A REFLECTION ON SOCIOLOGY, TECHNOCRATIC SYSTEMS, AND RISK

NORMALIZATION OF DEVIANCE

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THE USI ONE ADVANTAGE®

Hi there and welcome!

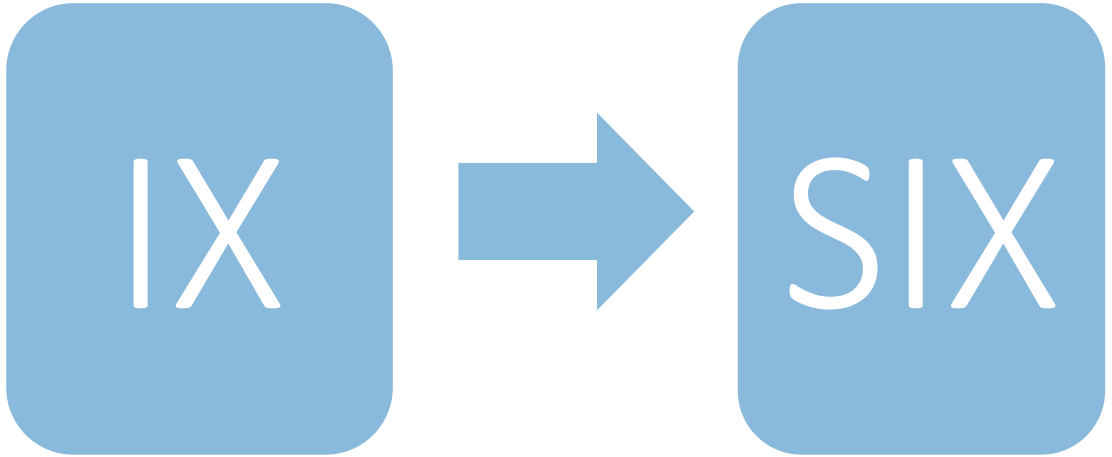
- USI Insurance Services
- Commercial Lines Sr. Risk Control Consultant
- Regional Team Lead
- Practicing safety 16 years

Objectives

- Recognize normalization of deviance.
- Control normalization of deviance.
- Innovate to mitigate normalization of deviance.

Puzzle Primer

9 + 1 = 6



A Sociologist's Definition

Dianne Vaughn, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology

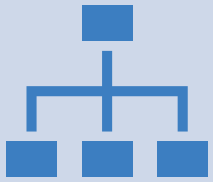
"Social normalization of deviance means that people within the organization become so much accustomed to a deviation that they don't consider it as deviant, despite the fact that they far exceed their own rules for the elementary safety."

Mike Mullane's Perspective

- The absence of something bad happening means that it must have been "safe" to work in a risky manner.
- The shortcut becomes normal, or safe.
- Deviance has become normalized.

