



SAFETY PROGRAMME FOUNDATIONS THE MOTIVATIONAL TRIAD

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As a Safety professional for many companies, I've performed hundreds of accident investigations. Never have I heard an injured person say, "I knew I was going to get hurt if I did that." Workers know when a task is dangerous and they try to be careful, but it comes down to the law of averages. If enough risks are taken often enough without negative consequences, depending upon the culture of the shop floor, the risks taken may become the norm. But at some point, the law of averages catches up and injuries will occur.

Workers should not be exposed to danger as part of their employment. When people come to work, they are paid to perform work tasks. They have no desire to get injured performing those tasks. The really wrong part of this is that when an employee gets hurt performing a dangerous task assigned to him or her, management often blames the injured employee for getting hurt. Most employees want to succeed at their jobs. There are many motivators to succeed, such as job security, financial security, pride, and self-esteem. We want to avoid injuries,



but we will take risks, if necessary, to succeed at our work. Whenever an employee is hurt at work, management must take the final responsibility. After all, the worker was simply trying to get needed work done. There is often more motivation to succeed at a task than to perform it in a safe fashion. Since employers are responsible for the task employees perform, it is up to management to take a proactive stance on workplace safety. This means actively identifying and taking action to address unsafe conditions and unsafe acts. It is up to the employer to provide a safe work environment. So why do workers take risk? Let's spend a little time to understand what motivates all of us at work.

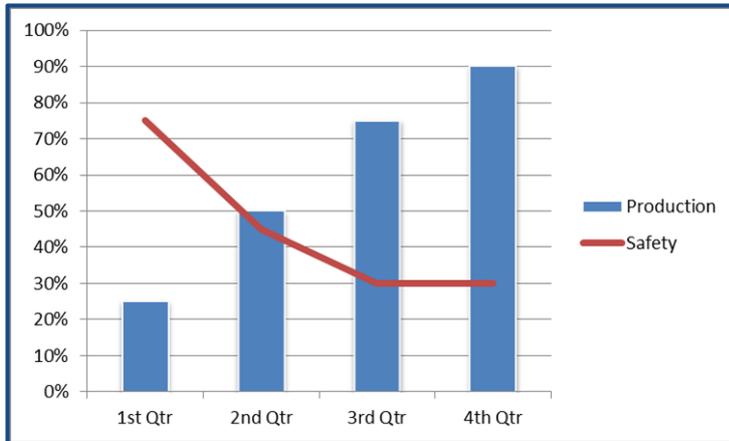
The Motivational Triad

In the book, *The Pleasure Trap*, by Douglas J. Lisle and Alan Goldhamer, the authors explain the motivational triad. The three motivations that dictate everything we do are:

1. The desire for reward
2. The avoidance of pain
3. The conservation of energy



In Petrochem/Oil facilities (and in any workplace) these factors influence safety. In-the-moment, we are not thinking much about the future, but are driven by our impulses, feelings and emotions.



We place value on production numbers at the expense of Safety.

The Desire for Reward

In a numbers/production driven culture, the desire for reward is fulfilled by hitting our production targets. We willingly take physical risks to protect ourselves emotionally and go for the desired reward. All of us want to succeed in whatever we do. The more important the goal, the stronger the desire to succeed. "Whatever it takes" are words we hear too often in some companies. Risks can quickly become acceptable and encouraged, eventually becoming the cultural norm. For a mechanic or

operator in the facility, being judged against other mechanics or operators managing the same equipment on another shift, safety may not be the first consideration. What registers is GETTING THE JOB DONE!

If we have to take risks by repairing equipment "on the fly" (i.e., while it is running), or running the process outside of parameters then we do it. Protect the numbers. If your production numbers are better than the other guy's, you win.

