

CASE STUDY

# Why Factories Benefit from a Culture of Safety





At Nirapon, we believe factories benefit when they shift from a focus on safety compliance to developing and embracing a holistic culture of safety.

We know cultivating and sustaining a safety culture is a significant commitment for factories, and we are constantly working to better understand the challenges and barriers they face – as well as the benefits they gain – when adopting a culture of safety.

#### What is a culture of workplace safety?

A factory with a culture of safety positively, proactively prioritizes safety by managing hazards, controlling risks, maintaining a safe work environment, and empowering workers to play a key role in keeping their workplace safe. A true culture of safety embraces the individual actions and collective mindset, values, and behaviors that make safety a shared responsibility.

To learn more about a factory's journey to a culture of safety, we interviewed management at five factories that supply to Nirapon members. These factories – referred to as Factory A through E in the narrative – are participants in the Nirapon Safety Management Program, working with our technical support team to create customized safety management systems and cultivate authentic safety cultures across their workplaces.

Interviewees were asked about their experiences developing and implementing a culture of safety at their factories and encouraged to share challenges, outcomes, and lessons learned. The common themes and unique insights that emerged from these interviews are helping us share real-world examples of the benefits a safety culture brings and better address the barriers through our programming.



## Factory Profiles

### Factory A

Started operations: **2008**  
# of Bangladesh factories: **8**  
# of employees: **100**  
Produces: **apparel**

### Factory B

Started operations: **1994**  
# of Bangladesh factories: **18**  
# of employees: **1,400**  
Produces: **apparel, personal protective equipment (PPE)**

### Factory C

Started operations: **1985**  
# of Bangladesh factories: **4**  
# of employees: **5,500**  
Produces: **apparel**

### Factory D

Started operations: **2010**  
# of Bangladesh factories: **3**  
# of employees: **1,000**  
Produces: **tents, shelters**

### Factory E

Started operations: **1995**  
# of Bangladesh factories: **5**  
# of employees: **3,700**  
Produces: **apparel**



Factories aligned on most key benefits of establishing a safety culture.

The process is slow – and expensive – but worth the investment.

Three of the five factories agreed that concerns about increased costs and lost production time were initial barriers to adopting a culture of safety. They also agreed these investments brought benefits in the long term.

**Factory D** acknowledged that they initially perceived implementing safety measures as a challenge and a cost burden. Over time, however, they realized the importance of fostering a safety mindset and culture among employees – and they have seen cost savings through reduced maintenance expenses and minimized production disruptions.

**For Factory B**, the investment to develop and implement a safety management system has been significant – yet they also believe the benefits outweigh the costs. They acknowledge that incidents and accidents could incur much higher costs, through loss

of business, damage to brand reputation, and inability to operate.

**Factory C** views implementing safety measures as an investment in their business rather than a cost. They believe it can lead to long-term benefits – such as identifying potential issues early, reducing and managing maintenance costs, planning budgets, and increasing productivity – and prevent potential disasters.



## A culture shift requires a mindset shift – and education is key to success.

All the factories agree shifting minds from a focus on regulatory compliance to a holistic culture of workplace safety has been a huge learning process for owners, managers, and workers, alike. One of the biggest challenges these factories faced is helping workers think differently about their role in factory safety and overcoming worker resistance to change. They agree that educating and engaging their workforce in understanding, managing, and prioritizing safety continues to be essential.



### Actions for Implementing a Safety Culture

Factory C is developing and sustaining their safety culture through training and team activities, and by incorporating safety messages into regular meetings and events. They strive to ensure that employees truly understand and practice the principles of a safety culture, rather than just going through the motions.

**Factory B** was proud to share that safety has become ingrained in their culture, from top management down to workers. They believe training is a critical part of that; workers are trained to identify and report safety issues (using the worker helpline, when necessary) and understand evacuation procedures.

**Factory C** also emphasized the importance of changing mindsets at the worker and manager levels as they shifted from a sole focus on structural safety to one that includes broader safety management and training. They highlighted the continued importance of communication, education, and supervision to make sure safety measures are properly implemented and maintained, and they believe

their safety culture helps workers understand they are part of the safety process, which they see as a key benefit.

At **Factory D**, there was initial resistance to transitioning from a focus on structural compliance to cultivating a safety mindset, as workers perceived safety measures as solely benefiting the company rather than themselves. However, through continuous training, motivation, and engagement, workers now recognize the personal benefits of a safe workplace and have embraced safety practices as part of their daily routine and culture. Workers now understand the importance of maintaining clear evacuation routes, following electrical safety protocols, and proactively identifying potential hazards – which Factory D feels has not only improved workplace safety but also contributed to worker retention, as employees feel more comfortable and secure in a safe working environment.

Shifting employee mindsets to a culture where safety practices are understood and followed continues to be a challenge at **Factory A** – particularly as employees turn over and safety standards change. However, ownership acknowledges that physical safety measures aren't enough; they believe training is crucial to helping change mindsets and developing a true culture of factory safety.

## A culture of safety increases productivity.

Three of the factory interviewees have seen productivity increase since they started to cultivate a culture of safety, and they cite everything from proactive maintenance to worker retention and peace of mind as contributing factors.

**Factory A's** ownership has noticed that instilling a culture of safety – which includes preventative maintenance across equipment and electrical systems – has reduced repair costs and downtime in the long-run, increasing productivity.

**Factory B** believes implementing a culture of safety has positively impacted productivity by providing a well-maintained work environment, reducing workplace injuries and accidents, and giving workers peace of mind. They have also seen improved worker retention.

In addition to improved productivity and a safer working environment, **Factory C** mentioned reduced waste as a benefit of incorporating safety measures into their factory.

## Buyers may (or may not) choose you or pay you more because of your safety culture.

When it came to the competitive advantage of a workplace culture of safety, our factory participants had different perspectives and experiences. While some believe their focus on safety builds customer loyalty, others aren't seeing a benefit from buyers.

**Factory E** feels that, despite their efforts, they do not receive higher orders, better pricing, or other incentives from buyers as a result of their investment in developing a robust safety culture.

**Factory A** thinks their new safety practices provide some competitive advantage, but it is relatively minor. For this factory, the bigger benefit is that the safety culture aligns with the factory owner's personal philosophy of valuing human life over business interests.

**Factory B** believes that maintaining safety standards helps them secure orders from brands that evaluate safety compliance.



**Factory C** is confident that their culture sets them apart from the competition. They discussed how having a strong safety culture and certifications helps build customer confidence and trust, which can lead to a competitive advantage over other factories. They believe their customers appreciate the efforts made to ensure safety and are more likely to continue long-term business relationships with companies that prioritize safety.



# Takeaways

## For Factory Partners

A culture of workplace safety delivers real business benefits, including:

- Reduced maintenance, incidents, and accidents
- Improved worker engagement, accountability, retention, and peace of mind
- Increased productivity and minimized production disruptions

It's important to communicate your commitment to a safe workplace – and the benefits you see – to current and potential buyers, as these attributes truly set your business apart and help them meet their own sustainable supply chain goals.

## For Nirapon Members

### *Recognition is key*

Developing and sustaining a culture of workplace safety is a big lift for factories. In order to champion this effort, we need to acknowledge and celebrate the investment they are making. Recognition can motivate factories, build their trust in the process, and strengthen your relationship with them.

Show up as partners for your factories by championing their efforts to build a culture of safety.

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