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**eBook**

# Light the Fire Within: How to Build Stronger Employee Engagement for Safety

*empower better performance*

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# Introduction

More and more, businesses are shifting their safety strategy toward a focus on safety culture – the truths, ideas and beliefs all members of an organization share toward workplace risk, injuries and prevention.[1]  And while consensus has been growing for over 40 years that strong safety cultures beget sustainable safety performance, companies continue to search in earnest for the perfect safety culture "recipe".

Shared values, leadership commitment, effective communication, continuous learning, just culture – these are just a few of the elements deemed critical for safety culture success. Recognizing the effect that discretionary effort can have on business outcomes, employers are placing renewed emphasis on employee engagement as a key ingredient to building world-class safety cultures that reduce the risk of workplace harm.

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But what can (and should) your company do to create the levels of employee engagement needed for safety excellence?

**In this eBook, we'll explore some of the ways your organization can encourage greater employee engagement in your health & safety programs, leading to stronger safety cultures and more predictable safety performance. Where applicable, we'll also look at how technology can support your initiatives to boost safety engagement and worker empowerment across the enterprise.**

# Why engagement
is so important

**Employee engagement** describes the extent to which an employee is emotionally committed to and enthusiastic about their work and the organization they belong to. It describes degree of discretionary effort they're willing to put in to advance the interests of the organization. Similarly, an employee who is fully engaged in safety is one who is invested in the organizations' safety ambitions demonstrated through discretionary action.

Organizations who want to accelerate safety performance need to focus on further engaging their workforce in safety. A 2016 Gallup study of over 1.8 million workers found that businesses rated in the top quartile for employee engagement had 70% fewer workplace incidents than those in the bottom quartile.[2] In fact, employee engagement is becoming so important that worker participation and consultation are now frequently included in new safety regulations and international standards like ISO 45001.

But building a more engaged workforce isn't

**Pro Tip:** Organizations who want to accelerate safety performance need to focus on further engaging their workforce in safety.
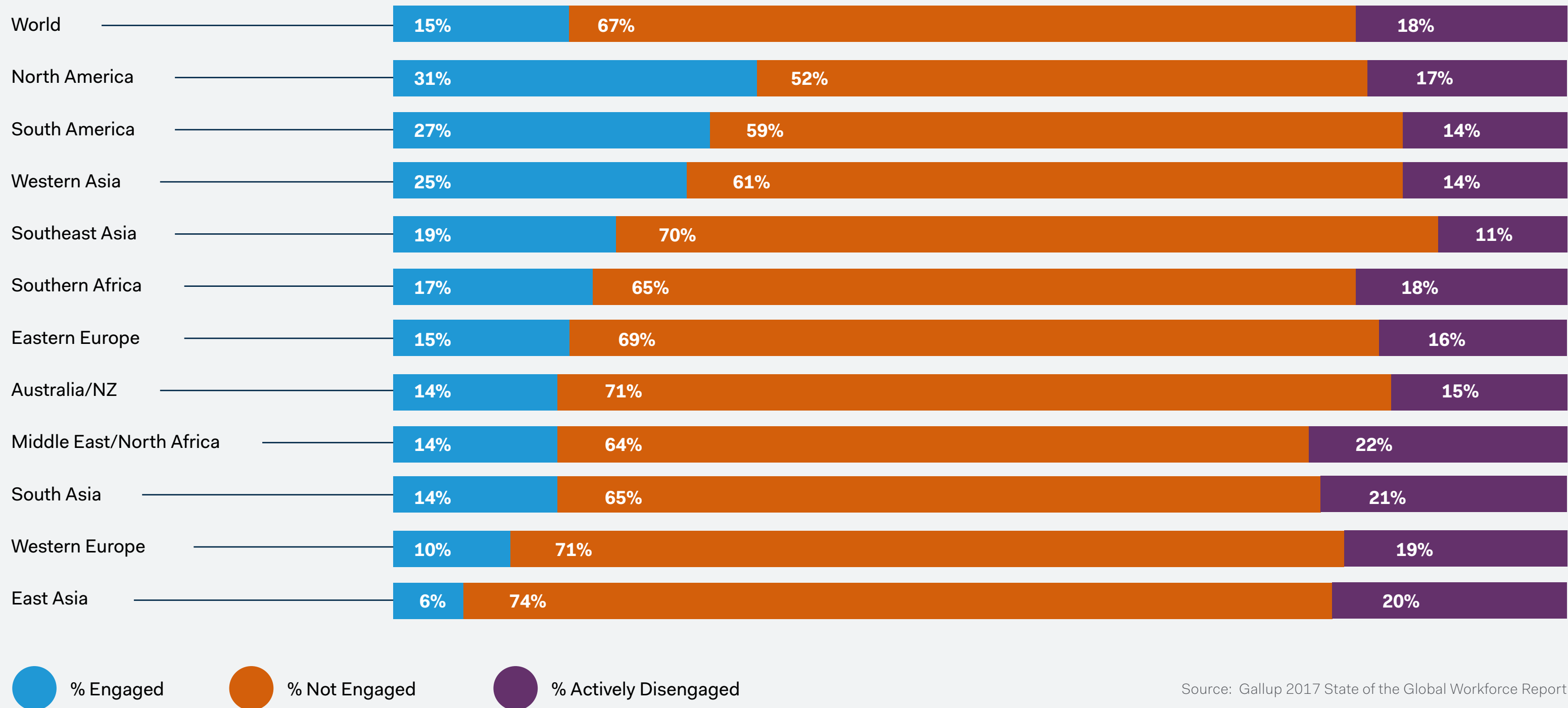
easy. While safety engagement is positively correlated with lower injury rates, 85% of employees are not engaged or actively disengaged at work, according to Gallup's 2017 State of the Global Workplace report.[3]

So, with that in mind, let's explore some simple things that your organization can do to promote better employee engagement in safety. By focusing on ways to increase worker involvement and empowerment in safety, your company will set itself on a solid path for future success.

