

THE STATE OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP

How do today's safety leaders measure up?



sentis



Safety

It's synonymous with hard hats, errors, incidents, policy, procedure, PPE...

We know these things are important.

But we've lost the true meaning of safety.

Safety isn't about protecting us from something, but for something.

For the things, places and people we love.

The things that bring us joy and that we care about most.

The cost of an incident extends far beyond the workplace.

Ongoing social aftershocks devastate families, friends, colleagues and communities.

Leaders are tasked to deliver the tough news.

Fingers are pointed. Direction and focus is lost.

Trust, engagement, reputation... it all begins to crumble.

We struggle with the 'what now' and the 'what if'...

How do we come back from this?

What more could I have done?

We've made significant progress in the safety space.

But there's still more to be done to ensure every worker returns home safe.

Leaders play a critical role in creating positive change.

So, how do we ensure employees make safe choices in and outside the workplace?

How do we invest in leaders to drive and foster a positive safety culture?

*Because safety **is** an investment.*

Not simply for organisations to prevent devastating hurt, injury or loss.

But for individuals to protect themselves for the things they care about most.

For the things we're all trying to get home to.

So that we can enjoy them, tomorrow and long into the future.

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“A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don’t necessarily want to go but ought to be.”

Rosalynn Carter

Introduction

When it comes to driving a positive safety culture and safety performance excellence, it's hard to deny that strong, effective leadership is crucial.

Yet, only 24% of leaders demonstrate strong safety leadership behaviours.*

For organisations whose leaders fall into the remaining 76%, poor or average safety leadership performance could be detrimental to safety outcomes, resulting in:

- misalignment of safety vision and expectations around safety-related decisions;
- reduced discretionary effort and compliance;
- reduced willingness to report incidents and hazards; and
- increased incident frequency and severity.

And this is just the tip of the iceberg. If you see poor performance in *any* area of your safety climate, you're also likely to uncover issues in safety leadership.**

But how can this be the case, when your leaders consistently assure you everything is on track?

Asking leaders to assess their own ability provides just one piece of the puzzle. Cognitive bias means we're more likely to positively inflate our ability—and our brain will justify our opinion by finding examples of when we've performed well, or feel we've demonstrated strong safety leadership behaviours. But when we take a 360° approach and consider our team's perception, we start to see a more comprehensive picture of our leadership ability. And this can be confronting.

Learning how others perceive your ability is unlikely to be a comfortable experience—but it is critical. Without it, how will you know where your true strengths lie? Importantly, how will you know where to improve? Not only to become a better leader; but to create a high performing team where each and every individual returns home safe at the end of their shift.

In this report, we explore seven key findings of a recent study into the state of safety leadership across heavy industry.

While the research suggests there are some areas we are doing well, there is certainly room for improvement when it comes to leading for safety excellence—regardless of whether you're leading on the frontline, in middle management or at an executive level.

So what are we doing well? Where do we most need to improve? Importantly, how do we set our leaders up for success?

*According to self-report and employee ratings of safety leadership ability (explored further in this report).

**Based on a Sentis study of 11,468 participants across 7 industries.

Effective Safety Leadership

Leadership impacts every facet of an organisation's safety culture including attitudes and behaviours of team members, how team members interact with procedures and safety rules, as well as the physical work environment. Leaders set the tone of the culture and influence where teams focus their time and energy.

Effective safety leadership not only results in increased discretionary effort, but also improved employee productivity, quality and engagement. Helping leaders understand their safety leadership ability enables them to capitalise on their strengths and develop their areas of opportunity.

Organisations who realise this, invest in their leaders and reap the benefits.



Transactional vs transformational leadership

Transactional leadership provides the social foundations for compliance and minimum standard employee safety performance. It includes skills such as rewarding and recognising high safety performance, and actively diagnosing and correcting problems before they become safety incidents to maximise compliance behaviour.

Transformational leadership extends employee performance by providing a source of motivation (safety vision and inspiration), independent problem-solving (challenging employees to resolve safety issues on their own), and role modelling of high safety performance.

The eight safety leadership competencies that follow incorporate both transactional and transformational leadership skills. This ensures an appropriate balance between compliance-based safety leadership (where leaders set standards, and monitor and provide feedback on employee performance) and transformational leadership skills (where leaders create and inspire a team towards a vision, collaborate to resolve safety issues and role model effective safety behaviours).

*“Effective safety leadership not only results in increased **discretionary effort**, but also improved employee **productivity, quality and engagement**.”*

8 Safety Leadership Competencies

Eight critical behaviours define effective safety leadership performance. These competencies are scientifically-validated and form the basis of the study and results that follow.



FIGURE 1. SENTIS SAFETY LEADERSHIP MODEL

Effective safety leaders:

- **Support** team members through active monitoring of decisions and actions, and ensuring alignment with the corporate safety strategy, vision and values.
- **Recognise** and reward team members based on their demonstration of effective safety behaviour.
- **Actively care** for the health, safety and general wellbeing of team members.
- **Collaborate** or share ownership of safety with team members by asking for their active participation in safety decision-making, and empowering individuals to take personal responsibility for safety.
- **Share** a vision for safety and facilitate the development of team goals, targets and plans to achieve it.
- **Inspire** the team to achieve the safety vision and safety excellence through motivational and encouraging communication.
- **Role model** safety-compliant behaviours that set the benchmark of what is expected from the team.
- **Challenge** team members to think about safety issues and scenarios in ways that they might not have considered before.

Organisations who invest in their leaders to build and improve these safety leadership skills, benefit from a more mature safety culture and improved safety results.

Business impact

Generally, as safety leadership improves (and as climate and culture improve with it), organisations see a decrease in unwanted safety outcomes and an increase in positive safety outcomes.

