

There has been a considerable amount of attention devoted to safety culture recently, both by researchers seeking to better understand it and companies seeking to apply it to enhance the safety of their operations. As a 2007 editorial in this journal noted (Baram and Schoebel, 2007, p. 632), "it has become convenient for investigators of accidents to aggregate their findings about contributing factors and hold an organization accountable for an accident by concluding that it had an inadequate safety culture." But is investigating safety culture as a potential cause of an accident warranted? Given what is known about safety culture, is it reasonable that accident investigators, using investigative techniques that meet the requirements of accident investigations, assess the role of a company's safety culture in the cause of an accident? Some have applied it retroactively, to explain incidents and accidents. To answer these questions, it is necessary to examine safety culture and the ways it is currently assessed.