**Engagement Rates:**

Based on data aggregated from Gallup World Polls (2014-2016)

| Region | % Engaged | % Not Engaged | % Actively Disengaged |
|---|---|---|---|
| World | 15% | 67% | 18% |
| North America | 31% | 52% | 17% |
| South America | 27% | 59% | 14% |
| Western Asia | 25% | 61% | 14% |
| Southeast Asia | 19% | 70% | 11% |
| Southern Africa | 17% | 65% | 18% |
| Eastern Europe | 15% | 69% | 16% |
| Australia/NZ | 14% | 71% | 15% |
| Middle East/North Africa | 14% | 64% | 22% |
| South Asia | 14% | 65% | 21% |
| Western Europe | 10% | 71% | 19% |
| East Asia | 6% | 74% | 20% |

% Engaged    % Not Engaged    % Actively Disengaged

Source: Gallup 2017 State of the Global Workforce Report

**Chapter 1**

# Give workers a voice

It's surprising to learn how many organizations fail to actively seek out the ideas, thoughts and opinions of their front-line workers when tackling health & safety challenges. Considering that front-line employees are often most knowledgeable of the risks present in their work environment, and how to control those risks, failing to take their perspectives into account when developing your safety strategy is a wasted opportunity. And it can lead to further problems.

Every employee exerts a significant social power in the workplace that influences the perceptions and beliefs of their co-workers. When enough workers feel that their opinions do not matter, this collective social power can quickly turn negative and undermine key company safety initiatives[4], increasing the risk of injury. A study conducted by Queen's School of Business found that disengaged workers were 50% more likely to be involved in a workplace accident.[5]

**Pro Tip:** Better safety engagement starts with creating conditions and providing solutions that make it easier for workers to share their ideas, opinions, concerns and challenges with management and their peers.
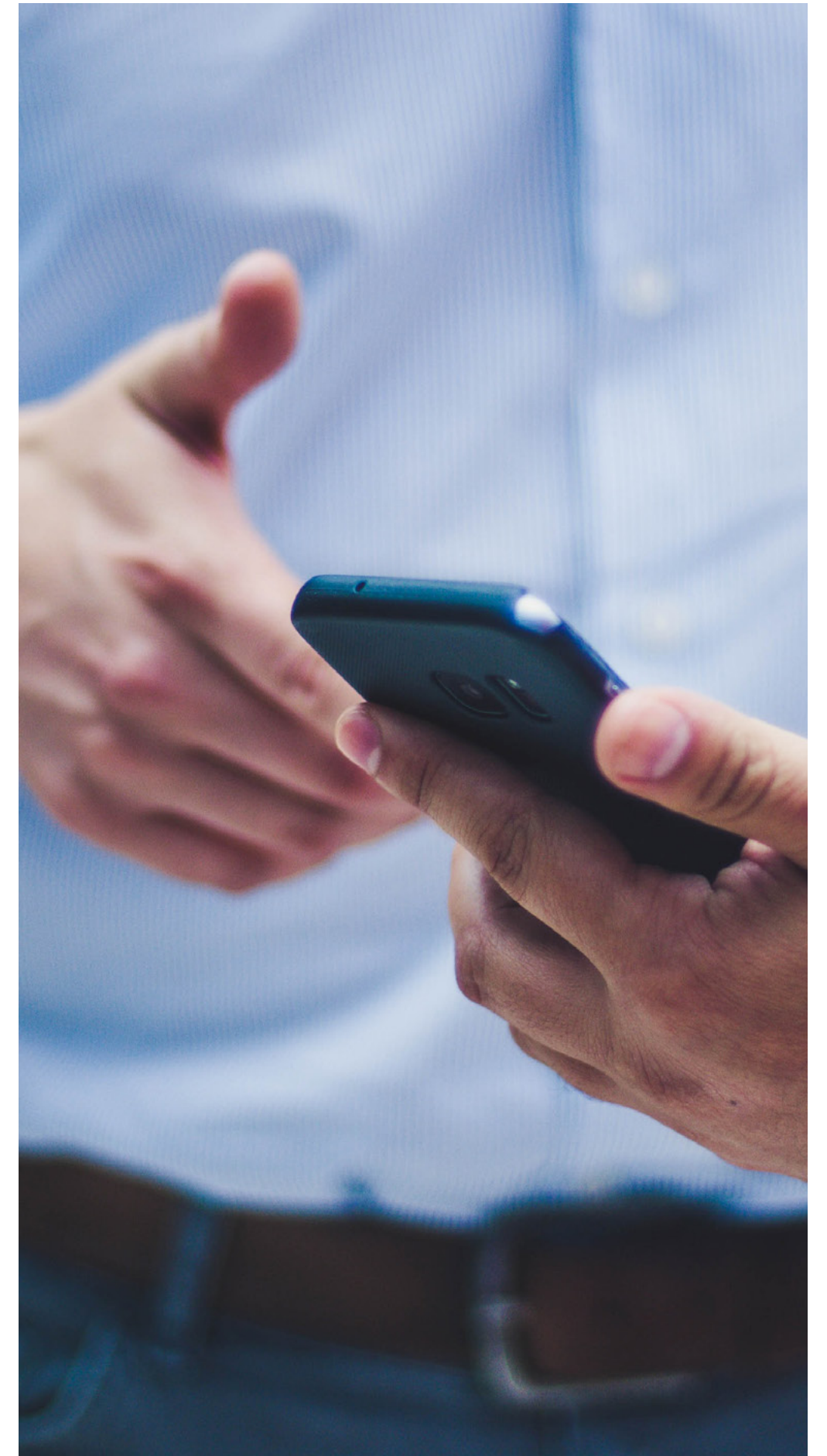
Organizations looking to strengthen safety culture must therefore look for ways to give workers a "bigger voice" in health & safety. It starts with creating conditions and providing solutions that make it easier for workers to share their ideas, opinions, concerns and challenges with management and their peers.

