

# A New Train of Thought – CIEHF Demonstrated Impact Award 2023

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## SUMMARY

The project commenced in 2015 initially to deliver Non-Technical Skills (NTS) to train drivers. Success evolved the project, and an Action Research methodology was employed from the boardroom to the classroom to create several Action Learning sets. Appreciative Enquiry, Learning Reviews (LR), a Compassionate Safety mindset and a suite of adult learning techniques were used to deliver sticky learning. The project has generated resilient business interdependence and the production of a Fair Culture Charter for all 4500 employees. This has resulted in a reduction in operational incidents from 277 (13/14), the year before PPWD became involved, to 150 (22/23) per year, and a decrease in the ratio of events to drivers from 0.43 to 0.14.

## KEYWORDS

Fair Culture, Compassionate Safety, Sticky Learning

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PPWD were selected by Southeastern Railway (SE) to deliver NTS courses to their train drivers as part of a larger incident reduction strategy. These courses were highly facilitated, adult learning-based workshops framed around the Rail Safety and Standards Board's (RSSB) seven categories and 26 skills. The facilitation centred on the information processing model, goal pursuit and priming; to raise the awareness in safety-critical staff to the limitations of amongst other things, their senses, memory and processing abilities. Such understanding being the foundation for more effective self and situation awareness, decisions, and safer actions. Throughout, wellbeing, and mindfulness training, mixed with the impacts of pressure, stress, sleep and fatigue, were overlaid to highlight the importance of individual responsibility toward self-management and the setting themselves up for success each day. The facilitators employed a broad and deep range of adult learning methods such as dialogue, case studies, shared experiences and practical exercises, to offer solutions to current problems and challenges, both cognitive, personal and social. Thus enabling delegates to explore human performance through theory, other's experiences and their own practices. Post-course critiques and 8-years of anecdotal feedback have demonstrated the learning to be sticky, effective and remain with delegates long after the workshops.

It became clear that a cultural evolution would be required to embed in a resilient way both the learning and organisational error orientation mindset. Therefore, PPWD took on an Action Research methodology, in a partnering approach. Through Appreciative Enquiry, it was important that whatever took place was undertaken 'with' as opposed to being 'done to' the SE teams. Linking theory to practice, and practice to theory, pragmatic solutions within a fair culture framework, ensured that solutions were emergent and iterative. This brought together siloed areas of the business to work together and establish empowerment and an interdependence. Compassionate safety, where humans were seen as an investment and problem solvers co-creating safety, as opposed to being problems to be solved; shifted relationships and established greater responsibility

for frontline staff to work with management to deliver the competing goals of safety, customer experience and an on-time railway.

A turning point in the programme was an offsite workshop with the Board. Key personnel across the business highlighted their challenges and how they each had a role within the overall safety strategy. The day's success released resources across the business as well as gaining personal board level understanding and support. The Head of Drivers, chairs, a monthly Operational Learning Review (OLR), which is an example of an Action Learning set. Here the mindset of senior managers was one of collaboration and compromise to achieve an overall goal of getting everyone home safe every day, as opposed to an atmosphere which was competitive, or avoidance focused. The use of statistics was shifted away from absolute numbers, towards trends, and to look at what goes right, the daily successes. The understanding of performance was shifted from a measurement of output to an input, an investment in people. The success of these initial courses resulted in their migration from train services into other business areas, both for management, the frontline and trainees. Ongoing course refinement and evolution led to the weaving of a cultural tapestry which included psychological safety, inclusivity, equality and diversity. The aim expanded to incorporate the evolution of a fairer culture within SE and to develop all SE employees to become safety leaders and take responsibility for generating a fair culture, free from harm. This has redefined Safety as going beyond the physical to also include psychological, emotional and spiritual duty of care.

The movement from investigations to Learning Reviews (LR) has established several Action Learning sets within safety, train, passenger and engineering services. The renaming of incidents to learning events, has helped to shift thinking away from rule breaches, causes and discipline; towards prevention of recurrence, and the identification of system factors involved in 'work-as-done' as opposed to 'work-as-imagined'. 'Who has gone wrong' has been replaced with 'what has gone wrong'. This has resulted in routine pre-adverse event, system stress-testing and group LRs. LRs now inform business plans, resource allocation and an investment in safety capacity to accommodate humans for being human, and to prevent recurrence.

A highlight of the project came in late 2022 with the launching of a Fair Culture Charter applicable to all 4500 SE employees. This is a set of binding principles to how employees will be managed post adverse event. The Charter has empowered managers and frontline staff to ensure that they are dealt with fairly and considered as but one factor amongst many within an adverse event. A recent LR held 21 recommendations, none of which were applicable to the Driver involved. New policies are interrogated by the Board to ensure that they meet the Fair Charter principles.

To date the 8-year project has resulted in a reduction in operational incidents from 277 (13/14), the year before PPWD became involved to 150 (22/23) per year, and a decrease in the ratio of events to drivers from 0.43 to 0.14. The shift towards a fairer culture has dramatically reduced disciplinary proceedings and the removal of individuals from across the business. The pre-adverse event LRs have encouraged frontline staff to proactively inform management of areas of concern. This had resulted in numerous recommendations shared across SE and more widely to the UK rail industry. Examples include empty coaching stock, platform staff hearing defence, electrical isolation and earthing for third rail metal structured stations. Of greater importance has been the creation of stronger relationships within the business, from the Board to the frontline and between business areas. We would have failed if SE had become dependent on PPWD, instead they have become dependent on each other. At times fragile, these relationships have a capacity to deal with every day business challenges and changes. They are focused on getting everyone home safe every day.