Creating a *safety+performance* work environment:
. . . *it's complicated*

Safety: In all of the other articles in the PERFORMANCE series, safety is just assumed to be one of the aspects of performance that gets handled appropriately like any other. True. It is sort of a given and if a company gets it wrong, legal action and compensation are likely to result.

All companies have a responsibility, and obligation, to provide a high level of safety for the benefit of its workforce, the surrounding community, consumers, and its shareholders. In many industries getting safety right is not terribly difficult and is many times mostly a matter of common sense – still important and should still be taken very seriously.

In some industries, especially hazardous process industries, safety, is a high challenge and a significant expense. All employees in the workforce are entitled to a safe work environment. And, as far as the surrounding community goes, normal plant operation should not adversely impact the locality in which it is situated. Companies are also obligated to be extremely proactive in avoiding any catastrophe that would inflict harm on the plant, assets, and the area in which they are located. Obviously, these responsibilities extend to the people in the area as well.

Products sold to, and used by, consumers should cause no harm. There are a host of product liability laws to reinforce this common-sense truism. Ensuring a high level of safety is not cheap, but is far less expensive than the cost of accidents and incidents. This results in increased profitability to shareholders, and profitability (return on investment) is the major responsibility to shareholders.

Other articles in this series have covered effectiveness and efficiency, but just to review:

Effectiveness: Companies have a responsibility to be effective – to actually accomplish the purpose, goals, objectives, etc. they have articulated to shareholders. This means that they must marshal the needed resources, acquire and apply the right competencies using appropriate processes to produce the correct results.

Efficiency: Once companies are effective, they can work on efficiency – doing all necessary activities faster (speed), better (quality) and cheaper (economy). Getting good at efficiency and continuous improvement in these areas creates profit and continuing value for shareholders.

Safety vs. Effectiveness & Efficiency? If you work in the hazardous process industry – sooner or later you are going to hear a conversation in which SAFETY is in some way characterized as being a burden to EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY (also profitability). This is not the perspective that we should use, but just be aware that this tension does exist.

A Safety+Performance work environment: In companies outside of the hazardous process industry, most equate performance to the sum of effectiveness and efficiency. In the hazardous process industry safety comes first – it is the *price of entry* into this field and you don't get to effectiveness or efficiency if you do not get safety right. Therefore, using the phrase "safety+performance" to describe the work environment that must be present in the work execution arena is both accurate and appropriate from the standpoint of a phrase which reinforces the mental attitude that we wish to cultivate in the workforce and the company.

To be a bit more specific, a good safety+performance work environment would be one in which:

- Best practices in work management and control are met or exceeded in the work execution arena;
- There is a demonstrably pro-active safety culture in which a host of *leading* indicators are monitored to measure the success of leadership in providing all knowledge, competencies, awareness and attentiveness to enable frontline workers to work safe, smart, effectively, and efficiently;
- Safety systems are used proficiently and safety behaviors are the custom and norm to such an extent that safety proficiency is positively contributing the overall performance and the productive capacity of the facility;
- Workers, supervisors, managers, and leaders share an awareness of, and commitment to, productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency in their work;
- Production and other key performance indicators tell an exciting story of high performance, commitment to company goals, stellar levels of individual competencies, and organizational systems that are aligned with safety and performance goals.

an article by Dr. Allen Saville

The work execution arena is the space in which people with competencies are brought together with raw materials, equipment, and other assets in order to produce the products that the company provides to its customers. This is "where the action is." And it is also the space in which safety is most critical. Here is a diagram that depicts the work execution arena:
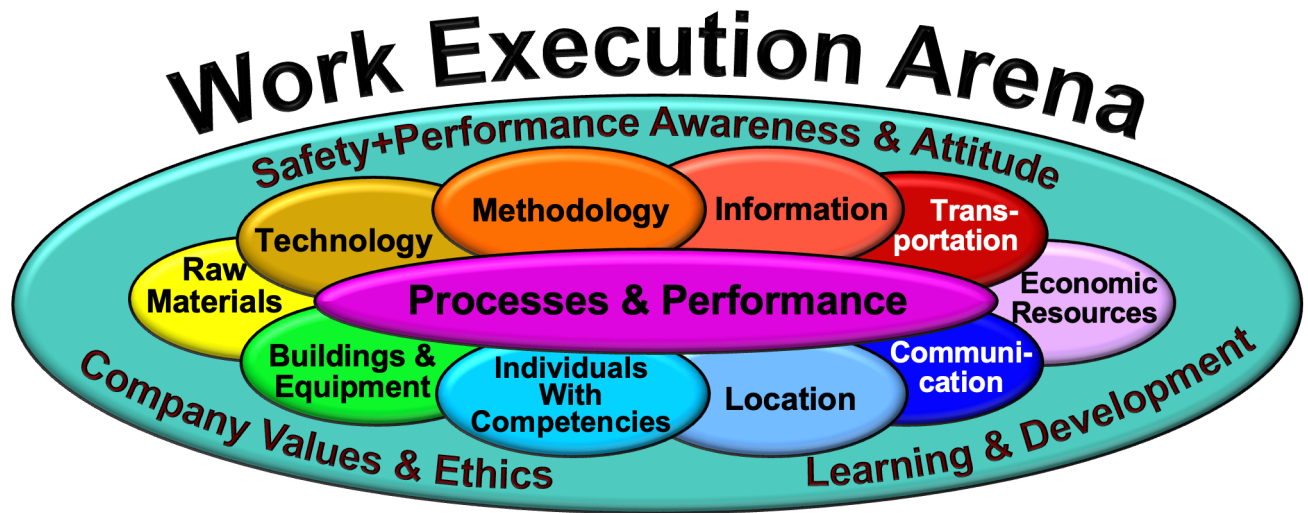
The real trick is to build and maintain a work environment here in which safety, effectiveness, and efficiency are emphasized in such a way that they are not in conflict. Rather, they are mutually inter-dependent – each contributing to the enhancement of the other.

