



Following

"The process was inflexible which caused huge issues ..."

"There is a very prescriptive process as to how you deal with it."

"We had to do this by the book ..."

The Challenge

A persistent challenge in high reliability management is deciding whether to follow a path rigidly or constantly change direction (see Figure 5.1). In other words, we are struggling to break free from norms, routines, and the authoritative power of orders, rules, processes and front-loaded best practice frameworks.

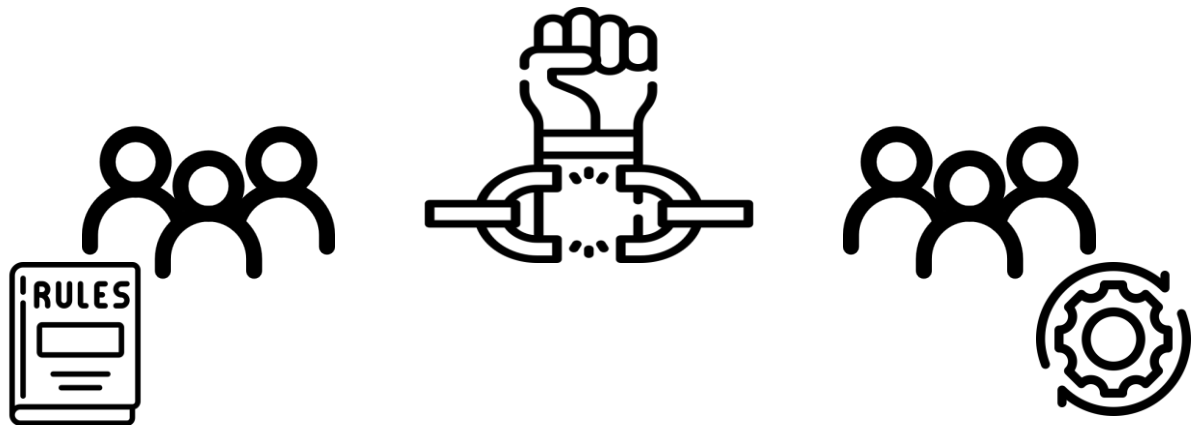


Figure 5.1: Freedom to act

The freedom to act is the opposite of being slavishly obedient to rules, processes, a higher authority, or our own impulses. Having authority over our own doing is, however, challenging:

"When we make decisions, we're not always in charge. We can be too impulsive or too deliberate for our own good; one moment we hot-headedly let our emotions get the better of us, and the next we're paralysed by uncertainty. Then we'll pull a brilliant decision out of thin air – and wonder how we did it." (Morse, 2006)

Although following procedures, processes, policies, routines, and habits is unsurprisingly centripetal wisdom (see Figure 5.2), we are also provided with an opposite choice of ignoring the very same procedures, delaying them or innovating a response if we believe that existing procedures, processes and policies do not serve as well in anticipating and containing impending adversity.