Our guest's perspective

https://youtu.be/NcgeWkG1HCg?si=MRL37KiRC6zsU7W7&t=34



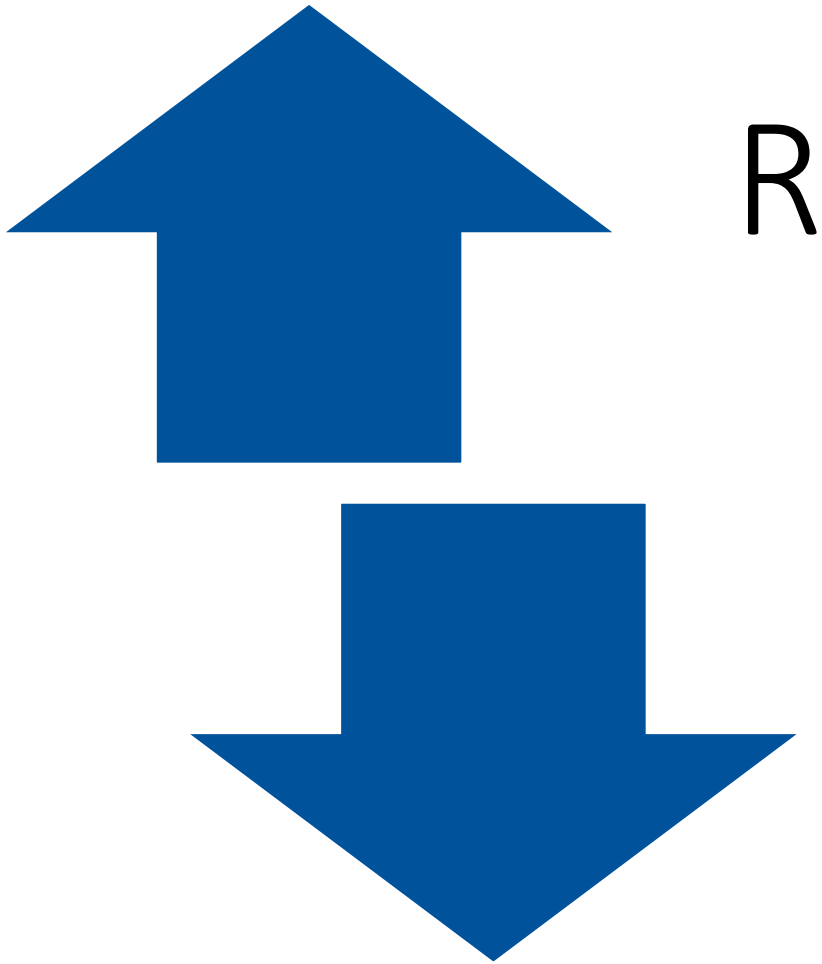
But it's not all about the worker, it's also about the organization and those leading your organization

Reality Check

Rationalized Risk

A reflection on sociology, technocratic systems, and risk

Based on analyses how much is too much?



Risk

Tolerance

Compare and Contrast

Organizationally

"…We find the effects of cultural understandings on choice at NASA: actions that analysis defined as deviant after the disaster were acceptable and nondeviant within the NASA culture."

– *Diane Vaughn*

Individually

A person chooses to work in an unsafe way because no catastrophic outcome resulted previously. For example, this choice could be with tool use, equipment operation, awkward posture, driving, chemical exposure, or at work at height.

Examples of Rationalized Risk

- What work does your organization perform?
- How does your organization transport goods and services?
- Where does your organization invest?
- What will you do for recreational fun?
- How do you clean out the gutters?

How does normalization of deviance relate to incidents at your organization?

The BIGSS Five Contributors

A reflection on sociology, technocratic systems, and risk

What contributes to normalization of deviance?

Budgets

What contributes to normalization of deviance?

Inattention

What contributes to normalization of deviance?

Groupthink

#1 **"Illusion of invulnerability"**

Are we truly aware of the risk?

#2 **"Belief in inherent morality of the group"**

Nobody would make a bad decision because they are all good folks.

#3 **"Collective rationalization"**

"The most dangerous phrase: we've always done it this way!" – Grace Hopper

#4 **"Out-group stereotypes"**

If you're not in, then you're out on an island.

#5 **"Self-censorship"**

Well, it's probably not that bad, we should just be careful, and it will work out.

#6 **"Illusion of unanimity"**

Well, if nobody has anything to say, then I guess we're good-to-go!

#7 **"Direct pressure on dissenters"**

"My God, Thiokol, when do you want me to launch, next April?" – Mulloy

#8 **"Self-appointed mind-guards"**

Let's make sure only the decision-makers are at the meeting, we don't need everyone, do we?

Source: Janis, Irving

What contributes to normalization of deviance?