With operating footprints growing, and businesses relying on less supervision and more self-directed teams, it's becoming more difficult for front-line workers to share ideas, report problems or communicate challenges. Workers may not have face-to-face interaction with their supervisors for hours or even days at a time, creating a real barrier to share information in a timely manner to support better work planning and risk-based decision making. Additionally, their limited access to information from other parts of the business can impede broader organizational learning needed for sustainable safety improvement.

**What you can do:** The growth in mobile

EHS apps is fortunately providing new avenues to help front-line workers overcome communication barriers and share safety information more quickly.

Mobile solutions provide a quick and reliable way for employees at all levels to collect and share data about incidents, observations, or hazards across the enterprise in real-time, eliminating administrative effort and errors linked to managing paper-based records, while reducing the lead-time between when an issue is discovered and when action can be taken to address it.

Simplified user interfaces and multi-language capabilities are helping make mobile solutions more intuitive and user-friendly, speeding up adoption and reducing training time, especially for global enterprises operating in multiple countries. And offline capabilities allow workers to continue to share insights or report issues anywhere, at any time, with information stored on the app and transferred when WiFi connectivity is reestablished. If you're looking to give your workforce

a bigger voice, you should really consider an investment in EHS mobility, to ensure you can reach even the farthest corners of your organization.

**Re-think your safety meetings**

If your safety meetings normally involve management "talking at" employees, you're likely on a surefire path to worker disengagement. Instead, try this:

At your next safety meeting, instead of spending time reviewing the most recent safety stats, pick a notable incident, and explore it in detail with your workforce. Ask your employees their opinions about what happened and why it happened. What do they see from a front-line worker's perspective that management might not see? What ideas do they have to prevent it from happening again?

Pick 1-2 solution ideas to implement and then review the effect of these ideas at your next meeting. Showing that management is listening to and applying their ideas is a great way to foster employee engagement.

**Chapter 2**

# Trust your people to do the right (and safe) thing

A few years ago, a colleague was complaining to me about how a manager from another department wasn't taking a key safety initiative seriously. "He's barely doing anything about it," my colleague argued. "And when he does, he isn't following any of the processes I set out."

"Look," I replied gently, "you can either ask him to take care of the situation and accept the way he does it, or you can direct how he's supposed to address it, but accept that he'll likely take no responsibility for the outcome. You can't have it both ways."

Ownership requires two things: accountability and autonomy. While people need to be accountable to their commitments, they will only accept that accountability if they are given the freedom to determine the best course of action to fulfill those commitments.

Building an empowered workforce – one in which the people at the lowest levels of the organization feel ownership for workplace safety – is only truly possible if leaders at the top are willing to trust them to make safe choices when confronted with risk[6]. In many



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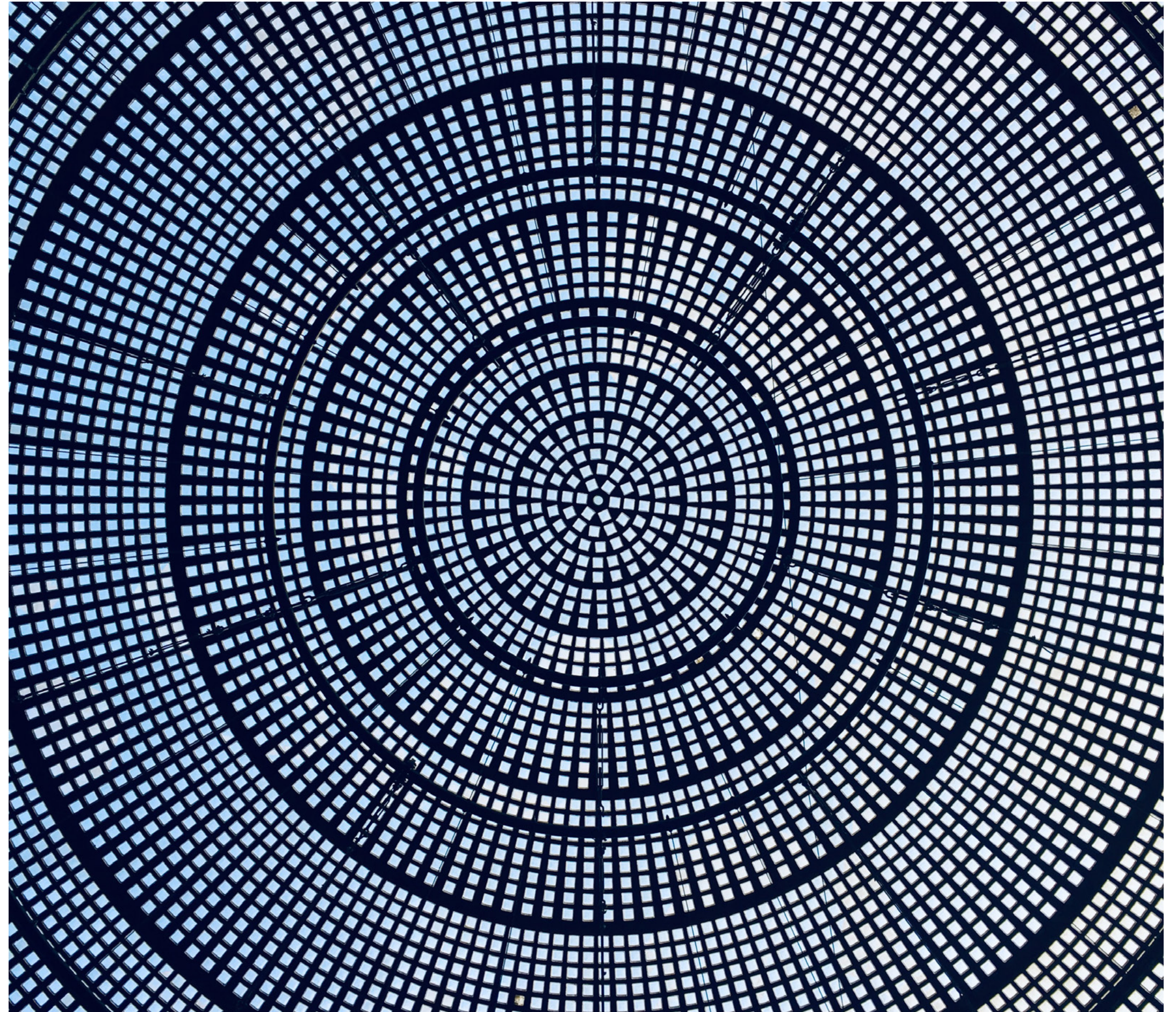
weak cultures, employees feel that their only job is to report problems. In others, they decline to take action to address problems for fear of being blamed if something goes wrong when they do.

