

**Shaping the organization to operate in a High Reliability/Productivity manor  
Or managing the day to day like we manage large scale incidents.**

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We have met with great success in managing emergencies of all types. We have created an environment and structure that is universally accepted to manage large fires, earthquakes, evacuations of 10s of thousands, hazardous materials accidents, terrorist attacks, hurricanes, and any other type of disaster you can think of. We can bring in or assemble teams to bring order to chaos and begin recovery to almost any situation yet we all have trouble managing the day to day business. We seem to have difficulty in assessing risk, planning for the unexpected, developing an empowering culture and creating an organization that can meet any challenge present or future.

One very smart guy (Joe Martin, Battalion Chief, Los Angeles Fire Department, Retired) said “What we do every day is what we do in an emergency,” meaning that we function the same way day-to-day as we do when called upon to respond to an emergency. Well, maybe we do when training for emergencies. We do use the same organizational structure when we practice for emergencies, teach, and train for emergencies.

But do we run the organization day-to-day the same way as we run emergencies? Do we have the same goals? Do we share the same objectives? Do we have the same vision of where we are, where we need to go, and why we need to go there? Does hierarchy rule? Does everyone have the ability to contribute their observations, solutions, and expertise? Do we have a sense of organizational trust or are there divisions in our structure?

Whenever an emergency is declared or recognized, no matter what business you are in, Public Safety, Petroleum industry, Politics, Nuclear Industry, Healthcare, Chemical Industry, Aviation, or the local Mom & Pop shop the same process tends to take place (at least in those with reliably successful outcomes). The threat is recognized and transmitted throughout the organization. The structure of the organization begins to change; organizational goals, objectives, and vision are defined, focused, shared, and adopted throughout the organization. Potential solutions and expertise are shared and recognized ahead of “normal” organizational hierarchy. A sense of teamwork and trust develops, regardless of hierarchal position or division, as they work towards the solutions of common threat. An ability to recognize the weak signals of change, awareness to positive and negative signals, and anticipation of the unexpected becomes acute and is shared by the entire organization. Personal responsibility and personal accountability is increased and accepted willingly by individuals. These are just some of the

changes that an organization experiences during serious threat or in managing an emergency. They are by all means a not an inclusive list. I am sure you have experienced many more! Let's think of the positive, action oriented changes that we have outlined and the positive changes in an organization that you have experienced under threat and how we would adopt organizational structure, policy, process, and employee development to bring about the same results in our "day to day" business operations. Quick identification of change, threat, unexpected outcomes or results, early in the cycle, are easier and less costly to correct and will decrease the cost of operation, increase profitability, increase quality, and assure a greater level of safety.

"What we do every day is what we do in an emergency," well we didn't! We had to make some changes. Below I describe the changes I found most useful in our operation to promote a more resilient, responsive and reliable organization.

### **Abolish all Committees!!**

Committees are the fastest way to make sure that whatever you don't want to be adopted never gets adopted yet you still look good. We established workgroups, a group established to produce a work product with expectations of outcome and timeframes. The workgroup is established with not just those interested in the subject but with some who are not in full agreement, and some who are informal leaders within the organization.

Staffing of the workgroup includes those that will be responsible for implementation and for function to assure a viable, well thought out implementation plan and quality program. This process calls for balancing the program with the resources available, assures necessity, and increases acceptance throughout the organization while addressing the needs of finance, training, monitoring, and updating. Workgroups maybe be established not just by management but from the floor or individual through a process that presents the goals and objectives of the program including the benefit to the organization. A successful application will be allocated the resources necessary to establish the workgroup.

### **Senior Staff, Managers, Supervisors**

Define the major job function of **not micro managing**. Management duties should clearly define management's responsibility to support personnel and provide the tools and resources necessary for their success. Management has the responsibility to teach what they know. Management should be clearly tasked with sharing the goals and visions of the organization. Management must make it clear that we (the organization) value each employee's ability to contribute to achieving the goals and visions of the organization. Each employee has the ability and knowledge to contribute with ideas, programs, information, and leadership. They must be afforded the freedom to develop programs within their job function to further those goals and

objectives. Managers are clearly responsible for providing the guidance and support necessary for each employee to fully utilize and develop their expertise. Further, managers will expand the organization's ability to communicate and carry out the organizational goals and objectives from top to bottom and, perhaps more importantly, at times from bottom to top.

Communication is not just up or down; silos kill people and, within the organization, horizontal communication and relationships broaden everyone's awareness. Hierarchical structure denotes job duties, not power or superiority. Your success depends on your people not your power.

### **Just Environment**

After action reports/ investigations, accident investigations, etc. should be relabeled as **studies**. The focus being how did the organization contribute to the occurrence and how can the organization create the conditions and working environment to prevent similar conditions from occurring? Finally, could the discoveries be applied to other risks or processes within our operation? A clearly defined process must be identified and specifically list what is actionable (instead of punishable) to (instead of against) the employee such as illegal/criminal actions, willful violation of policy or procedure, cover up or intentionally hiding or lying about the facts concerning an incident or event, and failure to attend update training (instead of remedial training) assigned as part of an event study or continued or repeated same risk behavior and an unwillingness to follow recommendations. An education based process with clearly defined boundaries will assist your organization in finding the real contributory facts surrounding an incident.

### **If it looks stupid rule.**

Institute the value of:

If it looks stupid, it probably is.

If it looks wrong, it probably is.

If it feels wrong it probably is.

**Ask us, tell us why, if you have a better idea let us know. We are not infallible, we do make mistakes. Sometimes we send the wrong message or just say it wrong. Sometimes we don't know it all, sometimes you do!**

These are just a few of the things that have proven successful in increasing our reliability and resiliency. There are many more one can implement to create swift and dramatic change. One can see the relationship to the identified principles of High Reliability Organizations and the

effects that allow us to function closer to the type of organization we become when the chips are down. As we work to create a more highly reliable environment during normal day to day operations the risk of managing an emergency can be kept to an ever lessening level.