

THE BRITANNIA GROUP WHITE PAPER  
BUILDING CAPACITY FOR **SAFETY**  
IN THE ORGANISATION



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## IN THIS GUIDE OUR FOCUS SHIFTS TO THE ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVES THAT WEAVE INTO THE FABRIC OF DECISION-MAKING.

We will explore the intricate interplay of power dynamics, pressures, and group interactions within the realm of organisational culture. By understanding these larger contextual factors, we will gain valuable insights into how they shape individual and collective decision-making processes.

Just like a ship, an organisation has its own dynamics that steer the choices people make. This guide will take you through the elements that affect critical decision-making. You'll learn about the roles of leadership, teamwork, and company culture in shaping a safe working environment. This isn't just for the bosses, but for everyone who cares about safety.

We will employ the IGLO model to dissect how individual actions, team dynamics, leadership, and the overarching organisational culture each play a role in decision-making during critical situations. Acting as the bedrock for effective choices, psychological safety creates an atmosphere where team members feel free to voice their thoughts, enhancing problem-solving capabilities. Various elements, including external pressures, mental fatigue, goal clashes, leadership approach, team interactions, and training levels, all add layers of complexity to decision-making in safety-sensitive scenarios.

## AN INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK FOR BROADER UNDERSTANDING OF INFLUENCERS ON DECISION-MAKING

In safety-critical situations, decision-making is a complex process influenced by various psychological mechanisms, biases and contextual factors.

Individual decision-making is impacted by numerous factors that can be analysed through the lenses of e.g. rational models, behavioural biases, naturalistic tendencies, the psychodynamic approach and prospect theory. However, to gain a comprehensive understanding of decision-making in these scenarios, we need to consider a broader context. Hence, we introduce the IGLO model—as a helpful and integrated framework that connects and builds upon the insights from these psychological theories.

The strength of the IGLO model lies in its integration of multiple perspectives.

The IGLO model offers an integrated framework that goes beyond individual psychology, taking into account the collective influence of group dynamics, leadership styles, and organisational culture.

The IGLO model considers the dynamics of the **INDIVIDUAL (I)**, **THE GROUP (G)**, **LEADERSHIP (L)** and **THE ORGANISATION (O)** in shaping decision-making processes. The IGLO model provides a holistic approach, illuminating how individuals are influenced by their individual factors as well as group dynamics, leadership and organisational structures when making critical choices.

The IGLO model posits that decision-making in safety-critical situations is not solely determined by individual rationality or cognitive biases but is influenced by a broader context. Let's briefly explore each component of the IGLO model:

### INDIVIDUAL (I)

This component focuses on the decision-maker as an individual and acknowledges that their psychological mechanisms, cognitive biases, emotions, and past experiences play a significant role in decision-making. Understanding the individual's personality traits, emotional intelligence, and coping strategies provides insights into their approach to risk and safety.

### GROUP (G)

Group dynamics have a profound impact on decision-making. Within a team or crew, individuals interact, communicate, and influence each other's judgments. The need for belonging, social norms, and power dynamics within the group can either enhance or hinder safety-related choices.

### LEADERSHIP (L)

Leadership plays a pivotal role within the IGLO model. An organisation's culture, leadership style, and values shape individual behaviour and choices. Effective leadership fosters a safety culture, sets clear roles, and establishes a climate of psychological safety, all of which influence decision-making.

### ORGANISATION (O)

The organisation's culture, values, and leadership significantly shape the decision-making context. Factors such as safety culture, clear roles and responsibilities, communication channels, and the prioritisation of safety impact how individuals perceive risks and make choices.



### UNDERSTANDING ORGANISATIONAL DYNAMICS

Organisational dynamics encompass a range of factors that impact how an organisation functions, including its structure, culture, hierarchy, and communication patterns. These elements play a pivotal role in shaping the context within which decisions are made. For example, a hierarchical organisation may influence how information is communicated up and down the chain of command, potentially affecting the accuracy and timeliness of critical information flow.

In any organisation, power isn't just a top-down concept; it flows through various layers and channels. These power dynamics can profoundly influence how decisions are made, including who gets to participate in the decision-making process.

