# Influencing Safety Culture at Work
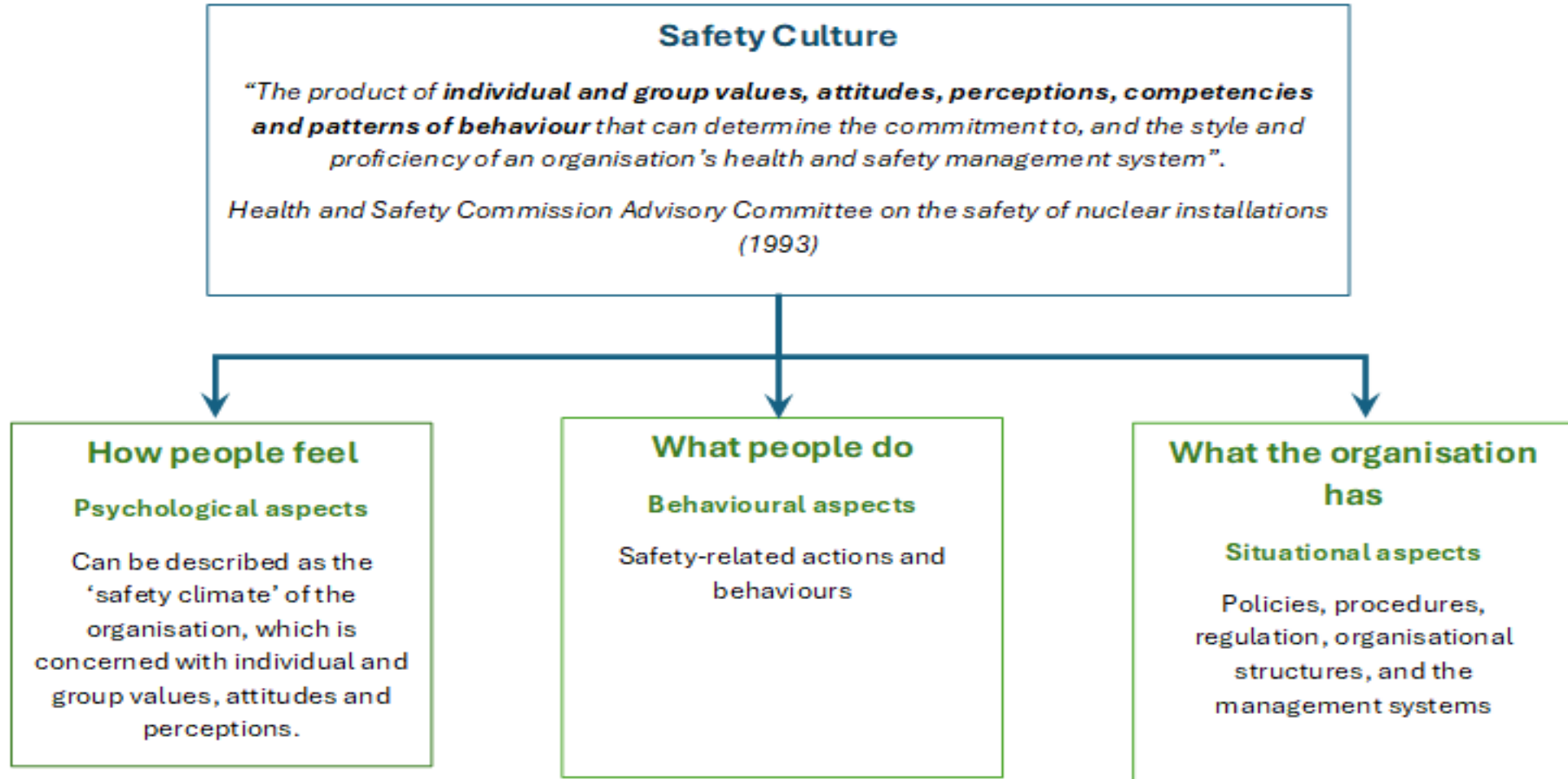
HSA

An tÚdarás Sláinte agus Sábháilteachta
Health and Safety Authority

Patricia Murray

Senior Work and Organisational Psychologist/Inspector

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# Influencing Safety Culture

## Safety Culture

"The product of **individual and group values, attitudes, perceptions, competencies and patterns of behaviour** that can determine the commitment to, and the style and proficiency of an organisation's health and safety management system".

*Health and Safety Commission Advisory Committee on the safety of nuclear installations (1993)*

### How people feel

**Psychological aspects**

Can be described as the 'safety climate' of the organisation, which is concerned with individual and group values, attitudes and perceptions.

