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Making Safety Culture a Corporate Culture

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Synopsis

Safety Culture is something that we have actively worked with in the nuclear industry for a long time. Formally, it has been on the agenda since the Chernobyl accident. However, the work with creating a safe organizational culture can of course be traced back even further in time. Over the years a lot has happened in how we are approaching the concept of safety culture and especially how we look upon the human being as a part of the system and how we as humans interact with the organization and technology.

For an organization to have a culture that promotes safety it is essential to create an ownership of safety with all workers within the site. To create this ownership it is vital to have the undivided commitment of the management. It all starts with the fundamental values of the organization. These values must then be concluded in firm expectations of behaviors that apply to all workers and management. This could be referred to as expectation of a Professional Behavior that allows us to live up to the company values.

At OKG nuclear power plant, a successful Business Improvement Program was recently carried out with intention to develop and contribute to the maturity of the organization in terms of safety. One of the sub-programs of the program was called Professional Behavior −With purpose of making safety in to a corporate culture. At OKG, Safety culture is something that systematically been addressed and worked with since 2004. Even though the Safety Culture program could be considered to already have reached a certain level of maturity the Business Improvement program helped the organization to lay the foundation for further development by clarify expected behaviors that was firmly cemented in to the corporate values.

There are of course many aspects that are important to help us create an organizational climate which will promote the safety culture efforts. It is not as easy as just stipulating a number of values and expectations of behavior. This could only be considered the foundation for success. Hence, to get a positive effect it is very important to have a certain frame of mind when it comes to safety and the development of a safety conscious organization. First of all safety is nothing that "we have" safety is something that we continually "do"! Furthermore, Safety is not only the absence of accidents and incidents; Safety is to understand what normally makes us succeed with what we do every day!

To help keep this organizational frame of mind alive there are a few helpful attributes for integrating state of the art safety in the outline for the future work within the field of safety culture. Examples of these traits are:

- Human error seen as symptom and not as cause. Human error is a symptom of trouble deeper inside a system. This means that apart from the human error identified, there are explanations for the factors that influenced human performance. (This does not cancel responsibility and accountability of workers and managers.)

- Avoidance of hindsight bias. We try to understand the course of events from the place of the actors and not as external observers.

- Shared responsibility. Both good and adverse outcomes result from interdependencies and interactions of all organizational functions.

- Focus on success rather than solely on failures. We need to understand how employees perform well under constantly changing conditions and conflicting goals.

These attributes (or tools) should lay as a foundation in the view of how the organization will reach higher and safer effects regarding safety culture efforts.

Accidents or "bad things" in the organization are not created by a combination of latent and active failures; they are the result of humans and technologies operating in ways that seem rational at a local level but unknowingly create unsafe conditions within the system that remain uncorrected. From this perspective, simply removing a 'root cause' from a system will not prevent the accident from recurring. To further develop our safety Culture efforts a more holistic approach is required whereby safety deficiencies throughout the entire system must be identified and addressed. An understanding of this is significant for the future development of our Safety Culture.

We must also stop treating safety as something we have or not-have. Safety is something that we continually are doing! This culture is set by the corporate management through Values and Behavioral expectations. The ownership of this culture is however something that must be in every workers possession!

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