

Risk Management in Practice

Lecture Title:
Global Perspectives and Cultural Considerations

Lecturer: Chris Camilleri

Date: 2nd Feb 2026



**Undergraduate Diploma in
Occupational Health and Safety**

Welcome and Objectives

Examines how cultural differences and global contexts influence risk perception, communication, and implementation of health and safety practices. Includes case studies from multinational organizations.

Learning Objectives:

- Analyze how cultural factors affect risk perception and decision making.
- Identify challenges in implementing H&S risk management globally.
- Develop strategies for effective cross-cultural communication in risk management.
- Apply global standards while respecting local cultural norms.



Introduction to Global Risk Management

Key Concepts

1. What makes risk management global rather than local
2. Differences in regulatory environments
3. Globalisation of supply chains
4. Multinational workforces and varying norms
5. How global events reshape risk (pandemics, geopolitical conflict, climate change)



Why it matters

1. OHS practitioners increasingly operate across borders or through globalised companies.
2. Local risk solutions often fail in cross cultural contexts.



International Regulatory Landscapes

Comparison of risk management approaches among regions:

1. EU — Preventive, prescriptive, worker involvement
2. US (OSHA) — Enforcement focused, regulatory penalties
3. UK (HSE) & Malta — Goal setting, ALARP principle
4. Australia — Harmonised WHS model laws
5. Asia & Middle East — Emerging frameworks, wide diversity

How does regulatory philosophy influence risk culture?



Cultural Dimensions and Their Effect on Risk

Using recognised cultural theory

- Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions applied to safety:
 1. Power distance
 2. Individualism vs collectivism
 3. Uncertainty avoidance
 4. Masculinity/femininity
 5. Long term orientation
 6. Indulgence/restraint



Cultural Dimensions and Their Effect on Risk

Application to workplace safety

- Impacts on reporting behaviour
- Worker participation
- Training uptake
- Attitudes toward authority
- Attitudes toward PPE and controls



Examples

1. High power distance cultures: reluctance to challenge unsafe instructions
2. Low uncertainty avoidance cultures: tolerance for risk-taking
3. Collectivist cultures: strong peer safety influence but possible group conformity issues

Case Study

Rana Plaza collapse (Bangladesh, 2013): Lessons for global OHS accountability



What happened?

On 24 April 2013, the Rana Plaza building — housing five garment factories — collapsed, killing 1,134 workers and injuring thousands more. Cracks had been seen in the structure the day before, but workers were forced to return due to production pressure from global brands. This event became the symbol of unsafe global supply chains and lack of multinational oversight.

<https://agencevu.com/en/serie/rana-plaza-collapse-the-cost-of-fashion-2013/>



Summary: Rana Plaza collapse

1. Cultural Factor:

High power distance, economic vulnerability, fatalistic attitudes, and weak enforcement.

2. Risk Impact:

Workers forced to re-enter a structurally unsafe building; rushed production; lack of worker empowerment; unsafe subcontracting.

3. Practical Adaptation:

Collective reporting systems, visual safety tools, investment in local inspector training, community-based safety programs, transparent supply chain mapping.



Case Study 1: Qatar Construction Projects

Undergraduate Diploma in
Occupational Health & Safety

Large-scale construction projects in Qatar involved 40+ nationalities, mostly migrant workers from South Asia, Africa, and Southeast Asia

Key Cultural & Global Risk Issues:

- **Multilingual workforce:** Over 20 languages spoken, leading to misinterpretation of safety instructions.
- **Conflict in communication styles:**
 1. Some cultures rely on verbal instructions.
 2. Others depend heavily on written directions or gestures.
- **PPE misconceptions:**
 1. Workers with no prior industrial experience often believed PPE was optional or “only for foreigners.”
- **Extreme heat & fatigue:**
 1. Workers coming from cooler climates (e.g., Nepal) suffered higher heat-stress incidents.
 2. Cultural norms about masculinity led some to hide exhaustion



Case Study 1: Qatar Construction Projects

Undergraduate Diploma in
Occupational Health & Safety

Large-scale construction projects in Qatar involved 40+ nationalities, mostly migrant workers from South Asia, Africa, and Southeast Asia

Teaching Point:

Risk controls must be

1. linguistically,
2. visually, and
3. culturally adapted.

Standard safety briefings are not enough.



