SELF-ASSESSMENT · SAFETY SENSE INC.

Safety Culture Diagnostic Checklist

A self-check built on the Cognitive Reliability Model™ (CRM™). Five pillars, thirty statements, a scoring grid, a guide to reading your results and a one-page action plan.

> Find where your safety system is breaking down, before the next incident shows you.

THE FIVE PILLARS, AND THE SENTENCE EACH ONE LEAVES BEHIND

1	**Neurological Baseline**	*"He seemed fine. Then it happened."*
2	**Threat Appraisal Architecture**	*"They knew the hazard was there."*
3	**Decision-Making Under Pressure**	*"They rushed it."*
4	**Social Reliability Systems**	*"Nobody said anything."*
5	**Communication Fidelity**	*"I thought they knew."*

Janel Penaflor
Safety Sense Inc. · The Safety Disruptor™

For anyone with safety on their mind, from a five-person shop to a Fortune 500 company. All frameworks proprietary to Safety Sense Inc. · Psychology Before Procedures™ · People Before Paperwork™ · safetysenseinc.com

BEFORE YOU START

Where a safety system breaks first

Here's what I usually find when I walk in after something goes wrong. The procedure is missing, or seven years old, or nobody's read it. Training is whatever the last person showed the new person. And somewhere in the weeks before, someone went quiet, a crew started rushing, a near-miss got told as a funny story, and nobody had a way to see any of it as a warning.

This checklist helps you see it. It's built on the Cognitive Reliability Model™ (CRM™), the framework that ties all of our tools together. The idea is simple: a safety system is only as reliable as the people running it, and that rests on five pillars. When a pillar starts to slip, there's a sentence you tend to hear afterward. You'll find it at the top of each pillar.

What this is, and what it isn't

This is a self-reflection tool, not a scientifically tested survey. It can't predict an incident. What it can do is show you where to look first, and give your leaders and your crews the same words to talk about it. Treat the scores as the start of a conversation, never as a grade on a person or a team.

How to score each statement

Read each statement and ask whether it's true on your site, for the people doing the riskiest work. Score what you've actually seen and could back up with an example. Count what the policy says only if the policy reflects what actually happened.

0	**Never true**	You can't think of a time this happened. Or the opposite happens, and nobody sees a problem.
1	**Occasionally true**	It happens when a certain supervisor is around, or right after an incident, then fades.
2	**Often true**	It's the normal way of working, with a few exceptions you can name, usually when things get busy.
3	**Consistently true**	It holds with new people, with contractors, when the boss is away and on the day the job is running late. You could show a visitor.

How to run it well

- **Run it twice, separately.** Once with the leadership team, once with a frontline crew. Then put the two sets of scores side by side on page 5. A gap of four or more points on any pillar tells you something on its own. It usually means the message isn't getting through (Pillar 5).
- **Use real examples.** If you can't think of one, the honest score is 0 or 1. An honest low score helps you far more than a comfortable middle one.
- **Give it forty minutes and a quiet room.** Spend your time on the statements people disagree on. That's usually where the useful stuff is.
- **Score it again in ninety days.** The first score tells you where to start. The second tells you whether what you did worked.

> **ABOUT THE TOOLS NAMED IN HERE**
>
> You don't need to know any of our tools to fill this out. Page 6 explains which ones to start with and what each one does. PERSONA™ is a lens for understanding people, never a label, and never used to rank, hire or discipline anyone.

1 PILLAR 1 · HOW PEOPLE ARE REALLY DOING

Neurological Baseline

What you hear afterward: "He seemed fine. Then it happened."

Warning signs: people who seem tense, jumpy or checked out; more call-outs; short fuses whenever safety comes up.

0 NEVER · 1 OCCASIONALLY · 2 OFTEN · 3 CONSISTENTLY

		0	1	2	3
1.1	Supervisors know each person's normal (pace, talk, mood, humor) well enough to notice when it changes.	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.2	When someone goes quiet, flat or short-tempered, someone who knows them checks in that same day, before giving them high-risk work.	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.3	Unplanned absences, overtime and call-outs are tracked by team and treated as a safety signal, not just a scheduling problem.	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.4	Limits on work hours and rest are written down, and they still hold on the day a big job is running late.	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.5	Supervisors check how they're doing before a tough safety conversation, and know at least one way to calm themselves first.	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.6	A worker can say "I'm not right today" before a high-risk task and be moved to other work without being punished, teased or written up.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Pillar 1 subtotal _____ **/ 18**

2 PILLAR 2 · HOW PEOPLE SIZE UP DANGER

Threat Appraisal Architecture

What you hear afterward: "They knew the hazard was there."