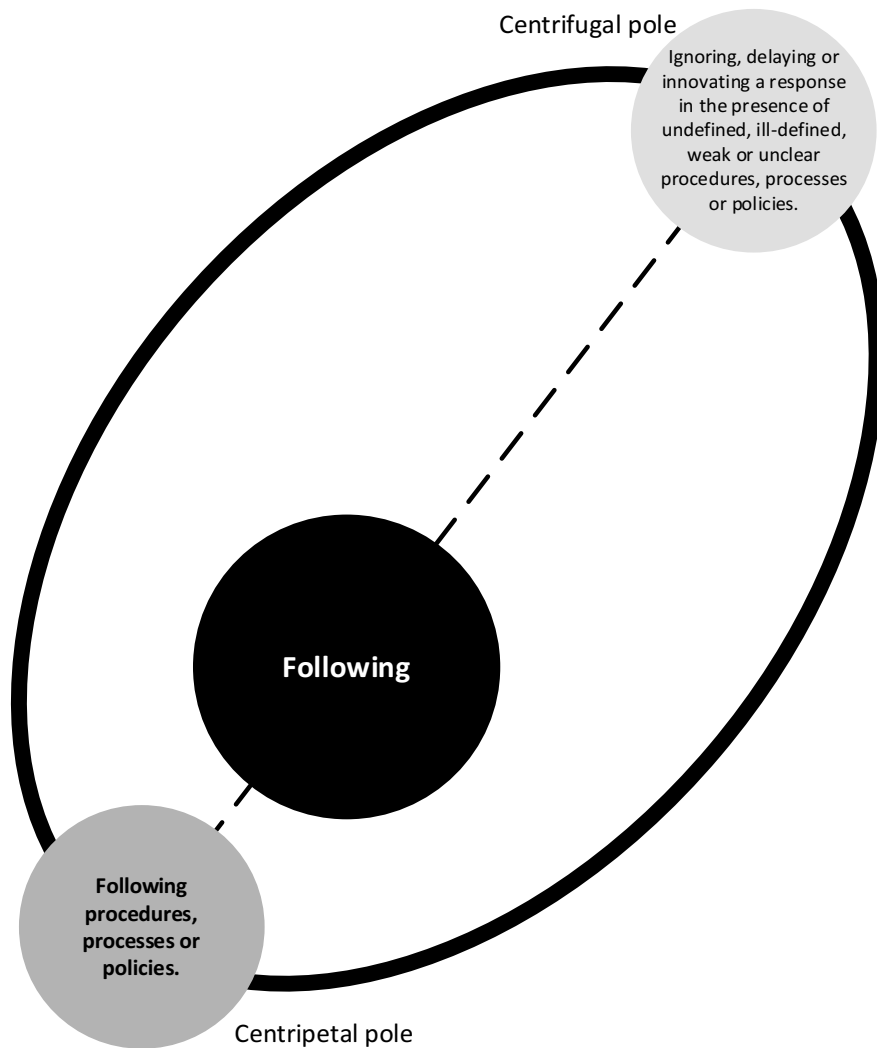


Figure 5.2: Centripetal and centrifugal forces (Following)

Centripetal Wisdom

Our freedom to act, not just follow somebody else's lead, or an order, a process, a rule or a task, sets us apart from those who are less capable of being mindful. And yet, in the face of impending adversity, our longing for latitude in determining what we want and what we need to do, is constrained by some of the following biases and inclinations:

Conformity. The conformity bias is an inclination to match beliefs and behaviours to norms that are shared by other people instead of using our own judgement (Moscovici and Faucheux, 1972). In other words, we tend to follow the herd, mimicking other people or society's norms.

Proficiency. Compliance with rules, processes, laws, and regulations is supposed to guide decision-making and streamline internal processes. The same process of compliance may

reinforce an illusion of control (Langer 1975) while in fact, responsibility is cast off and transferred to a process or a rule.

Automation. A rulebook is often embedded in electronic decision support systems that provide us with automated assistance in being compliant. The automation bias (Parasuraman and Manzey, 2010) results in complacency, a feeling of contentment with the decision support systems' output. Over time, we allow systems, signifying processes, rules and regulations, to make decisions for us.

Fixation. The tools, techniques or instruments that we are compliant with may become familiar, if not too familiar. In this respect, the famous refrain of "*if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail*" (adopted from Maslow, 1966) rings true. Compliance may drive an over-reliance on tools, techniques or instruments, and their outputs.

Not only do our biases make us routinise our actions and essentially reduce our freedom to engage with impending adversity mindfully, but the pressure from the external environment also drives an expectation of greater consistency in action. In the wake of incidents, we tend to tighten the screws by imposing more procedures and more rules to reduce situated cognition as a source of error. In other words, we do not think on our feet, as this may cause a problem or incident, or trigger a crisis. Instead, we box in our thinking by reverting to compliance and conformity.

