

# SafeAlign

## Executive accountability for safety using the M.I.C.E. framework

*Moral clarity. Better questions. Funded controls. Relentless follow-through.*

Version: 1.0

Date: 26 February 2026

Audience: Board, executive team, general managers, and safety leadership

Purpose: Provide a practical, executive-ready model for clarifying safety accountability and improving safety outcomes by aligning leadership behaviours, resourcing decisions, and assurance with the organisation's highest risks.

## Executive summary

Many organisations invest heavily in safety initiatives yet still experience serious incidents, recurring high-potential events, and increasing operational risk during periods of change. Incidents rarely result from a single error. They occur when multiple layers of defence degrade over time and the gaps align - the Swiss Cheese effect.

SafeAlign is a leadership system that helps executives and managers prevent drift, strengthen critical controls, and keep safety aligned with how work is actually performed. SafeAlign uses the M.I.C.E. framework - Moral, Inquisitive, Cost, and Embed - as a clear, practical way to define executive accountability and translate it into routines, decisions, and evidence.

SafeAlign provides:

- A shared language for executive safety accountability that goes beyond slogans and lagging metrics.
- A practical method to verify critical controls, not just confirm paperwork or injury rates.
- A governance and assurance rhythm that closes the loop and prevents recurring issues.
- A role-based approach that clarifies what the Board, C-suite, leaders, and supervisors each must own.

When the business changes, the 'cheese moves'. SafeAlign keeps the layers aligned so the holes do not line up.

## Why safety outcomes drift

In high-performing organisations, safety risk is created and controlled by the same system that creates and controls performance: strategy, priorities, resourcing, capability, supervision, asset integrity, and change management.

Over time, systems drift. Procedures become mismatched to reality, maintenance is deferred, supervision thins, contractors change, and production pressure normalises workarounds. People adapt to keep work moving. Those adaptations can quietly erode barriers.

The result is often a misleading picture: lagging indicators (such as injury frequency) may look stable while exposure to catastrophic risk increases. Organisations can be 'safe' on paper and vulnerable in practice.

## Two simple mental models

- Who Moved My Cheese? - change is constant; organisations must notice it early and adapt deliberately rather than rely on outdated habits.
- Swiss Cheese model - serious incidents occur when multiple safeguards fail or are bypassed across layers (governance, design, operations, supervision, and assurance).

## What SafeAlign is

SafeAlign is an executive-facing approach to embed safety as a leadership system. It is designed to help leaders:

- Clarify accountability across the organisation (who owns what, and how it is verified).
- Identify and strengthen critical controls for top risks.
- Align cost, schedule, and operational decisions with risk appetite and duty of care.
- Build routines that sustain performance under pressure - before incidents force change.

SafeAlign is compatible with existing safety management systems (SMS), ISO 45001, and critical risk management frameworks. It does not replace these systems; it makes them work in practice by aligning leadership decisions, behaviours, and assurance.

**The M.I.C.E. framework for executive safety accountability**

M.I.C.E. provides a practical way to describe what leaders are responsible for - beyond 'supporting safety'. Each dimension corresponds to a distinct leadership contribution that, when missing, creates predictable gaps in the safety system.

M.I.C.E. Dimension	Executive accountability (what cannot be delegated)	Typical 'holes' when missing	Example leader questions
Moral	Set non-negotiables and a duty-of-care culture: people can speak up; respect and psychological safety are real; leaders make decisions they would accept for their own family.	Shortcuts tolerated; fear of reporting; values replaced by slogans; psychosocial harm normalised; inconsistent consequences.	What are we asking people to tolerate that we would not accept for ourselves? Where is it unsafe to speak up - and why?
Inquisitive	Verify critical controls in the real world. Demand evidence, not reassurance. Look for weak signals, drift, and workarounds.	Dashboard theatre; audits that check paperwork only; assumptions untested; learning stops at injury rates.	Show me the critical controls for our top risks - how do we know they work today? What has changed that increases exposure?
Cost	Fund the controls that match the risk. Prevent cost decisions from quietly transferring risk to the frontline. Align procurement and contracting with safety-critical requirements.	Deferred maintenance; reduced supervision and training; cheapest contracting creates unmanaged risk; risk accepted without transparency.	What have we deferred this quarter and what risk did we accept by doing so? Are we buying risk through procurement choices?
Embedded	Sustain routines and close the loop: actions completed, verified, and embedded. Consistency under pressure, especially during change and peaks.	Actions never closed; 'campaigns' fade; leadership presence only after incidents; controls degrade over time.	How many overdue critical actions exist and who verifies closure? What routines make safe work the default, not optional?

