

Intercultural Effective HSE Culture

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Abstract			
<p>Companies operating internationally not only face the challenge of designing and implementing effective HSE (Health, Safety, Environmental) practices and culture that is functional in their home countries. They also need the awareness, competence, and experience to design and implement a HSE culture which is functional in a variety of local cultural contexts internationally.</p> <p>In addition to the numerous practical challenges, establishment of a HSE culture and practices needs to take into account the culturally different ways of dealing with authority, risks, and individual responsibility, amongst a number of other factors. A lack of cultural competence can in itself lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings, which in turn can cause dangerous situations and accidents.</p> <p>A group of experts on culture, training, HSE and safety from Kulturfolk AS, the Institute for Energy Technology (IFE), SimOptima and Sund Energy has developed an integrated process for transferring HSE culture globally by adapting Head Quarter HSE (culture) strategies into locally efficient practices. In short, a (stepwise) methodology is developed based on demonstrated methods where the main activities are: Project definition phase; HSE profiling and gap analysis phase; Mapping and analysis of the different cultural profiles' communalities and discrepancies phase; The design of a HSE and cultural specific training program; and The implementation of the training program.</p> <p>Undertaking this stepwise approach ensures an effective, robust and custom designed HSE strategy. This strategy will match both the Head Quarter HSE standards and the local practices. If done in the right way, the method will significantly reduce the risk of facing HSE complications at a later stage, which could be damaging to the employees, the management and the reputation of the enterprise (company in) itself.</p>			
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1 Introduction

This paper provides a short description of how a HSE strategy for companies operating internationally can be implemented in a culturally effective way. In the process it is necessary to adapt the company's HSE strategy to a practice effective across cultures.

1.1 Background and motivation

Nuclear power plants undergo regular and scheduled maintenance where extra staff representing different nations, cultures and HSE practices is engaged for a hectically period of time, still living up to safety requirements. Large Scandinavian companies expand internationally bringing their own HSE standards and requirement across cultures to developing countries facing different values and practices with the challenges this involve and to countries where the workforce represents a diversity of cultures with different interpretation of security and safety plans/procedures. Across organisations in high risk domains issues concerning generalisability need to be handled when guidelines or practices developed elsewhere are to be implemented locally.

Companies operating internationally not only face the challenge of designing and implementing effective HSE (Health, Safety, and Environment) practices and culture that is functional in their home country. They also need the awareness, competence and experience to design and implement a HSE culture which is functional in a variety of local and foreign cultural contexts. In addition to the numerous practical challenges, creating a HSE culture and practices need to take into account the culturally different ways of dealing with authority, uncertainty, and individual responsibility, amongst a number of other factors. Lack of cultural competence can in itself lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings, which in turn can cause serious situations and accidents.

Main challenges for an intercultural effective HSE strategy includes:

- How do you make sure your HSE Strategy is adapted across cultural boundaries?
- How do you know what to look for in order to understand the local culture?
- How do you make sure to avoid cultural misunderstandings that can create dangerous situations and accidents?
- How do you make sure you train your staff so that they effectively execute HSE according to set standards?
- How can you do this in a way where knowhow is left within your organization so that you can do it yourself?

1.2 Health – Safety – Environment (HSE)

In principle health, safety and environment (HSE) concern tangible practices, routines, and guiding principles implemented in every day work to ensure that the health and safety of the workers and the work and outer environments are not at jeopardy. The Norwegian Government (Stortingsmelding nr. 7, 2001-2002) describes (at a high level) that HSE concerns:

- Health and hygiene
- Work and outer environment: psychosocial and physiological environment, and pollution
- Personal, environmental and economical safety

Whereas what constitutes health and safety of the workers and the inner and outer environment to a large extent should be generic as the physical and physiological properties are the same, HSE still depends upon prioritisations, leadership, attitudes, ways of learning, politics, values, regulations, economy, and more, in order to be implemented. If it did not depend upon these factors HSE should be universal and straight forward to communicate and implement.

Safety is known to depend on culture (amongst others – see chapter below). Cultures will vary for different reasons, and so will safety (and HSE) practices. Which practices are more right, or better? Why are they better? What are the premises for our own HSE philosophy and practices? These questions and many more go to the very foundation of HSE, and then not only in an international perspective, but it concern the underlying motivation regarding our own practice and philosophy.