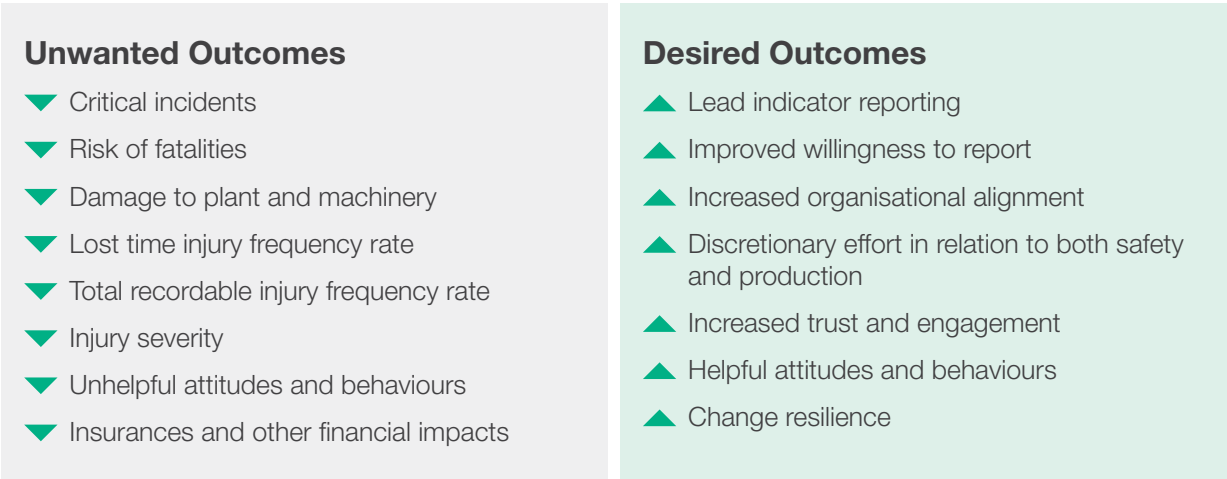


FIGURE 2. IMPACT OF IMPROVED SAFETY LEADERSHIP, CLIMATE AND CULTURE ON SAFETY OUTCOMES

But investment in leadership should not apply exclusively to senior or executive leaders. Organisations must also invest in frontline leaders. They’re closest to the ground and exert significant influence on team safety culture, behaviour and performance. They’re also less likely to have participated in formal leadership training and education, so failing to invest in developing frontline leaders’ ability could have detrimental effects.

*“Investment in leadership should not apply exclusively to senior or executive leaders. Organisations must also invest in **frontline leaders**.”*

Study Overview

How do employees perceive safety leadership in their organisation? How do leaders perceive their own ability? What strength and opportunity areas do safety leaders have in common? Do industry, age, tenure or position impact upwards perceptions of safety leadership?

The results of the study that follow use Safety Climate Survey (SCS) and Safety Leadership Assessment (SLA) data to answer these questions and uncover the key areas of strength and opportunity for safety leaders.

The results draw from responses relating to the 8 Safety Leadership Competencies (see page 7) and compare upwards perception ratings (*how I view my direct leader's ability*) and self-perception ratings (*how I view my own leadership ability*).

Note: With the exception of Finding 2, which uses SLA 360° data to compare others and self-ratings, all other findings use SCS data to report on upwards ratings and SLA data to report on self-ratings. In all instances, results are based on a six-point scale (not at all, very little extent, little extent, some extent, great extent, very great extent) and are presented using the following categories:

negative perception (<4)

fair perception (4-5)

positive perception (>5)

Research sample



*Companies operating globally across multiple locations

FIGURE 3. STUDY SAMPLE SIZE AND INDUSTRY BREAKDOWN

Key Findings

1. Only 24% of leaders display strong safety leadership behaviours.

2. Leaders hold higher opinions of their own safety leadership, when compared to their teams' perceptions of their ability.

3. Leaders need to improve the frequency and consistency of recognition and reward for strong safety performance.

4. Leaders need to improve their skills in sharing the organisation's safety vision.

5. Leaders have the same development areas, irrespective of industry.

6. Age, tenure and position influence perceptions of safety leadership.

7. Leaders need to continue to show they care.



1.

Only 24% of leaders display strong safety leadership behaviours

Safety leadership plays a critical role in determining an organisation's safety culture, so has significant impact on team safety behaviour and performance. Teams with a strong leader are more likely to take personal responsibility for safety, demonstrate increased discretionary effort, actively contribute to safety briefings, provide feedback and encourage shared learnings with regards to safety. But how well are our leaders really performing? Are their self-assessments of their ability accurate?

The data tells a concerning story. When considering both upwards and self-ratings of safety leadership, only 24% of leaders display strong safety leadership behaviours.



FIGURE 4. PERCENTAGE OF LEADERS WHO RECEIVED POSITIVE OVERALL SAFETY LEADERSHIP RATINGS WITHIN BOTH UPWARDS AND SELF-REPORT RESPONSES

For organisations whose leaders fall into the remaining 76%, there's cause for concern. Poor or average safety leadership performance is often reflected in less positive safety outcomes. Organisations are likely to observe a less-mature safety culture, increased incident frequency and severity, as well as reduced compliance and discretionary effort.

Clearly, organisations with these symptoms need to take action to better support their leaders' development. But what else can the findings tell us? When we compare our two data sets (self-ratings and upwards ratings), an interesting picture begins to form.

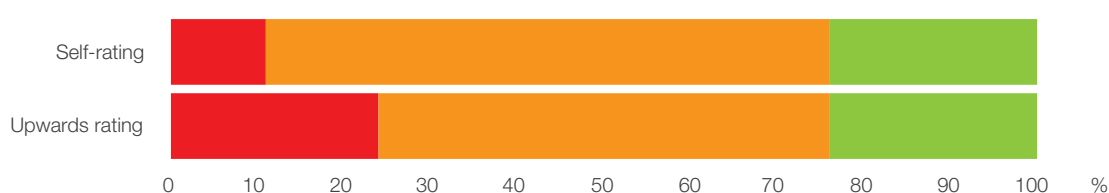


FIGURE 5. SELF-REPORT VS UPWARDS RESPONSES OF OVERALL SAFETY LEADERSHIP ABILITY BY PERCENTAGE OF NEGATIVE, FAIR AND POSITIVE RATINGS

We see that leaders tend to perceive themselves more favourably overall, with a small percentage rating themselves negatively. Yet when we consider upwards ratings, the dynamic shifts. The gap between positive and negative narrows, with more than twice the percentage of respondents rating leaders poorly. This suggests that, while perhaps unintentional, leaders may in fact be overinflating their ability.

It's interesting to note that the percentage of leaders rated positively is the same for both cohorts. While we can't link specific leaders to individual upwards ratings in this instance, we can explore this relationship further if we look to our 360° Safety Leadership Assessment data (see Finding 2, page 14).

