

## **Abstract HRO Conference New Orleans, Marc Otten**

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### **TRANSFER OF EXPERTISE: THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD TO FOOTBALL SAFETY AND SECURITY**

High Reliability Organizations (HRO) share features that account for impressive reliability performances related to production, safety or other critical outputs. These records are sometimes surprising given the considerable risks and challenges these organizations face. We would expect more failure than is the case and this makes it interesting to look for clues why these organizations are so successful. Although these features may be summarized under different headings, most features include: a preoccupation with failure rather than success; a reluctance to simplify interpretations; sensitivity to operations; deference to expertise and commitment to resilience.

When for now, we accept these features as hallmarks of HROs, we face another intriguing question: if HROs are set apart from conventional organization, as most HRO scholars seem to argue, does that also hold true for the way HROs disseminate knowledge on their successful modus operandi? In other words: do HROs also adopt different methods of transfer of their practices and features? Or do HROs use more conventional methods and rely on the experts' persuasiveness or authority?

Arguably, the first place to look for answer is where expertise resides. Although according to HRO research, challenges look for expertise *anywhere* in (or for that matter outside) the organization, HRO would propose that most often this expertise is found close to the operations. That is because situational awareness is better developed in those areas where survival depends on sensitivity to operations and deep knowledge of the system that is operated. Little surprise that early HRO research has uncovered most of the features by closely studying operations in various organizations. In the case of HROs, their impressive track record begs the question who are the operators that perform these remarkable feats and how they share their insights to others in the organization.

The UEFA (European Football Association) provided me with an interesting laboratory to study (and tackle) this issue. The UEFA organizes the European Football Championships every 4 years, the world 3<sup>rd</sup> largest sport event after the Olympics and the FIFA World championships. It also organizes the UEFA European club competitions with in total 330 matches every season. Revenue for one of those competitions, the Champions League, amounts to almost 600 million € yearly.

As project-manager of the UEFA Stadium and Security Education Program (SSEP), I was asked in 2005 to develop a program to "educate" professionals from 53 UEFA member associations on "good" safety and security practices to adopt. This program was part of a huge investment by UEFA to make European Football more safe, secure and welcoming. It intended also to raise minimum standards across the many venues hosting European matches.

The starting point was deceptively simple: to ask experts from the UEFA football

federation, so-called Security Officers with a vast experience in managing high-velocity, high-risk matches – to act as moderators and present “lessons learned” to their peer professionals. Through various lectures on themes and interactive sessions, our audience was to be enlightened with fresh insights and a better grasp of safety and security issues.

Not surprisingly this was not exactly how it turned out – safety and security expertise resisted to be captured in bullet point “truths” in distant class-rooms. More fundamentally, the Security Officers proved to be struggling with what they knew about the “real” secret to success and reliable safety and security performance and the difficulty of getting this message across. The transfer of deep knowledge, based on a long career in policing football, validated by both theoretical knowledge and tested in an impressive number of matches cross Europe, defied the educational methods adopted.

In the end, the education program turned out in a wild ride exploring how “experts” attempt to communicate their “expertise” to other professionals – in education and “normal” match situations. Although professionals were peers e.g. shared highly similar tasks, professional responsibilities and challenges, other differences (in background, culture, socialization, education) had to be overcome to effectively share deep knowledge. The most effective way of doing this, as it turned out, was to engage in “HRO talk”, to adopt the HRO features as common ground and sharing information on operations and challenges in a very distinct, and strictly defined way. Imagine tough police commanders talking shop but acting as UN diplomats.

In this presentation, I explore some of our lessons learned in how experts, in our case UEFA Security Officers, communicate their experience and what effective means of communication they use. It is my contention that these experts work according to HRO features and – without consciously knowing this – attempt to communicate HRO hallmarks to their peers. Based on observations of them in action across a wide variety of matches, I propose that much of their communication resembles pattern recognition decision-making (Naturalistic Decision Making theory) and attempts to increase the pattern-recognition capabilities of their peers. This method of transfer of experience requires a different approach to conventional “education” and communication of expertise with more attention to appreciative inquiry techniques, visualization tools, multi-media scenario’s and case-probing methods.