## Who must be engaged: role-based accountability

Safety is a shared organisational outcome, but accountability is not vague. Different leadership layers own different parts of the system. SafeAlign clarifies expectations by role, using M.I.C.E. to describe what 'good' looks like at each layer.

A useful governance mindset: the Board does not manage safety - but it must assure safety.

### Board and executive roles

- **Board / Directors:** Set expectations, approve risk appetite, and require credible assurance that critical controls are effective. *(M.I.C.E. emphasis: Inquisitive + Embed (assurance and follow-through); protect Cost for critical controls.)*
- **CEO / Managing Director:** Create enterprise alignment: resolve trade-offs, set cadence, and model non-negotiables in decisions and behaviour. *(M.I.C.E. emphasis: Moral + Embed with strong Inquisitive verification.)*
- **COO / Operations Executives:** Own operational control where pressure and change live; verify controls in the field and strengthen discipline. *(M.I.C.E. emphasis: Inquisitive + Embed; ensure Cost supports supervision, maintenance, and operational readiness.)*
- **CFO:** Ensure financial choices do not create unmanaged risk; align budgets, procurement, and investment logic to risk exposure. *(M.I.C.E. emphasis: Cost + Inquisitive; ensure Embed through owned budgets and closure.)*
- **CHRO / People & Culture:** Build capability and climate: supervision, competence, speak-up systems, and psychosocial safety. *(M.I.C.E. emphasis: Moral + Embed; Inquisitive through listening systems and hotspots.)*
- **CIO/CTO / Engineering & Digital:** Design safe systems and manage change: reliability, engineering standards, and technology impacts on safety. *(M.I.C.E. emphasis: Inquisitive + Cost + Embed; Moral through safe-by-design choices.)*
- **General Counsel / Risk / Assurance:** Maintain duty-of-care governance, defensible assurance, and effective learning systems that drive systemic fixes. *(M.I.C.E. emphasis: Inquisitive + Embed; ensure Cost is not confused with risk transfer.)*

### Operational leadership roles

- **General Managers / Site Leaders:** Translate policy into daily practice; set local priorities, remove obstacles, and ensure critical controls are verified and sustained. *(M.I.C.E. emphasis: All four dimensions, with emphasis on Inquisitive field verification and Embed closure.)*
- **Supervisors:** Control of work and real-time decision-making; coaching and consistency at the point where risk becomes exposure. *(M.I.C.E. emphasis: Moral + Inquisitive + Embed (last line before harm).)*

## Making it operational: the SafeAlign leadership system

SafeAlign turns accountability into action through five practical building blocks.

## 1. Define critical risks and non-negotiables

- Identify the handful of critical risks that can cause fatality, permanent harm, or catastrophic loss.
- Define non-negotiable controls and standards (critical control requirements, life-saving rules, safe design requirements).
- Make expectations explicit for employees and contractors.

## 2. Verify critical controls (not just compliance)

- Establish a critical control verification process: what is verified, how often, by whom, and what evidence is acceptable.
- Shift audits from 'paper passes' to field-based confirmation of control effectiveness.
- Use assurance to surface weak signals early, before events escalate.

## 3. Align resourcing and trade-offs with risk appetite

- Ensure maintenance, supervision, training, and fatigue controls are resourced to match exposure.
- Make risk acceptance transparent: if you defer a control, name the risk and the compensating measures.
- Design procurement and contractor management to buy capability and control, not just lowest price.

## 4. Establish leadership routines that sustain embed

- Embed safety into existing business rhythms: operational reviews, performance meetings, capital allocation, and change governance.
- Require action closure with verification and learning - not just completion.
- Maintain leadership presence in the field as a control: listen, verify, remove obstacles.

## 5. Build a learning culture with fair accountability

- Separate blame from learning; focus on system improvements while maintaining standards.
- Investigate high-potential events and control failures, not only injuries.
- Strengthen speak-up channels and psychological safety: bad news travels fast.

## Measuring what matters: evidence-based safety performance

SafeAlign complements lagging indicators with leading evidence of system health. Leaders should ask: 'Are our controls strong today, and will they still be strong when pressure increases or change occurs?'