Case Study 1: Qatar Construction Projects

Undergraduate Diploma in
Occupational Health & Safety

Large-scale construction projects in Qatar involved 40+ nationalities, mostly migrant workers from South Asia, Africa, and Southeast Asia

1) Cultural Factor

- Multinational workforce with 40+ nationalities
- High diversity in language, literacy, and communication styles
- Cultural norms around masculinity, reluctance to show fatigue or ask questions

2) Risk Impact

- Misunderstood instructions → inconsistent work methods
- Misinterpretation of hazards → PPE non-use or misuse
- Concealing fatigue → heat-stress incidents, fainting, reduced cognitive performance
- Conflicting cultural attitudes → breakdowns in teamwork and reporting



Case Study 1: Qatar Construction Projects

Undergraduate Diploma in
Occupational Health & Safety

Large-scale construction projects in Qatar involved 40+ nationalities, mostly migrant workers from South Asia, Africa, and Southeast Asia

3. Practical Adaptation (Respecting Local Norms)

- Use visual, multilingual toolbox talks with pictograms instead of text-heavy briefings
- Deploy cultural safety champions from major worker nationalities
- Implement heat-adaptation programs acknowledging cultural attitudes (e.g., normalising rest, shaded zones, supervised hydration)
- Conduct brief, repeated micro-trainings rather than long sessions unfamiliar to some groups



Case Study 2: European vs Asian Chemical Plants

A multinational chemical company operates plants in both Western Europe and East Asia.

Key Cultural Differences Affecting Safety::

- **Worker empowerment (“Stop Work Authority”)**

1. European plants: workers are encouraged to halt any unsafe job.
2. Asian plants: high respect for hierarchy results in reluctance to challenge supervisors.

- **Communication style:**

1. Europe: direct communication about hazards.
2. Asia: indirect communication, often reliant on subtle cues

- **Safety messaging adaptation:**

1. Western-style posters (“Speak up!”) had no effect in Asia.
2. Localised posters featuring team values and harmony improved compliance



Case Study 2: European vs Asian Chemical Plants

A multinational chemical company operates plants in both Western Europe and East Asia.

Teaching Point:

The same system implemented globally will not be received the same way. Safety communication must match cultural norms.



Case Study 2: European vs Asian Chemical Plants

A multinational chemical company operates plants in both Western Europe and East Asia.

1. Cultural Factor

- **Europe:** Low power distance, direct communication, strong worker empowerment
- **Asia:** High power distance, respect for hierarchy, indirect communication norms

2. Risk Impact

- **Asian plants:** Workers may hesitate to stop unsafe work or challenge supervisors
- **European-style** “Stop Work Authority” signs are ignored or perceived as disrespectful
- Misalignment in communication → critical hazards may go unreported

Case Study 2: European vs Asian Chemical Plants

A multinational chemical company operates plants in both Western Europe and East Asia.

3. Practical Adaptation (Respecting Local Norms)

- Reframe safety messaging around collective harmony, team protection, and group responsibility
- Reinforce “Stop Work” decisions coming from management, not individual empowerment
- Use group-based safety commitments rather than individual declarations
- Employ indirect communication tools: coloured tags, symbols, scenario discussions instead of blunt warnings



Multilingual Workforces and Communication Challenges

Issues

- Literacy levels
- Technical vocabulary
- Translation errors
- Non verbal communication differences
- “Loss of meaning” in risk communication across languages



Multilingual Workforces and Communication Challenges

Solutions

- Pictograms
- Universal signage
- Teach back methods
- Multilingual safety champions
- High context vs low context communication styles



Cultural Influence on Safety Behaviours and Attitudes

1. Cultural norms affecting:
 - Risk perception
 - Compliance
 - Use of PPE
 - Work pace vs safety
 - Gender roles
2. The concept of “normalised deviance” in cultural groups
3. Cultural barriers to incident reporting
4. Migrant worker vulnerabilities



Building a Global Safety Culture

Strategies

- Tailoring risk management to cultural context
- Creating universal safety values
- Leadership across cultures
- Inclusive training approaches
- Localising procedures without lowering standards
- Remote and virtual multicultural teams
- Cross cultural competency for OHS professionals



Real world examples

Key Takeaways from Shell, Toyota, and ABB

1. One Global Standard ≠ One Global Approach

- Even when companies have world-class safety frameworks, they cannot implement them identically in every country.
- Local norms, languages, literacy, and social expectations shape how safety programs must be delivered.

Takeaway:

- ✓ Global consistency must be balanced with local cultural adaptation.



Real world examples

Key Takeaways from Shell, Toyota, and ABB

2. Cultural Intelligence is a Core Safety Competence

- These multinationals succeed because they study local cultures instead of forcing Western-style safety behaviour everywhere.

Takeaway:

- ✓ Cultural awareness is as important as technical safety knowledge.



