

ISOMERICS · CHANGE MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The Ownership Index

Safety Culture Edition

From externally imposed compliance to fully embedded ownership.

IMPOSED

MANAGED

EMBEDDED

6 Stages · 3 Phases · One Continuum

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OVERVIEW

What Is the Ownership Index?

The Ownership Index is a proprietary diagnostic framework developed by Isomerics that measures where an organization falls on the continuum from externally imposed compliance to fully embedded ownership culture. It was designed specifically for industrial operations, manufacturing, and healthcare environments — always-on, high-stakes settings where the gap between the safety program that exists on paper and the one that actually runs the facility is not a theoretical concern.

Most safety culture frameworks measure outcomes — incident rates, near-miss counts, audit scores. The Ownership Index measures something different: the leadership behaviors and cultural conditions that produce those outcomes. It answers the question that lagging indicators cannot: *why do people who know the right way still do it the wrong way?*

THE ISOMER METAPHOR

In chemistry, isomers are molecules with the same formula but a different structure — and that different structure produces completely different properties. The same raw materials, arranged differently, become something better.

That is the underlying principle of the Ownership Index. The same workforce. The same facility. The same policies. Restructure the leadership behavior and the cultural conditions around them, and you get a fundamentally different outcome. Not because you changed the ingredients — because you changed how they are put together.

WHO IT IS FOR

The Ownership Index applies across three environments where safety culture is operationally critical:

- **Industrial Operations:** Refineries, chemical plants, petrochemical processing facilities, and other 24/7 high-consequence environments where errors have physical, financial, and regulatory consequences.
- **Mid-Market Manufacturing:** Fabrication, processing, and production environments — typically 50 to 500 employees — where rapid growth has outpaced the leadership infrastructure needed to sustain it.
- **Healthcare Operations:** Hospitals, health systems, and clinical environments where the same leadership and culture challenges that appear on a plant floor appear at the point of care.

HOW IT DIFFERS FROM THE BRADLEY CURVE AND DEKRA MODELS

The most commonly used safety culture benchmarks — including the DuPont Bradley Curve and DEKRA's Perception Survey — measure safety compliance levels and cultural maturity through survey scores and observable behaviors. They are useful diagnostic tools. The Ownership Index does something different.

Where the Bradley Curve describes *where* an organization sits, the Ownership Index focuses on the leadership behaviors that determine how an organization moves. It centers ownership transfer rather than compliance measurement — and it is built on the conviction that safety is a value, not a priority. Priorities compete. Values guide.

"Safety culture doesn't erode overnight. It erodes one shortcut at a time, one looked-away near-miss at a time, one supervisor who didn't say anything because production was behind."

— Elliot Anderson, Isomerics

Three Phases of Ownership

The Ownership Index organizes six stages of safety culture development into three phases. Each phase describes a fundamentally different relationship between the organization and the concept of ownership — who holds it, how it is maintained, and what happens when no one is watching.

Phase 1 — Imposed

Stages 1 and 2

Safety and performance are externally imposed. Leadership operates through authority and fear. Workers comply when watched and cut corners when they are not. If your best performers are also your biggest rule-benders, you are here. The safety program exists to satisfy external requirements — auditors, regulators, incident reviews. It does not exist because anyone believes in it.

THE SIGNAL

The program works when management is in the building. It changes the moment they leave.

Phase 2 — Managed

Stages 3 and 4

The organization has accepted safety as a legitimate priority — on paper. The infrastructure exists: procedures are written, systems are in place, people follow the rules. But ownership has not transferred to the frontline. The gap between work as written and work as done is wide, unexamined, and quietly everyone's worst-kept secret. The organization knows what to say during an audit and what it will do the moment the audit is over.

THE SIGNAL

Near-misses get reported to close out the form — not because anyone believes something will change.

Ownership is no longer managed — it is expressed. Workers act because they understand the mission, not because someone is watching. The frontline catches problems leadership never sees, because they feel safe surfacing them. The culture does not depend on a particular supervisor or manager to hold. It holds because the people in it believe it belongs to them.

THE SIGNAL

If a frontline worker stopped an operation today because something felt wrong — would they be celebrated or quietly resented? Your honest answer tells you whether you are actually here.

A Detailed View of Each Stage

Each stage of the Ownership Index describes a specific cultural reality — a mindset, a leadership culture pattern, and a diagnostic tell. The tells are the most operationally useful part of the framework. They are not survey questions. They are observable situations that reveal where ownership actually lives in your organization.

PHASE 1 — IMPOSED

Stage 1 — Resistance

MINDSET

"Safety is a distraction from real work."