Those who hold significant positions of power can shape the nature of discussions and outcomes. Their influence often sets the stage for other members, dictating how freely they can voice their own concerns and insights.

### THE RESPONSIBILITY THAT COMES WITH POWER

But power isn't just about influence; it's also about accountability. Those in authoritative positions must be responsible in how they use their power, ensuring that it serves the organisational objectives effectively. Equally crucial is the act of delegating responsibility where appropriate, empowering others to make informed decisions.

Recognising power imbalances within the organisation is key. Unchecked power can lead to a stifling atmosphere where only a select few opinions are heard, which can negatively impact the quality of decisions.

One way to mitigate the negative impacts of imbalanced power dynamics is by adopting a more distributive approach to power. Encourage participatory decision-making where every voice, regardless of rank, has an opportunity to be heard.

By addressing power dynamics head-on, we ensure a more inclusive and transparent decision-making process that serves the collective interests of the organisation.

### EXAMPLE

#### POWER DYNAMICS AND HIERARCHIES

*In the case example from guide 2 with a fire on board, officers waited for the captain to act and ended up assuming command. However, it was a very challenging situation and in the aftermath of the event the captain was furious and accused the officers of acting out of order. The example shows that even in very high-pressure emergencies power dynamics and hierarchies can sometimes inhibit or slow-down effective decision-making.*

In an organisation, various departments, teams, and individuals work in tandem to achieve common goals. However, misalignment of objectives or goal conflicts can create ripples that impact decision-making. For instance, if a department's goals prioritise productivity over safety, the decisions made within that department might not always align with the organisation's overall safety objectives. Understanding how objectives interact and influence choices is crucial for ensuring cohesive decision-making.

## WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY?

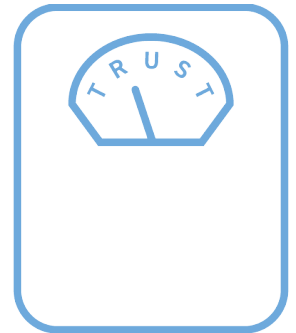
Psychological safety means feeling safe enough in a group or work environment to speak your mind, ask questions, or make mistakes without fearing negative consequences like ridicule or punishment. In a psychologically safe space, people feel comfortable being themselves and are more willing to contribute ideas. Psychological safety serves as the foundation for open and effective communication within an organisation. It acts as a compass, guiding team members to voice their thoughts, questions, and concerns without fear of judgement or backlash.

## THE ROLE OF TRUST

Trust is an essential component of psychological safety. In an atmosphere of trust, individuals are more likely to take the risk of speaking up, knowing that their contributions will be valued rather than ridiculed or ignored.

Alongside trust, a genuine interest in each other's perspectives promotes an open dialogue. This is critical for thorough decision-making, especially in safety-critical situations where multiple viewpoints can provide a fuller picture of potential risks and solutions.

Psychological safety enriches the decision-making process by enabling open and honest communication. In safety-critical situations, this freedom to speak and the feeling of being heard can make all the difference. Psychological safety facilitates the free flow of information, dissolving communication barriers. This contributes to a well-rounded decision-making process that is resilient to blind spots and biases.