Instead of taking action workers wait to be told what to do – even when they often have the most knowledge in the company to deal with the issues raised. Unfortunately, this approach paralyzes the safety program, since it funnels all issues to a single function which can become quickly overwhelmed.  As a result, risk exposure persists and doubt creeps into the minds of employees about the organization's commitment to safety – since nothing seems to get done.

**What you can do:** To build greater safety ownership within your workforce, start by establishing simple guidelines to clarify what types of issues must be elevated through the management team, and which issues can be resolved by the employee. This simple shift – empowering workers to apply their skills and

expertise at their discretion to address known problems - will lead to more immediate risk mitigation while contributing to greater trust between management and employees needed for better engagement.

Your organization can further drive engagement by providing workers with tools that help them manage and complete their assigned tasks and actions wherever they are. Virtually all mobile EHS apps offer users the ability to access and view assigned tasks, as well as update the status of these tasks in real-time right from the field. Automated alerts ensure that individuals are aware of tasks the moment they're assigned, and real-time updates on mobile devices ensure that leaders are always looking at the most accurate information, helping to drive better decisions on priorities and resource use.

# Act on the feedback you receive

When I used to coach management teams on health & safety leadership, I often reminded them to try to view safety issues from the worker's point of view. Supervisors and managers are constantly inundated with problems to resolve, and are invariably forced to assess and prioritize issues to determine what to address first. While a singular issue raised by a front-line employee might fall toward the bottom of a supervisor's priority list, we must remember that it's still the most important thing to that worker.

They are constantly thinking about it. And when the issue goes unaddressed, or when days go by without receiving a response about when it will be resolved, it sends a message to that worker that their concerns don't matter. And that can be toxic to workforce engagement.

I recall speaking to an hourly construction worker who was incensed that his request for a new hard hat hadn't been addressed for weeks. The supervisor likely had other pressing issues to attend to, but this issue was all that worker could think about – and it framed his perception of the company's entire commitment to safety.

Failure to respond to issues in a reasonable time erodes trust with the workforce, and discourages further participation in the safety program. Employees will begin to wonder "Why should I bring things forward if management won't do anything about it?" And when leaders don't hear about risks or problems in the field, it doesn't mean there aren't any. It simply means they are not being identified and addressed, increasing the potential for injuries and illnesses. So, while it is critical for employees to raise health & safety concerns to the management team, it's arguably more important that the management team demonstrates visibly that it's taking action to address those concerns in a timely manner.
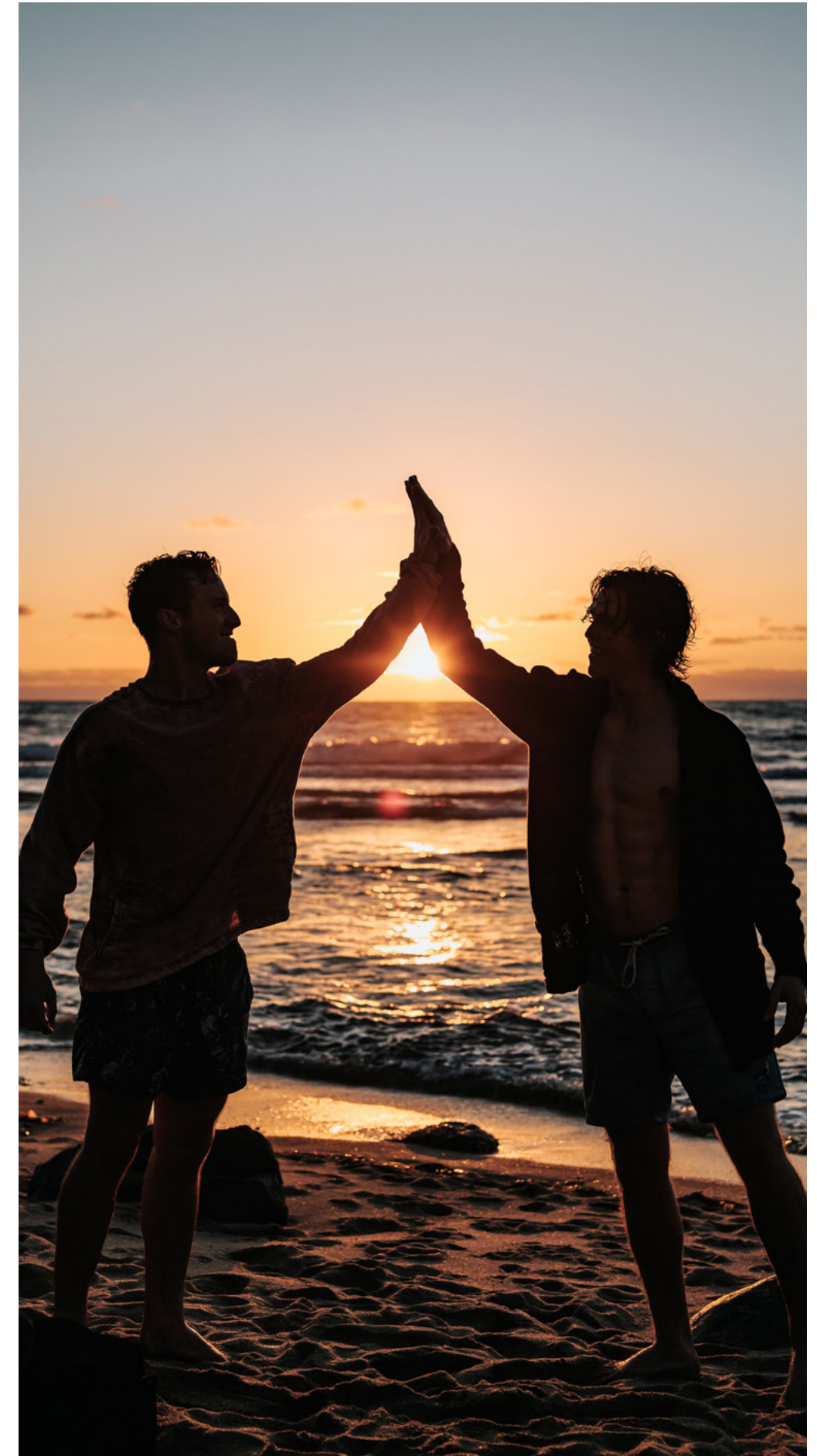
**What you can do:** Providing your workers with information that lets them gauge, for themselves, how well the organization is doing at addressing known problems will help you show that worker concerns aren't simply falling into a black hole. Enterprise EHS software platforms offer extensive capabilities to visualize key indicators and metrics on dashboards offering an at-a-glance view of progress to close H&S actions.