Getting there: Getting to the point at which you have a strong safety+performance work environment is not easy. To be truthful, it is complicated. There are a number of different organizational elements that are interconnected and must be addressed simultaneously, and it takes a comprehensive and holistic approach. Nevertheless, it is both possible and essential.

An important key to establishing, and continuing, your safety+performance work environment is connecting the rest of the organization with this endeavor in the work execution arena.

Some management theory would indicate that the balance of the organization should be designed to properly support what happens in the work execution arena. At the very least it is accurate to say that heart of productivity and profitability is here and the structure and functionality of the rest of the company needs to be intensely focused on, and directly linked to, what happens in the work execution arena.

MCRS: The management control and reporting systems (MCRS) are those things that link the rest of the organization to the production that occurs in the work execution arena. It is an interlocking set of control mechanisms based on measurements and other data monitored in the work execution/operations arena and regularly reported to supervisors and managers, and reviewed in other management and decision-making meetings.

A vital and dynamic part of the management control and reporting systems is the flow of appropriate and accurate information from the work execution arena. This information is used to ensure that the operational and production components of the organization are performing in accord with the company's specific goals and objectives and the operational parameters of the facilities.

When course correction is necessary and/or when improvements are available and can be deployed the vehicles that management has to implement these actions include: directives, guidelines, and improved processes, procedures and practices. The diagram of the work execution arena above in this article has been incorporated into a larger diagram that illustrates some of these relationships. The information flow and implementation efforts indicated by the yellow arrows in the diagram below are far more intricate and important than their simplicity might indicate.

Management Control and Reporting System

And, there's more: Did I mention that it's complicated? Notwithstanding the difficulty of accomplishing all that we have discussed, if obtaining a real *safety+performance* work environment were as easy as merely defining an enlightened and correct set of control of work standards, rules, processes, and procedures – everyone would have done it already.

Not to minimize the work of establishing all of the correct processes, procedures, practices, etc., within a specific facility; but the real trick is obtaining *true and pervasive commitment* to the disciplined and rigorous adherence to, and uniform application of, those control of work standards, etc. in such a manner that it actually has a positive influence on production and overall performance (effectiveness and efficiency).

Building that true and pervasive commitment requires carefully orchestrated and sequenced organizational initiatives that encompass all of the organizational elements listed in the boxes below.

❖ Organizational purpose
❖ Operational philosophy
❖ Equipment, maintenance, process integrity
❖ Relationships with contractors and unions
❖ Organizational structure
❖ Policies, procedures, processes, practices:
  • Effective operational processes
  • Integrated safe systems of work (ISSoW)
  • Aligned business management systems
  • Management control and reporting systems
  • Reward and recognition mechanisms

❖ Functional competencies;
  • Work management and control competencies
  • Leadership competencies
  • Worker, supervision, manager competencies
  • Technology, methodology, etc.
❖ Communication programs
❖ Commitment to Safety+Performance
❖ Cultivating a Safety+Performance work culture
  • Values, basic beliefs, attitudes, customs and norms
❖ Continuous Improvement & Sustainability

As you might suspect, designing and managing this type of endeavor requires a comprehensive, holistic, integrated, and highly coordinated approach led by a team that sees the "big picture" and understands the interconnectivities within the system.

There are a few of the organizational elements listed above that are not included in the system diagrams previously provided. For the sake of completeness an even more encompassing systems diagram is provided for your consideration. This diagram illustrates the relationship of overarching importance that is held by the purpose and vision of the company, the commitment to that purpose, and the company culture.