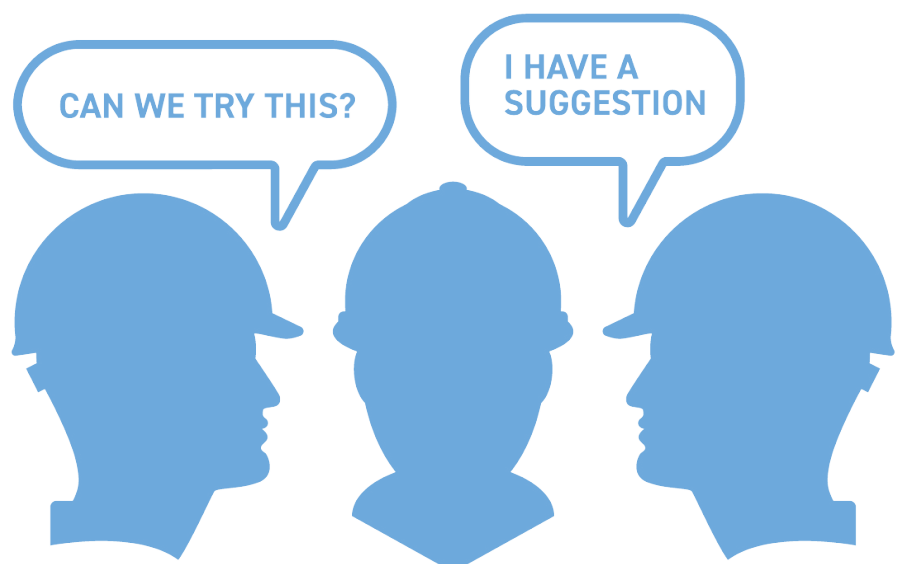
## FOSTERING ACCOUNTABILITY AND INCLUSIVITY

When people feel psychologically safe, they are more accountable for their actions and decisions. A psychologically safe environment also encourages inclusivity, recognising that diverse perspectives lead to better decision-making.

## EXAMPLE

### PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IN TEAM INTERACTIONS

*On a vessel, the chief engineer encourages a culture of psychological safety within the engineering team. During routine maintenance tasks, team members are empowered to voice any concerns or potential safety issues without fear of backlash. This open communication allows the team to identify and address potential hazards early, leading to improved safety practices and a more resilient work environment.*



## AFTER ESTABLISHING THE NECESSITY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY, LET'S DELVE DEEPER INTO HOW THIS FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENT INTERACTS WITH OTHER FACTORS, SUCH AS GROUP DYNAMICS AND BELONGING, TO SHAPE DECISION-MAKING IN AN ORGANISATION.

To help you navigate through these complexities, we can employ the IGLO model (which stands for Individual, Group, Leadership, and Organisation). These layers form a cohesive framework that enables us to see how psychological safety extends from individual actions to organisation-wide strategies.

### INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

#### COMBATTING THE FEAR OF SPEAKING UP

As highlighted earlier, the absence of psychological safety can lead to fear and silence, causing uninformed decisions with dire consequences. At the individual level, organisations can foster psychological safety by creating an environment where people feel valued and heard. It involves more than just encouraging people to speak up; it also means actively listening and showing genuine interest in what is being said.

### GROUP LEVEL

#### NAVIGATING GROUP DYNAMICS AND MECHANISMS OF BELONGING

At the group level, psychological safety helps to break down barriers that inhibit free flow of ideas. This leads us to examine the role of group dynamics and mechanisms of belonging.

Understanding the social structures and behavioural patterns within a group is crucial. Whether a group acts as a force multiplier for individual strengths or becomes an echo chamber of weaknesses depends on these dynamics.

#### THE NEED FOR BELONGING AND ITS IMPACT

Inclusion is more than just being part of a group; it's about feeling like you belong. We all have a deep desire to form relationships and be part of a community, and being left out can have harmful effects. In the maritime setting, the number of people you can connect with is limited. This emotional aspect influences decision-making, as individuals might lean towards conformity to feel accepted.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF GROUP DYNAMICS

In a maritime organisation, the sense of belonging and mutual support among crew members can sometimes lead to groupthink, which is detrimental to effective decision-making. Open discussions during safety briefings can break this cycle, provided psychological safety is established first.

### LEADERSHIP LEVEL

#### FOSTERING ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRUST

When it comes to leaders, their role isn't limited to directing; it also involves empowering. Leadership is crucial in setting the tone for psychological safety and ensuring that it's deeply embedded in the organisation's culture.

### ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

#### CREATING AN ECOSYSTEM FOR EFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

Finally, psychological safety must be institutionalised at an organisational level. This involves formal policies, systems, and protocols that encourage open communication and shared decision-making, enhancing the collective intelligence of the organisation.

## REFLECTION

### THE IGLO MODEL IN ACTION

#### CONSIDER THE IGLO MODEL AS YOU REFLECT ON YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES

Have you ever been in a situation where you wanted to share your own thoughts but ended up going along with the group instead?