### What people do

**Behavioural aspects**

Safety-related actions and behaviours

### What the organisation has

**Situational aspects**

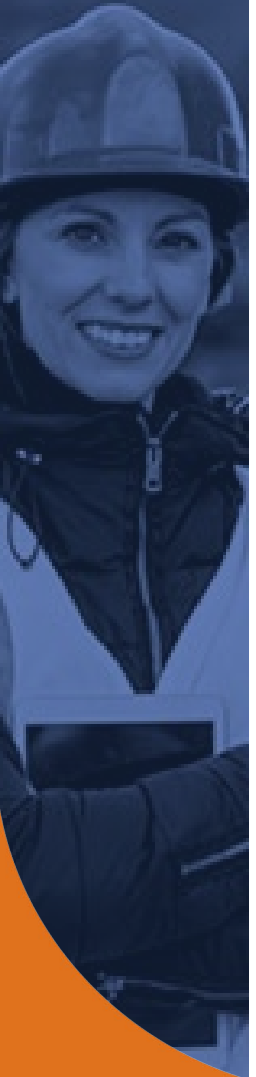Policies, procedures, regulation, organisational structures, and the management systems
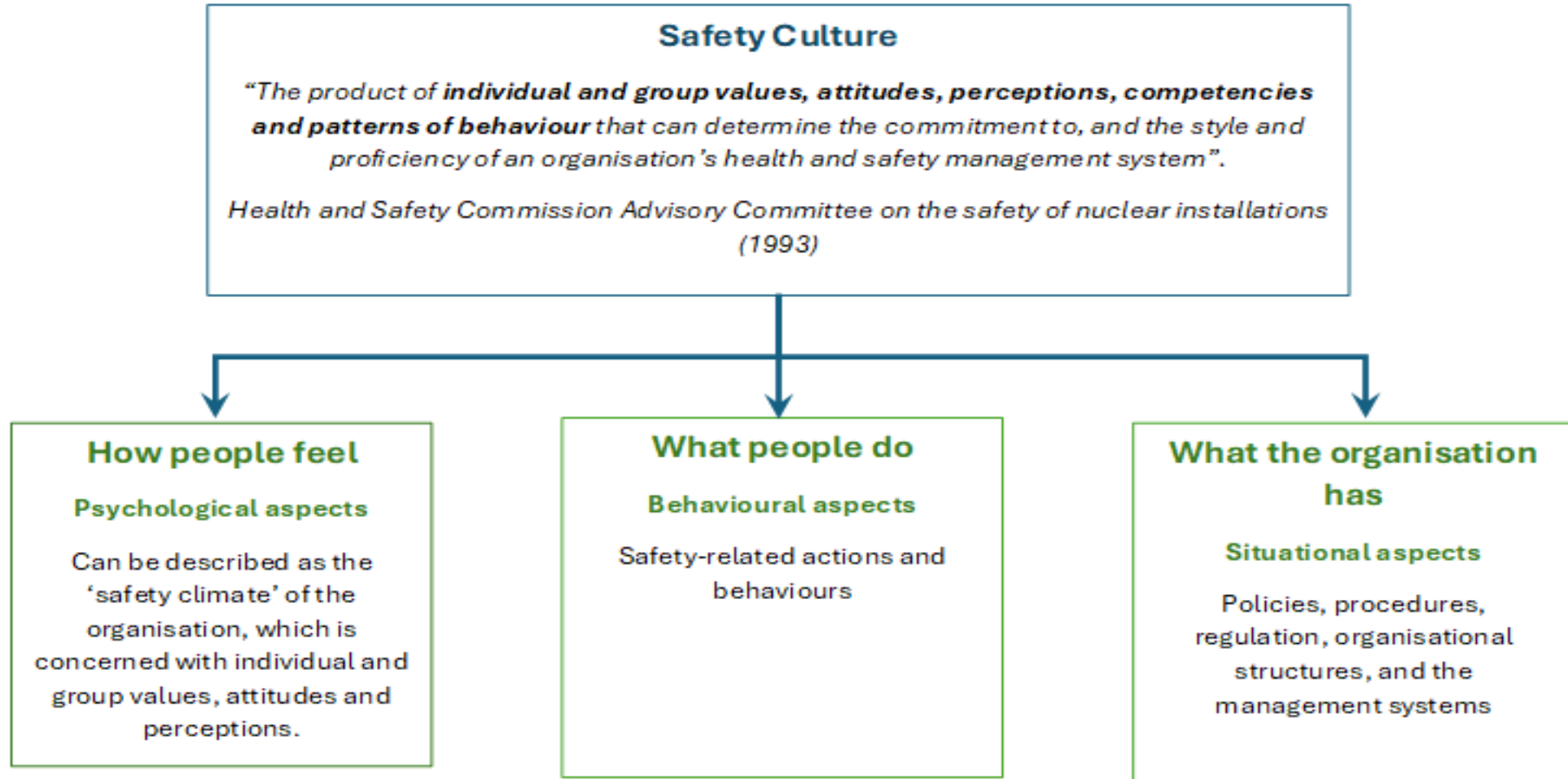
# Overview

1. Perspective of: improving safety outcomes at work

2. Through: identifying problems which cause unsafe systems

3. Linking casual factors to organisational culture (safety culture)

4. Highlighting solutions through broad spectrum behaviour change

# Some problems at work now?

- Accidents that cause injury

- Errors that cause frustration and lost time

- Training which is not being effective

- Increased budgets for equipment not used

- Time loss due to down time

- Hard to recruit good managers/personnel

- Knowledge gaps, conflict in teams, pay disputes

- IR issues and work related stress, anxiety, mental health issues

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# Workplace Culture

Organisational culture can be refined as…

**…. the patterns of thinking ………..and behaving ………….that are recognised …….. and espoused.  (Henley Business School 2021)**

Let's re frame it for our purpose here today….

