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ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND SAFETY.

MAINTAINING SAFETY ACROSS BOUNDARIES BETWEEN "US" AND "OTHERS

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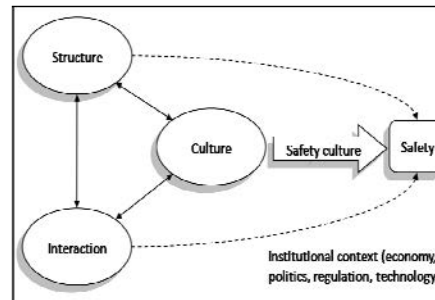
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How do I define (safety) culture?

- Culture in mind vs. culture as a social phenomenon

- *Culture consists of the shared frames of reference through which information, symbols and behaviour are interpreted, and the conventions for behaviour, interaction and communication.*

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Adapted from Boudreau and Newman's Triangle of social reality (1993)

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Integration and differentiation

- Culture is by definition referring to integration
  - It refers to something being shared
  - Patterns of meaning and patterns for meaning
  - Some level of shared identity

- What are the odds that a large corporation will have one, unified, organization-wide culture?

- The integration, differences, misunderstandings, power dynamics and identification processes *between* cultural units are important to understand organizational life.

- Safety culture research has not been very sensitive to matters of differentiation, i.e. the differences between cultural units

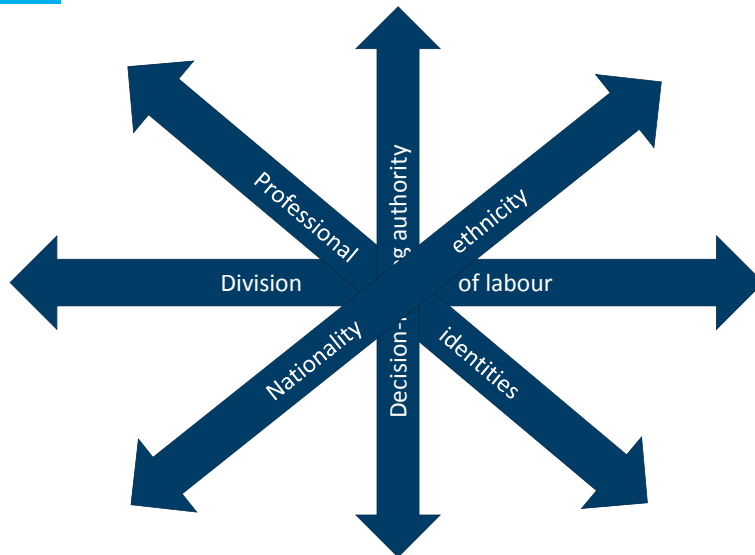| Definition of safety culture |
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References: Haukelid (2008), Antonsen (2009), Dekker & Nyce (2014)

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Boundary processes

Professional

ethnicity

Division of labour

Nationality

identities

Decision-...g authority

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What goes on at cultural boundaries?

- Well-functioning collaboration
- Negotiation of meaning about risk
- Stereotyping and identity formation
- Time pressure
- Power struggles
  - Resources
  - Prestige
  - Responsibility (both ways)

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"Us" and "them" Safety culture in different settings I

"Platform workers"

Asymmetrical power relations
Source of time pressure
Pushing safety margins

"Office workers"

Formal safety management
Drift toward paperwork

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7 *References: Bye et al. (2008), Antonsen (2009), Knudsen (2009)*

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"Us" and "them" Safety culture in different settings II

- We have plans, but the plans were not put into use

- We have exercises, but, we don't learn enough from them

- *"The problem is not first and foremost a lack of resources, regulation or organization, but cultures, attitudes toward preparedness, and the ability to coordinate"*

➤ A cultural diagnosis with reference to boundaries

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"Us" and "them" Safety culture in different settings II

- The 22. July investigation commission mentions the relationship between agencies working with issues of safety vs. security
- "Excessive secrecy" from the security agencies
- Differences based on policy, regulation, organizational structures, core competence and separate budgets
- But: formal boundaries complemented by cultural differences
- The different agencies share common ground within the term "societal safety" (samfunnssikkerhet)

