Health and Safety Performance:
A race to the bottom, or a journey to the top?

Organisational Psychology Perspectives

Ed Corbett

Content

SET THE SCENE

EXAMPLES

TIPS

Do we deliberately aim to 'race to the bottom'?

- Most likely not
- Fail to understand complexity
    - Biased towards simple cause and effect relationships
- Humans make organisations incredibly complex

'It's better to do the right thing wrong, than the wrong thing right'

Russel Ackoff

Case studies

- Townsend & Thoresen
- Volkswagen
- Boeing
- P&O
- Easyjet
- Wizzair

TRAVEL NEWS

Exclusive: Leaked union email says easyJet staff face 'serious safety risk'

Wizz Air boss sparks backlash over fatigue request

By Katy Austin & Tom Espiner
Business reporters, BBC News

6 days ago

GETTY IMAGES

Wizz Air chief executive Jozsef Varadi said staff should go "the extra mile"

Wizz Air is facing a backlash from pilot unions after the airline's boss appeared to call on crew to work through fatigue.

Chief executive Jozsef Varadi said staff should go "the extra mile" when tired so that the airline could avoid cancelling flights.
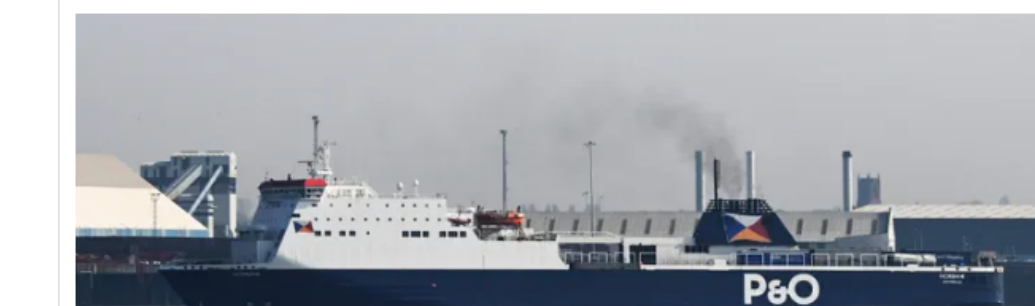
This article is more than 2 months old

P&O Ferries boss admits firm broke law by sacking staff without consultation

CEO tells MPs P&O aims to halve costs under 'new model' using seafarers paid just £5.15 an hour
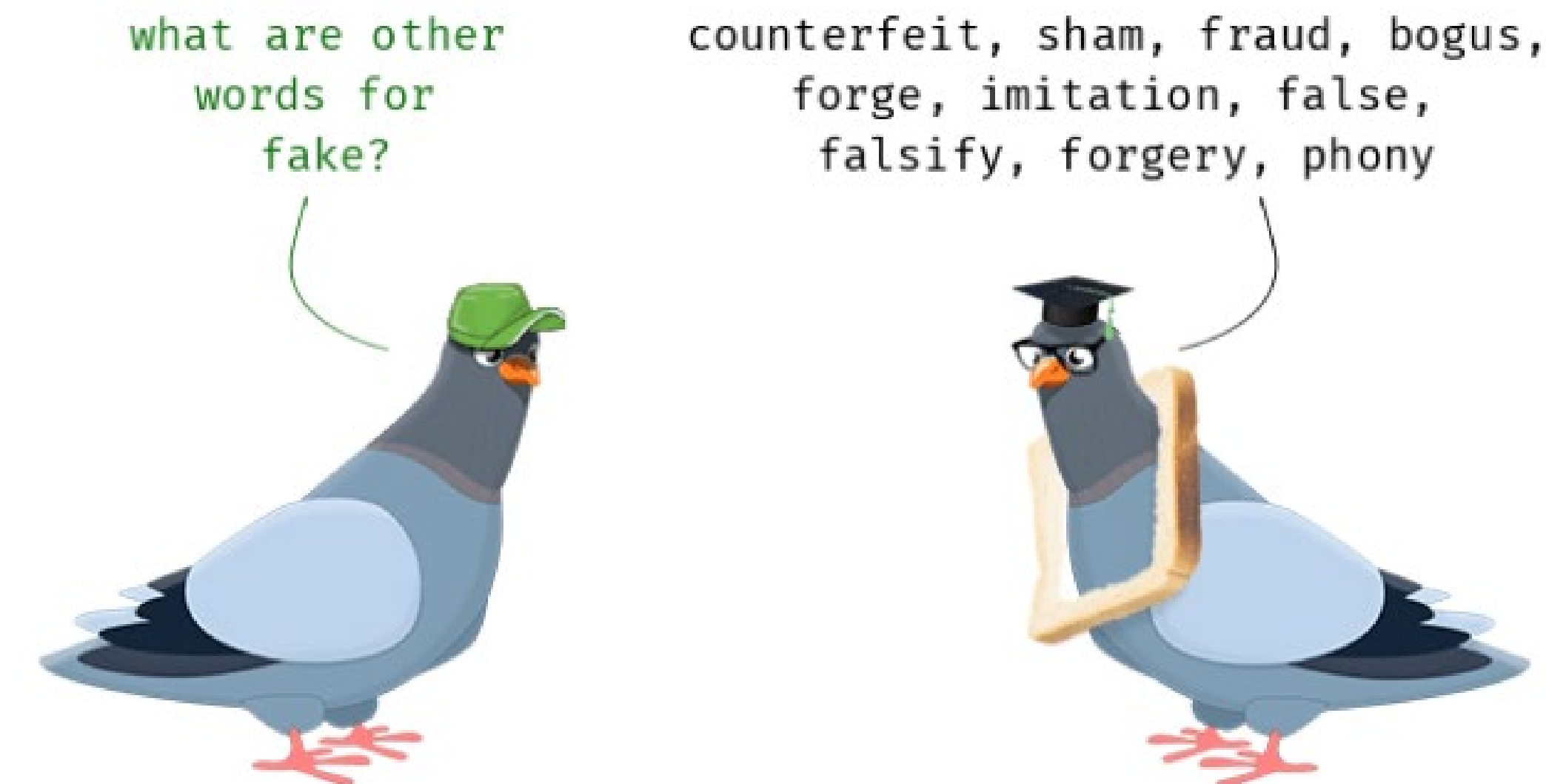
Common issues