Compliance is defined as the process of following a procedure, process, or policy, and adherence to rulebooks, regimens, and managerial directions set out by regulatory bodies (see Figure 5.3).

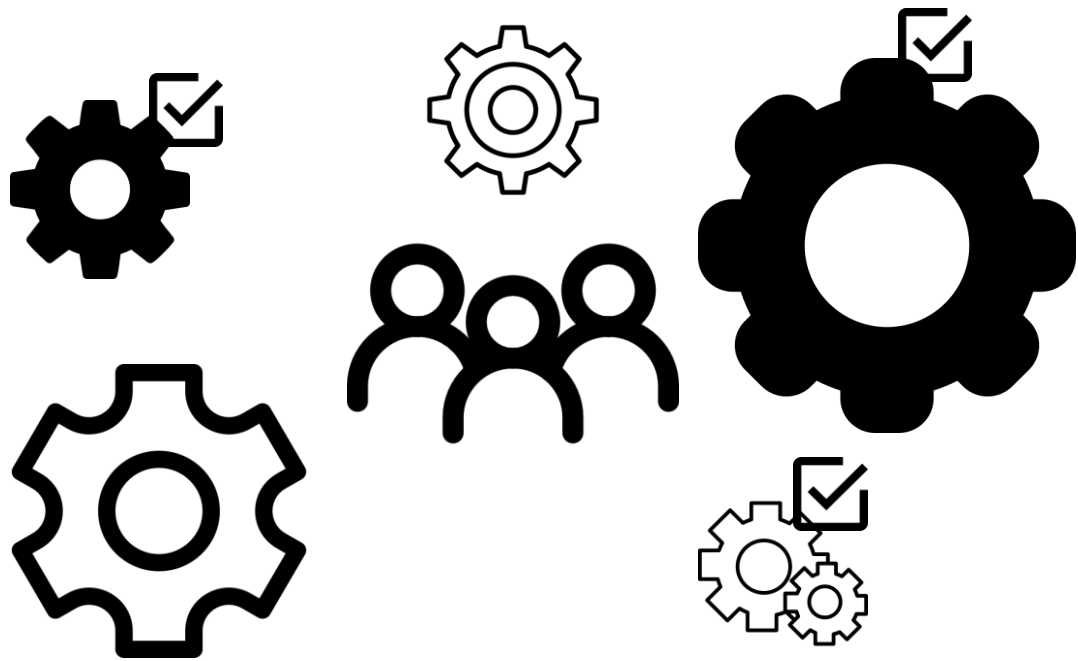


Figure 5.3: Compliance in collective decision making

Who has not taken part, sometimes reluctantly, in some form of compliance training; perhaps regarding workplace safety, information security, or trade compliance? These are all carried out by organisations to uphold their regimens. In combination, our urge to routinise our actions and the promotion of compliant behaviour result in habit-based, unchanging and mechanically performed activities, practices, and actions.

The resulting compliance culture is reinforced by consistent messaging about the expected compliance's nature, breadth, and depth. Activities, actions, and practices are monitored against predefined performance measures, often in the form of audits. Any violations of the compliance regime will result in punitive action, and adherence to it in rewards.

A compliance culture in an organisation produces a range of benefits. It fosters clarity in action in that it provides employees with an unambiguous and undisputed course of action. This allows a quick auto-pilot activation of activity, devoid of the need for situational analysis of the context in which this action is carried out. Last but not least, a compliant organisation or work unit forms the foundation for legal accountability.

