever HR are calling them this week...)? Then ask yourself how many of them – and the teams they manage – have safety as a target? Not just accidents, but safety? Do you even have a mechanism for measuring safety other than just the absence of reported accidents? Such as using an anonymous staff survey to see how they really feel about safety, how often they have a near miss, and what they think about the management's commitment to safety?

To really make safety work for you, develop a strategy for communication rather than just doing it piecemeal – and like anything you have a strategy for, find a way to truly measure it. Because communication isn't about what you say – it's about what they hear. If you aren't taking steps to find out what they hear when you try to talk about safety, you are only doing half the job.

Saul Jeavons

Director

The Transafe Network

0207 112 7036

[saul.jeavons@transafenetwork.com](mailto:saul.jeavons@transafenetwork.com)

[www.transafenetwork.com](http://www.transafenetwork.com)