LEADERSHIP CULTURE

The Enforcer Culture

THE TELL

Leaders only mention safety during incident investigations or regulatory inspections. Rules are seen as obstacles to clear or bypass, not standards to uphold. Safety is enforced through fear of discipline — not through shared values. The program exists to satisfy regulators, not to protect people.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

Your best producer is also your biggest safety violator — and everyone knows leadership will not address it because the numbers would suffer. The implicit message is that performance matters more than procedure.

MOVING FORWARD

The only path forward from Resistance is consequence — either a significant incident that forces accountability, or a leadership change that resets the cultural signal. External coaching or culture work alone rarely moves organizations from Stage 1.

Stage 2 — Requirement

MINDSET

"We do it because we have to."

LEADERSHIP CULTURE

The Auditor Culture

THE TELL

Engagement with safety is driven entirely by TRIR and LTI scores. Nothing moves until a number moves. The safety program is built around lagging indicators. Nobody is measuring what happens before the incident. Safety is a series of requirements enforced through compliance systems — not through shared values.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

The safety program exists to satisfy the audit. People know exactly what to say when an auditor is present and what they will do the moment the auditor leaves. The gap between work as written and work as done is visible to everyone who works there — and invisible to anyone who visits.

MOVING FORWARD

Moving from Requirement to Routine requires leadership to begin asking different questions — not 'did they comply' but 'does the procedure actually reflect how the work gets done.' This is where change management becomes essential: the shift from compliance-based to competence-based safety culture.

Stage 3 — Routine

MINDSET

"We have a process for that."

LEADERSHIP CULTURE

The Administrator Culture

THE TELL

Systems exist and procedures are followed — but compliance is the ceiling. If something goes wrong, the response is to write a new rule. Workers stop thinking and just obey instructions, even when those instructions do not make sense in the actual situation they face.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

Near-misses get reported to close out the form — not because anyone believes something will change. Order is valued over understanding. The organization is good at following procedures and poor at recognizing when the procedure does not fit the situation.

MOVING FORWARD

The transition from Routine to Recognition is one of the most important cultural shifts in the framework. It requires leaders to stop asking 'did they follow the SOP?' and start asking 'how is the work actually done?' This is also where psychological safety becomes critical — people will not surface what is actually happening if surfacing it leads to punishment.

Stage 4 — Recognition

MINDSET

"We want to find the problems before they find us."

LEADERSHIP CULTURE

The Coach Culture

THE TELL

Leaders start asking 'How is the work actually done?' instead of 'Did they follow the SOP?' Frontline knowledge is beginning to be treated as an asset. Leaders focus on building awareness and competence, not just compliance.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

Your best supervisors and team leads do this naturally — they build cultures of recognition and early problem identification on their crews. But it is not systemic. When they transfer or promote out, the culture goes with them. The behavior exists at the individual level but has not been embedded into organizational systems and expectations.

MOVING FORWARD

Moving from Recognition to Resolve requires the organization to systematize what its best leaders do naturally. That means codifying leadership expectations, building recognition systems that reinforce ownership behaviors, and creating the psychological safety that allows near-misses to be surfaced as intelligence rather than embarrassments.

Stage 5 — Resolve

MINDSET

"Safety is how we show care for each other."

LEADERSHIP CULTURE

The Facilitator Culture

THE TELL

Leaders have stopped being the answer-givers and become the question-askers. They ask 'What could go wrong today that we have not talked about?' Near-misses are treated as intelligence, not embarrassments. Workers self-identify hazards without being prompted.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

If a frontline worker stopped an operation today because something felt wrong — would they be celebrated or quietly resented for killing production? The honest answer to that question tells you whether the organization is actually at Stage 5. At Resolve, the answer is always: celebrated.

MOVING FORWARD

Stage 5 is a strong operating position. The challenge at this stage is sustainability — ensuring the culture does not drift when leadership changes, when the organization grows rapidly, or when production pressure spikes. The transition to Stage 6 is less about doing different things and more about making Stage 5 behaviors so deeply embedded they become automatic.

Stage 6 — Reflex

MINDSET

"Excellence is a habit, not a goal. We own the ship."

LEADERSHIP CULTURE

The Architect Culture

THE TELL

Authority lives where the knowledge lives. Workers do not wait for permission — they act because they understand the mission and own the outcome. The leader's job is to build the conditions for good decisions, not to make all the decisions.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

There is no tell at Stage 6. The culture polices itself. The few people who do not share the ownership mindset stand out immediately — because they are the only ones who still need to be watched. The standard is self-sustaining because the people who hold it believe it belongs to them.

