

Chapter 39

Embedding a New Health and Safety Culture Within an Indian National Gas Transmission Company

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ABSTRACT

Samuel Daniels led a five-year campaign to embed a healthy and safety culture in a National Gas Transmission Company in India. He took the challenge of establishing a safety culture in the company, which was dominated by a bureaucratic mindset. Although the company had a safety management policy based on ISO-certified integrated management system, the standard operating procedures, work procedures, guidelines, and formats were confined to mere documents, and any new change invited resistance from leadership. Samuel initiated several changes but could not sustain the gain. Lack of openness, trust, sharing, two-way communication, and participative leadership has systematically killed all the efforts to effectively manage safety. OCD strategy such as conducting a “cultural audit” to understand strategy, structure, systems, style, staff, skills, and shared values of the company; improved teamwork and co-operation; effective communication; and greater consultation, flexibility, work innovation at individual and group level have been suggested.

INTRODUCTION

Samuel Daniels (a pseudonym used for this change leader) led a five-year campaign from 2012 to 2016 to embed a health and safety culture within a National Gas Transmission Company in India. Although the company had had a safety management policy based on the Indian Standard Organizations (ISO) certified Integrated Management System, its standard operating procedures, work procedures, guide-

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lines and formats were just confined to mere documents, and any suggested new change had invited resistance from the organizational leadership of the company. In taking up the challenge to bring about desired organizational change and development (OCD), he did so in full knowledge that the company was dominated by a general resistive attitude. This 'reflective case history' concerns the OCD initiative undertaken and critically evaluates the effectiveness over time of the associated change agency practice. It starts by discussing the background to the initiative and the taken 'path to growth and success' in embedding the new health and safety culture, and then the subsequent 'path to decline and failure'. This is followed by a critical evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the OCD initiative and associated change agency, and the case history ends with several concluding reflections on how a more 'evidence-based' approach could have led to a quicker, better and more sustainable outcome.

THE OCD INITIATIVE

Background

The company deals in the transmission of natural gas by pipelines through its Natural Gas Grid project and had been set up as a subsidiary to a state Public Sector Undertaking (PSU). This way, it cannot be classified either as a pure PSU or as a private sector company, and instead is a hybrid of both with an organizational culture that is typical of a PSU, but with a resistance to change mindset.

When he joined the company in 2008 Daniels faced an organisation which did not have an iota of health and safety culture. The team below him was composed of fresh professionals, whereas he had 19 years of practical experience in this field. Prior to his joining this company, the organisation had suffered an accident wherein 5 labourers died while unloading pipes from a trailer. The reputation of the company dropped, and pressure was coming from the international financiers whose funding had been taken up initially as an investment. In such a climate Daniels had to begin an uphill battle to establish the best practices and systems. So, he concentrated his efforts in consolidating and upgrading the Health, Safety and Environment(HSE) systems by taking stock of the actual on-ground situation. This involved visiting all locations in a whirlwind tour across the gas grid and interacting with many professionals across the organisation.

Daniels learnt that the company had already been certified by an international organization for standardization (ISO) in the Integrated Management System. He found that Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), Work Procedures, Guidelines and Formats had been prepared by an outside consultant and introduced as part of the company's Safety Management practices, but they were all confined to just being documents. He learnt that people within the organisation were complacent about health and safety. The ISO systems relied more on paper filling exercises and not on execution. If a HSE culture was evident, it was only for creating documentation. Lip service towards safety was there, and safety execution lacked credibility. Professionals were not ready to think beyond complying with the ISO audit requirements. If new innovative ideas were brought in, there was resistance from managers at all levels to accept them. Clearly, gaps existed among planning, preaching and executing.

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