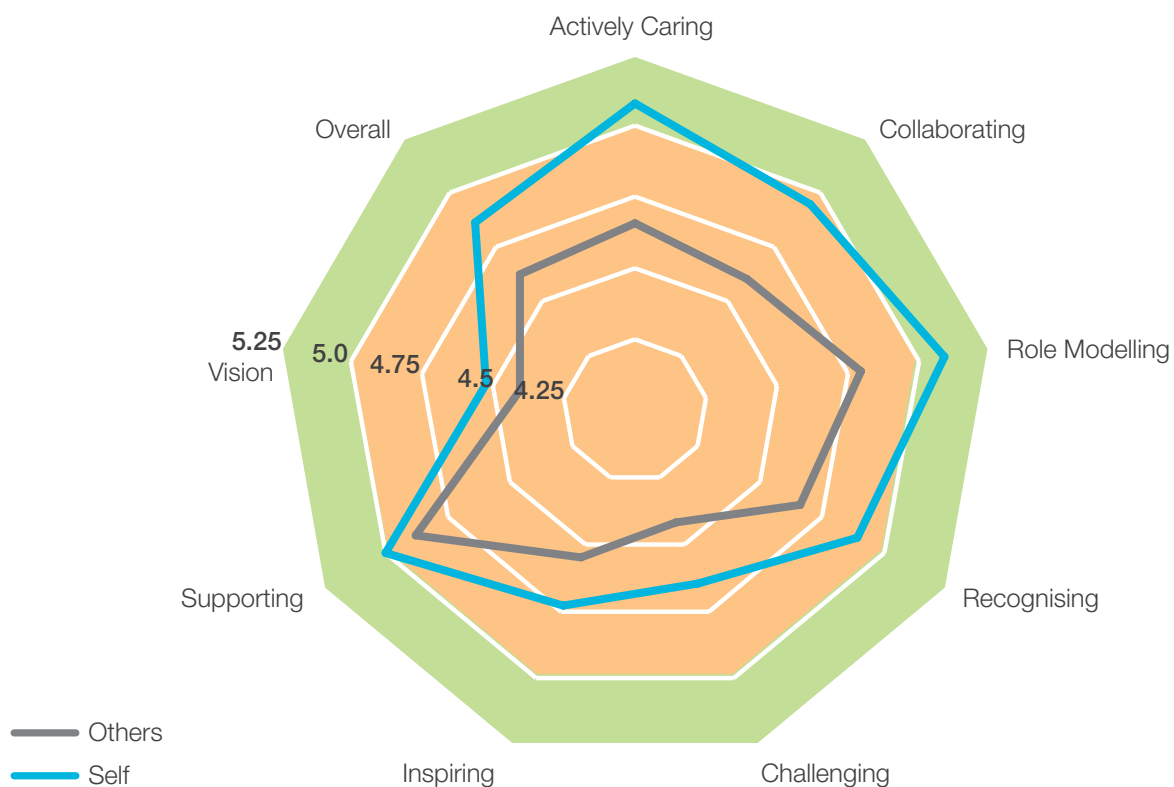
2.

Leaders hold higher opinions of their own safety leadership, when compared to their teams' perceptions of their ability

We can further understand the relationship between self- and others ratings, by examining a sample of respondents who undertook a 360° Safety Leadership Assessment (SLA). In this survey format, leaders rate their own safety leadership ability. Their responses are then linked and cross-referenced with their team's perceptions (including their subordinates, peers and direct leader).

For example, Daryl manages a team of frontline workers. Daryl completes a self-assessment of his safety leadership ability (self-rating). Daryl's team members, including his direct leader and a select group of peers, also complete a survey assessment on Daryl's ability (others rating). The two sets of data are linked and Daryl is provided with a comprehensive report of both his own assessment and his team's assessment of his ability.

When we delve deeper into the SLA data, we see a similar pattern of responses for both self- and others ratings. However, we also see that leaders consistently rate themselves higher than their teams do. This raises a serious question regarding the effectiveness of safety leadership development programs. The majority of organisations rely solely on leaders' self-report data to gain a sense of where leaders require development; but the data suggests this may not be an accurate representation. Essentially, organisations are 'taking their leaders' word for it'. And while leaders' perceptions may be *their truth*, the reality is likely to be different.



Note: Data used is a select sample (n=110) of participants who completed the survey as part of a 360° SLA, where team responses (while deidentified) are linked to a specific leader. The average leader to team ratio for this data set is approximately 1:4. Despite the smaller sample size, findings are significant and indicative of a trend.

FIGURE 6. COMPARISON OF SELF- AND OTHERS RATINGS OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP ABILITY AT A COMPETENCY LEVEL

Using Figure 6 as an example, we can see how this might play out in a real scenario. While some leadership areas identified for development on a self-assessment might correctly include *Vision* and *Challenging*, areas such as *Actively Caring* and *Role Modelling* might be overlooked in leadership program development due to their high self-ratings. However, when we consider the ‘others’ rating component of the 360° results, we quickly see that these areas also require significant attention.

Recommendation for leaders

If self-assessments are unlikely to provide an accurate picture of leadership ability, where should organisations invest their time and money? Self-assessment and self-reflection remain critical, but a 360° approach to safety leadership assessment is required if organisations seek to strategically invest in their leaders.

Yet most organisations shy away from the 360° approach; and it’s easy to understand why. It’s a confronting experience that, more often than not, triggers our brain’s threat response. Why would leaders want to open themselves up to such scrutiny? What if they don’t like what they hear? What if it impacts their career opportunities or performance management?

But the benefits far outweigh the perceived challenges. When run effectively, a 360° safety leadership assessment can provide leaders with invaluable information to confirm their strengths and highlight clear development areas to address. A 360° approach can also identify if there are particular areas that leaders struggle with across the organisation. If this is the case, organisations can more strategically invest resources in group training to target those key competencies and complement and fast-track one-on-one coaching.

Committing to undertake a 360° safety leadership assessment process with an open mind is half the battle. It’s also important to consider how you will make the process a strategic and rewarding one—particularly if there is a big difference between leader and team perceptions.

*“The benefits of a 360° approach to safety leadership assessment **far outweigh the perceived challenges.**”*

Key considerations for running an effective 360° safety leadership assessment



1. Be strategic in the set up.

It's important to carefully consider which team members and peers will rate each leader. To ensure an accurate picture of leaders' strengths and opportunities, be sure to ask leaders to select raters who best know their ability—those who work with them on a regular basis and see them carrying out their leadership role.

2. Don't rush it.

Give employees adequate time to consider and answer the surveys honestly and thoroughly. Ensure they understand the purpose of the assessment and how important it is to the leader they have been asked to rate.

3. Approach the results with an open mind.

Be prepared for the results to be confronting; and prepare your leaders accordingly. Encourage leaders to view the results as an opportunity for self-improvement. It's not about picking on their flaws, but identifying opportunities for them to become a better leader.

4. Take the time to debrief.

It's also important to invest in debrief sessions to coach leaders through the results. This ensures that results discussions do not become 'personal' and instead remain focused on the opportunity areas identified. Debrief sessions also provide an opportunity to explain the results in more detail and help ensure accurate interpretation by leaders.

5. Action the results.

If the results are unexpected or confronting, the worst thing an organisation can do is sweep them under the rug. It's important to take action and support safety leaders with development programs and ongoing coaching. At the end of the day, their ability to lead a high-performing and safe team hinges on their ability to demonstrate strong, effective safety leadership.

6. Re-measure to track improvement and refocus.

With any strategic initiative, it's important to track improvements and ensure regular pulse checks. This allows organisations to better measure ROI, celebrate wins and successes along the way, and refocus to address key opportunities areas as they arise.