Warning signs: big risks shrugged off and small ones blown up; near-miss reports that swing up and down; early warning signs nobody picks up on.

0 NEVER · 1 OCCASIONALLY · 2 OFTEN · 3 CONSISTENTLY

		0	1	2	3
2.1	The hazards most likely to seriously hurt someone here (stored energy, falls, line of fire, vehicles, chemicals, whatever applies) are named in plain words, and everyone can name them.	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.2	Hazards people call "normal for here" get a fresh look on a regular schedule, even when nothing has gone wrong.	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.3	Near-miss reporting stays fairly steady. A sudden jump or a sudden silence gets talked through with the team that same week.	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.4	Supervisors know the early warning signs (changes in how people talk, move and act weeks before something serious) and have real examples from here.	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.5	When a small issue gets a huge reaction and a serious hazard gets none, someone notices and says so out loud.	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.6	Risk assessments are written with the people who do the work, and updated when the job changes, even halfway through.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Pillar 2 subtotal _____ **/ 18**

3 PILLAR 3 · WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TIME GETS TIGHT

Decision-Making Under Pressure

What you hear afterward: "They rushed it."

Warning signs: jobs squeezed into less time; rushing treated as normal; checks skipped; "good enough" calls piling up through the day.

0 NEVER · 1 OCCASIONALLY · 2 OFTEN · 3 CONSISTENTLY

		0	1	2	3
3.1	Someone has stopped a job for safety in the last year, and they were thanked where others could see it.	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.2	When the schedule slips, the work gets reordered. Safety checks (testing, lockout, a second set of eyes) are never what gets cut.	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.3	People have a clear rule for when to stop and re-plan, and can explain it in their own words.	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.4	Time pressure is talked about before the job as a hazard of its own, right next to the physical hazards.	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.5	Supervisors get credit for stopping and re-planning safely, just as visibly as for catching up on production.	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.6	Decisions made at the end of the day or shift, when people are tired and want to finish, get a second look before work starts again.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Pillar 3 subtotal _____ **/ 18**

4 PILLAR 4 · WHETHER PEOPLE SPEAK UP

Social Reliability Systems

What you hear afterward: "Nobody said anything."

Warning signs: nobody questions the boss; silent safety meetings; one person's stress spreading through the team; everyone agreeing a risk is fine.

0 NEVER · 1 OCCASIONALLY · 2 OFTEN · 3 CONSISTENTLY

		0	1	2	3
4.1	In safety meetings the newest and quietest people speak up, and they can see what was done about it.	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.2	In the last month, a newer worker has pointed out a hazard to someone more senior, and it went well for them.	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.3	After a near-miss, leaders ask "what did we get wrong?" and the first answer is never a person's name.	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.4	Coworkers talk to each other about safety at least as often as supervisors correct people, and you could point to an example from this week.	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.5	When one person's stress is setting the mood for the whole team, someone steps in early and privately.	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.6	Contractors and new hires learn how speaking up works here, not just the procedures, in their first week.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Pillar 4 subtotal _____ **/ 18**

5

PILLAR 5 · WHETHER THE MESSAGE GETS THROUGH

Communication Fidelity

What you hear afterward: "I thought they knew."

Warning signs: safety talks that don't land; paperwork signed but not read; reports that go nowhere; information lost from one shift, day or person to the next.