Safety+Performance Organization
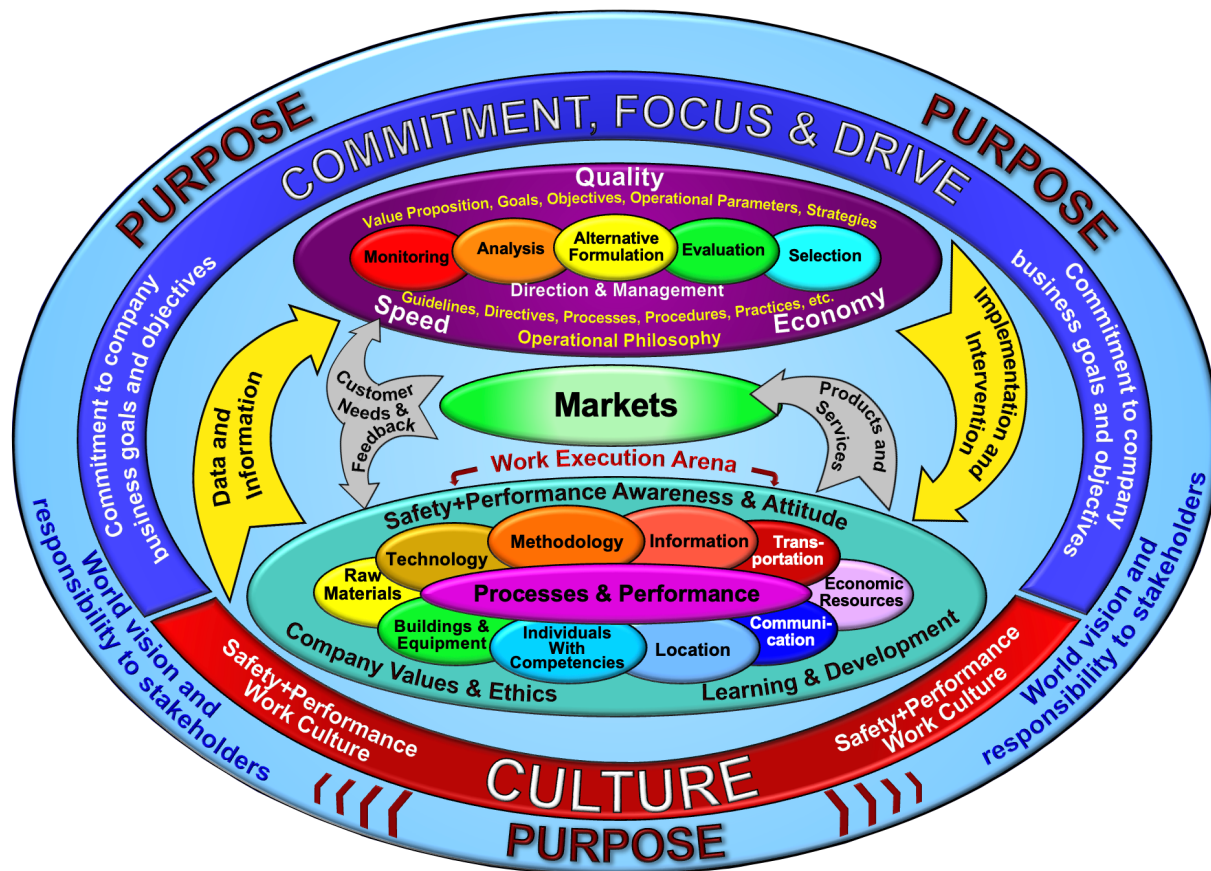
One might think that these relationships and the foundational importance of purpose, vision, commitment and culture are obvious and well understood among all business entities. But apparently this is not the case. Many companies have not taken the time to carefully articulate and communicate the company purpose and vision. Others have attempted to do this but have failed to link this to the strategic importance of safety, effectiveness and efficiency.

Many more companies do not appreciate that they have a proactive responsibility to build strong and widespread workforce commitment to the company purpose. This is a common mistake. Many business entities and the leaders who run them assume that once direction, strategies and goals are set everyone will just naturally follow. Sorry, it really does not work that way.

The workforce is made up of individuals – each of whom wants to know "what's in it for me" and really seeks to understand the compelling business rationale that will make the company vision achievable. Most employees do have an appreciation of the marketplace and they will not invest

their commitment in a vision or strategies that are either uncompetitive or so grand that they seem impossible.

Even more companies have failed to design and cultivate a culture that supports and reinforces the safety+performance behaviors required for effective and efficient operations. You can have the absolute best processes, procedures, and all kinds of checks and balances – but if employees are not truly committed to the disciplined application of all of that – they will find ways to defeat the system. Without true commitment, supported by a company culture in which safety+performance are real values, ultimately, the behaviors in the work execution arena will not be safe.

The point is that there are many measures that companies in the hazardous process industry can, and should, take to make incremental improvements toward safe, effective, and efficient operations – but to really get it right it takes a comprehensive, holistic, integrated and highly coordinated approach. It takes an approach that deals simultaneously with all organizational elements from company purpose and culture down to specific work execution competencies and everything in between. All of these elements are interconnected and should provide mutually reinforcing support to the overall goal of a safety+performance work environment. *[Did I mention that it's complicated?]*