

The link between culture and risk



everyone
home safe
every day

Dear all,

This week, I want to talk about the clear connection there is between our culture and how we approach risks.

If you caught last week's episode of the [Green Signals Podcast](#), you'll have heard their discussion of Sir John Armitt, National Infrastructure Commission Chairman, and some of his comments at the recent Transport Select Committee. One of the things John said that resonated with me, was that **we don't need to learn more; we know what we should be doing, but too often, we just don't act on it.**

I've thought deeply about how this idea relates to our safety culture and the everyday behaviours that shape it. Here's my take on it.

Whenever we experience safety incidents or accidents, we usually look back at how things unfolded and often point out the warning signs we missed. **This raises an important question; how and why did we overlook them?**

I believe that —without the benefit of hindsight—we tend to spot red flags, but culturally, try to label them as yellow flags. In other words, we recognise them but choose to see the positives, hoping for the best, as we're conditioned to focus on good outcomes.

Most of our investigations show that red flags were indeed missed, often blaming factors like “last-minute changes” or “communication issues.” However, **I think these flags weren't so much ignored as they were underestimated;** we were more focused on the potential positives rather than the negatives.

This point is crucial. When I examine several incident reports from the past two years, I see situations where staff who might have raised concerns about issues leading to incidents, would likely have been viewed as overly cautious or negative. **I firmly believe this influenced their decision-making, and as a leader, I must take responsibility for this, as culture starts from the top.**



Rob Cairns,
Regional Managing Director



It's essential to acknowledge that our culture brings together individuals with varying views on how likely certain risks are and what impact they might have. Some people may see specific outcomes as undesirable, while others may find them unacceptable.

Therefore, I can't allow too much variation in my regional approach to safety. While there's no one-size-fits-all solution, there are steps we can take to improve our chances of spotting potential harm early on.

What are your thoughts on this? You can [reply directly to me](#) if you wish and I encourage you to discuss this in your teams.

Stay safe,
Rob