1.3 Culture and Safety

1.3.1 Organisational and Safety Culture

The concept of culture is applied to different areas and levels including national, organisational, and HSE/safety culture. Organisational culture has been defined by Schein (2004: p 17) as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems”.

The concepts of ‘safety culture’ and ‘HSE culture’ acknowledge the role of cultural properties in safety. Guldenmund (2000, p. 251) define safety culture as “those aspects of organisational culture which will impact on attitudes and behaviour related to increasing or decreasing risk”. Safety culture can be seen as a subset of organizational culture (e.g. Cooper, 2000; Glendon & Stanton, 2000; Guldenmund, 2000), and IAEA (2002) claims that in the international nuclear industry the culture is centred on safety, and that it is the dominant part of organizational culture. ‘Safety Culture’ is defined by IAEA as “that assembly of characteristics and attitudes in organisations and individuals

which establishes that, as an overriding priority, nuclear plant safety issues receive the attention warranted by their significance”.

The importance for organisational and thus safety culture for safety and HSE lies in the functions of organisation culture. Hellesøy et al. (1993) pointed out different functions of organisational culture that all are relevant to safety and HSE. One function involves giving direction for behaviour; providing cognitive maps, models, standards and criteria for action; giving control and legality to the members' behaviour; and providing ways to solve the organisation's internal and external problems. Another function is integration, or how to create identity and loyalty, define the organisation's boundaries; create companionship; and acting stabilising over time.

The connection between the general functionality of culture in relation to the more specific safety has been described by Oedewald and Reiman (2007), who produced a list of eight themes on how the safety critical nature of a domain is reflected in its culture. The eight themes are seen as central to achieving safety and efficiency. The eight themes are; the way employees treat and understand safety or risks; the relationship between the awareness of risk and the effect on staff; organisation of work in safety critical organizations; predictability of organisational activity; methods used for staff training and their objectives; the role of rules and procedures in controlling performance and ensuring safety; how organisations handle the uncertainty involved in complex systems; and the set up of responsibility in organisations. These safety related themes not only relate to properties of the organisation culture, but also to properties at the national culture level.

1.3.2 National Culture

As individuals we belong to different (levels of) cultures at the same time. We typically belong to a certain nation, different organisations and groups, where the different levels of culture have different influences on our behaviour (Karahanna, Evaristo & Srite, 2005, Rosinski, 2004, Hofstede, 1991). Hofstede argue that the main difference between national culture and organisational culture is that the former is concerned with 'values' whereas the latter concerns 'practices'. Karahanna et al claim that for moral judgements supranational and national values dominate whereas for more task related behaviour professional and organisational cultures dominate. The influences of national culture on behaviour should thus be seen in addition to the effects of organisational culture on safety and HSE.

Few studies have specifically addressed the consequences of national culture differences within a high risk environment. Meshkati (1999) provided a list of issues and examples of culturally based attitudes affecting safety culture in nuclear power plants that differs between nations. These are (Meshkati p. 69):

- Achievement motivation and orientation
- Attitude toward time and time of day, organisation, hierarchy, procedure, work habits, technology, and work
- Population stereotype

- Religious duties and their effects on work
- Risk perception
- The 'if-it-ain't-broke, don't-fix-it' attitude
- Work group dynamics

These attitudes overlap with the safety functions of culture listed by Oedewald and Reiman (2007) suggesting a unique contribution of national culture on safety practice.

1.3.3 Cross cultural challenges

Differences in culture are most explicit when two (or more) environments with different cultures meet or is somehow united cross-culturally. Of most relevance for practical HSE and safety work are those areas where the cultural differences are largest and/or most central to HSE/safety.

The effects of differences in national (and organisational) culture are already known within the business environment. International mergers and acquisitions, international alliances, joint ventures, and take-overs all have been known to have a high failure rate due to an underestimation of the effect of cultural differences (Meschi, 1997; Fedor & Werther, 1995). There is a belief that mixing managers from different countries and companies cause serious organizational problems (Brannen & Salk, 2000). A survey revealed that integrating culture was the top challenge for 69 percent of 218 U.S. companies surveyed (Tetenbaum, 1999).

