

Incident Management Team's HRO Behaviors

Acting With Anticipation: A Summary

Reliability-enhancing organizations enact a number of processes to improve their capabilities to anticipate and become aware of the unexpected earlier so that people can act before problems become severe. These practices are based on three principles, involving failure, simplification, and operations. When these principles are expressed in incident management team practices, members do such things as these:

- They persuade their members to be continually alert to the unexpected and sensitive to the fact that in the face of the potential for surprise, any decision or action may be subject to false assumptions.
- They work to create a climate where people feel safe to question assumptions and to report problems or failures candidly.
- They help people envision undesired outcomes so that they can expand the number of precautions they will take.
- They encourage members to see close calls as a failure that reveals potential danger, rather than as evidence of successful disaster avoidance.
- They create a climate where people are wary of success and suspicious of quiet periods. They have a heightened concern for stability, routinization, and lack of challenge and variety that can pre-dispose their organization to relax vigilance and sink into complacency leading to carelessness.
- They counteract tendencies to simplify their expectations through adversarial reviews, selection of employees with non-typical prior experience, frequent job rotation, and retraining.
- They work to create a learning environment that encourages variety in people's analysis of the organization's technology and ways of doing business. They establish practices that allow those perspectives to be heard and to surface information not held in common. They also train people to manage these differences successfully.
- They pay serious attention to operations, the front line, and imperfections in these features. They set in place operating practices that help people develop a collective map of operations at any given moment.

Acting for Containment: A Summary

HROs do not ignore foresight and anticipation, but they are mindful of its limitations. Under the assumption that uncertainty is irreducible and that the sources of harm are limitless, HROs invest more of their resources to help people contain and bounce back from unexpected events after they begin to occur. Discussions with organizations revealed the following lessons involving containment from the more effective HROs.

- Pay just as much attention to building capabilities to cope with errors that have occurred as to improving capabilities to plan and anticipate events before they occur.
- Develop capabilities for swift learning, flexible role structures and quick size-ups.
- Adopt an organization wide mind-set of cure as well as prevention. This means that people are attentive to knowledge and resources that relieve, lighten moderate, reduce and decrease surprises. People are willing to begin treating an anomaly even before they have made a full diagnosis. They do so believing that they are gaining experience and a cleaner picture of what they are treating. Unlike anticipation, which encourages people to think and then act, resilience encourages people to act while thinking or to act in order to think more clearly. A commander tries different tactics to learn what the enemy can do. This is empirical fighting. It is reactive. It is supposed to be.
- Encourage people to make knowledge about the system transparent and widely known. The more people who know about the weaknesses of their system and how to manage them, the faster they can notice and correct problems in the making.
- Establish pockets of resilience through uncommitted resources such as informal networks of people who come together on an as-needed basis to solve sticky problems.
- Create a set of operating dynamics that shifts leadership to the people who currently seem more likely to have an answer to the problem at hand.

Note: The information above has been revised for incident management teams by the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center. It was originally produced on pages 62-63, and 80-81 of the book Managing the Unexpected: Resilient Performance in an Age of Uncertainty, a second and revised edition by Karl E. Weick and Kathleen M. Sutcliffe, published by in 2007 by Jossey-Bass of Wiley and Sons.