Financial focus: Profit, shareholders, cost saving

Competence: *'Fake it till you make it'*

                      Risk profile and risk management

Targets: Perverse impact / gaming

Rewards: Individual success, recognition

Structures: Silos, competition, allocation of resources

Change: Addiction to change (next silver bullet), your stamp

False caring: Integrity, Safety #1

what are other words for fake?

counterfeit, sham, fraud, bogus, forge, imitation, false, falsify, forgery, phony

Thesaurus.plus

A leader as an organisational architect

- Want a certain outcome
- Design like an engineer
- But, people are not like components

Scenario 1: The (ir)rationality of humans

- You know objectively that you've been doing more housework than your partner. You've even done a mini study to back this up. Your data clearly shows the split is consistently **80%** you, **20%** your partner. Your 'study' also shows that you have to do **all** the 'grotty' tasks. You've even taken some covert videos demonstrating you doing chores while your partner drinks cups of tea.

- You sit down with your partner and explain the imbalance. You've been using Microsoft Excel, and have produced some charts to illustrate your points. You've added photos and videos of your 'data'.

- To 'improve' the situation, you've designed a new schedule for household chores. Your data indicates this will result in greater fairness, with a likely 50/50 split of chores.

- Logic would dictate that this approach would land very well and result and a happy rebalanced outcome.

  What do you think?

Scenario 2: Achieving the 'real' goals

- Kirsty has told her team that safety is of utmost importance and that honesty and integrity are essential to their business (they're even company values on the website!).

- Gavin (a team lead), who works in Kirsty's Group, works with utmost integrity and conscientiousness to ensure his team work safely and uphold high ethical standards in all their work.

- Gavin starts to notice that other team leads are cutting corners to achieve work in budget and to time. This is compromising safety and staff health. Some are also doing ethically questionable things, maybe even illegal; in order to achieve their performance targets.

- At Gavin's review he is marked as an 'underperformer', as his team's outputs are lower than his peers.

- Over the following year, Gavin notices some of his peers; who are the 'biggest offenders' not supporting safe and healthy working, and ethically questionable actions; are now getting promotions, and performance bonuses.

- Gavin decides to join the others, and finds his 'performance' is now much improved. He's now part of the fast track promotion route.

Lessons

PEOPLE ARE COMPLEX
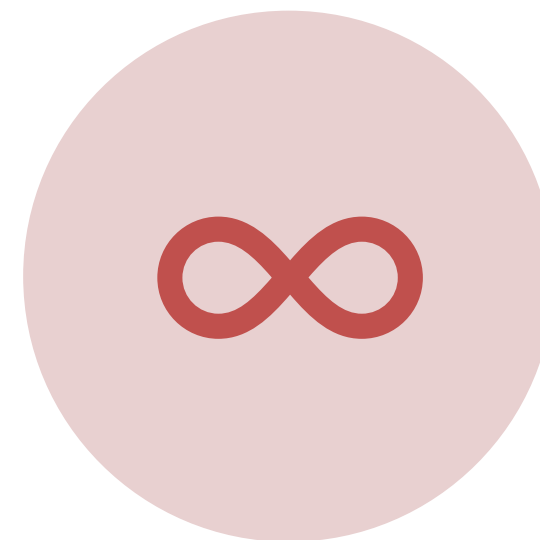
WE ARE NOT LOGICAL / RATIONAL / EVIDENCE BASED 'FACTS DON'T CHANGE MINDS'