Differences in culture have effects on a number of characteristics relevant for HSE. Gelfand, Erez and Aycan (2007) reviewed research on cross-cultural organisational behaviour summarizing different topics and perspectives finding cultural differences in relation to work motivation; the relationship between the individual and the organisation; negotiation and disputes; teams; and culture and leadership, all of which are central to HSE/safety.

Culture and work motivation concerns both personal and situational factors that predict work motivation across cultures (Gelfand, Erez & Aycan, 2007). There is some evidence that there are universal motives behind self-efficacy, need for achievement, and need for competence. What varies is what drives these motivations across cultures. Goal setting is another variable that differs between cultures, as is seeking and giving feedback as well as practices of implementing rewards. The meaning of job content (e.g. autonomy) and the job demands' effect on health seems to be consistent across cultures. Job and pay satisfaction is influenced by culture, as is the relationship between the individual and the organisation (with respect to organisational commitment). The perceptions of mutual obligations between the employer and employee (psychological contract) seem to be stable across cultures, but the nature of these may vary. The concept of organisational justice, or reward allocations, has produced inconclusive results and a lot of variation has been found (Gelfand, Erez and Aycan, 2007). Culture seems to affect cognitive representations of conflicts as well as the outcome of negotiations, and different cultures are concerned about different outcome variables.

National culture differences also concerns differences in team related aspects (Gelfand, Erez & Aycan, 2007). Depending on the national culture, employees will have different attitudes towards teams in general. Differences concerns general resistance towards teams, and/or self-management in teams. There are also differences in the cognitive team processes, like schemas for what constitutes a successful workgroup. Some believe socio-emotional behaviour is more important, whereas others view high task orientation and low level socio-emotional behaviour as important. Culture also influences motivational and affective processes in teams, as well as feelings of attraction and trust, which can be developed in different processes across cultures. The nature of cooperation varies between cultures based on differences in situational factors. Some cultures develop cooperation based upon presence of instrumental factors like high goal interdependence, enhancement of personal identity, and cognitive-based trust, whereas other cultures depend upon socio-emotional factors like goal sharing, enhancement of group identity, and affect-based trust (Gelfand, Erez & Aycan).

1.4 Intercultural competence

Intercultural competence can be trained, and Hofstede (2001) lists three phases in the training. These phases are awareness, knowledge, and skills. The awareness phase teaches the student to perceive people in their cultural context and to retrieve unconscious knowledge of their own mental programs. Knowledge about the other culture's symbols, heroes, and their rituals should then follow. Finally, skills are based upon awareness and knowledge, plus practice. An organization that is trained and has a clear communication, command and control structure increases its probability to act in the best way.

In a contingency/crisis situation it is imperative that the organization acts in a way that minimizes the consequences for the employees, the daily operations, financial results and the organization's reputation. This requires that the management and staff have trained on the plans and procedures within the actual cultural context. The training is based on the HSE and cultural analysis and focus on information, communication and decision-making paths within the functions and between the functions. The training give the management and staff a chance to see, understand and act based on this mutual understanding and, their roles, responsibilities and tasks.

2 Improved HSE culture through state of the art analysis, design and training

HSE and safety have an important property through cultural components that influence behaviour. The cultural components reside at both organisational and national levels and will vary between organisations and nations. Organisational culture concerns the attitudes of the employees and their understanding of risk, as well as the standards for how the organisation organise its different safety initiatives through organisational practices. National culture has an influence on preferences for factors affecting the organisational practices like roles and responsibilities, relationship between the individual and the group, and handling of disagreements. There are many different solutions for how safety can be ensured, but the main challenges rises when different safety practices are implemented across cultures where the assumptions for the different

practices differs. Safety practices, and their cultural assumptions, however, can be brought to awareness and implemented through a cross-cultural HSE strategy.

On the initiative of Kulturfolk AS a group of HSE and safety culture professionals from the Institute for Energy Technology (IFE), SimOptima and Sund Energy have developed an integrated process for improving HSE culture globally by translating HQ (Head Quarter) HSE culture strategies into locally adapted practices – done in a way that leaves your organisation with knowhow to do it themselves. In short, a stepwise methodology based on demonstrated methods (see Figure 1. below) where the main activities are: project definition phase; HSE profiling and gap analysis phase; mapping and analysis of the different cultural profiles' communalities and discrepancies phase; the design of a HSE and cultural specific training program; and the implementation of the training program. The activities are dependent upon each other and an iterative process of making adjustments and revisiting earlier phases is recognised. These different phases are described in the subchapters below.

