# Safety culture as an aspect of organizational culture -- rethinking our definitions.

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# Sample Definition

IAEA, INSAG-4:

"Safety Culture is that <u>assembly of characteristics and attitudes</u> in organizations and individuals, which establishes that, as an overriding priority, nuclear plant safety issues receive the attention warranted by their significance."

# Organizations

"The word organization, is a noun and it is also a myth. If one looks for an organization one will not find it. What will be found is that there are events, linked together, that transpire within concrete walls and these sequences, their pathways, their timing, are the forms we erroneously make into substances when we talk about an organization" (Weick, Middle Range Theories of Social Systems, Behavioral Science 19:357-367, 1974)

# Organizations

Organization as a purposefully coordinated system of communications that allow subordinates to accept the purposes of superiors…need for recognition of the nonmaterial, informal, moral basis of cooperation. Psychological and social motivations are critical to achieve cooperative efforts.

Goals must be imposed from the top down but they must be achieved with willing compliance from the bottom up.

Barnard, 1938, in The Functions of the Executive

# Organizational Culture

".  .  . This is the process of inculcating points of view, fundamental attitudes, loyalties, to the organization or cooperative system, and to the system of objective authority, that will result in subordinating individual interest and the minor dictates of personal codes to the good of the cooperative whole."

*Chester Barnard, 1938*

# Organizational Culture

"Although a formal control structure is in place and there are expectations that rewards will be distributed according to performance, the organization relies primarily on **an informal structure and on individual participants' embracing of common norms and values** that can orient and govern their contributions. These types of controls are described as denoting an organizational culture."

*W.R. Scott, 1987*

# Normative systems

Organizational cultures are composed of integrated normative systems. Examples of normative systems

- Political normative system (how decisions are made)
- Distributional normative system (how rewards are allocated)
- Hierarchical normative system (how people relate to each other)
- Normative system regarding safety (priority to safety issues, systems to assure safety, etc.)

# Improving normative systems regarding safety: three levels

- Artifact level: Technical system
  - Safe hardware
  - Safe procedures
- Espoused values level: Management system
  - Clear safety messages from management
  - Safety is a priority—before time and money
- Basic assumptions level: Socio-cultural system
  - Safety is important—THE top priority

# Organizational culture

We need to know
- How do cultures emerge in organizations?
- How do cultures affect organizational goals and outcomes?
- How do organizational cultures change?

In order to understand
- How knowing about an organization's culture can help us improve safety
  - What level of organizational culture needs to be addressed
  - What normative system is causing a problem
  - ?????