



# Humanising Safety

*With Tim D'Ath*

# Humanising Safety

## What we will be covering today...

- What is safety?
- The psychology of workplace safety
- A four-step approach to humanising safety:
  1. Getting to know your people
  2. Making safety simple
  3. Involving end-users in the design of safety programs
  4. Crowd sourcing for safety solutions



# What is Safety?



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## Safety.

What do you think of when you hear this word?

# What is Safety? - Methodologies

## Safety methodologies

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Traditional safety approaches.

Progressive safety approaches (Safety Differently, Safety II, HOP).

Blended approaches.

Does the model really matter?



# What is Safety? – Control vs Empowerment

## Control versus empowerment

Prescriptive procedures vs empowerment.

Positive reporting culture vs blame-inferring processes.

Safety intervention culture vs program pressures.

+ve safety cultures vs compliance focus.

How does our workforce navigate these conflicts?



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# What is Safety? - Psychology

Safety is ultimately about people – the human condition and its contribution to the safety of work.

- How people **think, feel** and **behave**
- Factors that influence risk perception
- Meaningful connection to safety

Do we hold space in our safety systems  
for the human condition?



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# What is Safety? – A definition

Have you defined safety in the context of your organisation?

- Can a safety strategy be developed without a definition?
- Does the workforce relate to safety the same way you do?
- Are we aligned?
- Does the problem(s) we are solving for require a definition for safety?



# What is Safety? – Our challenge

## Reflect

- Think about the key safety models & theories you are aware of.
- How have these ways of thinking about safety shaped your approach?
- How do we make safety more relatable and accessible for our workforce?
- Do you have a definition for safety?

What do you think the workforce think of when they hear the word 'safety'?





# The Psychology of Safety

# Major perspectives in psychology

	Psychology perspective	Safety linkages
1880's	Psychodynamic perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conscious vs subconscious mind (autopilot)</li><li>• Black-and-white thinking / denial</li><li>• Transference</li></ul>
1890's- 1900's	Biological perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stress response</li><li>• How neurotransmitters affect behaviour</li><li>• Motivation, concentration and learning</li></ul>
1930's	Behavioural perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Classical and operant conditioning</li><li>• Behavioural-based safety</li><li>• 'Carrot and stick' approach to behaviour</li></ul>
1950's	Humanistic perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People are inherently good</li><li>• Flourish under the right conditions</li><li>• Responsible for their own self-actualisation</li></ul>
1960's	Cognitive perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How people think, remember and learn</li><li>• Information processing</li><li>• Memory, perception, attention and decision making</li></ul>

**Just like safety models, there are no absolute “right” or “wrong” psychology perspectives.**

# Embracing the human condition

- The collection of emotions, states of being, shared experiences and key life events that are common to all of us (Practical Psychology, 2020).
- Effective safety management is deeply rooted in the human condition.
- Adjusting our work environments to cater for our emotions is important.
- Trust vs fear – what kinds of behaviours would we expect to see in both states?



# Neuropsychology of safety

- >10b neurons and >10k synapses which are constantly communicating
- The brain's primary function – processing and transmitting – is expensive in terms of energy
- We make trade-offs and create shortcuts



# Neuropsychology of safety

## MULTI-STORE MODEL OF MEMORY

ATKINSON AND SHIFFRIN (1968)

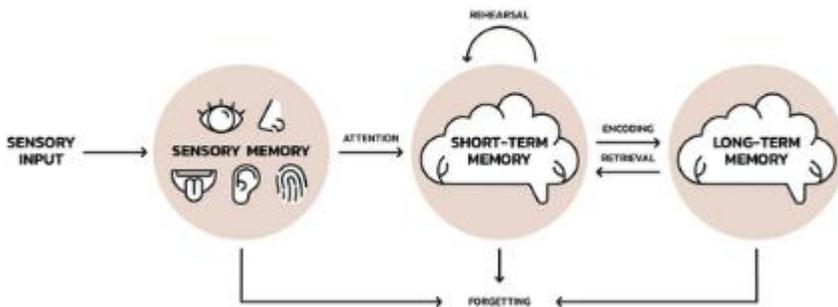


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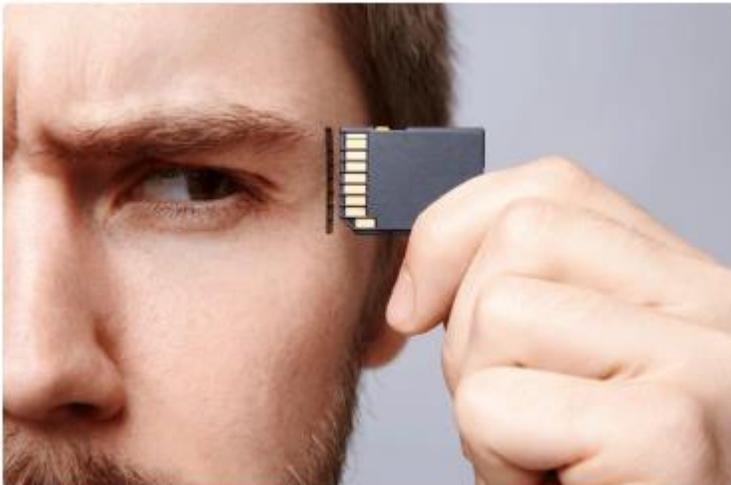


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- **Three memory stores:**

- Sensory memory
- Short term memory
- Long term memory

- Memory stores act as filters
- So, what's really getting through to our workforce?