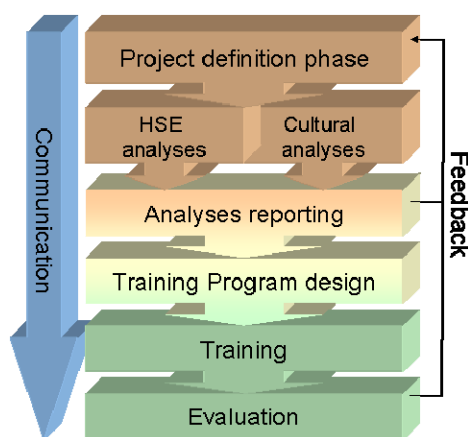


Figure 1. Overview of main activities.

2.1 Project definition phase

The activities of the project definition phase involve establishing the purpose and aims of the initiative, as well as the scope and practical work arrangements including contact persons, ensuring active involvement and process ownership. A central property of the process is the iterative relationship between the developments in the breakdown of the HSE vision into specific HSE targets, strategies and actions, and the development of the process where the aim is to develop specific HSE activities realizing the HSE vision through the different analysis and training activities – as seen in Figure 2. An important assumption for the effectiveness of the process is the ongoing communication between the process owner and the project.



Figure 2. Dependability between company HSE policies and project developments.

2.2 HSE analysis and cultural analysis phase

Health, environment and safety is an extensive area that involves the individual (employees, customers and providers), the organisation (the company), and the society in a relationship of dependability. Which element the company chooses to focus on depends on international and national commitments and regulations, the company's stated HSE policy (including Corporate Social Responsibility), identified risks, and national culture characteristics (see below). Further, it is essential that the identified HSE actions are integrated in the business' conduct of operation, and thoroughly evaluated as a part of the company's continuous improvement (learning organisation). Among the success criteria is the presence of both a top-down and a bottom-up approach in the organisation, and that there is an internal and external focus.

It is important to identify the local target areas and efforts as well as the factors acting as show-stoppers in realising the HSE strategy.

2.3 HSE analysis

The structure and properties of the intended HSE culture and the strategy to realise this, as well as the local practice, need to be mapped and then analysed. Through the use of a specific HSE framework the current state of the different HSE practices will be mapped. The current state is compared with the desired result in order to identify areas of overlap and discrepancies. The output will be comparable lists of HSE practices illustrating the gaps between the intended HQ HSE strategy, and the locally lived HSE practices. Through the use of a HSE specific framework, which consists of a hierarchical system, the different HSE terms and concepts are broken down (as far as possible) from the more abstract terms into more specific HSE actions.

The overlaps and discrepancies from the HSE mapping will be analysed in relation to the overall aim and vision regarding HSE – i.e. in relation to the desired HSE “profile”. In addition, the most challenging HSE areas will be analysed and scored on relative importance and required effort. The output will be a list of prioritized cultural HSE

areas for the design of a training program. The scoring is thus dependent upon the cultural analysis.

2.4 Culture analysis

The implementation of a HSE culture requires cultural competent leaders, trainers and employees. In addition to the procedures and standards the HSE culture will ensure the daily realisation of HSE. In addition to the HSE specific culture, knowledge regarding national and organisational culture is essential.

National culture differences affect a number of factors associated with change processes. Typically there are differences in the value systems that distinguish different nations. These values concern:

- Motivation
- How differences in authorities is handled
- How uncertainty is handled
- How the relationship between the individual and group is handled

The culture analysis will focus on the employees' value preferences, as well as the operational practices (organisational culture) that will provide valuable insight on the organisational assumptions regarding realising a common HSE culture. Based upon the culture analysis a training program for managers and instructors providing cultural competence, as well as tools and methods to strengthening the HSE culture locally is designed.

The local culture is analysed both in terms of values and practices. The mapping of local practices will serve to identify areas of safety culture dysfunctions. The mapping of local values gives important insight into issues such as delegation of authority, individual and collective responsibility, relation to uncertainty and time, and motivation, all important factors for an effective change strategy.