0 NEVER · 1 OCCASIONALLY · 2 OFTEN · 3 CONSISTENTLY

5.1	Safety talks are checked for understanding by asking the team questions back, not just by collecting signatures.	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3
5.2	Before anyone signs off on a job plan, checklist or training record, the people doing the work have read it and agree it matches the real job.	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3
5.3	Information is passed on the same way every time, from shift to shift, day to day or person to person, and always covers what's unfinished and what's uncertain.	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3
5.4	Every safety observation gets a response the person who reported it can see, within a time frame people know.	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3
5.5	When the pressure is on, supervisors slow down, lower their voice and pause on purpose, and know the difference between being heard and being understood.	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3
5.6	When information crosses a handoff (shift to shift, office to floor, employee to contractor), someone confirms it landed. Nobody assumes.	☐ 0	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3

Pillar 5 subtotal _____ **/ 18**

Your scoring grid

Copy each subtotal here. If you ran it twice, enter both scores and the difference (gap). Rank the pillars from lowest (1) to highest (5), then turn to page 6.

PILLAR	LEADERSHIP	FRONTLINE	GAP	RANK	START WITH
1 Neurological Baseline *"He seemed fine."*					Vagal Safety Ladder™, PERSONA™
2 Threat Appraisal Architecture *"They knew the hazard was there."*					PERSONA SIF™, The Backpack™
3 Decision-Making Under Pressure *"They rushed it."*					Quantum Safety™, ThresholdIQ™, PERSONA™
4 Social Reliability Systems *"Nobody said anything."*					PRISM™, BEACON™
5 Communication Fidelity *"I thought they knew."*					VOICE™, NISOS™
Total (out of 90)					

Reading your results

The total matters less than the shape. A site that scores 60 with one pillar at 4 is in more danger than a site that scores 50 with every pillar at 10, because the weakest pillar is where the next incident gets through. Check each pillar against these four bands first.

Reliable
15 TO 18
It's holding. Keep an eye on it. This pillar can carry the others while you work on them.

Degrading
10 TO 14
Warning signs are showing up but haven't piled up yet. This is Window 1 (days to weeks): catch it early. Act in the next few months.

Degraded
5 TO 9
Warning signs are stacking up. This is Window 2 (hours to days): step in now. Start this pillar's tools this month.

Critical
0 TO 4
This pillar is basically missing for the people involved. Treat it as Window 3 (minutes to hours). Act this week, and bring in help if you need it.

The protocol, step by step

1. **Score, then rank.** Use the grid on page 5. Your lowest pillar is where you start, whatever the total says. If two tie, start with the one whose sentence you've heard on your site most recently.
2. **Read the gap.** If leaders and frontline differ by four or more on any pillar, write it down as a Pillar 5 problem, even if Pillar 5 scored well. The two groups are describing different workplaces, and only one of them is real.
3. **Find the sentence.** Without showing them the scores, ask your supervisors which of the five sentences they'd expect to hear after the next incident. Their answer double-checks your lowest pillar.
4. **Start with that pillar's tools.** Use the guide below. Don't try to launch everything. One pillar, two tools, ninety days.
5. **Pick a game plan** for your situation (page 7), and line up the rest of the work behind it.
6. **Score it again in ninety days** with the same two groups. Look for your lowest pillar to move and the gap to close. If neither moved, the real problem is somewhere earlier than where you were looking. That's normal. Adjust and go again.

If your lowest pillar is…

1 Neurological Baseline
Vagal Safety Ladder™ then PERSONA™. Teach supervisors to spot the three stress states (calm, fight-or-flight, shut down) and to settle themselves first. Then use PERSONA™ to learn each person's normal, so changes stand out.

2 Threat Appraisal Architecture
PERSONA SIF™ then The Backpack™. Learn the early warning signs for serious injuries and how they build in five stages. Then use The Backpack™ to look at the old beliefs and experiences that shape what people treat as dangerous.

3 Decision-Making Under Pressure
Quantum Safety™ with ThresholdIQ™, then PERSONA™. Give people a shared "this is where we stop" line and the words to call it. ThresholdIQ™ shows where each person sits on risk tolerance, as a conversation starter, never a ranking.

4 Social Reliability Systems
PRISM™ then BEACON™. Shape safety messages so they land as helpful information, not a threat, and let coworkers carry them, not just the boss. Then teach leaders the six-step BEACON™ coaching conversation.

5 Communication Fidelity
VOICE™ then NISOS™. Practice pace, pauses, volume and tone for the moments that matter. Then build the O.B.S.E.R.V.E. steps into your observations, so what people see gets checked before anyone relies on it.

Two or more pillars Critical
Slow down and pick one. When several pillars are at 0 to 4, order matters more than speed. Steady the lowest one first, then add the next. Nobody fixes everything at once.

