

A series exploring Non-Technical Skills (NTS) and how they can benefit safety critical organisations

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7 of 8 - Educating rail employees about the benefits of NTS through training

Dr Stephen Fletcher, occupational psychologist and director at [the OPC](#) has written the 7th in the series of 8 articles about Non-Technical Skills (NTS). This article explores communicating with, and educating rail employees about the benefits of NTS. Previous articles have looked at specific NTS for key driver and safety critical roles as well as exploring the use of NTS in safety incidents. Links for previous articles can be found at the end of this page.

NTS have a crucial role to play in helping employees to be safe, and stay safe whilst undertaking safety critical activities within the rail industry. NTS training is a useful tool in helping to introduce employees into the concept of NTS and the benefits they can bring to safe working. NTS is relatively new to our industry and so we need to invest time in educating and communicating with employees what NTS are all about;

how to incorporate them into work tasks, and the benefits they can bring to safe working.

Potential opportunities for education around NTS could be:

- **During initial training for new recruits**

This is an excellent opportunity to instill some key NTS skills and tools at an early stage in a new recruit's employment life. It's a time where their working behaviours are still embryonic and are more open to change.

- **Training for existing employees**

This can be a little more challenging, particularly for those employees whose working behaviours may already be quite fixed. For this NTS training to have maximum effect and to bring about behaviour change, it needs to be persuasive and influential. In the OPC's experience this training will need to sell the benefits of NTS; be down to earth, rail specific and with relevant case studies. More importantly, we need to provide practical tools and techniques on how an employee can use and apply NTS in their daily work tasks. It is also very advantageous to use some behavioural tools to help the employee to fix these newly acquired skills into their work.

- **Training following a safety incident**

This type of training is usually focused on rail employees who have had safety incidents at work for which they were wholly or partially responsible. It is often employee specific. It should commence with a detailed investigation of the incident to help uncover the NTS shortfalls that may have contributed to the incident. There is more information available on this in [Article #5 - Effective incident investigations to uncover NTS root causes to a safety incident](#).

Once the NTS shortfalls have been uncovered they can be shared with the employee. This should include some practical NTS tools and techniques that they can use to help rectify the NTS shortfalls and so assist them in reducing the risk of a safety incident in the future. In the OPC's experience, having had an incident (or more than one) employees are more likely to buy into NTS training and engage in NTS behavioural change. However, it is important that this post incident NTS training is undertaken in a collaborative manner. The NTS shortfalls identified by an OPC psychologist/line manager must be credible and the NTS tools and any behavioural change techniques suggested should be practical in nature and easily implemented.

A case study about NTS training for a leading UK train operator with over 1,200 train drivers

A leading UK train operator was keen to introduce NTS into its driver function and approached the OPC to support with some training, utilising their existing expertise around NTS. It was proposed that through the use of a one-day safety brief training window, all drivers could receive dedicated NTS training and behavioural change support.

It was important that the training to be delivered was:

- rail relevant,
- fit for purpose,
- credible and practical, and
- encouraged personal development and behavioural change

Collaborating with a group of driver experts, OPC psychologists identified the top 6 NTS that were most important to driving trains for that train operator. These included the NTS of 'maintaining concentration', 'clarity in communication', 'anticipating risk', 'checking', 'attention to detail', and 'learning and developing'.

An OPC psychologist prepared a bespoke training programme that was interactive, engaging, and explored each of the 6 NTS in detail. To facilitate behavioural change at work, each driver was encouraged to choose 1 (or more) of the 6 NTS they would like to work on going forward. They each completed, and signed a simple NTS commitment card as a reminder and aide memoir to support and encourage their individual learning.

The OPC psychologists ran a train-the-trainer NTS session to a group of key driver managers, trainers and instructors with the aim of them becoming NTS 'gurus' for the train operator. This group would then deliver the NTS training to all of its 1,200 drivers.

The NTS workshops proved a great success. At the end of it **92%** of the 1,200 drivers said they **'liked it'** and **86%** said **'it worked for them'**. To check the effectiveness of the NTS training each driver took part in an NTS follow up session with his/her respective driver manager three months after attending the NTS workshop. This follow up meeting explored each driver's success in implementing changes and NTS improvement in their daily driving activities. Findings from the follow up sessions were also very encouraging:

- 63% of drivers stated that **using NTS** helped them stay safe
- and 50% said that **working on their NTS** had helped them stay safe

Occupational Psychologist and Director at the OPC, Dr Stephen Fletcher commented

'Training can be a useful tool to introduce NTS to employees as well as encourage them to use and apply NTS in their day-to-day work. However, it is unrealistic to expect a one-off training programme to bring about lasting change. Even in today's difficult pandemic work situation, alternatives to face-to-face training options are still valuable, viable and should be explored.'

'Our investment in NTS needs to be ongoing and include a wide range of different NTS interventions over time that can help bring about lasting and consistent change. If NTS is to work we need to see it as part of a change programme; giving it the time and effort to help bring about sustained safety improvement'

If you would like to know more about [NTS training](#) and how it can help improve safety performance, then contact us at admin@theopc.co.uk or call 01923 23 46 46.



the occupational psychology centre

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