

Safety and culture – How can safety support a more innovative culture in rail

Mark Carne, Chief Executive

National Rail Convention
Warwickshire
20 June 2018



I've been asked to talk about how safety can support a more innovative culture in rail.

I would argue that safety and innovation have always been inextricably linked.

Certainly innovation has flowed from a *failure* to work safely.

Think of the Tay Bridge disaster 140 years ago – a tragedy that led to structural engineers realising that wind loading had to be incorporated in their design. Or the Ladbroke Grove disaster that accelerated the introduction of TPWS (Train Protection Warning System) .

In the oil industry safety standards have taken strides forward after incidents like the Texas City disaster or the Macondo oil spill. And I'm sure that Grenfell will usher in new safety standards for high rise buildings.

The challenge for all leaders is to create the culture that innovates and tackles challenges – BEFORE they create the disasters that force change upon you.

Today, in rail, through many of the innovations that you can see as you walk around Rail Live, from the survey trains to the drones and helicopters, we operate the safest railway in Europe and each year we find new ways to reduce further train accident risk. A 38% reduction in CP5 alone. Our workforce is also safer – with accident rates down by 40% in the last four years. Again, you only have to walk around outside to see the number of innovations that can help drive safety.

Today, there is no doubt that we operate a much safer railway and a much higher performing Railway than 20 years ago – which reaffirms my number one business philosophy that safety and performance go hand in hand.

Many of the safety innovations introduced have been 'top down'. Corporate change programmes that have impacted specific areas of weakness – and they have been very effective.

But events over the last few weeks have highlighted that in both safety and in performance – we are not doing well enough and that we must further improve.

And I will contend that as well as relying on the top down initiatives, we must also change our culture to make the improvements that are now needed.

Two weeks ago a young man lost his life in an industrial accident while working on a station in Scotland. This was the first industrial fatality in CP5. But it was also essentially a domestic accident – falling from a step ladder. A task everyone in this room has done at home.

Like many accidents this seems likely to have been the result of a combination of small, seemingly isolated failings that combined in a dreadful way.

Collectively we have to create a culture where every small failing is spotted and that our people recognise that it is their obligation to call these out and fix them.

I do not want to equate, in any way, the tragic death of a person with the timetable difficulties that have beset our railway in the last few weeks. But there is no doubt that our failure to deliver this change as intended has had a huge impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

And just as in safety, there is no one single root cause. This hugely damaging event resulted from many small, seemingly isolated failures that combined in a way to prevent the industry delivering.

In both safety and in performance, there are cultural lessons for us all to learn - there are strong similarities and parallels.

If we are to address these small seemingly isolated failings we have to set for ourselves, demand of ourselves, higher standards.

But we also have to create an inclusive culture where everybody recognises their responsibility to improve the way things are done around them.

Now I would contend that if you want to innovate, to find ways to improve, you have to look at what you do differently.

Toyota showed years ago that the greatest forms of manufacturing innovation often came from the front line – they know how to improve what is done better than the people in the offices. And think of Team Sky's philosophy of incremental gains. All these tiny gains add up to a winning margin.

So as leaders we have to listen more carefully. We have to turn the hierarchical pyramid of power in our companies upside down and empower our people - the people who often know what can be done better – to call out the problems and to fix the issues.

But if thinking differently is so important to our culture of innovation – why do we accept that we all look pretty much the same?

Rooms full of white men.... Like me.

That is also why improving the diversity of our workforce in the railway is so vital to improving our safety and business performance.

Surely it doesn't matter whether you're male or female, black or white, what your sexual orientation is or what religion you believe in? All that should matter is that you are able to bring 100% of yourself to work every day.

We have clear evidence that teams with more than 20% women in them perform better, are safer and are more engaged. That is why we are attracting more women to join us – increasing the number of women by 32% in the last four years.

Diversity isn't just an issue of basic fairness – it is a huge opportunity to improve the performance of our businesses.

That is why diversity and inclusiveness is so central to the culture we are creating in Network Rail. That is why we aspire to gender equality in the recruitment of graduates and apprentices.

And I would like to throw down the gauntlet to my train operating colleagues; when will you achieve gender equality in your train driver recruitment? At present only 5% of drivers are women – that is simply unacceptable in a modern world.

Fundamental to a safe culture, to a high performing culture, is the value of care. We have to demonstrate and show, as leaders, that we really care about the safety of our workforce and about the impact that our performance can have on the lives of people, for whom the Railway is a vital part of their lives.

That is why we have worked so hard to ensure that by 2019 no trains will discharge their toilets onto the track. This practice is disgusting and degrading and doesn't represent the values of care that we have for our own frontline staff.

Treat people well, with respect and dignity, and they will respond. Don't just tell them you care – show them you care.

There are other ways we as railway people can show we care.

Our Small Talk Saves Lives programme is helping to enlist members of the public to help address the tragedy of people choosing to end their lives on the railway. And we have now trained over 15,000 railway people in suicide awareness. Together these initiatives, which all show a culture that cares, have reduced by 16% the number of suicides.

This is an example of the industry collaborating together.

Another is our Trespass Improvement Programme.

Tragic events earlier this week highlight the need for us to collaborate and tackle the increasing risk associated with trespass. We don't just have to make it more difficult to access the railway, we have to go into schools and local communities and educate people about the risks of trespass.

But cultures can also be changed by hard processes – I don't underestimate the power of these. Let me give you one example.

We have now installed vehicle safety warning systems on all 8000 Network Rail vehicles. It sounds an alarm when you drive over the speed limit, and advises your supervisor if you persist in driving outside the legal limit.

Safe behaviour is a requirement of working for Network Rail.

In one year since its introduction, we have seen a 75% reduction in vehicle accidents – helping to keep our people safe as well as other road users.

We are saving £1.5 million a year in repair bills. And our fuel bill is lower by £60k per month.

Safety and performance going hand in hand. It's a no brainer.

But there is another lesson for us in this example.

Vehicle safety warning systems have been installed in road fleets in other industries for 15 years, at least. Our slow adoption is exposing our people to unnecessary risk and harming our business performance. We must be faster at looking outside our industry and at adopting good practices from elsewhere.

So in conclusion, I believe that we still have a long way to go to improve both safety and business performance.

We have to focus on the small, seemingly isolated failings - and that means engaging our workforce to spot these failings and to correct them themselves.

Care for your workforce, treat them with respect and dignity, and they will achieve extraordinary things.

To find better more innovative ways of working we must embrace diversity as a source of strength – not political correctness. And we must do it fast and with renewed determination.

The railway is a system and we must work together – on both safety and performance initiatives. We must look outside our own industry and adopt more quickly the best practices that exist elsewhere.

As an industry we have much to be proud of. But as ambitious people, achievement should just make us set new standards.

We owe it to the thousands of amazing people who work in our industry - and to the millions of people who rely on us every day, to get them to work, or to get them home to their loved ones.

Thank you

**Note: this a transcript, so language reflects the speech as delivered.*