7. Consider a third-party.

When considering any large-scale employee survey or assessment that will inform strategic organisational investment, it's important to consider a third-party provider. Not only does this eliminate organisational or personal biases, in a 360° scenario it also encourages more honest feedback (due to increased trust and confidence in the anonymity and confidentiality of responses). It also allows for an independent, expert and objective viewpoint with clear actions and strategies for improvement post-assessment.

3.

Leaders need to improve the frequency and consistency of recognition and reward for strong safety performance

It may seem intuitive that we can influence team behaviour through positive feedback, recognition and the provision of rewards for good performance. But how conscious are leaders of the behaviours they actually reward? And how strategic are leaders in building the attitudes and behaviours they want to see in their team?

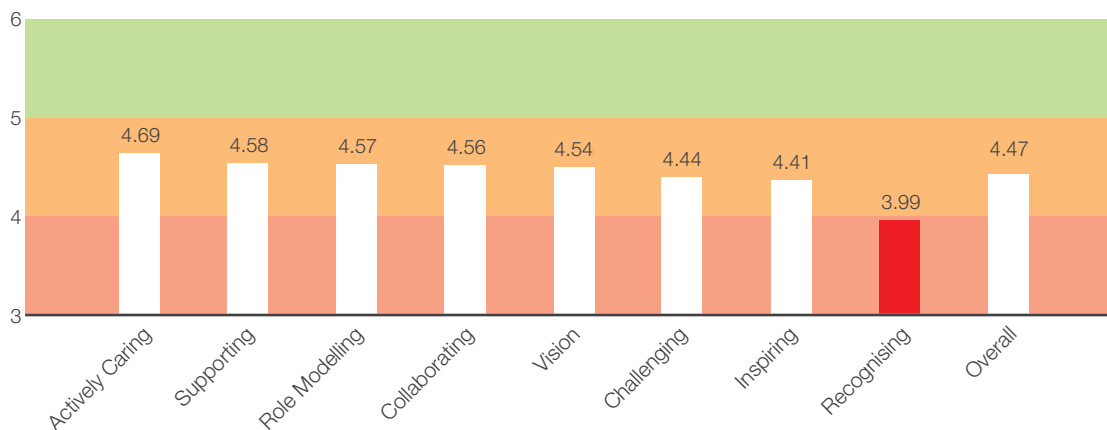


FIGURE 7. AVERAGE UPWARDS RATINGS OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP BY COMPETENCY

When considering upwards perceptions of safety leadership, leaders' performance was rated lowest for *Recognising*—a transactional leadership competency that focuses on recognising and rewarding employees based on the achievement of high safety performance.

Too often, leaders fail to consciously consider the specific behaviours they want to recognise in their team. Instead, they simply offer a word of thanks when team members act in a way they consider to be positive. As we'll explore in the following example, this may have unintentional consequences and drive unhelpful or counterproductive safety behaviours which put workers at increased risk.

Example

John supervises a team of workers operating machinery in a mineral processing plant. A vital piece of equipment has stopped working and John is feeling pressure from management to get it back online ASAP. He sees his team members work overtime and create a band-aid solution to get the equipment up and running. Even though John is aware that his team didn't complete a Job Hazard Analysis for the task, and actively chose to use tools on a task for which they were not designed, he praises them for their hard work and resourcefulness in finding a solution.

Although not intentional, John is rewarding his team for cutting corners and taking unnecessary risks to meet production pressure. While no one was hurt in this particular instance, this doesn't mean that things won't go wrong next time and result in an incident (or worse). Because John is not consciously aware of how he is using recognition, he risks driving increased unhelpful safety behaviours in his team, and an increased likelihood of incidents in the future.

There are many ways a leader can recognise or reward a team member, ranging from private praise or public recognition, through to tangible or material rewards. But a word of warning—in order for reward and recognition to be effective long-term, it must build intrinsic motivation within the workforce. Rather than taking a ‘carrot and stick’ approach, which can often result in individuals complying only when there is a promise of reward or threat of punishment, intrinsic motivation ensures workers undertake safe behaviours because they want to, not because their supervisor is watching.

Recommendation for leaders

To build intrinsic motivation, leaders must look beyond the concept of a reward as a specific, tangible item such as a voucher, esky or toolbox. They must instead begin to understand the psychological needs of the individuals within their team. Each team member has a driver or motivation that their leader can tap into to create rewards that they perceive as valuable.

Examples may include opportunities to:

- learn new skills;
- attend a development program;
- take on additional responsibility within the team; or
- take on tasks that allow them to gain an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of other teams within the business.

Leaders who are skilled in identifying what motivates their team and what type of rewards have value, are more capable of building intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, leaders who encourage intrinsic motivation to engage in safe behaviours also encourage a rewarding culture that reinforces personal ownership of safety.

*“**Intrinsic motivation** ensures workers undertake safe behaviours because they want to, not because their supervisor is watching.”*

5 steps for building *Recognising ability*

- 1. Identify** the positive safety behaviours you wish to see from your team (e.g. effective sharing of safety information within the team, personal risk assessments being completed). This list of behaviours must lead to improved safety performance and should align with organisational values.
- 2. Make a list** of the different types of recognition and reward you have available to use with your team members. Remember, these can range from public or private recognition to tangible or intangible rewards.
- 3. Spend time** in the field with your team and actively look for opportunities to reward and recognise individuals or work groups for demonstrating the positive safety behaviours you want to see.
- 4.** When you observe positive behaviours, consider the individual or work group and decide the type of recognition you think **they would most value**.
- 5. Take action** to recognise the behaviour as soon as possible, remembering to ensure that feedback is provided genuinely—insincere feedback is often worse than no feedback at all.



4. Leaders need to improve their skills in sharing the organisation's safety vision

The ability to create, share and reinforce a compelling safety vision is a leadership skill that motivates and provides guidance and direction. A safety vision sets the standard of excellence and gives individuals a goal to work towards. It creates meaning in the day-to-day safety activities that teams undertake.

When a team is inspired and engaged by a vision, they know where they are going and what they need to do to get there. Importantly, they continue to work towards shared goals associated with the vision, even when their leader is not physically present.

When analysing self-rating data, results indicate that leaders rate themselves lowest for this transformational competency. But why do leaders struggle so much with *Vision*?