MOVING FORWARD

Stage 6 is the destination. Maintaining it requires ongoing attention to the conditions that produce it: leadership development at every level, consistent recognition of ownership behaviors, and a commitment to treating near-misses and problems as intelligence rather than embarrassments — even when production pressure makes that difficult.

The Ownership Index — Safety Culture Edition

The visual below shows all six stages of the Ownership Index across the three phases — Imposed, Managed, and Embedded. Each column represents a distinct cultural reality. Most organizations sit between stages 3 and 4. The goal of every engagement Isomerics conducts is to move organizations sustainably toward stages 5 and 6.

The Ownership Index — Safety Culture Edition

From externally imposed compliance to fully embedded ownership

IMPOSED		MANAGED		EMBEDDED	
1	2	3	4	5	6
Resistance	Requirement	Routine	Recognition	Resolve	Reflex
<p>MINDSET "Safety is a distraction from real work."</p> <p>LEADERSHIP CULTURE The Enforcer</p> <p>THE TELL Leaders only mention safety during incident investigations or regulatory inspections. Rules are obstacles to clear, not standards to uphold. Safety is enforced through fear of discipline — not through shared values.</p>	<p>MINDSET "We do it because we have to."</p> <p>LEADERSHIP CULTURE The Auditor</p> <p>THE TELL Engagement driven entirely by TRIR and LTI scores. Nothing moves until a number moves. Safety is a series of 'thou shalt nots' enforced through compliance systems. The program exists to satisfy regulators — not to protect people.</p>	<p>MINDSET "We have a process for that."</p> <p>LEADERSHIP CULTURE The Administrator</p> <p>THE TELL Systems exist and procedures are followed — but compliance is the ceiling. If something goes wrong, the response is to write a new rule. Workers stop thinking and just obey instructions, even when those instructions don't make sense.</p>	<p>MINDSET "We want to find problems before they find us."</p> <p>LEADERSHIP CULTURE The Coach</p> <p>THE TELL Leaders start asking 'How is the work actually done?' instead of 'Did they follow the SOP?' Frontline knowledge is beginning to be treated as an asset. They focus on building technical competence and awareness at the floor level.</p>	<p>MINDSET "Safety is how we show care for each other."</p> <p>LEADERSHIP CULTURE The Facilitator</p> <p>THE TELL Leaders ask 'What could go wrong today that we haven't talked about?' Near-misses are treated as intelligence, not embarrassments. Workers self-identify hazards without being prompted.</p>	<p>MINDSET "Excellence is a habit. We own the ship."</p> <p>LEADERSHIP CULTURE The Architect</p> <p>THE TELL Authority lives where the knowledge lives. Workers don't wait for permission — they act because they understand the mission and own the outcome. The leader's job is to build the conditions for good decisions, not make all the decisions.</p>

ISOMERICS | ALIGN. TRANSFORM. PERFORM.

The most important question this framework surfaces is not 'where are we?' — it is 'where are we when nobody is watching?' A culture that performs at Stage 4 during a management walkthrough and Stage 2 at 2am is not a Stage 4 culture. It is a Stage 2 culture with a good audit program.

How to Use the Ownership Index

The Ownership Index is not a survey. It is a diagnostic framework that supports three specific applications in an Isomerics engagement.

01

Entry Diagnostic — Establish the Baseline

Before any engagement begins, the Ownership Index is used to establish a shared baseline with the leadership team. This is not a scored assessment — it is a facilitated diagnostic conversation that surfaces where the organization's leadership culture actually sits versus where leadership believes it sits. That gap is almost always instructive.

02

Change Management Anchor — Define the Target State

Every safety culture change initiative needs a clear definition of what success looks like. The Ownership Index provides that definition in operational terms — not abstract values statements but specific, observable behaviors that distinguish one stage from the next. This becomes the reference point for measuring progress throughout an engagement.

03

Leadership Development Tool — Name What Good Looks Like

The leadership culture descriptions in the Ownership Index — the Enforcer Culture, the Auditor Culture, the Administrator Culture, the Coach Culture, the Facilitator Culture, the Architect Culture — give organizations a shared vocabulary for talking about leadership behavior. They make it possible to name what is happening in a constructive way and to define the specific behavioral shifts required to move forward.

DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS FOR LEADERSHIP TEAMS

These questions are useful starting points for a leadership team assessment using the Ownership Index. They are not a scored survey — they are conversation starters designed to surface the gap between the official safety culture and the one that actually runs the operation.