ACTION PLAN · ONE PILLAR, NINETY DAYS

Your ninety-day action plan

Fill this in with the people who scored the checklist. Keep it to one pillar and three actions. A plan with twelve items is a wish list, and your people can tell the difference.

SITE / CREW	DATE SCORED	RE-SCORE DATE (90 DAYS)

Lowest pillar	*Number and name. Leadership score / frontline score / gap.*
The sentence we're trying never to hear	*Write the pillar's warning sentence in your own words, the way it would sound here.*
What we have actually seen	*Specific, observable, dated. Who noticed it and what happened next.*
Tools we will start with	*From page 6. Two at most. Who will learn them, and by when.*
Intervention window we're in	*Window 1 (days to weeks), Window 2 (hours to days) or Window 3 (minutes to hours). Say why.*

ACTION	WHAT WE WILL DO	WHO OWNS IT	BY WHEN	HOW WE WILL KNOW
Action 1				
Action 2				
Action 3				

The question we will ask on Monday	*One question a supervisor can ask a worker this week that would surface the signal early. Example for Pillar 1: "What's the biggest risk you see right now?"*
What we will stop doing	*Something that's making it worse. Often a metric, a meeting or a habit of blaming people.*
Re-score result	*Leave blank until day 90. Lowest pillar score then: _____ / 18. Gap then: _____.*

KEEP IT HONEST

If a frontline worker can't see an action within thirty days, it isn't an action yet. Rewrite it until someone on the floor would notice it without being told.

Game plans, for the "Tools" row above

Pick the one that matches your situation, start with the first two tools, and line the rest up behind them.

SIF prevention	PERSONA™ → PERSONA SIF™ → Vagal Safety Ladder™ → NISOS™
Culture rebuild	PRISM™ → Quantum Safety™ → BEACON™ → VOICE™
Post-incident	PERSONA™ → The Backpack™ → Vagal Safety Ladder™ → PERSONA SIF™
New site baseline	CRM™ audit → PERSONA™ → NISOS™ → PRISM™

NEXT STEPS

Where to go from here

You now know which pillar to start with. That's the hard part. No system is perfect, and every one has room to grow, including the people running it. What comes next is picking your pace and learning as you go.

Walk the site with the one-page checklist

"7 Warning Signs You're About to Have a Fatality" is the field companion to this document. It's free at safetysenseinc.com/resources, along with the free PERSONA™ assessment, ThresholdIQ™ and the PERSONA SIF™ Precursor Analyzer.

Learn the frameworks at HAVEN University™

The frameworks named on page 6 are taught and certified through HAVEN University™, from the PERSONA Certified Practitioner (PCP) to the NISOS™ Certified Observer (NCO) and the leadership track (LPI). Details at safetysenseinc.com/haven-university.

Use the free guides

The 12 Safety PERSONAs, the Psychology Before Procedures field guide, the SIF Precursor Checklist and The Invisible Gorilla at Work all go deeper on the tools named here. Free at safetysenseinc.com/resources.

Read the thinking behind it

The Quantum Mind of Safety™ series lays out the theory behind the five pillars and the frameworks, with real-world examples. Find the books at safetysenseinc.com/book.

> *The warning signs are almost always there, in the people, long before the paperwork catches them. Let's find them before they find your workers.*

Where this sits in the wider literature

The five pillars come from the field, from what kept showing up after things went wrong. They also stand on published work that's worth your time. Vaughan's study of the Challenger launch decision gave us the phrase "normalization of deviance" for the way an organization comes to accept what it once called unacceptable [1]. Hollnagel's distinction between work-as-imagined and work-as-done explains why a perfect procedure can describe a job nobody actually performs [2]. Edmondson's research on psychological safety found that teams whose members feel safe to speak up and admit error show more learning behavior [3]. Reason's model of organizational accidents reminds us that the frontline act is the last link in a chain the organization built [4]. Porges's polyvagal theory, widely used and still debated, is the basis of the Vagal Safety Ladder™ named under Pillar 1 [5]. OSHA's Recommended Practices for Safety and Health Programs list management leadership and worker participation among the core elements of an effective program, which is the ground Pillar 4 stands on [6].

References and further reading

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