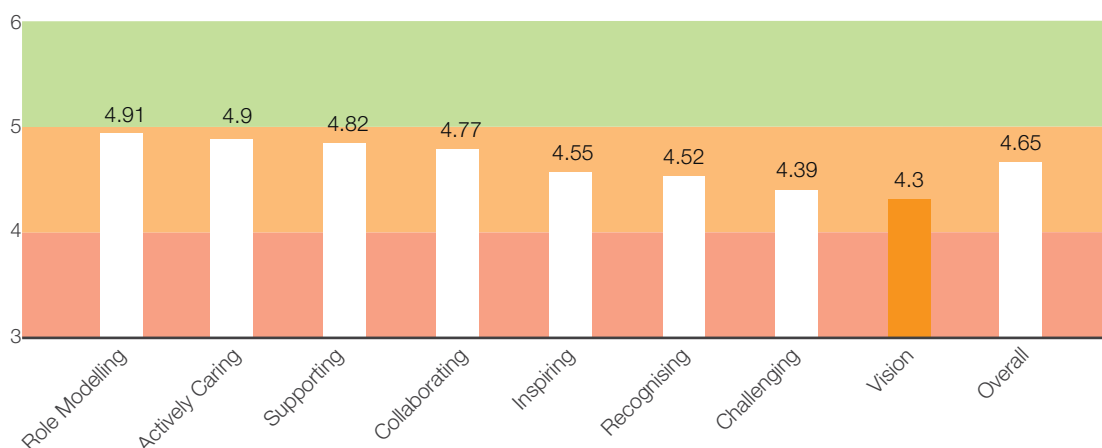


FIGURE 8. AVERAGE SELF-RATINGS OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP BY COMPETENCY

Several components are required to be able to demonstrate *Vision* effectively. For example, if the organisation lacks a clear vision to begin with, leaders can find it challenging to create and share a strong team vision. Leaders may also struggle to guide their teams towards a strong vision if they themselves do not fully understand or support the organisational vision. For this reason, an effective vision-setting process should involve leaders at all levels. This ensures leaders understand and buy-in to the organisational goal, so they can effectively 'sell' the vision to their team.

Leaders may also struggle to break down larger goals into smaller activities and tasks to support movement towards the vision. Without specific activities and short- and long-term goals to make the vision feel more attainable, teams may struggle to engage with the vision or create positive momentum towards achieving it.

To maintain focus on the team's short- and long-term safety goals, leaders must communicate these goals regularly, and reward behaviours that are in line with the vision consistently over time (see Attention Density, page 22). If leaders do not prioritise talking to their team about the vision; discussing how they are progressing towards the larger and smaller goals; and recognising their team when progress is made, then it is unlikely that the vision will have any impact on their team.

Recommendation for leaders

When creating a vision, think about the 'what', 'why' and 'how'.

Typically, visions focus solely on the 'what' and the 'how'. For example, *"We want to increase the number of hazards reported (the what) within our team, so we will aim to complete a certain number of hazard cards each week (the how)."*

The 'what' and the 'how' of a vision target our brains at an intellectual level. While this is important, it needs to follow the 'why' to be effective.

The 'why' triggers emotion, and our brains are motivated more by emotion than anything else. Starting with the 'why' helps to get people on board with the vision. Then they can focus on the 'what' and the 'how'. For example, *"We want to stay safe for the things we love (the why) and to do that, we need to identify hazards (the what) and we will achieve that by completing hazard identification forms (the how)."*

Once in place, leaders can help drive enthusiasm and ownership over the safety vision by:

- helping team members understand how their role contributes to the vision;
- keeping the vision front of mind in weekly and monthly meetings;
- aligning reward and recognition strategies to team members meeting the expectations of the vision; and
- explaining the 'why' of business decisions and how they relate to the overall safety vision of the organisation.

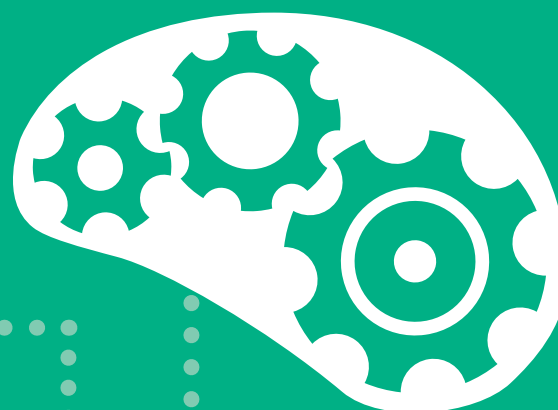
*"When a team is inspired and engaged by a vision, they know **where they are going** and **what they need to do to get there.**"*

Attention Density

Attention density is the term used in neuroscience to refer to the quality and quantity of mental focus (attention) paid to a particular thing. Paying repeated and intense attention to something will, over time, strengthen the circuitry in your brain to the point where it naturally guides behaviour.

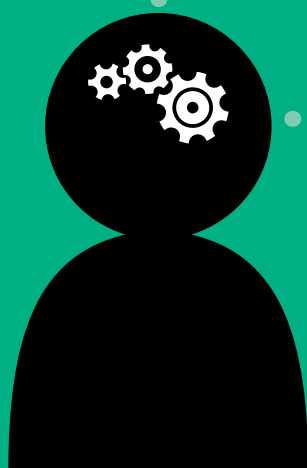
Examples of diverse ways to improve your team's attention density towards the safety vision:

- Ask the team to write down their top reasons for choosing to stay safe today, and put it in their pocket or lanyard.
- Pair up individuals in the team to share what they have coming up in the future that they want to stay safe for.
- Ask team members to describe in detail the life they want to have in 10 or 20 years, and then ask them what they need to do today to stay safe to achieve those goals.
- Run a session with the team during your pre-start and have everyone write down why they personally want to achieve the safety vision, and put these notes on a pin-up board for reflection and visibility.



Why should leaders care about their team's attention density?

- Leaders who do not regularly repeat and communicate the safety goals and vision to their team will see less motivation and poorer recall of the vision.
- Leaders who repeat the vision regularly, but do so in the same, predictable manner, will also see decreased motivation over time. For example, the leader who says at the end of every pre-start meeting "Let's all be safe out there today".
- Leaders who achieve the greatest success in motivating their team towards the vision are those who ask their team to reflect on it in diverse ways.



By varying your approach to communicating and encouraging team reflection on the vision, you will be more likely to encourage motivation and engagement with the vision, even when you are not physically present.

5.

Leaders have the same development areas, irrespective of industry

We often hear clients talk about their industry as being different when it comes to safety culture and safety leadership—that they’re unique and somehow better (or worse) than other industries. However, based on interactions with clients, and diagnostic results delivered over the years, we feel that these ‘differences’ are few and far between. In fact, most clients present to us with very similar challenges, regardless of their industry.

So, what does the data say? Does industry really impact perceptions of safety leadership? And do these perceptions differ when compared against each other? Or do similar patterns or trends appear?

When we analyse both self- and upwards ratings of leaders against the 8 Safety Leadership Competencies, we find a consistent trend. While significant differences occur between industries with respect to average scores (e.g. oil and gas perform better across the board than mining), overall, the pattern of results is similar.