Many platforms extend this dashboard functionality to EHS mobile apps, providing front-line workers with the chance to monitor company progress in real-time wherever they are. This flexibility helps workers challenge leaders and hold them accountable to their commitments to safety.

But remember – reports and dashboards do not replace the need for your supervisors to have regular, candid conversations with employees to keep them apprised of the status of their concerns and to assure them that they haven't been forgotten. A best practice is to follow the C48 principle – supervisors should commit

to communicate with employees every 48 hours (at minimum) to provide updates on their specific issues. This cadence will show employees that their concerns matter and that leadership is working to provide a suitable solution.

**Chapter 4**

# Involve front-line employees in safety decision-making

Early in my career, I learned an invaluable lesson about workforce engagement in safety. At that time, I was working for a Tier 1 automotive parts supplier building components for one of the Detroit "Big 3" automakers.

Recognizing a need to eliminate production bottlenecks, the engineering team worked one weekend to redesign one of the assembly lines. They were pleased with the results, until the front-line assembly team arrived at the plant Monday morning.

Workers were visibly upset. Union reps were called. Some refused to work, claiming the re-designed line created new hazards that were not considered or adequately controlled. We soon realized that the changes themselves were not that big of a problem. The problem was that the changes were made without any consideration for the thoughts, opinions, ideas or involvement of the employees who would be required to work there. Their exclusion was the issue.

**Pro Tip:** Workers want to be part of creating health & safety solutions. Do your part to include them in the conversation.

So, during the next assembly line re-design, a group of line workers were brought in to work alongside the engineering group. They collectively designed the assembly line layout, including the best position for fixtures, parts, tools, etc., to balance safety and throughput. And when the rest of the assembly team arrived at work following the change, there was little dissention. Workers want to be part of creating health & safety solutions and they need to be included in the conversation.

**What you can do:** Whenever contemplating a change in your workplace, it's essential to include employees who will be affected by the change early in the process. Offer them the opportunity to comment on the purpose and expected benefits of the change. Allow them to ask questions or raise concerns. Solicit them for ideas to make the change work. And make sure the workforce knows that they have representation in these discussions – it'll go a long way to reduce opposition to new equipment, processes or work methods.

By expanding Management of Change capabilities, EHS mobile apps are now offering firms new ways to further integrate front-line workers in safety decision-making. Individuals can easily initiate a change request from their mobile device, triggering workflows to ensure that proposed changes are thoroughly vetted for H&S considerations before approval.

Configurable workflows allow your organization to include multiple groups in change validation, from engineers and maintenance to safety professionals right down to the front-line operator, all of whom can provide feedback right from their mobile device while they review the change in the field. And business logic can be leveraged to automatically trigger corrective actions ensuring identified risks are addressed before the change is released to full production. It's just another way technology is supporting greater employee engagement in safety.