2.5 Analysis reporting

The outputs from the HSE and the culture analysis will be the basis for a report. The report will take both the analysis' results and the HSE purpose and aims into consideration and give recommendations regarding the best way to progress. Both the training program on cultural competence relevant to HSE, and adjustments to HSE purpose and aims are considered. The reporting is the first deliverable and decisions are made on if and how to proceed.

2.6 Training program design

Based upon the results of the analysis and decisions on how to precede a training program will be designed. The training program will be designed based upon the cultural and the HSE analyses. HSE relevant training is based upon the HSE analysis and the results from the HSE mapping. Through the scoring of HSE challenges and

priority areas, and the overview of HSE discrepancies and overlaps, specific HSE relevant scenarios can be targeted. These scenarios will in turn feed into the training program. The final parameter is practical simulation based scenario training. In addition, the cultural analyses will identify the cultural assumptions for realising the HSE culture as well as the main cultural challenges. These cultural parameters are expressed both along value dimension and practices dimensions and are then integrated in the scenarios to be used in practical training. In sum, the key HSE and cultural challenge areas are integrated into training scenarios.

The training is based on the reports from the analysis and the documents established in the organization to handle contingency/crisis situations in addition to interviews with key personnel.

2.7 Training

The aim is to provide cultural competence needed for the participating staff to effectively deal with the practical HSE work in the international context. The underlying assumption is that by training on cultural and HSE relevant scenarios sufficient competence will be developed by the participants for handling their “real-life” challenges. The objectives of the training are:

- Enable internal trainers to use the training tools themselves
- Educate key operating staff through practical exercises on how to create a more effective HSE culture given the specific HSE and cultural challenges
- Evaluation for improvements after each training program
- Establish a knowledge network of internal trainers within the organization and if possible across organizations

The tailor-made training consists of four modules: Walkthrough, Talkthrough, Tabletop Exercises and Simulation Exercises (See Figure 3). The objective is to prepare the workforce for operational reality, to perform both in normal and contingency situations based on the results from the analyses.

2.7.1 Walkthrough

The walkthrough is either a physical or a mental walkthrough of the project, as perceived by client and stakeholder groups and serves to establish a good understanding of their expectations and perspectives.

2.7.2 Talkthrough

This training session provides an understanding of the project, tasks, roles and responsibilities. In addition to the reports from the analyses, documents such as plans, policies and procedures are used for this module to enable the workforce to gain an overview of the working processes, important contributions to the project from functional areas and possible bottlenecks etc.

2.7.3 Tabletops

Tabletops are exercises where participants explain how they will solve a given scenario related to the work process and based on the reports from the analyses. In doing so, they will also explain what their roles and responsibilities are, why they solve issues in that particular way and how and with whom they will communicate. Tabletop exercises provide operational knowledge and empower the workforce to handle both normal and contingency situations, test and/or develop procedures and create operational knowledge.

2.7.4 Simulations

Simulations are created on the basis of real situations. Perspectives and areas of focus are predefined in order to ensure appropriate behaviour based on the results from the analyses. The basis of this methodology is “learning by doing”, encouraging participants to learn from their own experience. Different approaches can be taken, thus producing new experiences and situations to learn from. The workforce is given the opportunity of practising on contingencies that may occur, in order to find the right solution based on established plans and analyses.