This is what I often see when I visit a facility that has not embraced the proposition that production and safe operation working together provide the most value. Too often we forget that one serious incident can cause significant loss of production as well as loss of human life and ultimately, loss of our "license to operate". We talk about safety but all our support is actually behind getting needed work done no matter what. We would tell a mechanic or operator to be safe as we expected them to perform dangerous tasks that were in no way safe. Is it any wonder that the employees don't believe management when they say "Safety First"?

The Avoidance of Pain

The avoidance of pain does not play in our favour for safety either. Remember that feelings, impulses and emotions drive our actions from moment to moment. We can avoid emotional pain at the risk of physical pain. Emotional pain is inflicted in a "production first" culture by not hitting the numbers. A mechanic does not want to explain why the equipment is down or running poorly, so risks are taken. End of story. Employees in these facilities are often reprimanded for poor performance. If an operator or unit supervisor consistently has low production numbers they could be reprimanded in many ways.

Disciplinary actions for poor performance often include:

- Verbal warnings
- Written warnings
- Probation
- Demotion
- Termination



With regard to safety, however, people at some facilities are rarely disciplined. If safety rules are not followed, an employee might be lightly scolded, but this carries little weight as compared to the risk of reprimand for production issues. The message is clear: Protect the production numbers! The risk of physical injury was preferred over the risk of disciplinary actions for poor performance.

A manufacturing environment can be very dehumanising. Since people are sometimes measured only by production numbers, the equipment takes on their identity. If the equipment is running well, they are well; if the equipment is running poorly, their very job may be at risk. There is little loyalty toward the employee, only the production numbers count. Employees are perceived as expendable. If the employee is not performing well based on the production numbers, there will be negative consequences, including possible termination. Workers know that if a lead mechanic or supervisor tells them to “work safe” and “put safety first,” it is code for “Do whatever it takes, just don’t tell me about it.” This puts the employee in a horrible position. If the numbers were bad they got in trouble. If they took dangerous risks such as adjusting equipment while it was running (which they were wrongly expected to do) and get caught, they could also get in trouble. Employees feel like they are in a no win situation.

Conservation of Energy

The conservation of energy, the last of our three motivators, is always at play. We tend to take short cuts whenever we can. Doing anything the safe way often requires extra effort. We all fight laziness, but if that extra effort is not valued in the existing culture, why bother? Just find a way to get it done. Locking out equipment, chalking tires, putting on personal protective equipment, going to get the right tools... all these things take effort and time, and if safety is not valued, no extra effort will be given. Even worse, there can be peer pressure from co-workers. If you are the only one performing a task the safe way, you will catch flack and lots of it! Worse still, I have seen it come from supervisors and lead mechanics.

A management team that encourages production targets over employee safety has no integrity or sense of community. They are, in effect, telling their people that they do not matter. Only the numbers matter; the employee is a means to an end and can easily be replaced.



There is no loyalty in such a culture. Since workers will not always be hitting the production targets, morale will be low. Even worse, production targets often reflect a “stretch goal” philosophy. The targets can get stretched out to a number almost impossible to meet. They might only be achievable when all conditions are perfect.

Safety will not be much of a consideration in a culture that values profit at the expense of its employee’s safety. Lest I offend the managerial powers that be, I recognise, as all employees do, that the company has to make a profit. It has shareholders and targets that must be met. But a focus on safe and reliable operation in tandem with maximising production targets provides the highest level of profitability in the long term through increased unit uptime and avoidance of the cost of catastrophic loss. My point is that these goals should never purposely place employees’ safety at risk.

Conclusion

If a safety programme does not consider the motivational triad it is likely that it is not performing at its optimal level. We must review and measure the system against the triad and assure we are sending the right message. Ask yourself these questions:



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- What and how are we rewarding behaviour?
- Are we driving safety underground to always achieve production?
- Are we being complacent and allowing laziness and shortcuts to dictate our safety performance?
- And even for those who do value safety in the workplace, is there room for improvement with the potential for even greater rewards?

If you can answer these questions honestly then you have a chance of truly making people and safety number 1 and everyone comes out a winner.

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