What influenced your decision?

On the flip side, have there been times when you felt comfortable expressing your ideas because the environment felt psychologically safe?

What elements made you feel at ease in those instances?

Do you think there's more you can do to foster a positive culture on board?

In the next section, we'll delve into how power dynamics and hierarchies further complicate this intricate landscape, and what can be done to mitigate their influence on high-stakes decision-making.



## THE ROLE OF POWER DYNAMICS

In any organisation, power dynamics play a significant role in shaping decisions and interactions. This power can be official, coming from job titles or roles, or it can be informal, based on skills, personal connections, or even charisma. Grasping how power is distributed and exercised is key to understanding how it influences the choices an organisation makes. This potentially also has an impact in safety critical decisions.

## THE IMPACT OF HIERARCHIES ON DECISION-MAKING

Hierarchies outline who is in charge and who is accountable. Decisions usually move through these layers, with those at the top typically having the final say. While this can speed up decision-making, it can also lead to a culture where people feel pressured to go along with their superiors. This can stifle diverse opinions and critical thought, lowering the quality of the decisions made.

## THE PITFALLS OF HIERARCHICAL BIAS

This term refers to giving more weight to the views of those higher up in the organisation. When this happens, valuable input from lower-ranking employees might get overlooked. This can lead to decisions that lack different viewpoints, which could have resulted in better outcomes.

## BALANCING POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

Managing power dynamics means finding the right mix between honouring leadership and encouraging a range of opinions. Some organisations are moving towards a more level hierarchy where employees at various levels can have their say in decisions. This makes room for a wider range of ideas and experiences, leading to better decision-making.

## HOW TO ADDRESS POWER IMBALANCES

To lessen the harmful effects of power imbalances, organisations should focus on creating an inclusive environment. This means giving everyone, regardless of their job title, the chance to contribute. Leaders need to actively seek out a variety of viewpoints, sparking debates that can bring about better decisions.

## REFLECTION

### CONSIDERING POWER DYNAMICS IN DECISION-MAKING

Think back to a time when you've seen power dynamics at play in your organisation's decision-making. How did it affect communication, teamwork, and choices related to safety? Share your thoughts with your team to better understand the challenges tied to power structures.

Allowing employees to have a say in decisions, even those usually reserved for managers, can counter the downsides of power dynamics. When people feel empowered, they're more likely to be committed, share helpful insights, and help improve the organisation as a whole. Being open about why certain decisions are made is key to managing power dynamics effectively. This builds trust and makes it less likely that negative power dynamics will take root. By aiming to create a fair and inclusive environment where decisions are based on merit rather than just authority, organisations can benefit from the collective wisdom of their staff, leading to smarter, more effective decisions.

While leaders need to make sure everyone is involved, they also must assert their authority, make important decisions, and act promptly to avoid creating a sense of uncertainty among the crew. Finding the right balance between encouraging participation and making timely decisions is crucial.

## REFLECTION

### JUGGLING PRIORITIES

Think about times when you had to make a choice between efficiency and safety. How did you manage these situations? Were any compromises made that impacted safety? Discuss these experiences with your team to brainstorm better ways to align priorities without putting safety on the line.

## REFLECTION

### FEELING THE PRESSURE

Reflect on a recent situation where you felt the pressure to compromise on safety due to external factors like tight schedules. How did this affect your choices? Share your thoughts with your team to encourage open talks about managing these kinds of pressures.

## UNDERSTANDING THE FORCES AT PLAY

Organisations face a complex set of pressures that shape their choices. These can range from budget limits and regulatory requirements to performance goals and the need to keep a good public image. While these pressures are often critical to success, they can also create conflicts, especially when it comes to maintaining safety.

## STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE

The trick is to balance these different pressures without putting safety at risk. For example, the need to hit production targets might make some decision-makers think about skipping safety steps. It's essential to remember that these kinds of choices can bring serious risks, highlighting the fine line between different priorities and safety.

## COMPLACENCY RISKS

When the focus is too much on hitting targets, there can be a dangerous slip in attention to safety protocols. Missing the early warning signs or downplaying risks can have severe long-term consequences.