# Neuropsychology of safety

- Automatic / subconscious mind:
  - Biases
  - Fallacies
  - Stereotypes
  - Heuristics
  - Schemas & Scripts
- Deliberate / conscious mind:
  - Awareness
  - Reasoning
  - Planning
  - Goal pursuit
  - Executive functions



Image credit: Vitalii Vodolazskiy/Shutterstock



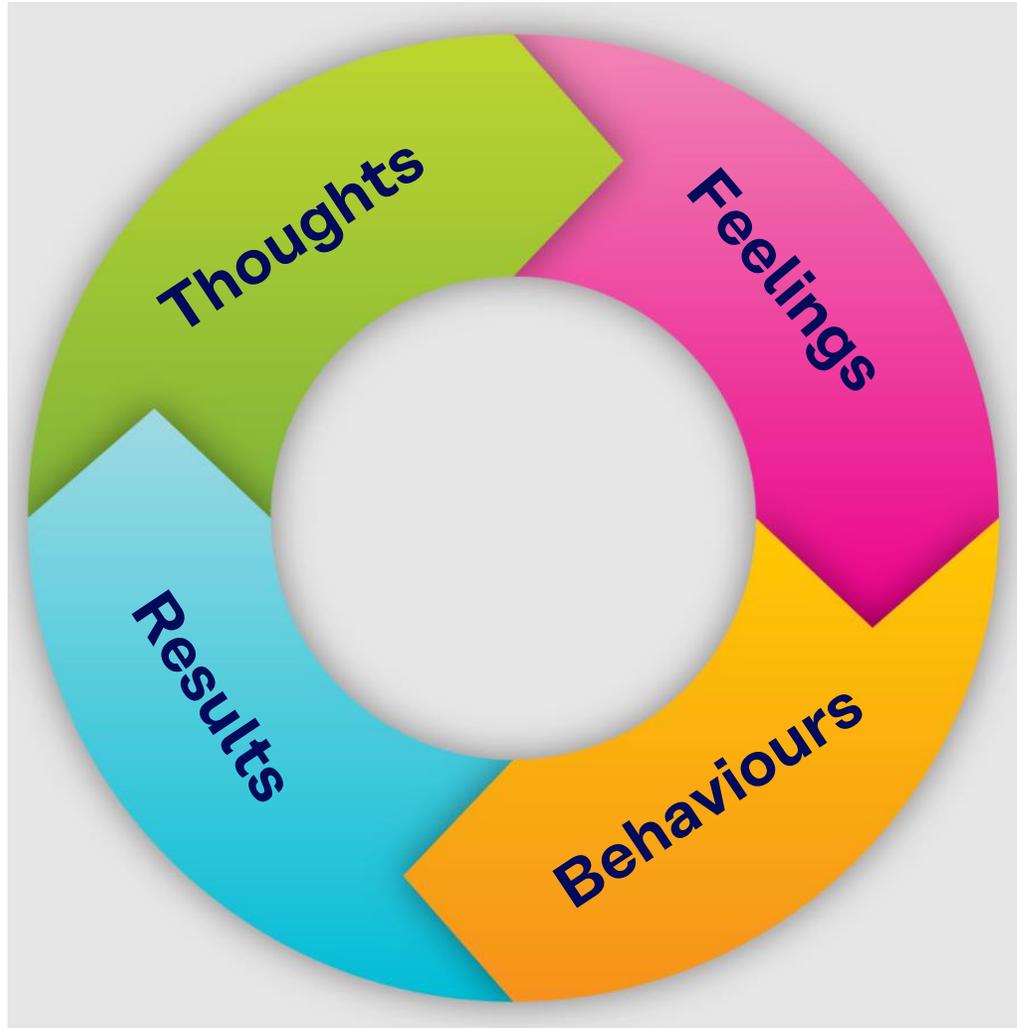
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# Attitude formation

- Biases, stereotypes, privileges, fallacies, heuristics, schemas, scripts, power dynamics
- Are we aware of them and how they play out?
- How do they inform our attitudes and beliefs?



# Attitudes drive behaviour



- Our **frames** are our perceptions
- Attitudes drive behaviours
- Are you an active agent or a passenger?
- What **frames** did you bring to this session?