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The Toolbox

The checklist. A checklist is a standardised list of steps to take, usually reserved for repetitive tasks (see Figure 5.4). With checklists, the management of near-misses and

accidents is front-loaded; they aim to help us get organised and not forget any important steps:

"Here, then, is our situation at the start of the twenty-first century: We have accumulated stupendous know-how. We have put it in the hands of some of the most highly trained, highly skilled, and hardworking people in our society. And with it, they have accomplished extraordinary things. Nonetheless, that know-how is often unmanageable. Avoidable failures are common and persistent, not to mention demoralising and frustrating, across many fields – from medicine to finance, business to government. And the reason is increasingly evident: the volume and complexity of what we know has exceeded our individual ability to deliver its benefits correctly, safely, or reliably. Knowledge has both saved us and burdened us. That means we need a different strategy for overcoming failure, one that builds on experience and takes advantage of the knowledge people have but somehow also makes up for our human inadequacies. And there is such a strategy – though it will seem almost ridiculous in its simplicity, maybe even crazy to those of us who have spent years carefully developing ever more advanced skills and technologies. It is a checklist."
(Gawande, 2010, p. 13)

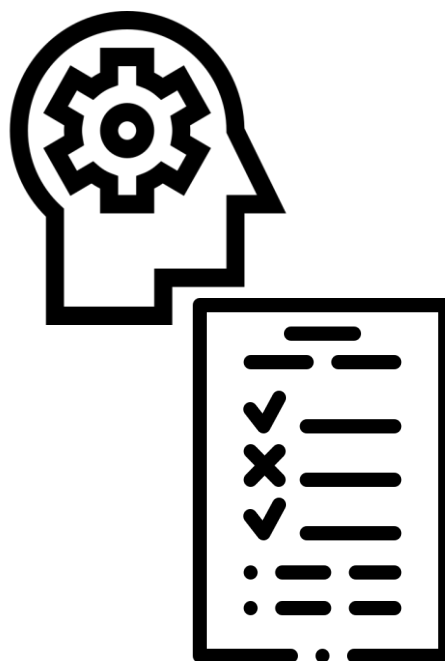


Figure 5.4: Checklist

A checklist is slightly different to a procedure or policy. A checklist tends to focus only on what to do and at times it also indicates who should do it. The main purpose of a checklist is to ensure that tasks are completed quickly and efficiently.

Risk Control. For a third time (see Chapters 3 and 4), we will look at probabilistic risk management; however, with reference to the construct of Following, only the aspect of risk control (see Figure 5.5) will be scrutinised in more detail.

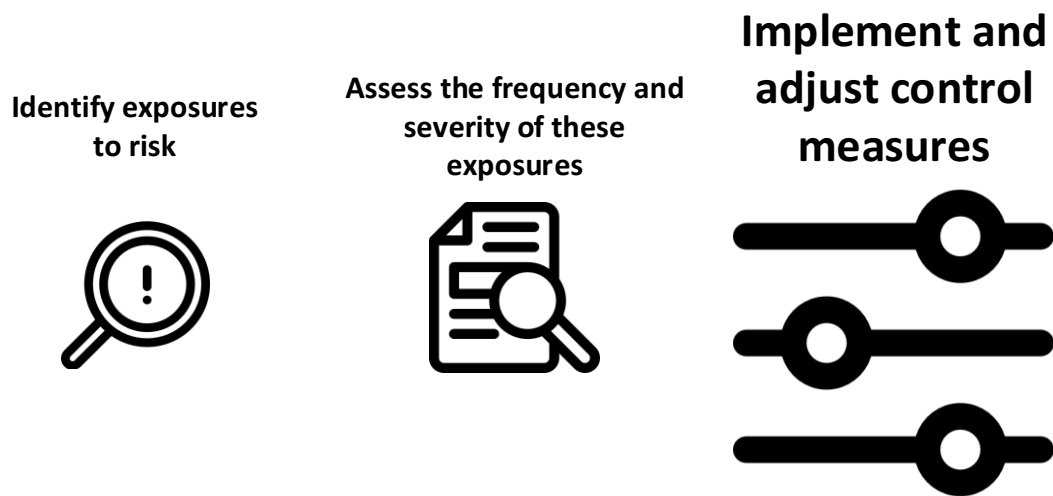


Figure 5.5: Risk Control

Risk control measures may include the

- Elimination of risk (by, for example, de-scoping the problem)
- Substitution of risk with a lesser risk
- Reduction in the likelihood of occurrence
- Mitigation of potential impact
- Modification to the environment (so that the risk is less likely to materialise or will materialise less quickly)
- Establishment of safeguards
- Development of procedural methods (e.g. safer ways of operating)
- Protection of critical assets and functions (in case a risk materialises)