## LEADERSHIP'S CRUCIAL ROLE

The way leaders act sets the tone for the whole organisation. If safety is given top priority by the leadership, this sends a strong message to everyone. On the flip side, if other goals are seen as more important than safety, this can lead to a work culture where cutting corners becomes the norm.

## PROMOTING ETHICAL CHOICES

Aligning what the organisation says and does can help in making ethical decisions. Being open about the challenges of balancing different priorities and letting staff speak up about safety concerns without fearing backlash are key steps in building a good decision-making environment.

## MINIMISING PRESSURE IMPACT

To lessen the effects of organisational pressures, open communication, realistic target-setting, and a constant check on priorities are needed. Involving everyone in conversations about the pros and cons of different choices can help find a balance that keeps safety front and centre.

## THE DANGER OF ROUTINE SHORTCUTS

Continued pressure can lead to what's called the "normalisation of deviance," where unsafe practices become accepted over time. Spotting and dealing with these signs early on is crucial for maintaining a strong safety culture.

## FOSTERING ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESILIENCE

Leaders must make it clear that safety is not up for debate. Open discussions about the challenges brought by external pressures, and giving support to those who voice safety concerns, helps build a sense of responsibility. Building resilience by equipping staff with the skills to manage pressures while keeping safety in mind is also important.

In sum, balancing power dynamics, hierarchies, and external pressures is a complex task. Organisations that put both safety and success at the heart of their culture, engage their staff in decision-making, and promote open communication are more likely to make wise choices that protect both their people and their mission.

## THE POWER OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership hugely shapes a workplace culture and the choices that people make on the job. Good leaders put safety first and act in ways that show it. They get that what they do speaks louder than what they say.

Leaders are like walking billboards for what's important in an organisation. If they put safety first, then everyone else is more likely to do the same. But if they slack off on safety, that's a fast track to a workplace where safety takes a back seat.

When leaders show they mean business about safety, it resonates with everyone. Using safety gear, sticking to safety rules, and talking about safety shows that leaders aren't just all talk. Following through with actions makes their safety messages real.

What leaders do has a ripple effect on the whole team. When safety is a top priority for leaders, it becomes the norm for everyone. This creates an environment where people are more willing to speak up about safety issues.

Leadership is more than just getting the job done; it's about being the example others will follow. True safety leadership is rooted in being responsible, consistent, and deeply committed to everyone's well-being.

## JUGGLING DIFFERENT GOALS

Leaders often have to balance many things at once, like hitting financial goals while keeping things safe. In these situations, leaders should be clear about why they're making certain choices. This helps everyone understand the tough decisions that have to be made.

## THE HALO PROBLEM

Sometimes people think a leader is good at everything because they're good at one thing. This 'halo effect' can be risky because it might mean overlooking areas where the leader isn't strong, like safety. Leaders should be held accountable in all areas, not just the ones they excel in.

### EXAMPLE 1

#### THE HALO PROBLEM IN ACTION

*Captain Jacobs is known for their top-notch skills in navigating ships. But they also tend to overlook safety rules, thinking their skills make up for it. This can lead their crew into dangerous situations without them even knowing it.*

## PROMOTING OPEN CONVERSATIONS

Leaders should create an atmosphere where people feel free to talk about safety issues. This means making it clear that it's okay to speak up without the fear of getting into trouble. This openness helps to spot and fix potential safety problems more quickly.

### EXAMPLE 2

#### CREATING A SPEAK-UP CULTURE

*Sarah, who heads a maintenance team, regularly encourages their crew to talk openly about any safety concerns. Because of this, the team isn't afraid to report mistakes or hazards, helping to nip safety issues in the bud.*

## REFLECTION

### ENCOURAGING OPEN TALK

Think of a time when you felt at ease to speak out about a safety matter at work. What made you feel that way? How can you make this a regular thing in your workplace?

## BUILDING LEADERS WHO FOCUS ON SAFETY

Leaders are role models in every sense, and they should have the skills and attitude needed to make safety a priority. Training programmes can help leaders get better at promoting safety, managing conflict, and making hard decisions under pressure.