### Recommended measures

- Critical control health: verification completion and quality, control failures, and time-to-restore.
- Action management: overdue critical actions, repeat actions, and independent verification of closure.
- Operational conditions: fatigue exposure, staffing and supervision ratios, maintenance backlog, and permit-to-work quality.
- Learning signals: high-potential events, near misses with control failure, speak-up volume and responsiveness, and safety culture pulse checks.

- Contractor performance: competence assurance, onboarding effectiveness, and control alignment at interfaces.

## **A practical adoption roadmap**

SafeAlign is typically implemented in phases. The sequence below provides momentum while building sustainable capability.

### **First 30 days: align and diagnose**

- Executive alignment session: agree critical risks, non-negotiables, and M.I.C.E. expectations by role.
- Baseline diagnostic: review incidents, high-potential events, and where control failures recur.
- Assurance reality check: compare 'work as imagined' to 'work as done' in selected areas.

### **Days 31-60: strengthen controls and routines**

- Establish or refresh the critical control framework: definitions, verification, owners, and evidence standards.
- Set leadership routines: field verification cadence, action closure discipline, and review forums.
- Targeted capability uplift: supervisors and leaders trained on verification, learning, and just culture.

### **Days 61-90: embed and demonstrate evidence**

- Run the first full cycle of control verification and executive review using M.I.C.E. questions.
- Close top system gaps: resourcing, supervision, maintenance, change governance, and contractor interfaces.
- Publish a concise executive assurance pack: what we learned, what changed, and what is improving.

## **Common failure modes SafeAlign addresses**

- Slogans without trade-offs: values stated but not reflected in budget, schedule, and decisions.
- Lagging-metric comfort: low injury rates masking rising catastrophic risk exposure.
- Paper compliance: audits and procedures that do not reflect real work or real control effectiveness.
- Unclosed actions: recurring issues because fixes are not verified and embedded.
- Change without control: rapid operational change eroding safeguards, competence, and supervision.

**Appendix A: one-page M.I.C.E. scorecard**

Use this as an executive conversation guide. The goal is not a score; it is evidence and action.

Dimension	Evidence to ask for	Red flags	Actions to expect
Moral	Speak-up and response data; psychosocial hotspots; fairness and consequences; examples of leaders choosing safety under pressure.	Fear of reporting; disrespect normalised; inconsistent discipline; 'hero' culture.	Reinforce non-negotiables; fix hotspots; leadership coaching; improve reporting safety.
Inquisitive	Critical control verification results; field observations; high-potential events and learning; change impacts.	Only injury data discussed; no evidence of control checks; surprises seen as 'bad luck'.	Increase verification quality; strengthen learning reviews; improve change governance.
Cost	Maintenance and staffing data; training and competency evidence; contractor selection criteria; risk acceptance decisions.	Backlog rising; training cut; supervision thin; procurement drives cheapest outcomes.	Rebalance budgets; protect safety-critical spend; adjust contracting requirements.
Embedded	Action closure and verification; routine attendance; follow-through examples; sustained improvement evidence.	Overdue actions; repeat findings; initiative fatigue; post-incident focus only.	Tighten action management; simplify routines; verify closure; embed into business cadence.



## Appendix B: executive questions

Use these questions in operational reviews, site engagements, contractor meetings, and Board assurance discussions.

### Moral

- Where do people feel least safe to speak up, and what are we doing about it?
- What conditions are creating fatigue, frustration, or disrespect that increases risk?
- Where have we recently chosen safety over short-term output, and what did we learn?

### Inquisitive

- What are our top critical risks and what controls must not fail?
- Which controls are currently weak, and how do we know?
- Where is work being done differently than procedure, and what is the system telling us?

### Cost

- What safety-critical investment are we deferring, and what compensating controls are in place?
- Are contractor and procurement choices aligned to control requirements?
- Is our staffing and supervision model realistic for the work and hazards?

### Embedded

- Which critical actions are overdue and why?
- How do we verify closure and sustained effectiveness, not just completion?
- What routines ensure controls stay strong when the business is under pressure?

## About SafeAlign

SafeAlign is designed for executive teams who want clear accountability, stronger critical controls, and a defensible assurance story. It can be delivered as an executive workshop, a diagnostic and roadmap, leadership coaching, and embedded support to implement critical control verification and action closure discipline.