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Stifling situated cognition

The dark side of a compliance culture, augmented by checklists and risk controls, is that it constrains situated cognition. The organisational regimen front-loads our actions; we routinise our behaviours, practices, and actions mindlessly, without evaluating context. This, in turn, predisposes our view of near-misses and accidents. In case this predisposition is confronted with novelty, we are likely to feel unprepared for it. Ultimately, we run on autopilot.

"Despite all the rhetoric and money invested in it, risk management is often treated as a compliance issue that can be solved by drawing up lots of rules and making sure that all employees follow them. Many such rules, of course, are sensible and do reduce some risks that could severely damage a company. But rules-based risk management will not diminish the likelihood or the impact of a disaster such as Deepwater Horizon, just as it did not prevent the failure of many financial institutions during the 2007-2008 credit crisis." (Kaplan and Mikes, 2012, p. 50)

Self-serving

We tend to be rewarded if we are compliant and be punished when not. Consequently, it is tempting to comply and conform for the sake of furthering our own interests, rather than those of the work unit on whose behalf we are managing adversity.

Self-evidently correct

The imposition of a regimen of rules drives the practice of self-evidently correct routines, which do not require proof or explanation. We follow them for the sake of being compliant, even if the routine may seem absurd to us.

Lack of sensitivity

Just as we conform to routines because they are in our (self-serving) interests and do not requiring any validation, we also tend to rely on habits in isolation of each other, being unaware of their impact on the problem at hand, as well as on each other. Once we have adhered to a rule or process and completed a routine, as expected of us, we move to the next in a Taylorist (Taylor, 1911) manner, devoid of sensitivity to the consequences of our auto-pilot behaviour.

Anonymity and authority

The mere requirement to be compliant may make us feel like a 'cog in the wheel'. The authority of compliance diminishes the perceived importance of our situated cognition as a means of preventing and containing adversity. In essence, we just need to 'tick the box', and so the process, rule, or routine deauthorises our longing to think.

Centrifugal Wisdom

The limitations in driving collective decision-making through compliance with control systems are summarised by Hamel (2009, p. 93):

"Traditional control systems ensure high levels of compliance but do so at the expense of employee creativity, entrepreneurship, and engagement. To overcome the discipline-versus-innovation trade-off, tomorrow's control systems will need to

rely more on peer review and less on top-down supervision. They must leverage the power of shared values and aspirations while loosening the straitjacket of rules and strictures. The goal: organisations filled with employees who are capable of self-discipline.”

Hence, relying on compliance is questionable because of the front-loading of past-informed processes, rules, and procedures that are to be applied in a mindless but disciplined, efficient manner, although ill-equipped to activate a response to novel problems the pre-configured rulebook does not have an answer to.

Rationalist, top-down, front-loading actions are still a tempting proposition for organisations. To reduce situated cognition as a source of error, we tend to break down our past experiences into smaller controllable actions to which we adhere; any rule-breaking will result in punitive measures; rule-following will be rewarded. The codification of common problems drives the routinisation of behaviours and actions, thus contributing to an ever-growing repository of best practices that we may mindlessly rely on.

In an HRO, the prevailing mantra is less one of routines and more one of the mindful appropriation of rules, processes, procedures, and routine practices:

"When considering how safety rules are tools, the focus is not on how members follow rules, nor on how rules dictate action (as with the rationalist approach). Instead, the focus is on how members appropriate safety rules – how they draw from safety rules to access lessons from catastrophes, and how they use safety rules to make present or visible organisational priorities and lessons." (Jahn, 2016, p. 366)

Discretion and commitment

Good judgement involves the appropriation of rules and routines. Hence, discretion implies the freedom to define, deviate, adapt, and make decisions that reside outside the formalised front-loading of behaviours and actions.