# Provide workers with the right data to make the right decisions
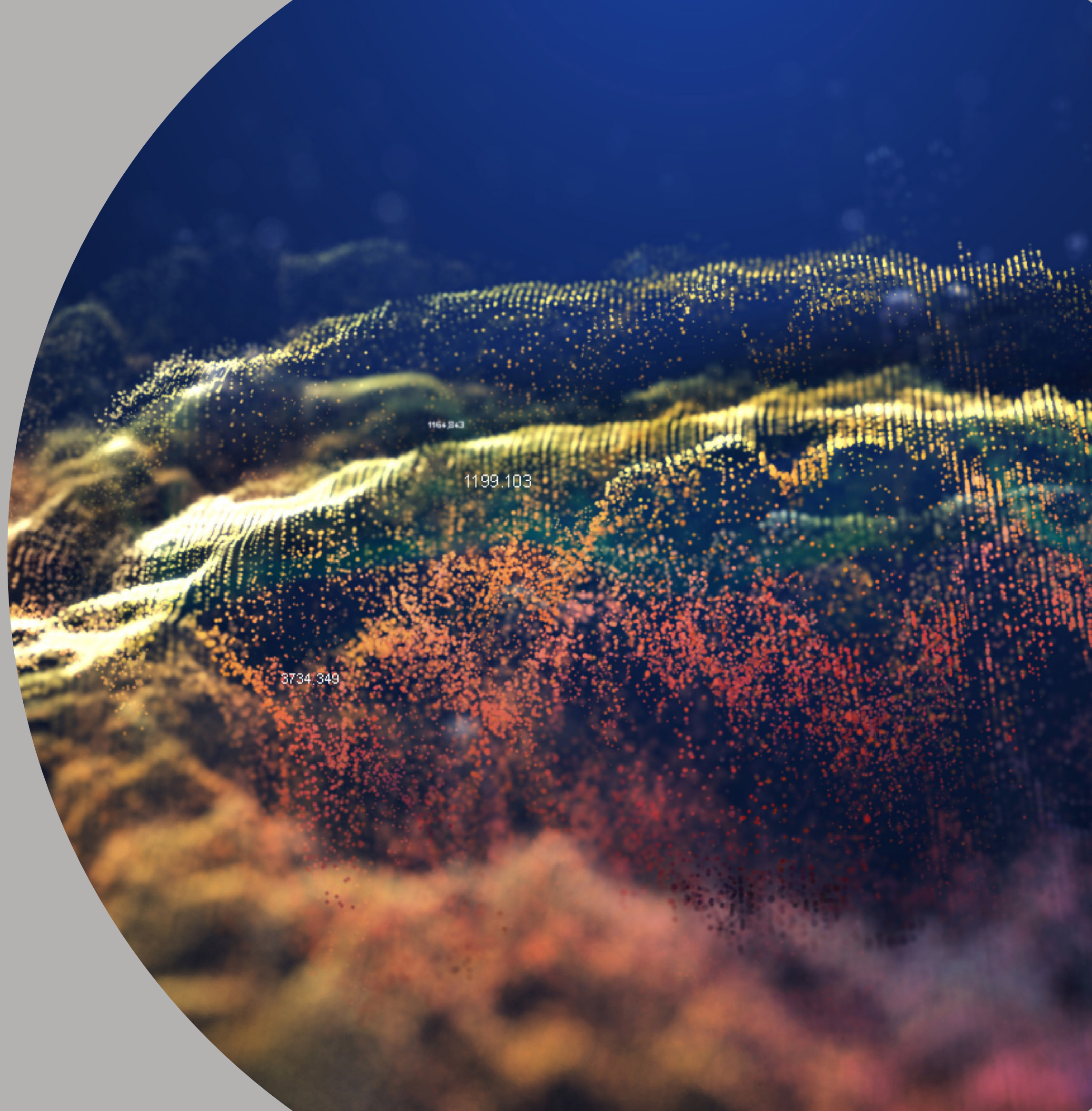
One way that organizations can drive better worker engagement, writes Adrienne Selko, is by adopting technology that provides workers with real-time data to make better decisions.[7]

Safer work comes, in part, from ensuring that workers have reliable access to the information they need to plan and carry out their tasks. While organizations often create procedures or work instructions for specific activities, these procedures often represent an idealized way to complete the task. Yet conditions faced by workers are rarely ideal. Variability – brought about by time pressures, scope changes, weather events, lack of specific tools, etc. – often forces workers to adapt their original plan in order to get the work done.

Digital tools like EHS mobile apps provide workers with real-time access to the vital data they need to make adjustments to work plans with an appropriate consideration of the risks involved. Through a mobile device, workers gain immediate access to critical data from risk assessments and job hazard

analyses, work instructions, Safety Data Sheets (SDS), inspection records, or even equipment operating manuals without having to dig through dusty binders or track down their supervisor, allowing them to make better decisions that lead to better safety and business outcomes.