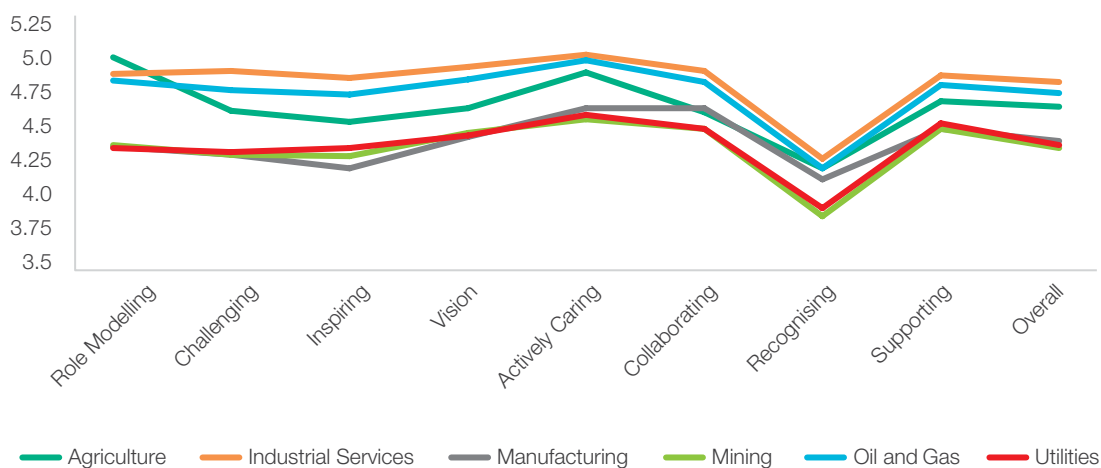


FIGURE 9. UPWARDS RATINGS OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP ABILITY ACROSS INDUSTRY

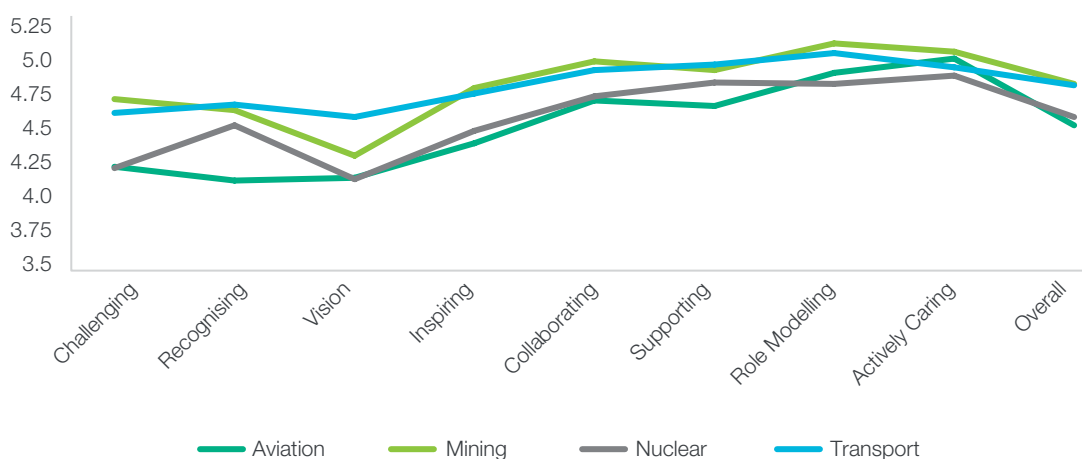


FIGURE 10. SELF-RATINGS OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP ABILITY ACROSS INDUSTRY

While some industries may perform better than others in terms of the strength of leadership skills, *Recognising* remains the lowest result for each industry for upwards ratings, and *Vision* the lowest for self-ratings. Therefore, opportunities for leadership development in high-risk industries are consistent, regardless of which industry a leader operates within.

Recommendation for leaders

All leaders would benefit from improving their ability to recognise and reward positive safety performance, and share a vision with their team. The good news behind this result is that leaders in high-risk industries can learn from one another. We encourage leaders to stop looking at how different they are from other industries and instead look at what other industries are doing well in order to learn and improve.

***“Opportunities** for leadership development in high-risk industries are consistent, regardless of which industry a leader operates within.”*

6.

Age, tenure and position influence perceptions of safety leadership

Age and tenure

The relationship between age and perception of safety leadership shows that individuals under 20 years and over 60 years of age express more positive perceptions of their direct leader's ability than all other age groups.

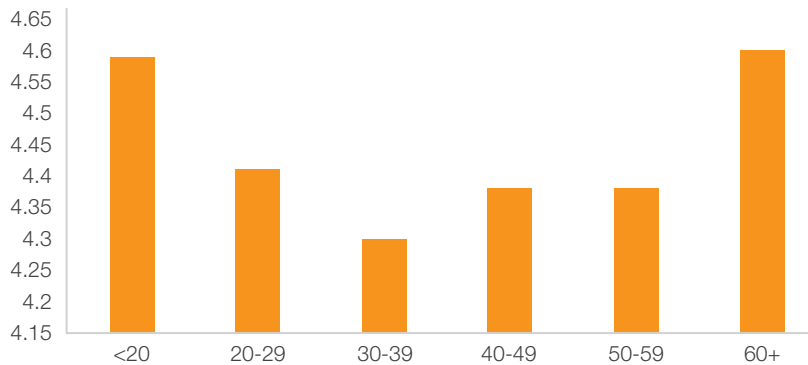


FIGURE 11. UPWARDS RATINGS OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP ABILITY BY AGE GROUP

It's not surprising that the youngest workers are likely to have more favourable perceptions of safety leadership. At less than 20 years old, they're new to the workforce and it's easy to understand how a new employee, working in their first job in the industry and likely earning what they feel is great money, would tend to view things with a positive outlook.

This same argument doesn't necessarily help us understand why those over the age of 60 are also likely to hold more favourable views of their leaders' safety leadership ability. These individuals are likely coming to the end of their career and have a great deal of experience to draw upon when reflecting on effective leadership practices.

Could it be that because they are reaching the end of their career, they view leadership less harshly? After spending decades in the workforce, perhaps they are more forgiving of perceived flaws within leaders?

However, when we examine the impact of tenure, both within the company and within the industry, we find that those with tenure of over 10 years do not have more favourable perceptions of safety leadership. Age seems to make the difference, not tenure.

Age and tenure cont.

