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Lessons Learned from a Five-year Evaluation of the Belgian Safety Culture Oversight Process

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Synopsis

The Belgian Regulatory Body has implemented a Safety Culture oversight process since 2010. In a nutshell, this process is based on field observations provided by inspectors or safety analysts during any contact with a licensee (inspections, meetings, phone calls···). These observations are recorded within an observation (excel) sheet –aiming at describing factual and contextual issues –and are linked to IAEA Safety Culture attributes.
It should be stressed that the purpose of the process is not to give a comprehensive view of a licensee safety culture but to address findings that require attention or action on the part of a licensee. In other words, gathering safety culture observations aims at identifying cultural, organisational or behavioural issues in order to feed a regulatory response to potential problems. Safety Culture Observations (SCO) are then fully integrated in routine inspection activities and must be seen as an input of the overall oversight process.
As a result, the assessment of the SCO is inserted within the yearly safety evaluation report performed by Bel V and transmitted to the licensee .
However, observing safety culture is not a natural approach for engineers. Guidance, training and coaching must be provided in order to open up safety dimensions to be captured. In other words, a SCO process requires a continuous support in order to promote a holistic and systemic view of safety.
A SCO process also requires continuous improvement in order to enhance the capacity of a Regulatory Body to go deeper within the cultural dimension of safety. Therefore, after a first self-assessment in 2012, the Belgian regulator reinforced its process through a new procedure, a guidance document for inspectors ("How to observe") and the opening of a Safety Culture Coordinator position (in charge of process monitoring and assessment of SCO).
The process is now fully operational. Nevertheless it is also time to deeply review the process in order to gain from experience. The aim of this paper is then to present the main strengths and the limits of this kind of tool for safety culture oversight. Based on a five-year evaluation of the Belgian SCO process, the paper intends to take stock of the main findings of this review. More particularly, some issues will be highlighted such as the efficiency and the effectiveness of a SCO process, the way to improve the input of the process (better observations, dedicated inspections···), the integration level of the process within the overall oversight process (how to better use the Safety Culture Observations for defining scope of inspections and performing safety evaluations) and the impact of the SCO process on the licensees Safety Culture.
Next steps to enhance a SCO process will be pointed out.

Country or International Agency

Belgium

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