



# The impact of caring relationships on safety performance: 'reaching the hearts and minds of people'

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## Synopsis

The concept of caring is in most cases confused with material needs and not psychological needs. By giving employees a job, most managers think that employees should be grateful and return the favour by being loyal, productive and working safely. Other managers hold the view that employees can be lucky to have a job.

To show and demonstrate that management are caring for the safety of the workforce requires involvement, dedication and commitment. Obtaining the trust and respect of the workforce should be the main thrust of any organization because within trust and respect lie the secret of optimal safety performance.

In the last 70 years, all the fatalities and serious injuries that occurred in the mining industry can be traced back to one thing, non-caring. The same safety non-compliances are still observed, reported and planned against as 70 years ago, and strange as it may sound, the same injuries occur the same way.

The question could be asked: Does the mining industry need more risk assessments? More codes of conduct? More engineering. Or does the mining industry need more caring?

## Introduction

Research in coal mining companies in the USA by Gaertner (Peterson, 1996) showed that the safety performance in coal companies, with poor relationships, produced almost double the number of injuries when compared with companies that have caring and trusting relationships.

Leger (1986) argues that accident statistics published tend to suggest that employees cause the majority of accidents (risky behaviours). Leger suggests that such statistics are misleading because the specific circumstances in which accidents take place are ignored.

As far back as the 1930s, Heinrich revealed through his research that risky behaviours are the direct cause of the majority of injuries and accidents. During the 1960s and '70s the research of Frank E-Bird and George Germain confirmed this finding. Other experts, such as Dan Peterson, Dr Beth Sulzer-Azaroff, Thomas Krause and Scott Geller, have supported the view that risky behaviours cause the majority of accidents and injuries.

Unfortunately, this knowledge causes many safety professionals and managers to blame shop floor employees for accidents and injuries. Managers and supervisors permit risky conditions and condone risky behaviours, neglect to provide employees with the required safe tools and equipment, pressure employees to take shortcuts, and fail to remove reported safety hazards, and get away with it.

Safety inspections and audits reveal repeatedly that managers and supervisors fail to comply with their safety risk control responsibilities without suffering any negative consequences.

Non-compliances with safety risk control responsibilities are evidence of non-caring behaviours. Non-caring behaviours have a significant impact on the safety performance of employees.

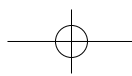
Non-caring is the root cause for creating a 'mind my own business' safety culture. A mind my own business culture can be recognized by the following characteristics:

- Not my brother's keeper mentality
- High occurrences of at-risk and non-caring behaviours
- Blaming and labelling
- Identifying culprit
- Many safety rules and procedures (cover ourselves' philosophy)
- Managing injuries (categorizing injuries into severity categories in order to conceal the truth)
- Hiding injuries.

A non-caring safety culture encourages speculative risk-taking (gambling with one's own safety and the safety of others.) (Figure 1).