And mobile apps allow organizations to easily configure digital checklists and forms to support field-based risk analysis and work permitting. This flexibility means that risk assessments and permits can be easily shared with supervisors, allowing for effective review and work authorization, even when the supervisor is not physically on site.
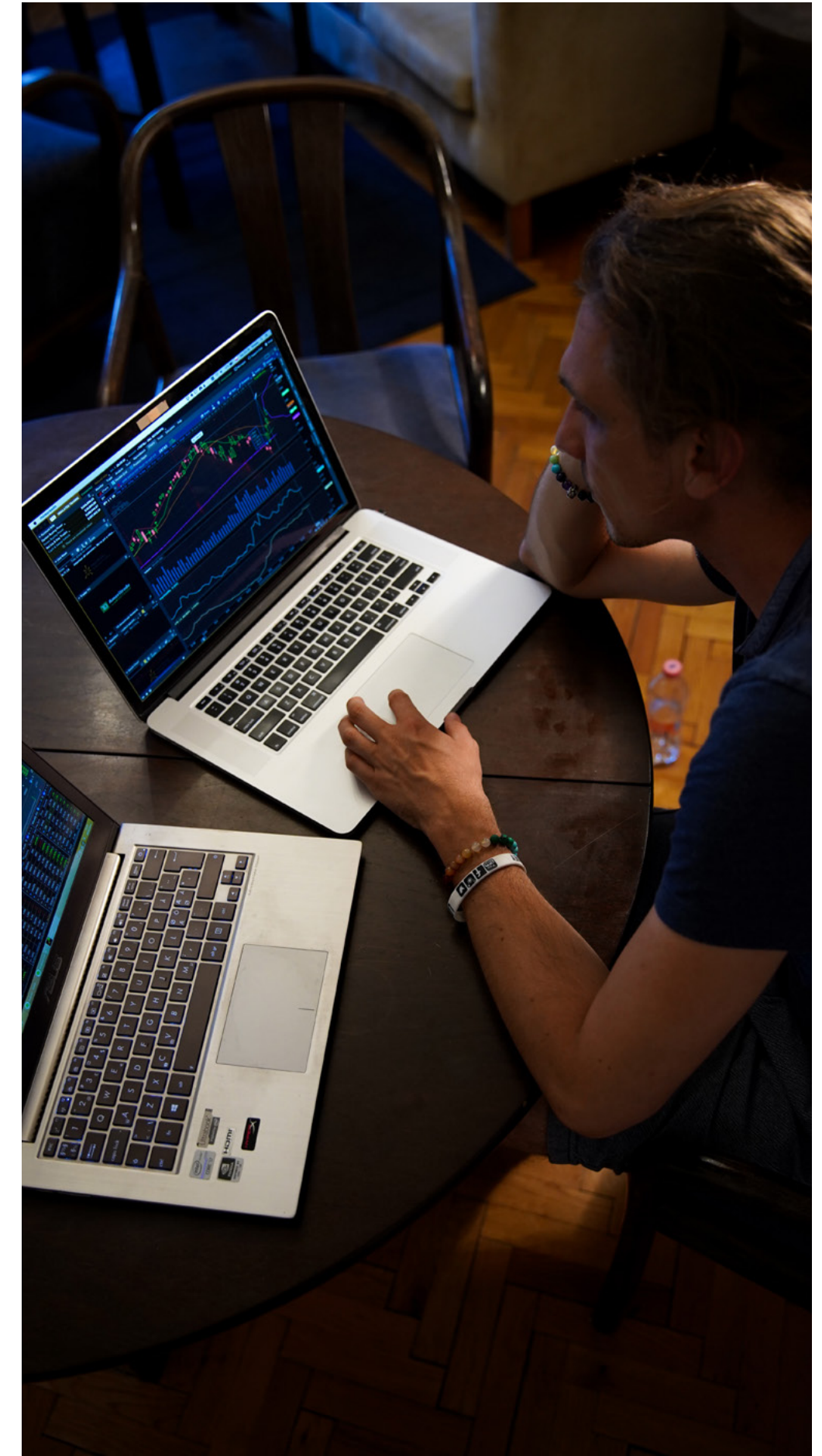
# Create a psychologically safe workplace

In the early 2000s, construction was completed on two massive offshore oil platforms. One platform – Shell's URSA installation, has since been recognized as one of the safest offshore platforms in the world. The other – BP's Deepwater Horizon, was rocked by an explosion in April 2010, claiming 11 lives and causing one of the largest marine oil spills in history. How did two platforms, constructed roughly at the same time and with workers from the same part of the world, have such different stories?

Oil rigs are considered some of the most dangerous workplaces on the planet. And these environments have a historical culture bias for "roughnecks" – tough individuals valued for their ability to get things done[8]. But this emphasis on results has a downside. Rig workers, who fear showing any sign of weakness to their peers, are more likely to avoid asking for help or admitting mistakes. And that reluctance to share can result in risks laying dormant, increasing the chance for harm later on.

Investigations into the Deepwater Horizon disaster found that the platform lacked "a culture that emphasizes and ensures safety".[9] Investigators found that nearly half of workers on the rig feared they'd be disciplined if they admitted causing equipment damage or forgot to complete an inspection.[10] Many workers openly expressed reluctance to raise issues since they didn't want to negatively impact the platform's safety record.

Shell URSA took a different approach. It held a series of workshops with crews in an attempt to create a culture on the platform where workers would not feel like they would be punished or humiliated for speaking up with questions, concerns, or most importantly, admitting when they made mistakes.[11] The management team at Shell URSA understood that "if you can't expose errors and learn from them [then] you can't be safe or effective".[12]