In contrast to an external commitment (see Table 6.1), defined as contractual compliance, the discretion to act is a participative process (Argyris, 1998) that allows us, individuals, to appropriate rules, routines and practices.

How Commitment Differs	
External Commitment	Internal Commitment
Tasks are defined by others	Individuals define tasks
The behaviour required to perform tasks is defined by others	Individuals define the behaviour required to perform tasks
Performance goals are defined by management	Management and individuals jointly define performance goals and values that are challenging for the individuals
The importance of the goal is defined by others	Individuals define the importance of goals and values

Table 6.1: External versus internal commitment (adopted from Argyris, 1998, p. 100)

The discretion to act, through internal commitment, tends to foster greater job satisfaction, as we feel less like an externally operated 'cog in the wheel' and more like an individual creator of rules and routines.

Value-driven appropriation

The discretionary management that we may internally commit ourselves to does not provide us with a carte-blanche, a free-for-all style of managing adversity. A value-based mindset (Ginsburg and Miller, 1992) can be best understood as guiding and directing behaviours and decision making towards commonly shared values. Hence, the appropriation of rules and routines is driven, and constrained, by the extent to which values such as profitability, integrity, quality, or productivity are supported.

Expertise

The need for us to appropriate rules, routines and habits as a means of creating novel responses to impending incidents requires an abundance of expertise and the willingness to have such expertise challenged.

The build-up of expertise requires investment in people, in the form of training and learning exercises. A valuable expertise-building approach is the provision of stretch assignments (Douglas and Jay, 2007, see also Toolbox). These may take the form of giving us a project or task that is beyond our current knowledge or skills level.

Sensitivity

Value-driven appropriation of rules and routines imposes limits on the extent to which we internally commit ourselves to deviate from an established regimen. Within these limits, we need to be keenly aware of the consequences of actions; we need to stay attentive to the ramifications of our discretion to appropriate rules and routines. Such sensitivity is fostered through frequent interaction and familiarity with each other's jobs (Weick and Sutcliffe,

2015). Subsequently, we each constantly align our respective discretion regarding rule appropriation with others, addressing emerging tensions of interoperability.

Preventive training

Under the umbrella of centripetal wisdom, we may be trained to front-load our actions, to drill them into ourselves, so we can repeat them efficiently. As beneficial as such training would be in rendering our management of adversity automatic, it is nevertheless detrimental in the context of any novelty we might face. As a consequence, the centrifugal definition of training is one of thinking and acting beyond the mechanics of a checklist or risk controls:

"The lessons learned are simple: organisations that have fewer accidents are those that teach their people how to recognise and respond to a variety of problems and empower them to act. The training teaches people not only how to react to specific situations, but also, and perhaps more importantly, how to respond to situations that aren't in the training manual. Preventive training also includes recognising decoys or false trails, so that people see that not everything is as it appears. Finally, such training helps people recognise how to decouple highly coupled systems quickly to minimise the harm caused by the initial accident to the total system." (Roberts and Bea, 2001, p. 73)

Trust and recognition

Rule and routine appropriations require an atmosphere of trust in which people are not automatically labelled and scrutinised as rule benders or breakers. Indeed, we must be trusted to appropriate rules and routines with integrity and with a clear commitment to realise those values that are important to the organisation. This does not imply that if bad behaviour (e.g. gross negligence) is observed, it will not result in punitive actions (Reason, 1997). Nevertheless, if we apply our discretionary power to appropriate rules and routines in a value-adding manner, then we should be incentivised and rewarded.