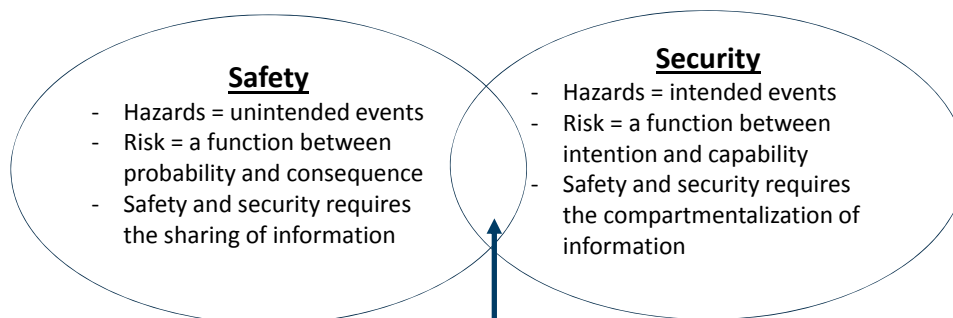| Definition of safety culture |
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Safety vs. security

Safety
- Hazards = unintended events
- Risk = a function between probability and consequence
- Safety and security requires the sharing of information

Security
- Hazards = intended events
- Risk = a function between intention and capability
- Safety and security requires the compartmentalization of information

Implications
- Influences on the exchange of information about threats to society
- Problem for comprehensive risk governance
- Problem for prioritization between measures

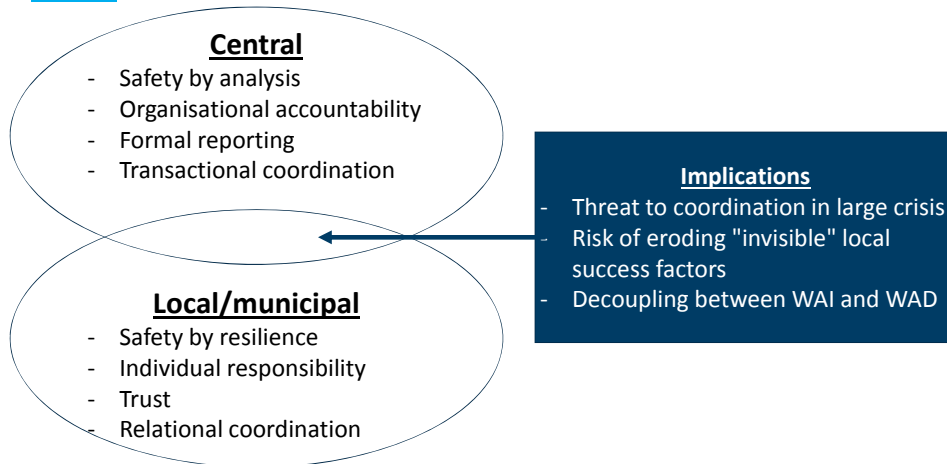| Definition of safety culture |
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"Us" and "them" Safety culture in different settings II- Government vs. municipal level

Central
- Safety by analysis
- Organisational accountability
- Formal reporting
- Transactional coordination

Local/municipal
- Safety by resilience
- Individual responsibility
- Trust
- Relational coordination

Implications
- Threat to coordination in large crisis
- Risk of eroding "invisible" local success factors
- Decoupling between WAI and WAD

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References: Almklov et al. (2017)

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Why do boundary processes matter for safety?

- Turner & Pidgeon (1994): The variable disjunction of information
  - Safety against major accidents is the end product of the efforts of several groups
  - Cross-border coordination is essential for major accident risk

- Different groups will have access to different information and may have different interpretations about what is safe and what is not

- Information processing about major accident risk is likely to cross organizational borders
  - Weak signals of danger
  - Implementation of measures

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References: Antonsen (2017), Almklov et al. (2017)

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Conclusions – the double-edged sword of integration

- Disagreement can be a good thing – Different eyes see different things
- A "good safety culture" is not necessarily characterized by homogeneity
- With no integration, communication and coordination is virtually impossible
- In any case, ignoring the dynamics between groups strips the concept of culture of much of its utility
- What we need is *sufficient* integration to be able to communicate about safety across organizational interfaces

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[13] *References: Antonsen (2009)*

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Conclusions - How do we bridge these gaps?

- Small-scale measures directed at the most critical interfaces
- Stop trying to fix interface problems by serial reorganizing
- Develop "brokerage capacity" instead of homogenizing cultures
  - Circulate personnel
  - Work with common problems
  - Develop a common knowledge platform
  - Foster a more common language to communicate risk

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[14] *References: Antonsen, Kongsvik & Ramstad (2007), Kongsvik & Solem (2016)*

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Concluding remarks

- There is a lot to be learnt from studying boundary processes from a cultural approach

- It is often in the meeting between groups that culture is made relevant and is the most visible

- The interfaces between cultural units is crucial for the way information "travels", lessons are learned, and safety critical coordination achieved

- If you want to improve safety, it is often "easier" to address problematic interfaces than changing culture (depending on the problem)

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Thank you!

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