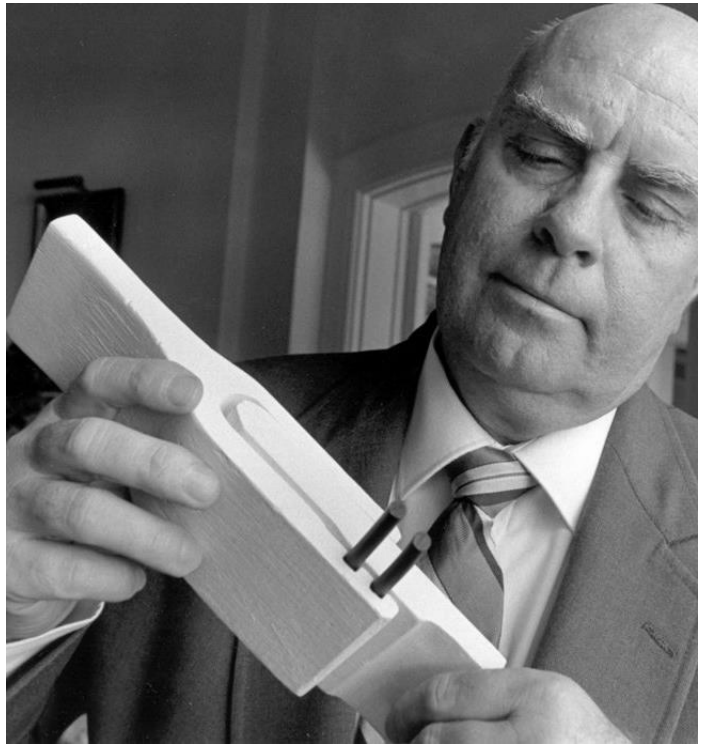
Schedules

What contributes to normalization of deviance?

Shortcuts

STS-51-L *Challenger*

- Roger Boisjoly
- Morton Thiokol SRB Engineer January 28, 1986



"… [the caucus called by Morton Thiokol managers, which resulted in a recommendation to launch], constituted the unethical decision-making forum resulting from intense customer intimidation."

A Normalization of Deviance Pattern

Misunderstood signals

Overlooked signals

Ignored signals

Early warning signs

Organizational factors

Long incubation time

Thought moment

"Large numbers of rules and procedures create monitoring difficulties for safety regulators, increasing the workload and reducing the possibility of detecting problems." – Vaugh

Thought decision process: Routine Decisions?

Risk exists

Acknowledge risk

Review risk

Normalize risk

Operations continue

Recognizing normalized risks: Driving

- The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration published its 2022 annual traffic crash data, which showed 42,795 lives were lost in traffic crashes nationwide.
- That is among the highest number of annual fatalities since 2007.

Recognizing normalized risks in a workplace setting:
Ergonomics

Awkward postures	Overhead work
Contact stress	Wrist actions
Force and exertion	Bulky loads
Fatigue	Twisting

And what about complexity?

- “The problem in safety isn’t deviation, it’s complexity.”

– Ron Gantt

- For example, engineers had run tests at different temperatures and still observed erosion and blow-by.

Affinity for the path of least resistance

"The amount of effort required to do something influences what we think we see"