WE ARE HARD WIRED TO BRING BIAS AND EMOTION
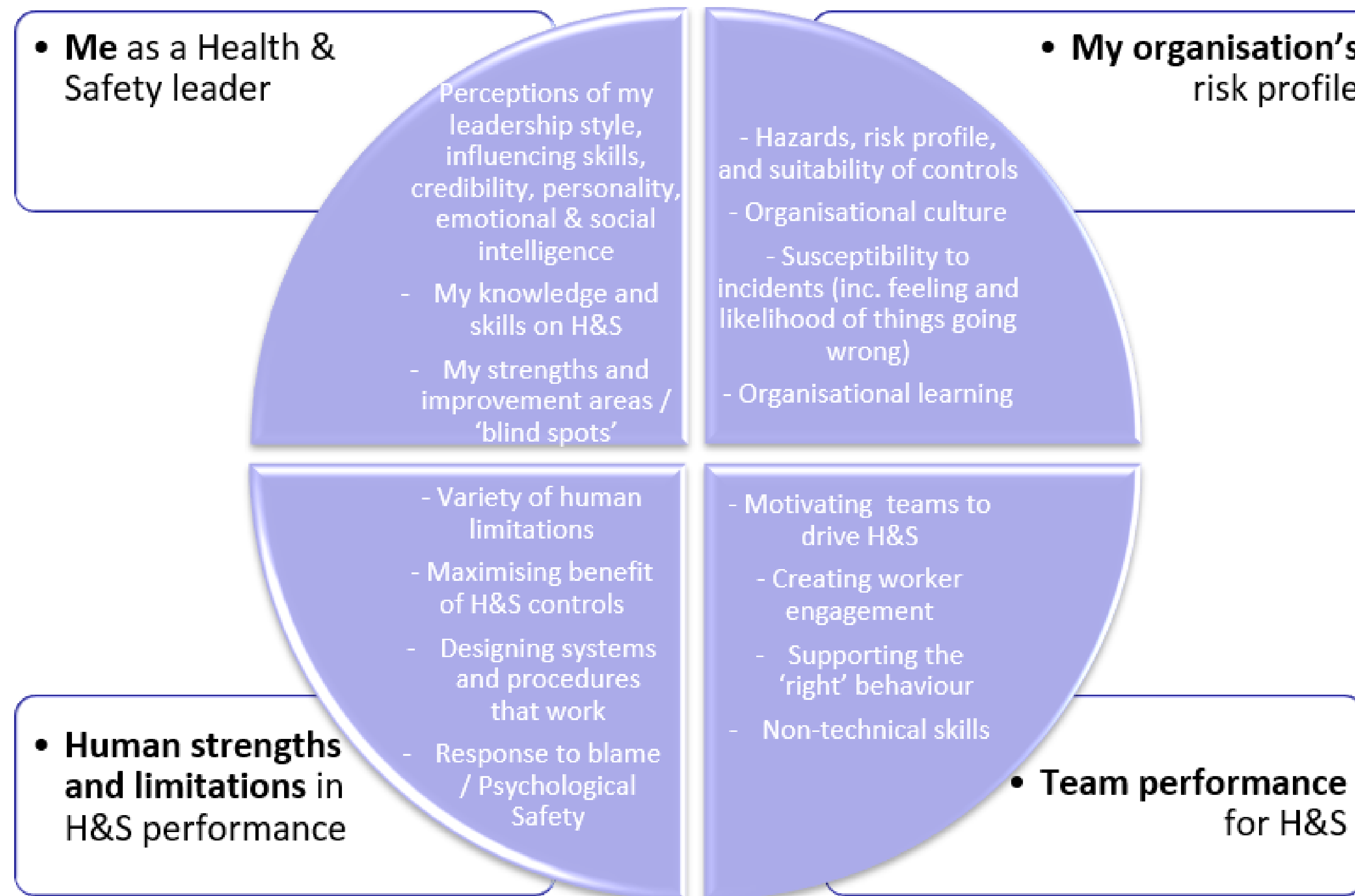
WE WORK OUT THE REAL GOALS

Be cautious of simple solutions

Culture improvement

- Workload
- Provision of equipment / tools
- Support / enabling management
- Bullying & harassment
- Learning from incidents
- Robust control measures
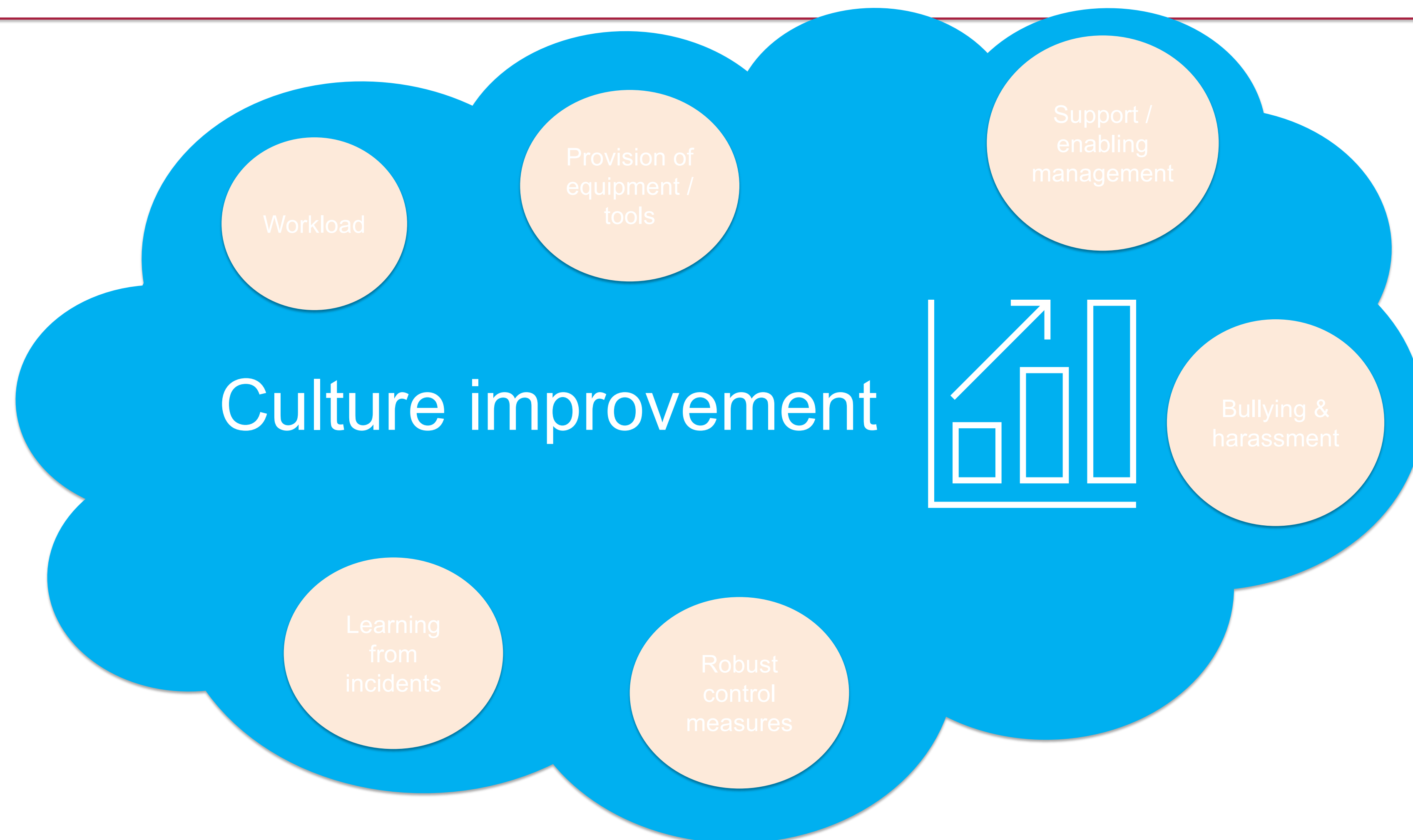
Tips: The journey to the top…

- **Me** as a Health & Safety leader

Perceptions of my leadership style, influencing skills, credibility, personality, emotional & social intelligence

- My knowledge and skills on H&S

- My strengths and improvement areas / 'blind spots'

- **My organisation's** risk profile

- Hazards, risk profile, and suitability of controls

- Organisational culture

- Susceptibility to incidents (inc. feeling and likelihood of things going wrong)

- Organisational learning

- **Human strengths and limitations** in H&S performance

- Variety of human limitations

- Maximising benefit of H&S controls

- Designing systems and procedures that work

- Response to blame / Psychological Safety

- **Team performance** for H&S

- Motivating teams to drive H&S

- Creating worker engagement

- Supporting the 'right' behaviour

- Non-technical skills

Questions and keeping in touch

LinkedIn

Or

ed.corbett@hse.gov.uk