The patterns of thinking (or not thinking) among people at work….about what acts  (to do or not to do) are safer than others and ……. the patterns developed of acting on those thoughts to do those things (or not do things)… ..and how these are recognised (or not recognised) …by others at all levels….and then….how these patterns are adopted and spread outwards, upwards and downward…..

# What is associated with poor Workplace Safety Culture

- Consistent reliance on casual/ temporary staff  - why?

- Communication and supervision problems – how?

- Poor relations  - across levels/functions

- Excessive workload - badly dispersed tasks

- Training deficiencies and box-ticking L&D activities

- ESRI research (HSA 2015): juggling, rushing, high demands, new.

# Workplace Safety Culture

- A culture is influenced by **what is done AND influences what is done**

- But also by what is **not done – and influences 'not doing'**

- *What is ignored is not invisible*
- *What is denied is not unseen*
- *What is bypassed is not without reverberations*

- **The underbelly of the iceberg determines the upside**

# Less visible influencing factors - underbelly

- Physical environment: is it comfortable for those working there?

- Does comfort not matter when working?

- What Is comfort?

  - Menu studies – how do we rate our experiences?
  - Social env;  satisfaction studies – engagement/motivation
  - Psychological environment – trust and attachment

# Org Psychology insights

- Psychological environment
  - Psychological safety studies – less performative, more authentic
    - Safety climate studies – Strong behavioural norms
  - Organisational commitment theory – affective + maintenance
  - Psychological contract – agreed transactional >trust

- All point to people being primarily emotionally stimulated beings
- Who engage in various levels of various behaviours depending on….

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# A Positive Psychology Approach

- Build positivity and recognition into systems

- Move from fixed to learning mindsets

- Focus on creative innovative sessions for all teams – team establishment cycle

- Resolve conflict productively – early, openly, respectfully

- Goal setting and feedback systems embedded

- Achievement rewarded and recognised

# Staged approach: 1 Remove the frictions

- On-going small scale tensions and unclear goals

- Unclear roles and responsibilities – leave it chance

- Look the other way, someone else will get it done

- 'My corner' is clean, I am fine approach

- Autocratic management and no questioning

- Groupthink and performative posturing


- If behaviours and attitudes are frictions, and remain ignored, they are reinforced.
  - Unintentionally, become the cultural norm

# 2. Introduce small general changes

- Improved communicating – EAST – nicer, easier, useful, timely
  - And personal follow up: comfortable, enjoyable, interesting
- Merging of in and out groups – older workers, younger workers, old habits, new methods (short term projects)
- A conflict awareness and management system - inform
  - Increased interpersonal dialogue – listening/talking
  - Acceptance of error/mistakes – no blame, learning
- Increased self-efficacy – show, tell, watch, review

- Increase social learning throughout everything

# Influencing for change

- Reduce FRICTION - explain and share the NEW THINGS. Get buy in.

- What motivates behaviour generally – Self interest and social connectedness. Socialise and Reward. ATF intrinsics

- Don't assume agreement - listen and discuss, allow dissent but show methods to do it this way, for now

- Highlight impacts/manifestations and listen

- Review changes and new implementations – do they deliver?

- This is all about Safety – but SAFETY is not a straight road

# Using Insights from Psychology

- Mechanisms to improve safety culture:

  - Re-framing of safety issues to include org values
  - Social norms – what are the safety behavioral norms? shift them safer
  - Novelty and innovation – be up to speed on the improvements, update, upskill
  - Learning – part of how we do things, on the job, practical, doing it safer
  - Social togetherness – socialise safer and normalize the thinking

# Actions -> consequences

Reinforcement as psychological tool: consistency matters (CSS)

- Certain

  There's a high probability you'll receive the consequence

- Soon

  The consequence occurs immediately after your behavior

- Significant

  The consequence is significant or meaningful to you

# Solutions are dynamic, not one size

- Strategic – long term goal, chunk and chain for smaller sub goals
- Tactical – short term - using social and indiv. psychology
- Look at the data –when and how are incidents occurring, or not occurring (behaviour)
- Set a goal for one change in one area
- Set another one for another area – set specific goals for each
- Remember: when you change one thing, everything changes
- Motivators develop and come alive within change cycles
- Heuristics – biases : COM-B/ EAST models for Beh Change
- EMOTION. Feeling good and right about the work, will be its own reward.

# Influencing Safety Culture

- How People Feel

- Thank you!

**Go raibh maith agaibh**

**Thank you**

T: 0818 289 389

E: contactus@hsa.ie

W: www.hsa.ie