Safety – Making It Happen

The term 'safety' means different things to different people, but essentially it captures an ideal of 'absence of harm'. It becomes a little more difficult if it means 'absence of failures' and really complex if it means 'absence of risk'. If we do not agree on what we will achieve, we will not achieve anything. Therefore, the first challenge is to achieve a common language on safety, then a common belief about its paradigms and then a common understanding what 'excellence' in it means. Only through a shared vision can we achieve 'excellence in safety' and go BeyondZero®.

The achievement of 'excellence in safety' is the goal for most organizations and it is translated in a variety of ways into mission statements, goal statements and policy documents. In the worst cases, the safety effort in companies is often a hybrid of different tools, programs and off-the-shelf products, while the deployment of these is done without integration and without a long term vision. It mostly results in short bursts of success, unpredictable failures and a phenomenon called 'accident migration'.

But only a few organizations translate safety into a value, namely that the goal of "zero" (injuries, accidents, tolerance, etc.) is never compromised: where it is truly part of the sustainable business process, where it is manifested in a powerful culture that affects the behavior of all. The values, or convictions, of the organization are the untold, unseen and invisible drivers of organizational behavior and the most powerful.

What type of organization is that? It is an organization where safety is invisible.

There are no posters, campaigns, targets or safety programs. It is a Culture of Caring where people genuinely care and watch out for each other. It is a risk-competent culture. Operations and safety are seamless, no safety meetings, no committees, no separate points on agendas for safety and line management is truly accountable for safety. It is an organization that does not investigate the causes for an accident; however, investigates the causes that caused the causes of the accident. And it is an organization that allows, elicits and rewards innovation, for which it must learn from failures to improve in the future.

Developing a value-driven organization is a process that will take time, because before the conviction will result in action to work safe – as an individual, team, site or corporation – there are three prerequisites:

- The recognition and understanding of our risks

- The motivation to take action

- Rigorous systems that control variation/entropy in operations and projects

This requires careful education and deployment of the right resources of people, time and money; both operationally and strategically. It is a complex and difficult road to travel for any organization, with a stark reality: the goal will never 'finally' be achieved, because, by definition, the journey can never end. 'Zero' cannot be the end of our efforts, we must go BeyondZero. Thus, safety is not defined by the absence of a number (zero), but defined by the presence of energy, motivation and competence.

Industry safety statistics may be seen as if we are nearing the end of our current ability and safety technology to completely remove random events. However in a value-driven organization, instead of accepting these events, it sparks action to overcome the hurdles towards BeyondZero.

Therefore, in the pursuit for a caring safety culture, we recognize that we may not eliminate all injury or death from our workplace in the short term, but it will give us the best possible chance to do so over the long term.