# Get inside the tunnel

## Be Curious

Humble enquiry, authentic conversations and Work Insights.

Seek to understand why it made sense to them to undertake the work that way.

Beneath every behaviour is a need (is that need being met?)

What demands and pressures were they under?

What's the real story at play?

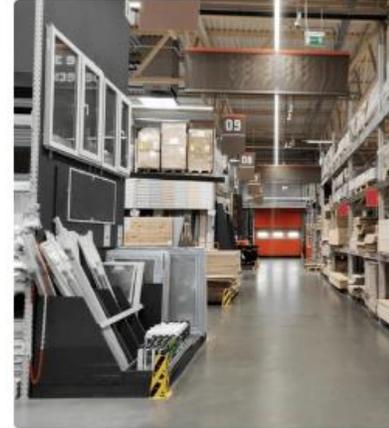


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# Safety as a social construct

## Question what you think you know

Is safety as tangible and quantifiable as mainstream safety wills us to believe?

Or is safety a social construct where employees are active agents in the creation of their safety knowledge?

Safety is an ever-evolving social negotiation.

Safety cultures exist at different levels of the organisation (that's right – there isn't one safety culture for the whole organisation!).



# The psychology of safety

## Reflect

- Safety, like psychology, is not a “one size fits all approach.” Is your safety program built around the context of the organisation?
- Can you think of an example where your safety program provides space for the human condition?
- Our brains are hard-wired to take shortcuts and enter ‘auto-pilot mode’. Are you getting “in the tunnel” with your workers to understand things from their perspective?
- Are your safety efforts placed on trying to change behaviour (short term) or are they placed on trying to change attitudes and beliefs (long term)?
- Can you think of one work team / group that might not have a great attitude towards safety? Start there....

A collage of hands in business attire stacked together, symbolizing teamwork and collaboration. The hands are of various skin tones and are wearing white and light blue shirts. One hand on the left is wearing a watch. The background is a light gray gradient. A white horizontal bar with a blue and green border is overlaid on the image, containing the text.

# A Four Step Approach

# Step 1: Get to know your people

*“A desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world”.* – John le Carre

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- Relationships are based on trust and reciprocity.
- Employ skilled, clever people and learn from them.
  - Spend more time in the field building relationships.
- The success of your safety programs depends on the quality of the relationships you invest in.



# Step 1: Get to know your people

## Case study #1

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Getting to know the workforce on a large, geographically dispersed oil and gas project.

# Step 1: Get to know your people

## Reflect

- You can't fix the work (make it safer) if you don't understand it. And you can't fix a secret!
- The success of your safety programs largely depends on the quality of the relationships with the frontline.
- Without working relationships based on trust and reciprocity, the workforce will likely feel safety is being done *to them* rather than *with them*.
- Embedding yourself in 'the real work' for a period of time as a peer, can help build connection and trust.

# Step 2: Make Safety Simple

- This is not about oversimplifying inherently complex and critical work (eg: HROs).
  - It's about identifying 'safety clutter' or 'safety noise' and moving it out of the way.
  - Move away from an 'additive mindset' towards a 'reductionist mindset.'
- Look for points of friction, duplication, low value safety activities, and the gaps between WAI and WAD.



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# Step 2: Make safety simple

## Case study #2

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What to do when the Safety Management System is not being utilised by the workforce.

# Step 2: Make safety simple

## Reflect

- Not about oversimplifying safety for inherently complex work – it's about identifying and removing unnecessary safety clutter.
- Train your organisation to resist additive approaches – instead, lean into reductionist approaches.
- Look for points of friction, duplication, low value safety activities, and the gaps between WAI and WAD.
- Start small and see how the process is received by management and the workforce.

# Step 3: Involve end-users in designing safety programs

- Who are the customers of your safety programs?
- Build a product they believe in and see the need for.
- The workforce is an untapped resource for learning about safety and operations.
- Appeal to their intrinsic motivation (rather than external motivators).
- Ownership comes through involvement in design principles.



# Step 3: Involve end-users in designing safety programs

## Case study #3

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Engaging the workforce to co-design safety outcomes.

# Step 4: Crowd Source for Safety Solutions

- Safety teams are usually lean (limited resources)
- Balancing annual safety plans, safety strategies, reporting, audits, risk management and BAU is tricky.
- Steps 1 to 3 have paved the way to a solution...
- Decentralise power for safety decision-making and increase worker autonomy.
- Lean on your safety coalition and build intrinsic motivation!



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# Step 4: Crowd Source for Safety Solutions

## Case study #4

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The 'Solutions Council.'

# Questions?

A four-step approach to humanising safety:

1. Getting to know your people
2. Making safety simple
3. Involving end-users in the design of safety programs
4. Crowd sourcing for safety solutions

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My book is available on Amazon or Routledge (publisher)

# Questions?

