

A NEW APPROACH IN OHS:  
HUMANISM TO INFLUENCE  
ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS  
Research and Results

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A study carried out in companies and focusing on changes in behaviour in the area of OHS took place from January 2009 to June 2010 in a Quebec steel factory. This study showed convincing results regarding the pertinence and efficiency of such an approach. Although using drastically different tactics to implant a culture of prevention may seem daring, it sometimes proves to be the way to succeed and reach goals.

**CONFORMITY IS UNNEGOTIABLE IN AN ABNORMAL ENVIRONMENT**

An environment where there are risks to be taken (for example in factories), is abnormal for humans as we typically do not thrive in a place where we are constantly exposed to physical and psychological aggression or danger, therefore having to make up for this with standards put in place to protect us. The first kind of behaviour to develop is conforming to safety standards. But how does one traditionally go about getting workers to follow standards or adhere to rules? Do workers become safe by obligation or by conviction? Observing behaviour in a totally rule-free environment would probably provide a few answers.

**THE MOST COMMON WAY: OBEDIENCE**

The method most used by companies and employers is the behaviourist method, i.e. using obedience with workers, assuming that they will adhere to safety standards by offering rewards or punishment for compliance or non-compliance. We think that in both these cases, the consequences will ensure the desired behaviour. However, the problem with obedience is disobedience...in this educational fashion we call upon the individual's reasoning (the mind), by giving him directives, advice, and values to follow. "do this", "beware of that", etc. Can human behaviour be influenced in other ways in order to make someone conform by their own volition and increased maturity? We believe it is possible, and the research carried out in the factory shows this.

**THE HUMANIST APPROACH IN OHS: CALL UPON COMMON SENSE AND THE CONSCIENCE**

What is the humanist approach and how can it help in the field of OHS? To explain, we will use the definition of an accident...

<p>An accident is P x O The unfortunate result (Accident) of a collision between a Person (P) and an Object (O)</p>
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In our culture, there is more emphasis on the object. When an accident occurs, we review and change safety standards, go over the procedure or resort to using protective equipment, etc.

The humanist approach focuses primarily on the person and gives rise to new attitudes and new types of behaviour which are more suited to a dangerous or potentially harmful workplace. In this way the humanist approach creates the conditions for each human being to realize his or her full potential.

While the traditional approach uses obedience, the humanist approach calls upon the conscience. It helps people to realise the importance of adopting conformist behaviour in dangerous or risky places. Here we favour the holistic approach, i.e. ignoring reason (the mind : cognitivism). Via very precise learning and role-play situations, workers are encouraged to develop their emotional intelligence (how to work well in a team) and one brings out the willingness to act, and therefore the motivation to react in a safe way in risky environments.

However, this is not always enough. One ought to be aware of the reasons unnecessary risks are sometimes taken – perhaps out of bravery, thrill-seeking, to get noticed, for a dare or even to cut corners and save time. When the motive for taking a risk is more evident, it becomes easier for someone to control or master their impulses. Also, a self-awareness program such as the enneagram can be an educational tool to better understand policy in action vis a vis taking risks.

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### **ACCOUNTABILITY IS ABOUT SAFETY SKILLS**

Does being aware of the standards put in place automatically lead to respecting them? Obviously not: other factors come into play. But what is required for someone to voluntarily adjust his or her behaviour? It is simply necessary for them to believe in the values of safety and accident prevention behaviour.

Accountability rests on awareness of safety issues. By fostering awareness via training programs (which combine awareness of reason and emotion), employees can begin to use real skills and their own self-awareness to become safe in an unsafe environment. When someone becomes aware of this, they are able to take better care of themselves, which is most certainly something that all managers would like to see.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF A CULTURE OF PREVENTION OVER AN 18-MONTH PERIOD**

We wanted to verify (in a steel factory situated in Laval, Quebec) if the humanist approach could provide different results compared to traditional approaches used in OHS. A factory with an accident frequency rate of 18.9 (and therefore not in control of its OHS management) was identified. The factory employs 180 people - 19 nationalities, with a basic education, and 62 layoffs occurring during the research period, due to the US recession.