- When a frontline worker identifies a hazard that is not covered by the existing procedure, what do they do — and how do you know?
- When was the last time a near-miss was reported that led to a visible, meaningful change in practice? Can anyone on your team name it?
- If your best supervisor transferred to another facility tomorrow, how much of your safety culture would go with them?
- What does your operation look like at 2am on a Friday night compared to 10am on a Tuesday? Is the answer the same?
- When something goes wrong, what is the first question leadership asks — 'who did this?' or 'what conditions allowed this to happen?'
- Do your frontline workers believe that surfacing a problem will lead to a fix — or to scrutiny?

Common Questions About the Ownership Index

What is the Ownership Index?

The Ownership Index is a proprietary safety culture diagnostic framework developed by Isomerics. It measures where an organization falls on a six-stage continuum from externally imposed compliance (Stage 1 — Resistance) to fully embedded ownership culture (Stage 6 — Reflex). It is designed for industrial operations, manufacturing, and healthcare environments where safety culture has direct operational and safety consequences.

How is the Ownership Index different from the Bradley Curve?

The DuPont Bradley Curve measures safety compliance levels and cultural maturity through observable behaviors. The Ownership Index focuses specifically on leadership behaviors and cultural conditions — the mechanisms that produce compliance levels, not the levels themselves. Where the Bradley Curve describes where an organization sits, the Ownership Index focuses on how it got there and what it takes to move.

What does 'embedded safety culture' mean?

An embedded safety culture is one in which safety behaviors are self-sustaining — they do not depend on supervision, audits, or external pressure to hold. Workers act safely because they understand the mission and own the outcome, not because someone is watching. An embedded safety culture at Stage 5 or 6 of the Ownership Index performs the same way at 2am as it does during a management walkthrough.

How does an organization move from one stage to the next?

Movement along the Ownership Index continuum is driven by deliberate leadership behavior change — not by policy updates, training programs, or safety initiatives alone. The specific interventions depend on where the organization sits. Moving from Stage 2 to Stage 3 requires different work than moving from Stage 4 to Stage 5. Isomerics uses the Ownership Index as the anchor for designing the specific change management approach each engagement requires.

Can an organization be at different stages in different parts of the operation?

Yes — and this is extremely common. A facility may have supervisors operating at Stage 4 or 5 during day shift and Stage 2 during off-hours, because the conditions that enable ownership behavior

(visible leadership, peer accountability, clear escalation paths) are not present after hours. The Ownership Index is most useful when applied at the crew, shift, or department level — not just at the organizational level.

What is the relationship between the Ownership Index and safety culture consulting?

The Ownership Index is the entry diagnostic for every safety culture engagement Isomerics conducts. It establishes the baseline, defines the target state in operational terms, and provides the reference point for measuring progress. It is not a standalone assessment — it is the foundation for a change management approach designed to move the organization toward embedded ownership.

What industries does the Ownership Index apply to?

The Ownership Index was developed for high-stakes, always-on operational environments. It applies directly to industrial operations (refineries, chemical plants, petrochemical processing), mid-market manufacturing (fabrication, processing, production), and healthcare operations (hospitals, health systems, clinical environments). The underlying leadership and culture dynamics are consistent across all three.

Is safety a priority or a value in the Ownership Index framework?

Safety is a value — not a priority. This distinction is central to the Ownership Index philosophy. Priorities compete: when two priorities conflict, one wins and one loses. Values guide: they are the lens through which decisions are made, not rules that replace judgment. An organization that treats safety as a value integrates it into how every decision is made. An organization that treats safety as a priority will deprioritize it when something else seems more urgent.

Change Management for Always-On Operations

Isomerics is a change management consultancy specializing in behavior change in industrial operations, manufacturing, and healthcare. We work in always-on environments where the cost of change that does not stick is not abstract — it shows up on the floor, in the incident report, and in the gap between what leadership intended and what actually happened.

Elliot Anderson, Founder, spent 20+ years working inside industrial operations — refineries, chemical plants, petrochemical facilities — before founding Isomerics. That operational credential, combined with Prosci change management certification and practitioner experience with Everything DiSC and the Leadership Circle Profile, is the foundation of every Isomerics engagement.

Strategy without behavior change is just a plan. Isomerics builds the behavior.

CERTIFICATIONS	PROPRIETARY FRAMEWORKS	PRIMARY ENVIRONMENTS
Prosci Change Management Practitioner AI Adoption Specialization Everything DiSC Certified Facilitator Leadership Circle Profile Practitioner	The Ownership Index RESET Leadership Framework Movers, Losers & Cruisers Workforce Segmentation Model	Industrial Operations Refineries & Chemical Plants Mid-Market Manufacturing Healthcare Operations

Ready to find out where your safety culture actually sits?

The Ownership Index Assessment is the starting point for every Isomerics engagement. One conversation. A clear picture of where ownership lives in your operation — and where it doesn't.

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