Building a Culture of Safety

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ABSTRACT

Discussions about safety and safety culture are often discussed after an incident occurs. The need for safe performances in the workplace is critical in high-stakes/high-consequence environments. In order to foster consistent safe practice, a culture of safety becomes essential in order to help mitigate risks associated with working in hazardous environments. Although there is no single, generally accepted definition of what a culture of safety consists of, it is widely accepted that it does consist of attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and principles. These factors, when properly embraced, influence values, assumptions, experiences, behaviors, beliefs, and accepted norms that describe the work environment at a specific work site. When an organization chooses to engage in such actions enterprise-wide regarding safety relevant subjects, the sum total of the workgroups learning will result in a culture of safety.

The greatest challenge in building a culture of safety is to define what critical attributes make up the culture, instilling the culture, and nurturing the culture so that it continues to be functional within the organization. In this presentation, the author presents an overview of essential attributes of a culture of safety, how human performance engineering can be used to instill a culture of safety, and areas requiring attention in order to maintain the culture. This overview is based upon the author’s previous experience in building cultures of safety in nuclear, explosives, and military special operations environments.