Outline

- Origins and axioms

- Two scientific approaches

- Safety Culture as a politics of organizational practices

- Safety Culture and the constitution of a way of seeing (which is also a way of not seeing)

- Safety Culture and the Disaster Incubation Theory

Origins
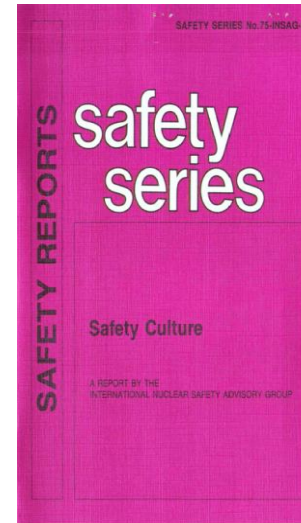
"Safety culture is that *assembly of characteristics* and *attitudes* in organizations and individuals which establishes that, as an *overriding priority*, nuclear plant safety issues receive the attention warranted by their significance."

"Safety Culture requires all duties important to safety to be carried out correctly, *with alertness, due thought, and full knowledge, sound judgment, and a proper sense of accountability*.

Ref.: Henriqson et al., 2014. Safety Culture as an object of scientiffic knowledge. Safety Science.

Origins: initial axioms

1. Safety is a guiding principle, a core value, and an overriding priority.

2. Safety requires management commitment, planning, and supervision.

3. Safety requires workers' commitment, engagement, and adherence to policies and procedures.

4. A culture of safety is an essential trace of highly reliable organizations.

Ref.: Henriqson et al., 2014. Safety Culture as an object of scientiffic knowledge. Satey Science.

Scientific approaches

Functionalist

Culture as...

- Something an organization has;

- Top-down;

- fabricated, manageable, measurable.

Interpretivist

Culture as...

- Something an organization does;

- Bottom-up;

- Emergent, resistant to management and measurement.

Ref.: Henriqson et al., 2014. Safety Culture as an object of scientiffic knowledge. Satey Science.

SC and organizational practices

- Culture and practices are collective phenomena.

- Practices unveil collective understandings, rules, and intentions.

- Practices unveil traces of integration, differentiation, and ambiguities of the organizational life.

Ref.: Henriqson & Capaverde, 2023 (manuscript in progress)

Lenses for interpretation of safety

Old Safety

1. Workers are a problem to control and fix. They introduce failures.

2. We must tell workers what to do (and not do).

3. Safety is "the absence" of an accident.

New Safety

1. Workers are problem-solvers. They create safety.

2. We must ask workers what they need to work safely better.

3. Safety is "the presence" of positives.

Ref.: Dekker, S. Safety Differently.

The Challenger disaster was an accident, the result of a mistake. What is important to remember from this case is not that individuals in organizations make mistakes but that mistakes themselves are socially organized and systematically produced.
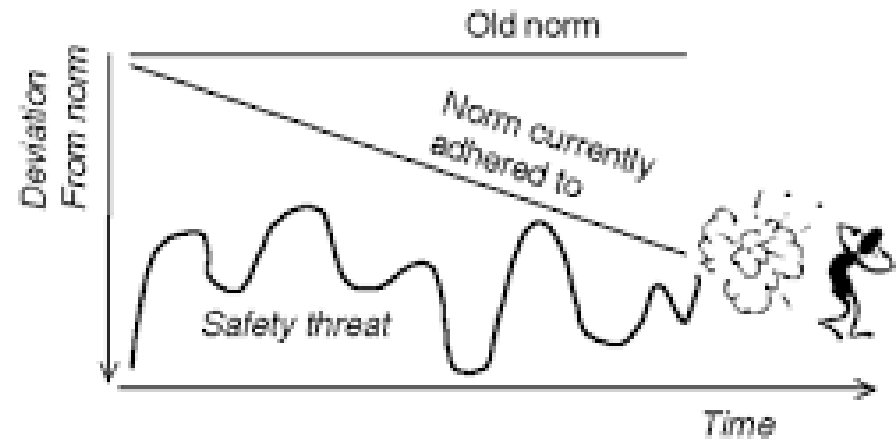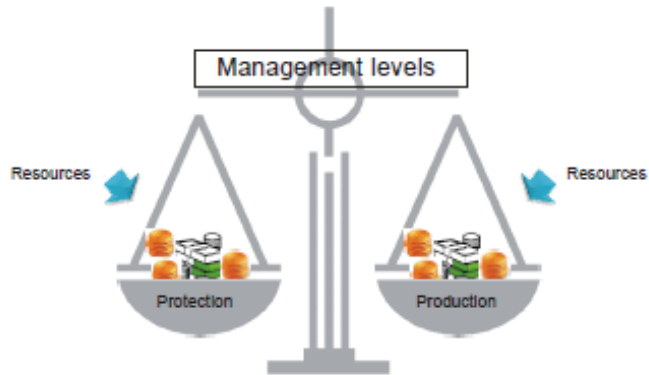
*(...) the tragedy had systemic origins that transcended individuals, organizations, time, and geography. Its sources were neither extraordinary nor necessarily peculiar to NASA (...). Instead, its origin was in routine and taken-for-granted aspects of organizational life **that created a way of seeing that was simultaneously a way of not seeing**.*

D. Vaughan, 1996, p.394.

Disaster incubation theory

- Initially culturally accepted beliefs about the world and hazards.

- Accumulation of an unnoticed set of events at odds with accepted beliefs about hazards and the norms to control them.

- Precipitating event. Shit hits the fan. Transforms general perception. Surprise. Cultural disruption.

- Full cultural re-adjustment. Beliefs and precautionary norms are adjusted to fit newly gained understanding of the world ("this must never happen again").

Ref.: Turner, B. 1978. Man-Made Disasters.

Silence, Drift, and Incubation...

Management levels

Resources — Protection | Production — Resources

Old norm

Norm currently adhered to

Deviation From norm

Safety threat

Time

Sidney Dekker

Culture is not...

- About individuals

- Brainwash and new slogans

- Another "tag" to blame workers, managers, and organizations.

Éder Henriqson, PhD.

ehenriqson@pucrs.br

HFACTORS – Human Factors & Resilience Research

https://hfactors.pucrs.br/

hfactors@pucrs.br

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