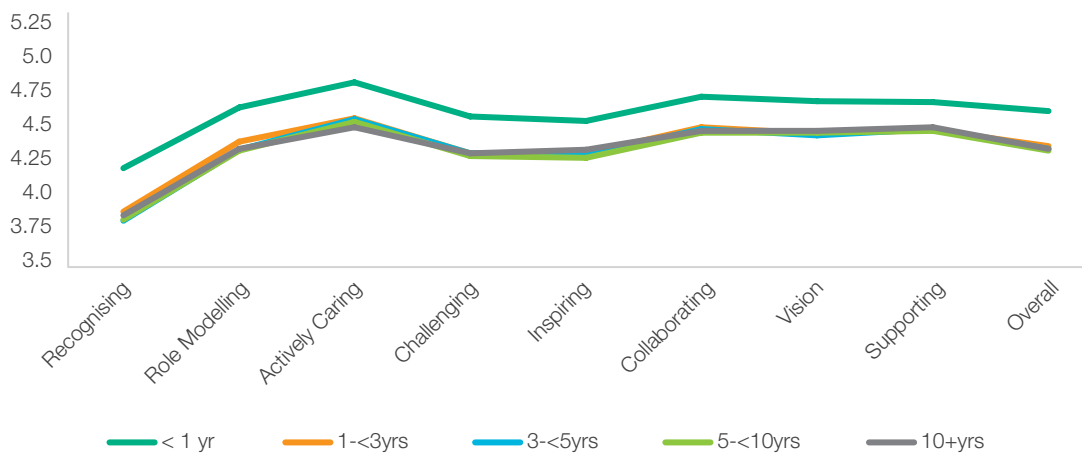


FIGURE 12. UPWARDS RATINGS OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP ABILITY BY TENURE IN COMPANY

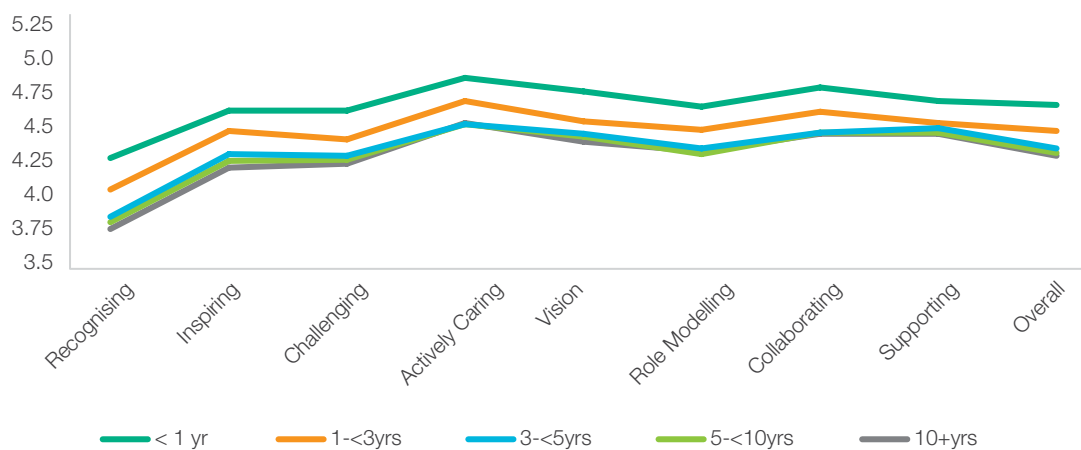


FIGURE 13. UPWARDS RATINGS OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP ABILITY BY TENURE IN INDUSTRY

Another theory is that individuals over 60 years of age may be employed in more senior roles within the business. This would mean they are rating very senior leaders who have likely received greater training and development opportunities over the years, and who are consequently likely to be stronger leaders.

Regardless of the reason behind the result, organisations may benefit from encouraging the youngest and oldest of their workforce to adopt the role of informal leader or influencer within their team to positively influence collective safety attitudes.

Position

Survey participants are asked to rate their direct leader’s safety leadership ability. This means that a frontline worker typically rates a frontline leader (e.g. supervisor, team leader, superintendent), a frontline leader typically rates a manager, and so on.

When position is considered, we find that frontline workers rate their direct leader’s safety leadership ability lower in comparison to all other positions (frontline leaders and managers). And managers rate their leader’s safety leadership ability higher in comparison to both frontline workers and frontline leaders. This suggests that the higher an individual sits within the organisational hierarchy, the more positive their perceptions of their direct leader’s ability.

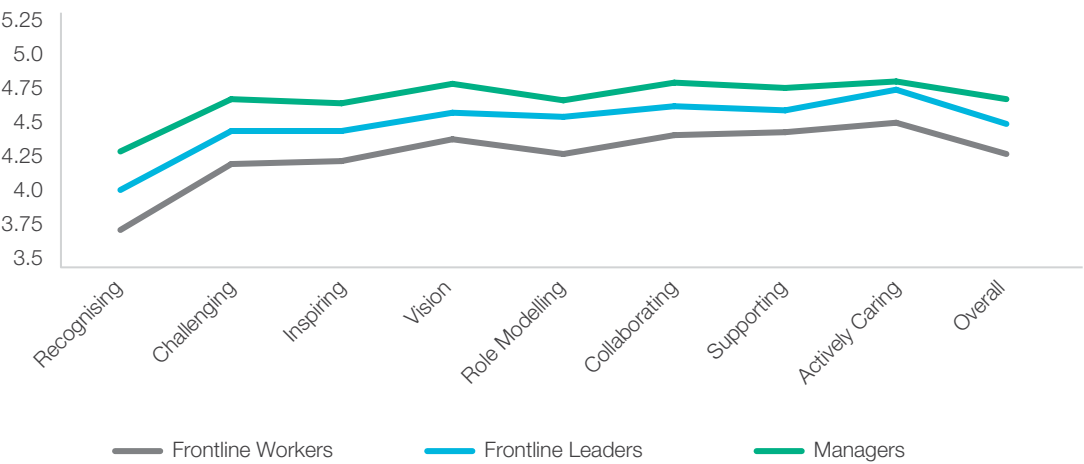


FIGURE 14. UPWARDS RATINGS OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP ABILITY BY POSITION

Many businesses offer leadership training or aspiring leaders programs. But how many are confident that the level of leadership training offered to frontline leaders is adequate? We often hear from clients who feel that leadership skills are lacking at the frontline leader level. Yet at the same time, this group is often overlooked when it comes to leadership training investment.

In our study, more than 60% of participants identified themselves as frontline workers, which points to an area of opportunity for businesses to improve frontline leadership. While the training and development of managers and executives remains important, organisations also need to invest energy and resources into developing frontline leaders. In turn, this will lead to more favourable perceptions of safety culture and will drive improved safety performance.

7.

Leaders need to continue to show they care

Truly effective leaders develop genuine relationships with their employees. They listen to their team and follow up on the concerns they raise. They manage their own stress and emotions, and do their best not to let stress cascade down to team members. They get to know their team and can easily spot a team member who is not okay, and follow up with a conversation to demonstrate their concern.

In turn, this positive relationship leads to increased employee willingness to not only work harder, but more safely. This transformational safety leadership competency is known as *Actively Caring*, and while there's still room for improvement, our study shows some promising results.

