Choosing the right safety climate tool for your organisation

This guide will help you choose a survey that is suitable for measuring safety climate in your organisation. The guide will provide an overview of safety climate surveys and how they can help organisations assess their safety climate. The accompanying document 'Getting the most out of your safety climate survey' will help you take action once a survey has been selected.

What is safety climate?

Safety climate refers to employees' perceptions of how much safety is valued in an organisation. These perceptions are formed over time as people use safety systems, listen to what others say, and particularly what they do when it comes to safety. When positive perceptions of safety are consistent across the organisation, a positive safety climate exists and employees are more likely to act safely.

How is safety climate measured?

Safety climate is usually measured by a survey that asks employees about their safety experiences. To help identify areas of strength and improvement, safety climate surveys are designed around common topics. These topics may have different names depending on the assessment tool being used, and some common topics include:
- management safety commitment – which looks at areas of priority of safety and credibility of commitment
- effectiveness of safety systems – which looks at ease of use of safety procedures.
- quality of tools, equipment, and machinery to work safely – which looks at appropriateness of PPE and other safety equipment.

Current research suggests that the shelf life of a safety climate survey's data is about three months, so consider measuring your safety climate every three to six months.

How do I choose a safety climate survey?

Some surveys are developed for specific industries, while others are designed to be used generally across all industries. You should also consider whether the survey tool is based on solid evidence, such as a scientific study. You should also consider your audience and company setting – issues such as length and complexity of language may determine the quality of data you get back from employees. A checklist is provided in this guide to help you evaluate the quality of safety climate surveys that you are considering for use.

What are validity and reliability?

Validity and reliability are important concepts that have an impact on the quality of survey tools. Validity is how well the survey measures what it says it will measure. This means that the survey actually measures safety climate and predicts important outcomes such as injuries and illnesses. Reliability refers to the consistency of the survey. A reliable survey measures safety climate effectively every time it is administered. Establishing the validity and reliability of your safety climate survey means you can trust the data that it produces. If you are hiring a consultant or buying a survey, make sure you ask them about validity and reliability.

Should I test the survey?

Pilot testing is an important step used to make sure a survey is suitable for your company. This usually involves using the survey with a small group of people who represent the broader employee population. These people should provide feedback on the content of the survey, including questions that are unclear, terms that are not relevant to your company (e.g. toolbox talk), complexity of language, and any special needs your employees might have. Based on this feedback you may need to replace words so that the questions make more sense to people in your organisation. Be very careful not to make too many changes to questions. Usually, changing one to two words to make them simpler or replacing a technical term with one that is relevant to your company will not invalidate the question.

How are safety climate surveys analysed?

Each safety climate survey is unique in how it was designed, but most surveys use the same method to analyse the data. Typically, you take an average across several survey questions that measure the same dimension. For example, there may be three survey questions relating to management safety commitment, so an average is calculated across these items, with a higher average meaning a more positive safety climate. This is known as the climate level. Another safety climate metric is strength. This can be measured either as the standard deviation of scores around the average, or by calculating an agreement statistic. This metric describes how consistent the safety climate is across your company.

How can I make sense of the survey results?

Benchmarking is a way of comparing your company's results against some standard or reference point. This allows you to gain insight into how well your organisation might be doing and help identify areas for improvement. There are two ways to benchmark either internally or externally. Internal benchmarking means you are comparing the results gathered from different demographic group in your organisation (e.g. comparing results between different departments or sites). External benchmarking means you are comparing your data to external organisations. Sometimes external benchmarking data is published in research papers or companies negotiate agreements to share their data with each other.

What happens after the survey results have been interpreted?

It is vital that employees receive timely feedback after the survey has been conducted. The most effective way to do this is by presenting the main high level themes and consulting with employees to help interpret the results and identify possible actions to improve. This should also be a time to congratulate and thank employees for participating, showing that their involvement is valued. Keeping employees involved along the way will increase their support for any improvement actions that are implemented.

What are the next steps?

1. Source a selection of different safety climate surveys using the Resource guide in this document and any other places you may have access to.
2. Using the Safety climate survey selection tool in this document, review the quality of each survey to narrow down your choices.
3. Read the accompanying document 'How to maximise effectiveness of safety climate surveys' and conduct your survey.

Safety climate survey selection tool

How to Use this Tool: Review each safety climate survey under consideration by answering the questions outlined below (place a tick in each relevant box). Compare each tool you evaluate using these prompts to help you make your final choice.

Survey Title: _____

1. Was the survey designed for a specific industry?

Don't know, more information needed.	Yes and it doesn't match my company's industry.	No, it is a general industry tool.	Yes and it matches my company's industry.

Comments:

2. Do you anticipate any problems with the survey wording or language?

Don't know, more information needed.	Yes, it is complicated/ unclear/ not relevant.	Maybe, but it could be easily adapted to improve it.	No problems anticipated.

Comments:

3. Will the dimensions or factors in the survey adequately measure what you need?

Don't know, more information needed.	No, the survey seems to be missing some important factors.	Maybe, the most important factors are included.	Yes, the survey is very comprehensive.

Comments:

4. Does the survey have any benchmarking guidance or resources?

Don't know, more information needed.	No, and scoring/ interpretation is complex.	No, but scoring/ interpretation seems straightforward	Yes, and I am clear how to score/ interpret it

Comments:

5. Is the survey valid and reliable?

Don't know, more information needed.	No, there is no information about performance.	Probably, there is some information about performance.	Yes, there is a scientific study that shows it performs.

Comments:

6. What are the licensing/copyright arrangements?

Don't know, more information needed.	Commercial tool and significant investment required.	Nominal fee or permission required to use.	Freely available for corporate use.

Comments:

Safety climate survey resource list

Finding a suitable safety climate survey can be challenging. To get you started, below are four tools that are freely available. There are many other tools that you could consider, so treat this resource list as a starting point.

Title	Industry	# Items	Source
Organisational Performance Metric	General	8	http://www.iscrr.com.au/workplace-health-and-safety/assesing-and-measuring-workplace-safety/ohs-leading-indicators
Organisational and Safety Climate Inventory	General	78	https://www.researchgate.net/publication/222697162_OSCI_An_Organizational_and_Safety_Climate_Inventory
Safety Climate Questionnaire for Road Construction	Construction	40	https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ian_Glendon/publication/222354697_Safety_climate_factors_group_differences_and_safety_behaviour_in_road_construction/links/53e036c20cf27a7b830a38fb.pdf
Safety Climate Scale for Lone Workers	Transportation	40	http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1369847812000824
Hospital Survey on Patient Safety Culture	Health Care	42	http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/patientsafetyculture/hospital/index.html
Loughborough University Safety Climate Assessment Toolkit	Oil and Gas, but has been used elsewhere.	43	http://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/our-research/case-studies/safety-climate/

More Information

The below publications offer detailed reviews of multiple safety climate tools:

Measuring the Leading Indicators of Occupational Health & Safety: A Snapshot Review

http://www.iscrr.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/297258/Measuring-the-leading-indicators-of-OHS-A-snapshot-review.pdf

Occupational Safety and Health Culture Assessment: A Review of Main Approaches and Selected Tools

https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-publications/publications/reports/culture_assessment_soar_TEWE11005ENN/view