Canada Energy Regulator

Régie de l'énergie du Canada

Safety Culture Threat: Production Pressure

This safety moment describes an important cultural threat, production pressure, 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. 1: Production Pressure

Production pressure occurs when there is an imbalance between production and safety. This can occur when leadership overly values production, such that the emphasis is placed upon meeting the work demands, schedule or budget, rather than working safely. Organizational goals and performance measures are heavily weighted towards commercial and production outcomes over protection and safety. Business strategy, plans, resourcing and processes fail to adequately address safety considerations.

Key characteristics of production pressure (Attributes)

- Leaders making decisions based upon short-term business objectives without sufficient consideration of long-term impact to safety outcomes
- Leaders failing to see the impact of their actions in eroding safety as an organizational value

Examples of production pressure (Descriptors)

1. There are time and workload pressures because not enough time or resources are assigned to activities.
2. There are excessive budgetary pressures.
3. Leaders are less strict about adherence to procedures when work falls behind schedule.
4. Project deadlines are set based upon overly optimistic assumptions.
5. There are frequent project overruns.
6. The constant tension between production and safety results in a slow and gradual degradation in safety margins.
7. Shortcuts are necessary to meet unrealistic deadlines.
8. Rewards and incentives are heavily weighted towards production outcomes.

Questions for team discussion

1. How does our organization stay vigilant to and combat production pressure?
2. What can we do to enhance our sensitivity to production pressure?

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