[Text Box Start]

The Toolbox

Stretch Assignments. The successful appropriation of rules and routines does not come out of thin air. In acquiring and honing such skills, stretch assignments serve as valuable opportunities to develop adaptive expertise. Stretch assignments tend to require us to accomplish a task or a project for which answers have not yet been defined or solutions not developed. Thus a stretch assignment takes us out of our rule/routine zone (see Figure 5.6); the task or the project does not reflect routine work but is unfamiliar and uncomfortable to us.

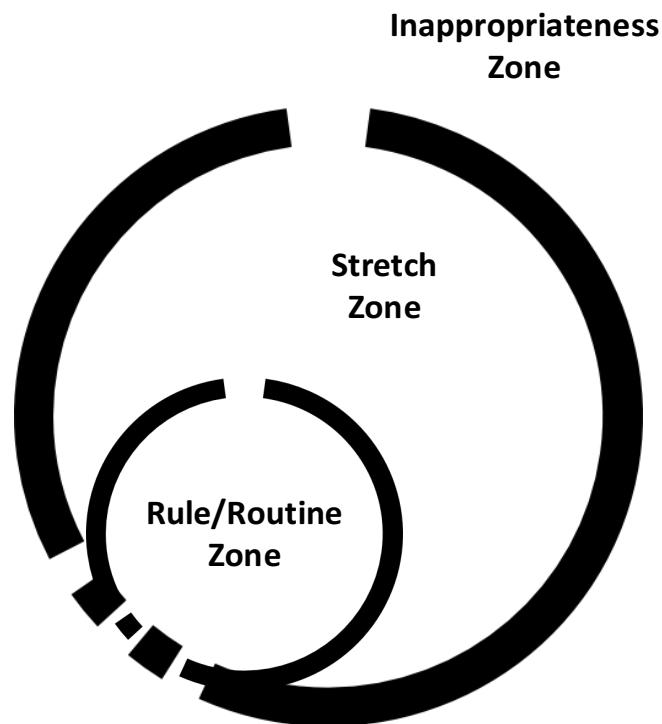


Figure 5.6: Zones of rule/routine appropriation

The coordination of stretch-assignments requires the definition of check-points to allow us to take stock of how far we have moved beyond our own, hardwired mental schema of rules and routines. If they are embedded in the routine work of our organisation, touchpoints with the Rule/Routine zones, as well as the opposite extreme, the Inappropriateness zone, need to be carefully monitored. Such monitoring and provision of interim feedback may be carried out by a mentor who is emotionally and structurally detached from the mentee, to allow objective and impersonal feedback.

Improvisation. The process of 'in-the moment' appropriation of rules and routines (see Figure 5.7) builds on the key skills of improvisation:

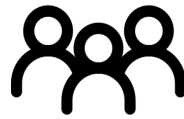
"In general terms, improvisation is the ability to create and implement a new or unplanned solution in the face of an unexpected problem or change. It is often seen as spontaneous, intuitive, creative problem-solving behaviour that happens 'mostly on the fly'." (Conforto, Rebentisch and Amaral, 2016, p. 8)

Within the boundaries of the positively shaped (see Figure 5.6) stretch zone, improvisation thrives. This may include the temporary or permanent empowerment for us to make a mindful, in-the-moment decision, while yet informed by expertise and with awareness of the inappropriateness zone. Furthermore, open, frequent day-to-day communication with mentors and outside experts provides objective feedback on the improvisational activities of the team.

Build a culture that recognises and views change positively



Create the right team structure and project environment



Provide management practices and tools that facilitate improvisation



Figure 5.7: Fostering business improvisation (adapted from Conforto, Rebentisch and Amaral, 2016)

To help us define and sharpen our improvisation skills, we will draw on the fields of arts (White, 2021) and entertainment, where improvisation is considered a vital skill. Below are three simple to carry out improvisation exercises used in comedy (extracted from Yorton, 2022):

Embrace the ensemble. Gather five to ten people in a circle and create a new story, with each person in turn contributing a single word. Go around a dozen times, then stop to check-in. Participants quickly learn that they have to balance their own ideas and expectations with those of the ensemble. No one can control the outcome. And words like "the" or "and" are just as important as "tortoise" or "hare." Seemingly small contributions matter greatly to the whole.