The organisation should consistently search for strong leadership qualities when hiring, promoting, and during everyday tasks, coupled with regular feedback to sustain high-quality leadership throughout the company. It's important to remember that leaders don't operate in isolation; they also function within the wider organisational framework.

### EXAMPLE 3

#### TRAINING FOR SAFETY LEADERSHIP

*One way of supporting leaders is to set up a special training programme for officers, including workshops on effective communication, conflict handling, and decision-making in stressful situations. This equips them with the skills to keep safety front and centre.*

## IN SITUATIONS WHERE EVERY SECOND COUNTS, DECISION-MAKING TAKES ON AN EVEN GREATER SIGNIFICANCE.

It's vital to have protocols and training in place to guide actions in emergency circumstances. Whether it's a medical emergency onboard a ship or an unexpected mechanical failure, being equipped with the right tools and knowledge can make all the difference. Training exercises that simulate emergency situations are essential for preparing teams to make quick, effective decisions under pressure.

### DECISION-SUPPORT SYSTEMS

As technology continues to advance, decision-support systems offer another layer of assistance in complex environments. These systems can rapidly process data, analyse risk factors, and offer evidence-based suggestions, aiding in more precise and timely decision-making. While these tools are incredibly valuable, it's important to remember that they are meant to support, not replace, human judgment. Combining the insights from these systems with human expertise can greatly enhance safety measures.

### THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD OF DECISION-SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Decision-support systems can be invaluable tools in safety-critical contexts. They help to gather, analyse, and present information in a way that aids human decision-making, particularly during emergencies. However, they come with their own set of pitfalls that must be understood and navigated carefully.

#### RELIANCE AND OVERCONFIDENCE

One of the key risks is an over-reliance on these systems. Trusting a decision-support system blindly can lead to 'automation complacency,' where human operators expect the system to handle all variables perfectly. This can be risky, especially if the system encounters a situation it wasn't programmed for or fails due to a technical glitch.

#### INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Another pitfall is the risk of information overload. Decision-support systems can generate a wealth of data, but not all of it may be useful or even accurate. A deluge of information can make it harder for decision-makers to focus on the most relevant facts, leading to delays or mistakes in action-taking.

#### LACK OF HUMAN INSIGHT

Lastly, these systems lack the 'human touch'—the ability to read nuances, assess emotional factors, or consider ethical implications. While they can process data faster than a human can, they don't possess the ability to understand the broader context or implications of a decision.

#### MITIGATING THE PITFALLS

The key to mitigating these pitfalls is training. Decision-makers should be trained not just to use these systems, but to understand their limitations. This involves simulated scenarios where the system's advice is intentionally flawed or incomplete, forcing the decision-maker to actively consider and potentially rely on their own judgement.

## OUR JOURNEY HAS ILLUMINATED SOME OF THE COMPLEX FACTORS AFFECTING DECISION-MAKING, FROM INDIVIDUAL COGNITIVE PROCESSES TO DECISION-SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND TRAINING FOR EMERGENCY SITUATIONS.

Understanding this intricate tapestry enables us to navigate high-stakes scenarios more effectively. As we continue to embrace this learning journey, we contribute to building cultures of safety, resilience, and continuous improvement.

As we wrap up our detailed look into making decisions in situations where safety is crucial, let's pause and think about all we've learned from these four guides. We've covered everything from how our own minds can trip us up, to how to communicate well, to how a whole organisation can affect our choices. By looking at all these aspects together, we get a more complete picture of the many things that can influence our decisions.

All in all, we've seen that a lot of things can influence our decisions. From how our own minds work, to how we interact in groups, to how the whole organisation operates—each of these plays a part in how we make choices, especially when safety is on the line. Being aware of these influences is key to making good decisions.

So, as we face the challenges of working in settings where safety is paramount, remember that understanding how to make decisions well is an ongoing process. By keeping on this path, we help build workplaces that are safe, resilient, and always looking to improve.

We hope you continue to apply these insights in your daily work, contributing to a safer and more effective organisation. Stay safe and continue the good work.