Canada Energy Regulator
Régie de l'énergie du Canada

Safety Culture Threat:

Normalization of Deviance

This safety moment describes an important cultural threat, Normalization of Deviance, 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

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[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 Threat No. 3: Normalization of Deviance

Normalization of deviance occurs when it becomes generally acceptable to deviate from safety systems, procedures, and processes. The organization fails to implement or consistently apply its management system across the operation (regional or functional disparities exist). Safety rules and defenses are routinely circumvented in order to get the job done.

Key characteristics of normalization of deviance (Attributes)

- The organization failing to provide adequate or effective systems, processes, and procedures for work being performed
- The organization failing to provide necessary financial, human, and technical resources
- Impracticable rules, processes and procedures, which make compliance and achievement of other organizational outcomes mutually exclusive
- Employees finding workarounds in response to operational inadequacies
- The organization failing to provide employees with effective mechanisms to resolve operational inadequacies

Examples of normalization of deviance (Descriptors)

1. Operational deviations are not managed using change and risk management processes.
2. Some safety rules and operational procedures are not practical in the operating environment.
3. There is an extended time between reporting of safety issues (hazards, inspection and audit findings, other deficiencies, etc.) and their resolution.
4. Maintenance activities are not prioritized and executed as planned.
5. Processes and procedures are not routinely assessed for accuracy, completeness, or effectiveness.

Questions for team discussion

1. How does our organization stay vigilant to and combat normalization of deviance?
2. What can we do to enhance our vigilance to normalization of deviance?

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