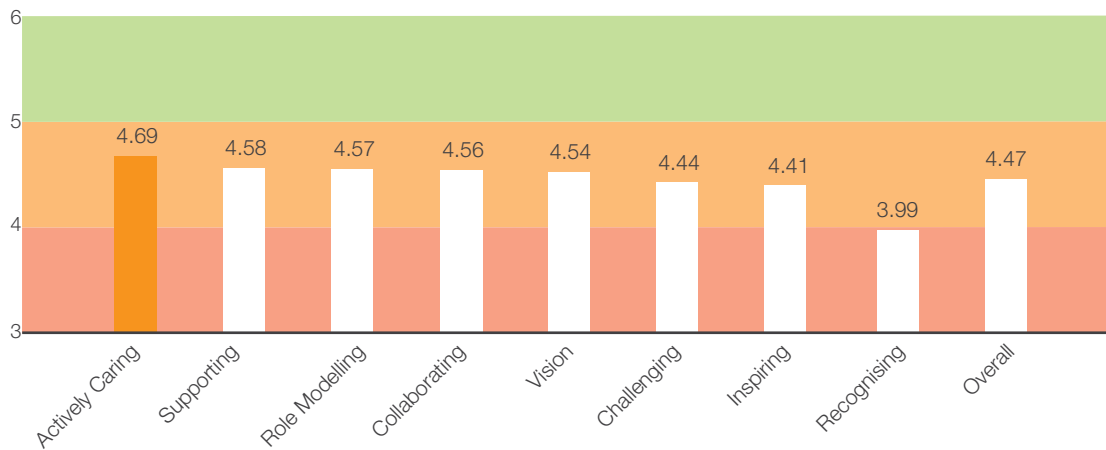


FIGURE 15. AVERAGE UPWARDS RATINGS OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP BY COMPETENCY

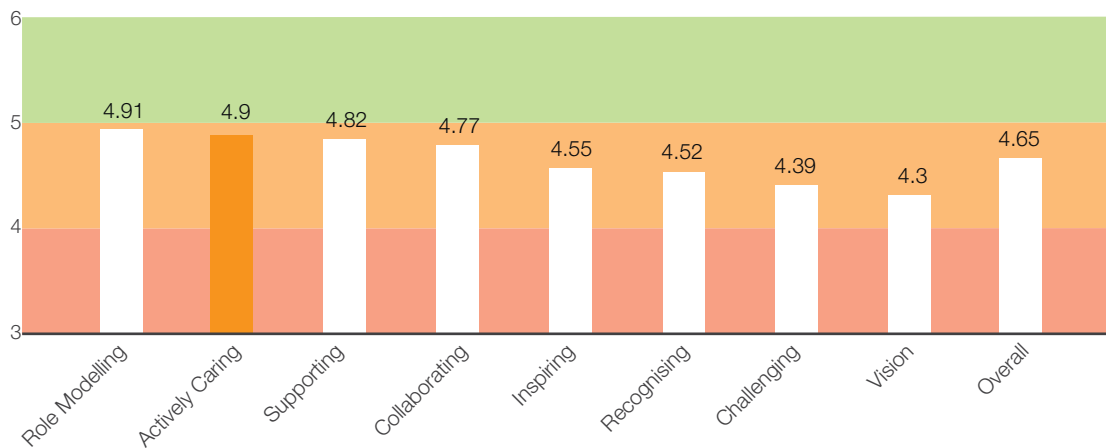


FIGURE 16. AVERAGE SELF-RATINGS OF SAFETY LEADERSHIP BY COMPETENCY

The discovery that *Actively Caring* is rated highly by teams and leaders alike is perhaps the most encouraging of the study. While leaders would benefit from developing their abilities to recognise and reward teams for high safety performance, and share a clear and consistent safety vision with their team, at the end of the day, they care about the safety, health and wellbeing of the people they lead.

Recommendation for leaders

Strong and effective leaders demonstrate active care consistently and genuinely. Leaders seeking to improve or continue to demonstrate higher levels of active care should reflect on the following:

- How well do I know my team? How much energy have I invested in simply understanding what makes each of my people ‘tick’? Do they feel like they have a good working relationship with me?
- In what areas does my team need the most leadership support? What do I need to do to manage any ‘noise’ going on around the team, to allow them to focus on their tasks and not get distracted by things that may not be in their control and are better managed at a leadership level?
- Can I recognise when somebody is having an ‘off day’? And if I notice that they are, how often do I proactively ask about their wellbeing? How often do I allocate them to different or less hazardous tasks if they are facing a personal challenge that might affect their ability to focus?
- How can I encourage my team to look out for each other’s health, safety and wellbeing, and support each other through personal challenges?

If an organisation has a team of leaders who genuinely care about their people and who want to keep them safe and well, then the remaining safety leadership competencies can be acquired. The motivation is there; and organisations and leaders are already on their way to creating positive change.

*“At the end of the day, **leaders care** about the safety, health and wellbeing of the people they lead.”*

Next Steps and Recommendations

If you are looking to invest in your safety leaders, the first step is to determine where their individual strengths and opportunities lie.

Measurement of safety leadership ability is best done by a third-party to ensure accurate reporting and to eliminate organisational bias.

For maximum impact, we recommend undertaking a Safety Leadership Assessment in a 360° format where leaders' self-assessment is complemented by a team assessment of their ability. This provides leaders with a meaningful and comprehensive understanding of their strength and opportunity areas to guide their ongoing development.

Post-assessment, leaders should undertake a formal debrief and feedback session to discuss their individual results and personal development plan. This process can complement an organisation-wide leadership training and development program.

However, it is recommended that leaders also receive regular one-on-one coaching to support their development journey. We also recommend using embedding strategies to cement lasting change, as well as pulse checks to track improvement and make adjustments where required.

But remember, investment in leadership should not apply exclusively to senior leaders or executive. To create true and lasting change, organisations must also invest in frontline leaders.

By assisting leaders at all levels to build their skills and abilities, organisations encourage a leadership environment that not only drives increased team engagement and safe behaviour, but also improved safety performance.

THE SAFETY LEADERSHIP LINK

Implications for organisational safety climate, behaviour and performance

Intuitively, it makes sense that safety leadership predicts organisational safety culture. But where do the strongest relationships exist? What safety culture benefits will organisations observe if they invest heavily in leadership development? And what gaps might exist in their safety culture if they choose not to invest in their leaders? Find out the answers to these questions and more in *The Safety Leadership Link*.

We've analysed responses from more than 11,400 employees across 7 industries to bring you meaningful insights on the links between safety leadership and safety climate, behaviour and performance, as well as recommendations for improvement.

Visit sentis.com.au/safety-leadership-link to access *The Safety Leadership Link* and discover trends in safety leadership, as well as key opportunity areas for improving safety culture through strong, effective safety leadership.

Sentis specialises in safety culture measurement and transformation. Experts in applied psychology and neuroscience, Sentis helps organisations to enhance and move beyond compliance to empower employees to work safely—not because they have to, but because they want to. Offering training, coaching and consulting, Sentis has helped more than 250 companies and 140,000 people think differently about safety since 2003.

For more information, visit sentis.com.au
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