When workers feel they can be vulnerable with peers and managers – by admitting mistakes and talking openly about failures – organizations create conditions for real safety
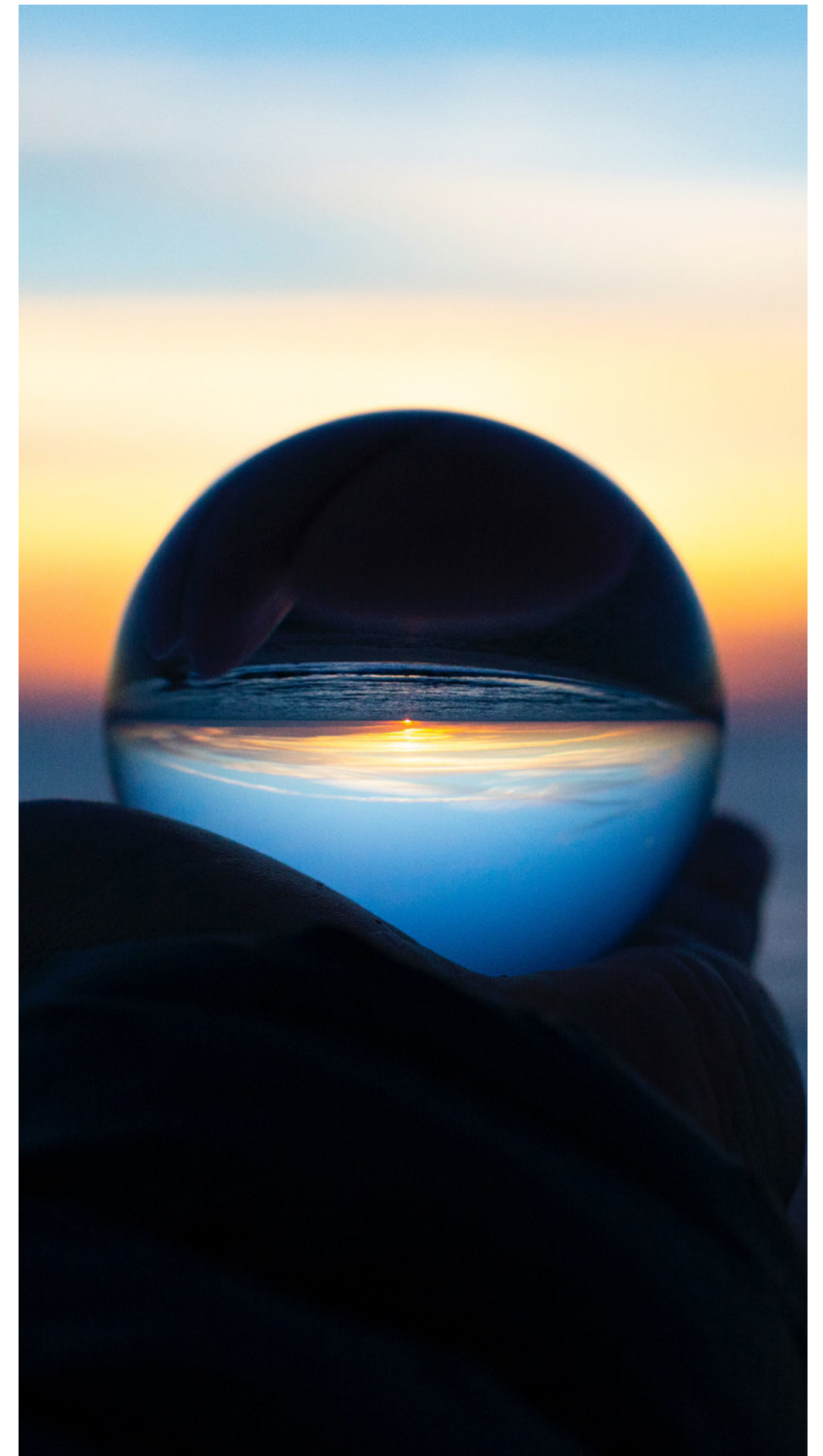
performance to grow.  Many workers are reluctant to report and discuss when things go wrong, especially when the company places so much emphasis on the importance of things going right (i.e. no accidents).  If business leaders emphasize that low injury rates are synonymous with safety success, or when they respond negatively when problems occur, they set a tone that it's not safe to admit failures. But openly discussing why things went differently from what we expected is necessary for organizational learning and continuous improvement.

**What you can do:** Your leaders must recognize the traps they can create by focusing too heavily on lagging indicators, like injury rates. Instead, your organization should look deeper into your results, and identify a few actionable metrics that influence your lagging indicators, and focus attention and effort there. These are leading indicators. EHS mobile apps are a great way to involve front-line workers in the reporting of leading indicators to help manage safety more proactively, and shift the organization away from viewing safety solely

as the absence of failure.

When problems do arise, your organization must create an environment where these issues can be openly discussed in a blameless manner.  Instead of focusing on who did what, or who failed to do what, instead re-frame the conversation toward how the failure occurred, and what controls are needed to either prevent the failure or allow that failure to occur 'safely'. Learning teams are one way to create an environment where your organization can learn from mistakes in an effective way.

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# Measure employee engagement

There's little point in trying to improve employee engagement (and by extension safety culture), if you're unable to measure if the things you're doing are contributing to the results you want.  In our companion piece,  "Improving Safety Culture: Where to Focus Your Attention for Maximum Impact", we talked about how safety culture can be divided into 3 interrelated aspects: a psychological aspect, a behavioral aspect and a situational aspect.

The psychological aspect encompasses the attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and values held across an organization, often termed "safety climate".  One of the simplest ways your organization can gauge the safety climate of your workplace is by conducting a safety perception survey.

**What you can do:** One of the benefits of leveraging a mobile-enabled EHS software application is the ease in which safety perception surveys can be created, distributed, collected and analyzed to guide safety strategy. Digital questionnaires

and checklists can be quickly created, and assigned to individuals at any level of your organization, which they can access in their preferred language on any mobile device. Questionnaires can include scoring to allow weighting of specific responses, while offering the ability for employees to add commentary or attach documents or photos to support their opinions.

Best of all, once questionnaires are submitted, results can be immediately aggregated, analyzed and visualized on dashboards to provide your employees with a real-time view of safety climate, while identifying the key areas of improvement. Perception survey results can even be incorporated into other metrics like Cority's Safety Culture Score to give your organization a point-in-time account of employee perceptions and what you need to do to keep your safety maturity moving in the right direction.

# Final Thoughts

There's no silver bullet to improve employee engagement in safety. Organizations that commit, however, to making small, incremental changes that increase the involvement of workers in safety discussions and empower them to manage safety on their own create the foundation for rapid improvement in safety culture, and by extension, safety results.

Technology has a role to play as well. As organizations become more global, it's getting more difficult for business leaders to reach employees at every corner of the organization and ensure their thoughts, ideas and opinions are equally considered in building and sustaining an effective safety program. EHS mobile apps are now offering companies a way to break down these barriers and ensure everyone's voice is heard.

Introducing CorityOne™, the most comprehensive, human-centered SaaS platform—designed by EHS experts for EHS experts and business leaders. Our global enterprise platform unites the full spectrum of powerful solutions to empower healthier, safer, smarter, and more sustainable outcomes that fulfill today's business imperative—creating a better enterprise for tomorrow.

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