



Safety Culture Defence: Resiliency

This safety moment describes an important cultural defence, resiliency, and provides questions to promote team reflection and discussion.

Safety culture overview

The CER has endorsed the following safety culture definition:

Safety culture means “the attitudes, values, norms and beliefs, which a particular group of people shares with respect to risk and safety.”¹

Safety culture is an intangible construct with a powerful impact on organizational safety outcomes. Because of its unobservable nature, it is useful to represent safety culture through a framework. A framework helps illustrate what safety culture looks like within an organization, and subsequently, can help organizations detect what areas of their organizational functioning are supporting vs detracting from a positive safety culture.

The CER’s safety culture framework acts as an example for industry of safety culture in a high-risk organization. The CER’s framework depicts eight cultural dimensions (i.e., eight elements of organizational functioning) that support vs detract from a positive safety culture. There are four negative dimensions identified that act as threats to existing organizational safety defences: production pressure, complacency, normalization of deviance, and tolerance of inadequate systems and resources. On the other hand, there are four positive dimensions identified that act as cultural defences against these threats: committed safety leadership, vigilance, empowerment and accountability, and resiliency.

These dimensions are shown in the table below:

Negative dimensions (Cultural threats)	Positive dimensions (Cultural defences)
Production pressure	Committed safety leadership
Complacency	Vigilance
Normalization of deviance	Empowerment and accountability
Tolerance of inadequate systems and resources	Resiliency

¹ Mearns, K., Flin, R., Gordon, R. & Fleming, M. (1998). Measuring safety culture in the offshore oil industry. *Work and Stress*, 12(3), 238-254. “Safety” includes safety of workers and the public, process safety, operational safety, facility integrity, security and environmental protection.

Cultural Defence No. 4: Resiliency

Resiliency is the capability to respond effectively to changing demands in order to manage potential or emerging risk. There are organizational mechanisms in place to manage complex activities, and to constantly meet the fluctuating demands of a high hazard industry. There is a reluctance to simplify problems and situations in order to arrive at a solution. The organization allows decisions to be made by frontline employees and allows authority to migrate to the employees with the most expertise, regardless of their level in the company. The organization is committed to developing capabilities to detect, contain, and rebound from errors that may occur.

Key characteristics of resiliency (Attributes)

- Recognizing the introduction of new or changing threats in the operating environment
- Ensuring employees (at all levels) have adequate knowledge and skill related to error management
- The organization having the capacity, diversity and redundancy to manage risk
- The organization responding to unanticipated or changing conditions in a timely and effective manner

Examples of resiliency (Descriptors)

1. Adequate financial and human resources to manage risk and perform operational activities safely.
2. Authority to make decisions lies with the most qualified employees.
3. Robust change management practices include safety considerations.
4. Timely corrective and preventive actions are taken when deficiencies and hazards are detected.
5. The organization promotes effective teambuilding and maintenance skills in support of operational excellence.
6. Cross-functional and interdisciplinary teamwork is present in safety reviews and analyses.
7. Contingencies are in place to fill vacated roles with competent staff.
8. There is an ongoing monitoring of the operation and its environment for changing conditions and related risks.

Questions for discussion

1. How does our organization nurture and support resiliency?
2. What more can we do to nurture and support resiliency?

For more information and useful tools related to safety culture, visit the CER's Safety Culture Learning Portal at www.cer-rec.gc.ca.