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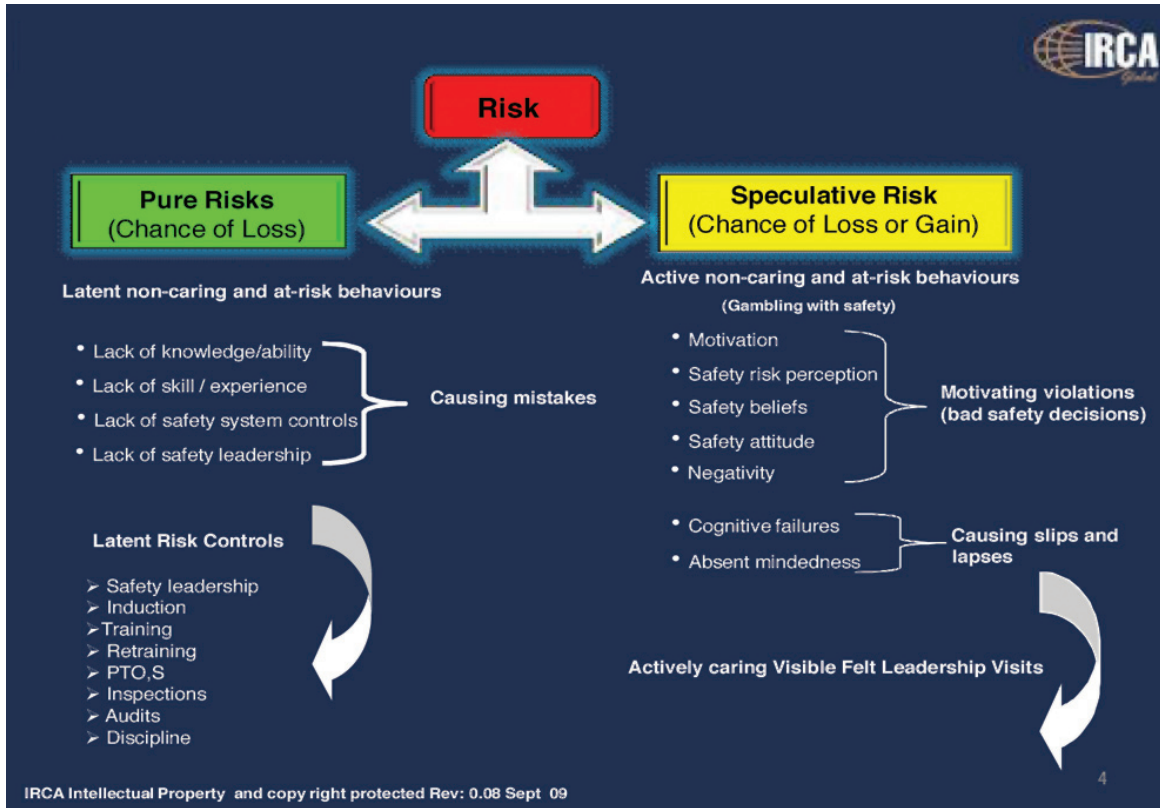


Figure 1—A non-caring safety culture

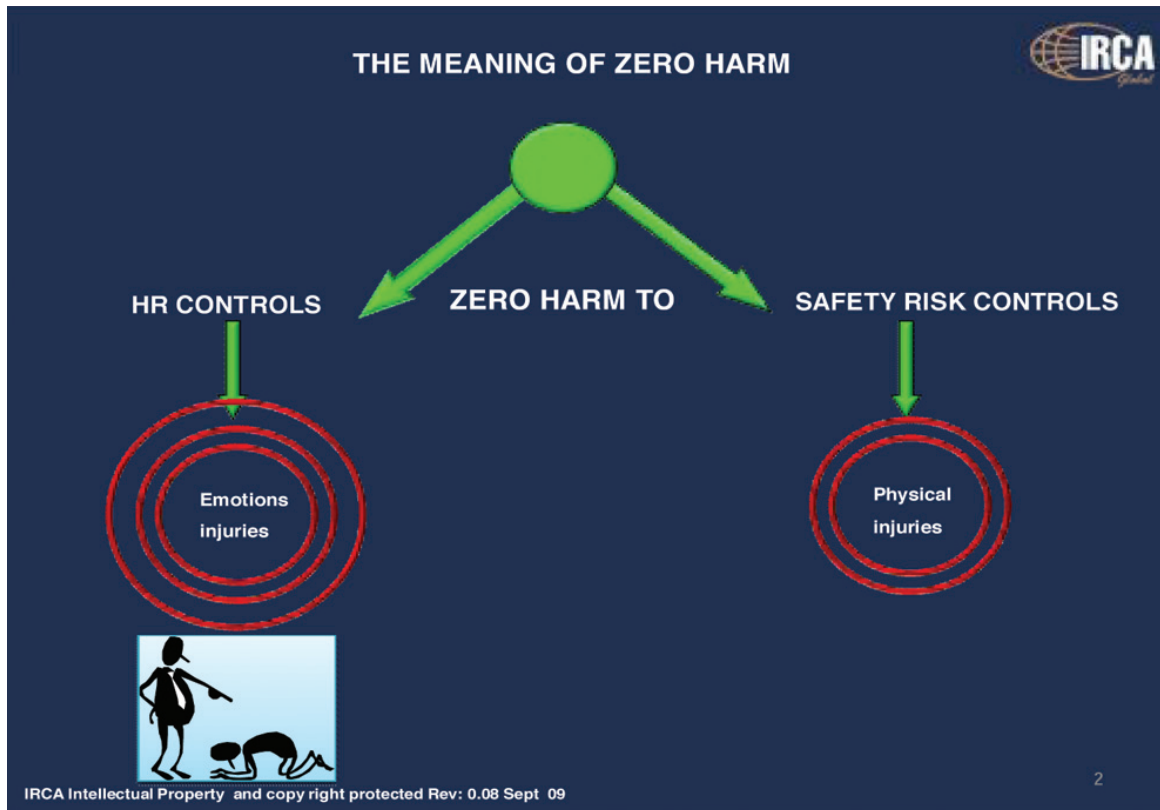
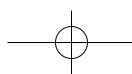
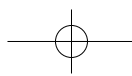