Training method:

- 1) A three hour meeting where the management, foremen and union members convened in order to agree on whether they wanted to improve or excel in OHS. Those who attended this meeting were eager to train and work together to make the necessary improvements.
- 2) Meetings where employees gathered in groups of 40 to get acquainted and present the attitudes and behaviours of a safety-conscious person, and present the project as regards the implementation of a culture of prevention at the factory.
- 3) One day of training for staff who will become observers and reporters, assisting wherever they witness a breach of OHS regulations.
- 4) Two days of training in several modules or sessions for employees on all levels teaching them how to think, and work in a team.
- 5) A two day training session in self-awareness (see The enneagram\*\*\*) helping participants (more than half of the staff followed the program) to understand the motives for taking risks according to personality type.

Over the course of these training sessions, the participant (via various exercises), was able to analyse his/her behaviour, i.e. how he/she thinks and behaves in the workplace. Each participant was able to examine the awareness he/she brings to different situations (see table below). As you will see, each exercise was done by both managers and workers.

<u>MANAGERS WILL</u>	<u>WORKERS WILL</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assist in interventions with workers. (Session: Observer and CARING communicator in OHS) (1 day)</li><li>• Oversee a good atmosphere in the team and in the company.</li><li>• Become self-aware, and aware of the best ways to manage. (Session: Enneagram: a tool for self-knowledge). (2 days)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be caring and helpful with their co-workers.</li><li>• In the case of unforeseen danger, to think and act appropriately: learn to TIME-OUT. (Session: TIME-OUT (2 days)</li><li>• Become self-aware, and fully aware of the reason(s) why of (wrongful) risk taking (Session: Enneagram: a tool for self-knowledge). (2 days)</li></ul>

## IMPRESSIVE RESULTS

OHS expenses

**The company saved \$265,000.00** over an 18-month period

**A 92% reduction** in the accident frequency rate.

Six months after the intervention, the company published the following results:

Topics	2008	31 Dec. 2010 <sup>1</sup>	Results
OSHA Freq. Rate <sup>2</sup>	18.9	1.55	92% drop
Days lost	7.4	0	100% success rate
Days lost + time assign. /200.000 hr	471.8	7.75	98% drop

### COMMENTS BY PARTICIPANTS:

1) The proposed training program opened **the channels of communication** within the company. If we refer to the Bradley curve model, the environments have become interdependent.

2) We were aiming for **rigor**, but it was not ingrained in the company culture. Even though we were still improving gradually each year, the content of the proposed training program has really helped us to understand its importance and to improve dramatically within a more friendly working atmosphere.

3) Before the intervention, **responsibility** rested exclusively on the department foreman, whereas now that a management team has now been put in place, incidents are much easier to avoid. The aim of the weekly meeting is to work towards solving problems that arise in OHS.

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### **CONCLUSION:**

It is possible to implement a culture of prevention in 18 months within an evolving environment. The following factors are vital in ensuring success or change within this time period:

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<sup>1</sup> 2010 statistics were reviewed over a 6-month period (completed in June 2010). Figures for 2008 are based on one year.

<sup>2</sup> Based on 200,000 hours.

- 1) Make sure influential people in the company are committed to the success of the program.
- 2) Emphasize on the importance of conformity in an abnormal setting.
- 3) Encourage full cooperation between workers and supervisors.
- 4) Open the channels of communication between individuals.
- 5) Gain a higher level of self-awareness during the training course in order to understand one's attitude and behaviour with risk-taking.

By educating humans to understand and act on the rules rather than simply obeying orders, we see dividends on several levels: better relationships and more consideration towards co-workers, increased initiative and improved respect for rules and equipment.

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\*\* Definition by Richard Martel (Cascades).

\*\*\* Enneagram: a tool for self-knowledge that defines 9 personality types:

See: [www.centreennea.info](http://www.centreennea.info)

\*\*\*\* See Bradley evaluation model, Vernon Bradley (Dupont Plant Worker).

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