CATCHING THEM AT IT

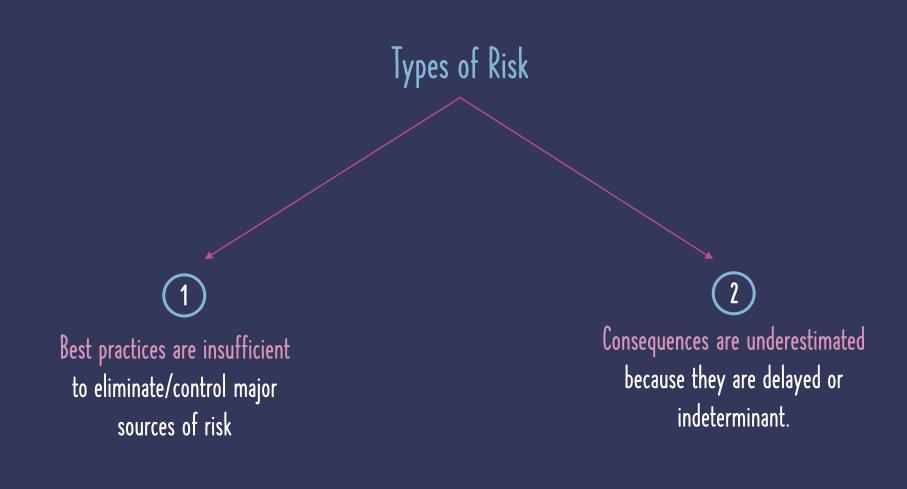An ethnography of rule violation

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"...this [ethnographic] article explores the occurrence of rule violations in industrial settings subject to a high level of regulation, and is specifically concerned with operatives' risk perceptions in relation to health and safety rules and with management strategies for their successful mitigation."

Types of Risk

1

Best practices are insufficient to eliminate/control major sources of risk

2

Consequences are underestimated because they are delayed or indeterminant.

Definitions

Ethnography
a systematic study of individual cultural phenomena from the perspective of the subjects of the study.

Operator / Operative
individuals on the ground doing the work which is regulated by organizational safety measures.

Invisible Risk
the risks and its outcomes are not obviously and immediately linked in the minds of operatives.

High Reliability Organization (HRO)
organizations that operate in complex, high-hazard domains for extended periods without serious accidents or catastrophic failures.

Large Group Discussion Topics (15 mins)

Not the explanation of why

- "...operatives remember the rules, but not the explanation of why it may be important to comply with them."

Gambits of compliance

- "What appears to be less well recognized...is the issue of 'gambits of compliance' whereby individuals superficially appear to be obeying the rules, but are actually finding ways of making the rules suit their own way of working."
    - Operatives: "used post-hoc estimates of vibration exposures...enabling them to finish allocated jobs which would otherwise be left incomplete"
    - Managers: "...turn[ed] a blind eye to this practice rather than...require a rescheduling of the unfinished work..."

The gap between rules and reality

- "The apparent [almost inevitable] gap between rules and reality...can seriously undermine the trust [in the efficacy and applicability of organizationally devised rules and practices], with negative consequences for compliance."

Additional Discussion Topic for Breakout Rooms (30 mins)

High Reliability Thinking

"the organizational enculturation towards safety...was translated into an employee-led, participative approach to practical safety issues which recognized the need to go beyond rules to achieve safe working."

"...rule structures...were viewed in process rather than outcome terms"
- "they were seen as tools for highlighting safety issues and prompting safe working practices, but not as an end in themselves."

"operatives acted as 'behavioral based safety advisors', taking time out from their normal work to observe colleagues and provide feedback--to them and to management--on the working practices observed."

References

- Iszatt-White, M. (2007). Catching them at it. *Ethnography. 8*(4), 445-465.

- Rae, D.; Provan, D. (2019, November 24). Ep. 2 Why do people break rules? *The Safety of Work.* [Audio Podcast]. https://safetyofwork.com/episodes/ep-2-why-do-people-break-rules