

# The four criteria of safety leadership



**Senior leaders** must accept, promote and communicate the concept of safe production.

safety behaviours and solicit commitments to safety from others.

In a practical sense, this may involve: the CEO primarily (and the chair where appropriate) regularly reinforcing the existing company safety vision; the board authentically engaging with employees in safety issues while on site visits; and the board understanding the importance of, and actively supporting, the CEO and other senior executives in safety leadership.

## 2. Personal commitment

The personal commitment of senior executives and board members to safety leadership is essential in the development of a strong safety culture. In the context of this group of leaders, who are often removed from the daily operations of the organisation, personal commitment is defined as a sincere, visible and genuine dedication to workplace safety that demonstrates care for the safety and welfare of others. Senior leaders with a personal commitment to safety exemplify a positive attitude to safety, role-model safe behaviours and help resolve safety issues on behalf of employees.

In a practical sense, boards may choose to: ensure a commitment to safety is included in the board charter; ensure a company safety vision exists, is communicated regularly and widely, and aligns with, and supports, company values; and ensure the board and senior executives accept, promote and communicate the concept of safe production.

## 3. Decision-making

This criterion of safety leadership relates specifically to the decision-making task of senior executives and board members. Decision-making is a fundamental role of senior executives and board members

## How can safety leadership and safety governance be demonstrated in the boardroom? By **Dr Kirstin Ferguson**.

**FREQUENTLY**, safety leadership research focuses on the behaviours and attitudes of managers and supervisors working directly with employees in the field. Yet, consider the Pike River Mine tragedy in 2010, where the subsequent Royal Commission highlighted the role of the board in not providing effective safety leadership and instead being distracted by financial and production pressures.

My recent PhD research at Queensland University of Technology, 'A study of safety leadership and safety governance for board members and senior executives', has identified four criteria of safety leadership

specifically applicable to this group of senior leaders. Also, safety governance has been defined to clarify the vital role that these leaders play in safety leadership.

### 1. Vision

An essential element of any successful safety culture is having a vision of what is to be achieved. In the context of senior executives and board members, such a vision is defined as the ability to publicly articulate shared safety goals that resonate across all levels of an organisation. Senior leaders demonstrating vision will inspire others, set high standards for

and, in the context of safety leadership, is defined as promoting sound assessment of safety issues while also providing an opportunity for open communication between all levels of an organisation. Senior leaders promoting decision-making ensure safety concerns are heard and employees are included in the safety planning process.

Practically, this may include: establishing a board committee focused on safety; ensuring regular, robust and meaningful reporting of company safety performance; and encouraging senior executives to think strategically about safety.

#### 4. Transparency

The final criterion of safety leadership focuses on the need for senior executives and board members to ensure open, transparent communications about safety performance to encourage a culture of continuous improvement. Transparency in this context is defined as being open

to scrutiny of safety performance through monitoring and communicating the effectiveness of safety initiatives. Senior leaders demonstrate transparency through formal and informal communications that celebrate safety successes and openly communicate safety challenges as they emerge.

In a practical sense, this may involve: ensuring that a consistent and comparable range of lag and lead indicators is reported and disclosed to stakeholders; facilitating open communications with other companies to develop best practices in safety; and including team safety performance within executive remuneration.

#### Safety governance

When considering the role of senior executives and board members, it's necessary to think about the framework in which they operate. This group of leaders is, in most cases, geographically and physically

removed from the coalface. And board members, while they are not involved in daily management of the company, do influence its tone and safety culture through the questions they ask, the focus they place on key organisational issues and the messages they give during direct interactions with employees.

Mature safety governance frameworks ensure that senior leaders have the tools, knowledge and structures to maximise safety performance beyond mere legislative compliance. It provides the structure through which: safety vision and commitment is set; the means of attaining safety objectives are agreed; the framework for monitoring performance is established; and compliance with the legislation is ensured. **✓**

Dr Kirstin Ferguson is a professional company director on a number of ASX-listed, private company and government boards. Contact her via [www.orbitasgroup.com](http://www.orbitasgroup.com)

**STAPLES** Facility Solutions

## Get the job done safely.

Trust Staples Safety Solutions to protect your people and property.

Staples Safety Solutions has a full range of safety supplies for any workplace, from personal protective equipment and apparel to first aid and visual warning products. Our Safety Specialists work directly with you to provide the right solution for your needs.

- Wide range of products from leading brands
- Specialists with diverse industry experience
- Delivered fast wherever you are
- Easy online ordering
- Customisable ordering platform to achieve procurement goals
- Automated vending solutions to remove guesswork and risk

For further information, head to [safety.staples.com.au](http://safety.staples.com.au) or give us a call on 1300 676 200.

