Creating a great safety culture requires evolution not a revolution argues Andrew Sharman. Here he outlines four important steps to achieve this.

I suggest that there are four key elements that we must focus our attention on – we must encourage people to get involved; engage them fully; enable them to work in safety; and empower them to take action.

**Encourage**

Think about your own choices in life. Why do you do the things you do? I’ll hazard a guess that there is almost always something that motivates you to take certain action. Perhaps you’ve learned a new language, taken up a new sport or hobby, stopped smoking, or visited a country or city you’d never dreamed of going to before. What prompted you to do this? Perhaps there was some specific encouragement from someone or something that provided the initial motivation to act. In the workplace it goes the same way – without encouragement, people simply won’t do certain things. Gentle encouragement is effective in focusing attention on what’s required and getting folks ready to move in the right direction.

**Engage**

We cannot do safety to people; the route to success is to engage people and work with them to identify challenges, solutions and approaches. It continues to amaze me how many organisations invest huge amounts of time, money and resources developing very sophisticated safety improvement programmes, campaigns and tools almost in secret in the health and safety department only to be met with a lack of take-up by their workers. Critically consider the way that your organisation approaches safety – is it to or with the people?

**Enable**

Once we have gained the attention of our audience, encouraged them to get involved and then gained their commitment to engage with us we need to equip them with the skills, knowledge and tools to enable them to work in safety. Enabling people isn’t about telling them what to do; it’s about building the competence and confidence to allow them to understand how to do it for themselves.

**Empower**

We learn something from everything we do, and we use these experiential learnings as we face the next challenge or action that crosses our path. Where we find things that go well, or bring us positive results, we tend to repeat the successful actions. Generating the space and security to allow people to practise what we’ve asked of them is crucial.

Change is the new norm. Whether we like it or not, as human beings we choose to evolve or revolve every day. As Charles Darwin pointed out back in the mid 19th century: “It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent... It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.”

There is a far stronger correlation between worker involvement in safety and incidence rates than there is between compliance and incidence rates. On our journey towards safety excellence we must move beyond compliance being the goal and instead find ways to encourage interaction and facilitate empowerment. Creating a great safety culture requires evolution not a revolution.