Figure 2—The meaning of 'zero harm'





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Creating a caring safety culture is demonstrated in Figure 4.

### Demonstrating 'on the spot' actively caring behaviour

Actively caring behaviours are 'doing' behaviours. Doing behaviours include verbal, non-verbal (body language) and action-taking behaviours. In order to demonstrate actively

caring behaviours, management must go to the shop floor to where the action takes place to demonstrate to employees that they value the safety of employees.

### Satisfying the psychological needs of employees

There are critical psychological needs that can only be satisfied during face to-face interaction. (Figure 3.)



Figure 3—Herzberg's Two Factor Model

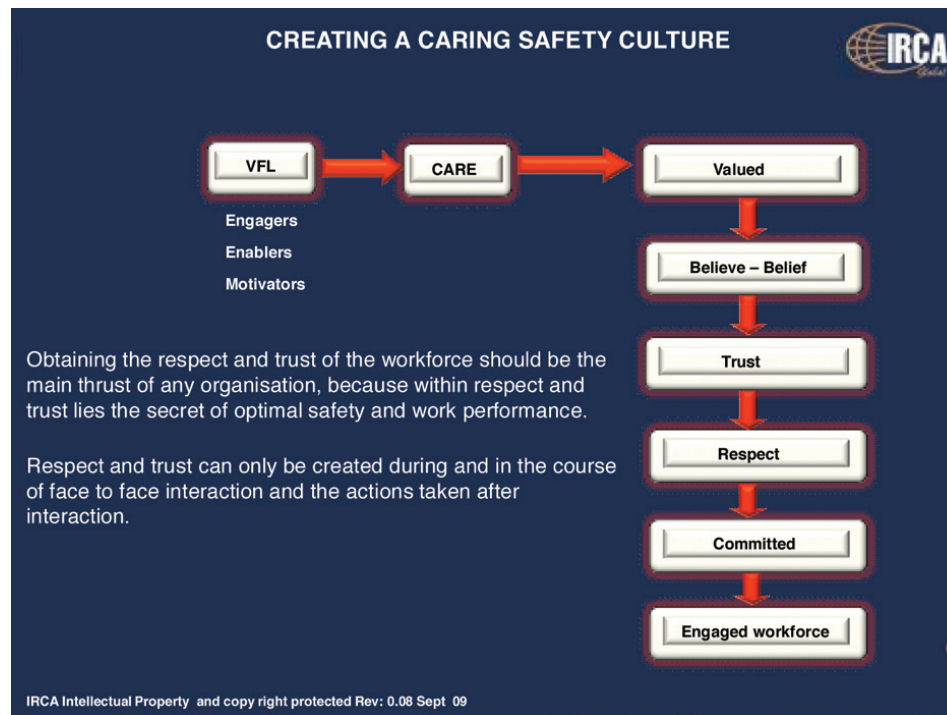
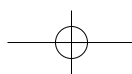


Figure 4—A caring safety culture



## The impact of caring relationships on safety performance



Figure 5—Visible felt leadership

- The need to care and be cared for
- The need to trust and not fear
- The need to be positive and not negative
- The need to be accepted
- The need to be acknowledged for one's efforts.

'Nobody cares how much you know, until they know how much you care' (John Casis).

The question could be asked: Do the organizations need more risk assessments? More codes of conduct? More safety rules? More safety engineering? Or what do organizations really need? ◆

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