Real world examples

Key Takeaways from Shell, Toyota, and ABB

3. Worker Empowerment Depends on Culture

- Shell Europe and Toyota USA thrive on stop work authority and direct reporting.
- In hierarchical cultures (Middle East, Asia), workers often hesitate to challenge supervisors.

Takeaway:

- ✓ Safety leadership must align empowerment strategies with cultural comfort levels.



Real world examples

Key Takeaways from Shell, Toyota, and ABB

4. Communication Methods Must Be Culturally Matched

Companies learned that:

- Direct safety messages fail in indirect-communication cultures.
- Text-heavy instructions fail in multilingual or lower-literacy regions.
- Visuals, stories, and group-based messaging often work better globally.

Takeaway:

- ✓ Safety communication must shift from text → visuals, from individual → group, or from direct → indirect, depending on the region.



Real world examples

Key Takeaways from Shell, Toyota, and ABB

5. Community Involvement Boosts Safety in Certain Regions

Especially for ABB in Africa and Shell in remote areas:

- Safety behaviours are shaped by whole communities, not just workers.

Takeaway:

- ✓ Engaging families, local leaders, and community norms strengthens safety culture.



Real world examples

Key Takeaways from Shell, Toyota, and ABB

6. Local Leadership Is the Bridge Between Global Policy and Local Reality

All three companies rely heavily on:

- Local supervisors
- Cultural mediators
- National safety champions

These individuals translate global expectations into culturally acceptable practices.

Takeaway:

✓ Local leadership is not optional — it is the key success factor in global risk programs.



Real world examples

Key Takeaways from Shell, Toyota, and ABB

7. Adaptation Does Not Mean Lowering Standards

Shell, Toyota, and ABB keep the same safety objectives, but adapt the method of achieving them.

Takeaway:

✓ Cultural adaptation $\neq$ reducing safety. It means changing the delivery, not the standard.



Real world examples

Key Takeaways from Shell, Toyota, and ABB

8. Visual Systems Improve Safety Across Cultures

This was consistent across all companies:

- Colour coding
- Pictograms
- Illustrated procedures
- Step-by-step visuals
- They overcome literacy, language, and communication barriers.

Takeaway:

✓ Visual safety tools are globally effective and culturally neutral.



Summary

Key Takeaways from Shell, Toyota, and ABB

Global companies succeed when they:

1. Keep global standards but adapt local implementation
2. Adjust communication to match local culture
3. Use visuals to overcome language barriers
4. Empower workers in culturally appropriate ways
5. Leverage local leadership to drive safety
6. Engage communities where workplace culture extends beyond the organisation



Applying Global Standards with Local Sensitivity

Focus on:

- ISO 45001 global local dilemmas
- EU directives applied in non EU operations
- Ethical issues when local norms clash with global standards
- Supplier audits in Asia/Africa
- When to adapt vs when to enforce non-negotiable standards

How can companies stay globally consistent while remaining locally respectful



1. Which country is known for having one of the lowest workplace fatality rates due to its strong safety culture?
2. What cultural factor can lead workers in some countries to avoid reporting near misses?
3. In which type of culture are employees more likely to challenge unsafe instructions?

4. Which global region tends to use more prescriptive safety legislation with strict rules?
5. Why might PPE compliance be lower in extremely hot climates?
6. Which cultural dimension affects whether workers prefer written instructions or face-to-face explanations?



7. Why do multinational companies adapt safety training to local languages instead of only using English?
8. Which global disaster highlighted the impact of weak supply-chain oversight?
9. What cultural characteristic makes workers more likely to follow group norms—even unsafe ones?



10. Which internationally recognised standard emphasises control of risks in global supply chains?
11. Why might migrant workers be at higher risk in globalised industries?
12. Which type of culture typically embraces change and structured safety systems more readily?
13. What is one global trend pushing countries to improve safety standards?



14. What makes training delivery in multicultural teams more challenging?
15. Why do some cultures value safety meetings as a group ritual?
16. Which international organisation develops global guidelines for workplace safety?



17. What cultural factor may influence how workers react during emergencies?

18. What is one advantage of a multicultural workforce in risk management?



Next: Lecture 16: Capstone Lecture: Integrating Risk Management in Practice

Brings together all concepts from previous lectures into a practical, integrated approach. Participants will work on developing a comprehensive risk management plan for a simulated high-risk scenario.

Learning Objectives:

- Synthesize knowledge from all previous lectures into a cohesive framework.
- Develop a complete risk management plan, including assessment, controls, and monitoring.
- Apply stakeholder engagement and communication strategies in practice.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of proposed solutions through group discussion and case study analysis.