– Dr. Nobuhiro Hagura

Signals

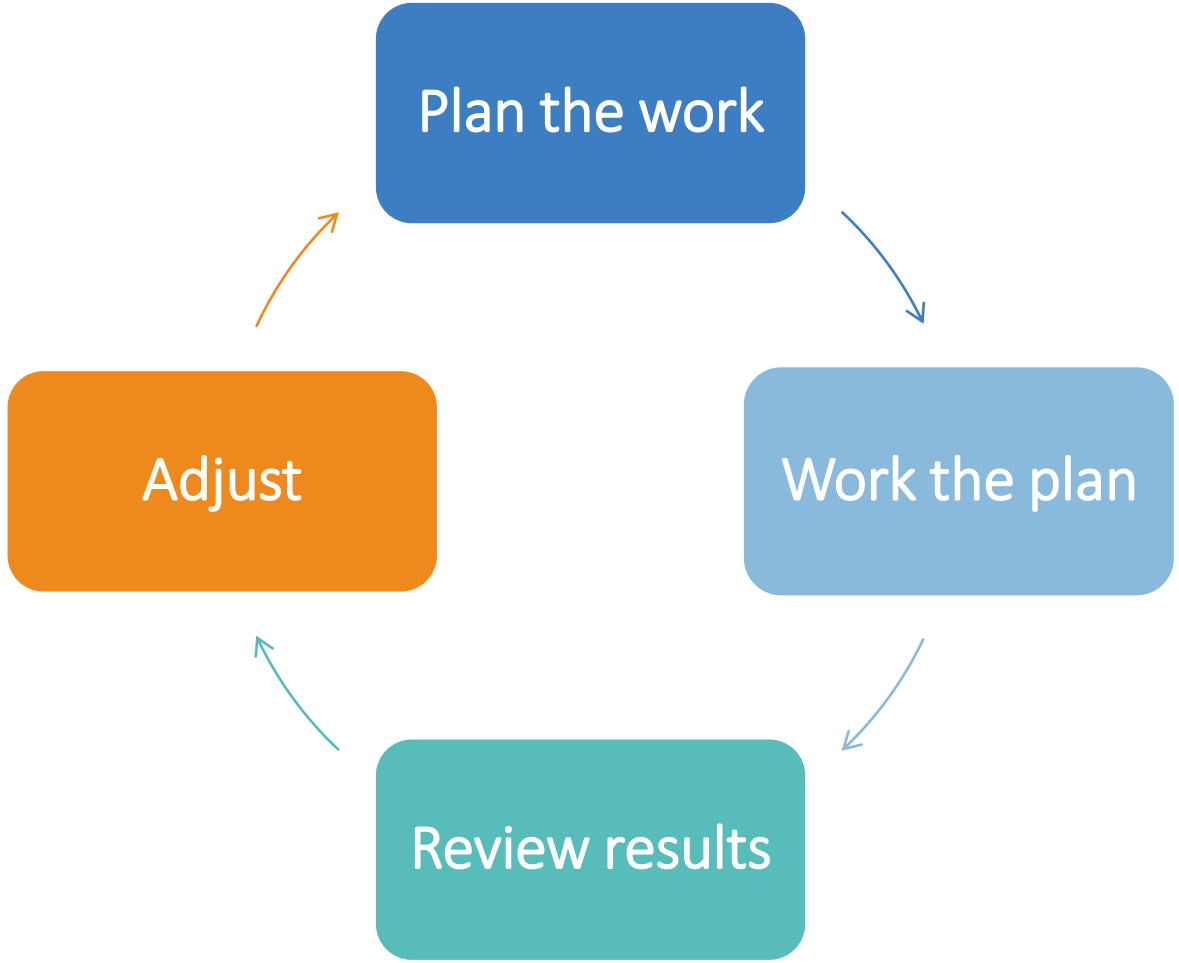
- How much risk are we placing on our organizations at any given time because of the decisions we make as leaders?
- How do we know that we, as leaders, have the right information?
- What risk signals are we missing?
- How do we more effectively garner insights from our team members?

So, What are some techniques to help?

Usually, it's easier said than done.

Risk management techniques

- Include information from all sources, regardless of organizational status.
- Reflect deeply.
- Be humble.



So, how do we assuage the effects?

Enable psychological safety

Create resiliency

Include team feedback

Follow through

Innovate

NASA's ten enduring lessons

1. It can happen to you
2. Focus
3. Speak up
4. You're not nearly as smart as you think you are
5. Dissension has tremendous value
6. Question conventional wisdom
7. Do good work
8. Engineering is done with numbers
9. Use your imagination
10. Nothing worthwhile was accomplished without taking risk

ISO Resources

- ISO/CD 7101 Health Care Quality Management System Standard
- ISO 9001 Quality Management Standard
- ISO 10377 Consumer Product Safety
- ISO 14001 Environmental Management
- ISO 26000 Social Responsibility
- ISO 31000 Risk Management
- ISO 45001 Occupational Health and Safety

Other resources to help you on your journey

Risk Consultants and Insurance Partners

Safety Differently

The Cynefin Co., *Making Sense of Safety: A Complexity-Based Approach to Safety Interventions*

Insurance Loss Trend Reports

Industry Associations (e.g. NSC, ASSP, RIMS)

National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

CHALLENGER POINT, 14080'+
In Memory of the Crew of Shuttle Challenger
Seven who died accepting the risk
expanding Mankind's horizons
January 28, 1986
Ad Astra PerAspera

What is your vision for your safety system?

In Sum

- Whether you're in general industry, construction, healthcare, agriculture, school districts or the public sector, **normalization of deviance affects you**.
- **Budgets, inattention, groupthink, schedules and shortcuts** all contribute to risky business but with renewed awareness **we have tools to help us overcome**.

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