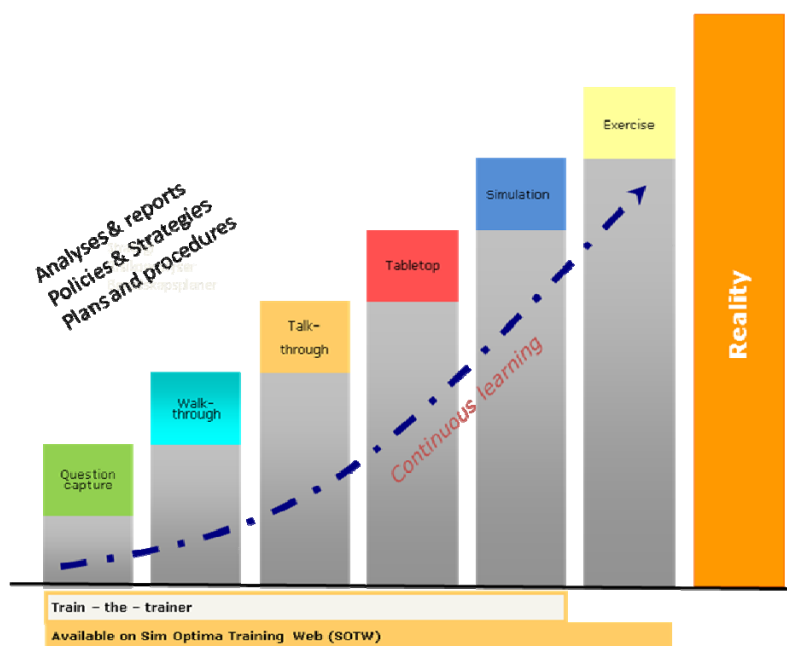


Figure 3. Training methodology.

3 Discussion and Conclusions

This paper brings forward the argument that effective HSE can not be implemented across nations unless the cultural properties are considered. HSE and safety culture relies on not only formal descriptions and regulations, but also to a large extent on attitudes, values, social scripts, norms, traditions, practices, etc. that all are central constructs of cultural variations. There are (at least) two errors that can be made regarding culture. The first is that cultural differences do not matter. HSE require a focus on practical and tangible issues that appeals to common sense, and differences in

practice can be assumed to represent levels of development and progress only. The second error is to assume and take for granted that the culture we represent ourselves is somehow superior and both should and can be introduced to others as HSE drivers. The functions and effects of culture, and the implications across cultures need to be fully appreciated and included the overall HSE strategy.

There have so far not been any practical demonstrations of the full method including all analyses and phases. Still, the method is based upon and put together by approaches and techniques that are demonstrated in a number of different projects where similar issues are addressed. Different multi-cultural organizations have used the training concept with different focus in the different phases of a project, from preparation/planning to the execution based on the plans/procedures and the cultural context. Focus has among others been to:

- ensure delivery within budget and keep the best reputation
- empower the staff to solve the challenges on the lowest level in the organization
- establish confidence and mastery to handle contingency situations in own functions

Through our experience we know the importance of training on contingency/crisis situations based on the culture where the operation is to take part and with a mutual understanding of the cultural context. Our contribution is to increase our customers' ability to do the training themselves by sharing our knowledge and experience through a train-the-trainer concept. Undertaking this stepwise approach will ensure an effective, robust and custom designed HSE strategy. This strategy will match both the HQ HSE standards and the local practices. If done in the right way, the method will significantly reduce the risk of facing HSE complications at a later stage, which could make damaging the employees, the management and the company in itself.

4 Parties involved

IFE – The Institute for Energy Technology (IFE.no) is a well established research institute within the petroleum and nuclear environments. IFE hosts the OECD Halden Reactor Project (HRP.no) with 18 world wide member countries and more than a 100 member organizations and has first hand experience in international safety research and guidance work. Through the sector Safety MTO IFE advices on a number of organizational, human and technical safety issues within the nuclear, petroleum, transport and process control domains.

Kulturfolk AS is a training and consulting firm based in Oslo with a network of experts in intercultural communication and management around the world. Kulturfolk creates cultural competence on an organizational, team and individual level both in regards to national culture, organizational culture and operational culture. Kulturfolk bases its methodology on state of the art know-how and research, as well as solid experience, and is a preferred supplier of cultural competence by major private, public and non-governmental organizations in Norway and internationally.

Sim Optima AS offers training solutions to organizations nationally and internationally to ensure effective operations. We are the preferred supplier of Operational Readiness Exercises (ORE) to several significant companies and sport event owners/organizers. Our concept is a practical tool in both the planning process (normal plans and contingency/crisis plans), in implementing systems/processes and in creating an empowered workforce. Sim Optima also offers training of internal trainers in the methods to enable the organization to do the training themselves when needed. By implementing a concept with operational training, the organization contributes to bridge the knowing – doing gap. Through this strategic, financial, hazard and operational risks are reduced.

Sund Energy is a specialised energy consulting company, providing strategic and commercial support in the area of gas, power and CCS. Sund Energy supports a wide range of energy projects from major energy players to single projects. We deliver insights and analysis, designing strategies, business models and investments robust to uncertain future developments.

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