

Change Is Good:

Why Aviation Units Should Adopt SMS

By Ray Wall, Air Logistics, The Bristow Group, Western Hemisphere Helicopter Services Director of Safety

"It's not the strongest species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the most responsive to change." — Charles Darwin

Nobody likes change, or so the saying goes. People often don't like change because of the way managers go about making changes in an organization. But change can be made without disrupting people's comfort with the status quo.

Changing the culture of an organization means changing how we operate. It occurs when new equipment and technology are introduced, when policies and procedures change, when a new commander is assigned to an organization. When done correctly, change can occur without the pain that often accompanies it.

When improperly managed, changes can result in inadvertent introduction of hazards and increased risks. When making changes, the following should be done to minimize the potential for increasing risk:

- Analyze changes in operational procedures or processes to identify changes in training, documentation or equipment.
- Analyze changes in location, equipment or operating conditions for any potential hazards.
- Ensure all organization manuals reflect current changes.
- Maintain a process by which personnel are made aware of and understand any changes in requirements and procedures.

All personnel should be consulted when changes that have health or safety implications are made to the work environment, process or practices. Changing an organization's culture takes time, careful planning, patience, fairness and understanding. Policies and procedures must be established to manage changes.

A systematic approach to managing organizational change is part of the risk management process. Changing an organization's culture requires leaders to identify and prioritize the desired changes. Let's assume your organization wants to implement an incident reporting program. People may initially perceive this to be an effort to catch them when they make a mistake. This can be overcome by including members from every level of the organization in the change process. So how do you proceed?

HOW TO IMPLEMENT CHANGE

Change should be accompanied by a reward system that recognizes people for normal, positive performance of their duties in compliance with organization standards. However, people should not be rewarded for accomplishing a mission by breaking the rules. This often occurs in high risk, high profile events, such as pursuits and rescue operations, when people can be perceived as heroes, despite the luck that may have been involved in a successful mission.

Standards are mechanisms for change. And compliance with standards helps guarantee repeatable results. However, bad rules produce bad results. All personnel have a duty to comply with approved standards. Research shows that once you start deviating from the rules, you are almost twice as likely to commit an error with serious consequences. Breaking the rules usually does not result in an accident; however, it always results in

greater risk, and one of the guiding principles in risk management is to never take unnecessary risk.

Management must be committed to identifying and correcting deviations from standards. This most often can be done through counseling and training. Corrective action must be consistent and fair. Management must make a clear distinction between honest mistakes and intentional non-compliance with standards.

Here are 12 components to consider when implementing change:

Policies and Procedures-Eliminate rules and policies that hinder changes and create new ones that reinforce the desired manner of operation. Document this in new SOPs.

Goals and Measurement-Publish a statement of management's commitment to change. Develop goals and measurements that reinforce the desired changes.

Customs and Norms-Replace old ways of doing things with new customs and norms. Replace written reports with face-to-face meetings. Share lessons learned that promote change.

Training-Provide training to personnel commensurate with their level of responsibility. Replace training that reinforces the old way of doing things with new training. Develop experiential training that provides real-time, hands on experiences with new processes and procedures. Document, update and review training requirements.

Ceremonies and Events-Create ceremonies and events that reinforce new methods of operation. Recognize individual and team contributions that make changes work.

Management Behaviors- Publicly recognize and reward managers and supervisors who support and facilitate change.

Rewards and Recognition-Make rewards specific to the change goals that have been set. Ensure that the performance management system recognizes and rewards the desired ways of operating and does not simply reinforce the old ways.

Communications-Management should demonstrate its commitment to change by example. Use multiple channels, such as memorandums, orders, newsletters meetings and training programs, to deliver consistent messages before, during and after change.

Physical Environment-Make sure the physical environment around your unit reflects any changes made. If knowledge and information sharing is your goal, for example, get people out of offices and into the open.

Organizational Structure-Make sure that unit structure reinforces operational changes. Combine overlapping divisions; re-organize around people as opposed to functions.

Just Culture-Implement a just culture process with open reporting that ensures fairness when dealing with human error in incidents and accidents.

Feedback System-Have a feedback system that promotes participation by all personnel in assessing changes. This can be accomplished during roll calls, training days, hazard reports and periodic reports up the chain-of-command.

Changing an organization's culture helps us find new and better ways to operate. But change must be an all-inclusive process. Everyone must buy in for it to be successful. This can be accomplished with careful planning, implementation and compliance with written standards that clearly express management's commitment to achieving organizational goals and objectives.