Take responsible risk. Two people engage in a conversation about anything, but have to begin every sentence with the words, "thank you." This underscores a key idea in improv: everything your colleagues offer is a gift about which you should feel grateful. When comedians, or leaders, create an environment that welcomes and values contributions, people are willing to give bolder, more honest comments and take more risks.

Follow the follower. A group makes a circle; one person stands in the middle, eyes closed. Everyone else silently chooses one member of the circle to be the leader, then begins to mimic the movements the leader makes. The person in the middle opens his or her eyes and tries to determine who the leader is. We use this exercise to reinforce the idea that high-functioning improv ensembles find their leaders by looking for the right person at the right time, not formal titles.

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Revisiting the Chernobyl Disaster

After World War II, the former USSR invested heavily in nuclear power. By the end of 1985, it had a total capacity of 1,500 billion kilowatt-hours, covering 14% of the electricity needed. Most of the power plants in the 1980s were boiling-water, high-power reactors (in short, RBMK-1000). One of them was the Vladimir Lenin Nuclear Power Plant, located near the city of Pripyat (close to the border to Belarus) in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

On April 25th, 1986, routine maintenance was scheduled in Reactor 4; this included carrying out a safety test that mimics a power loss; if a power plant loses power, the reactor still needs to be cooled. In 1982, 1984, and 1985, such a test was conducted, but all yielded negative results. Another test was scheduled, initially to be carried out by the day shift. Nevertheless, because another power station went offline in the Kiev region, that test was postponed and overseen by a comparatively inexperienced evening shift.

The first step was to decrease the power to 700 megawatts (MW) at midnight on April 25th. In fact, the power collapsed to a near-shutdown stage at 30 MW. Despite this oddity, the operators increased output to 200 MW, still far below the 700 MW outlined in the test protocol. The test officially began at 1:23:04 AM on April 26th. Unbeknown to the operators, due to the near stall of the reactor, the core became unstable, and the final steps resulted in a power outage that was not contained by an emergency shutdown, but because of the design of the reactor, the sudden emergency shutdown fuelled a jump in output to an unsustainable 30,000 MW. At 1:23:58 am, reactor 4 of the Vladimir Lenin Nuclear Power Plant exploded. It is widely considered the worst power plant accident in history.

A multitude of causes has been identified to explain this disaster. In addition to the design deficiencies in all RBMK reactors, another aspect was the inexperience of the evening shift and their adherence to a test protocol that they followed almost religiously under unsafe conditions:

“Immediately upon the start of the shift, Diatlov began demanding that the program continue to be carried out. When Akimov sat down to study the program, Diatlov began approaching him for working too slowly and failing to pay attention to the complexity of the situation that had arisen in the unit. Diatlov shouted at Akimov to get up and started insisting that he hurry up. Akimov, holding a sheaf of papers in his hands (evidently the program), began going around to the control room operators and establishing whether the equipment was in appropriate condition for the program that was being carried out.” (Plokhly, 2018, pp. 79–80)

Just-this-way and Just-for-now

Centripetal wisdom may dictate that following processes, procedures, and policies is the only legitimate way to avert adversity. The biases we have may amplify the propensity to routinise our practices, so in essence, we are tempted to run on autopilot. It requires less effort; it is efficient; and accountability for our actions can be deflected away from us, and instead directed at the front-loaded autopilot.

Over the years, operators and engineers became more accustomed to the new technology of an RBMK reactor. Guidelines, manuals, checklists, procedures were produced for running a reactor; they were refined and matured to allow safe operation, although safety was often compromised in order to meet productivity targets. The just-this-way management of adversity (see Figure 5.8) is, unsurprisingly, one of strict compliance, fortified at times by an excessive notion of obedience to a higher authority.

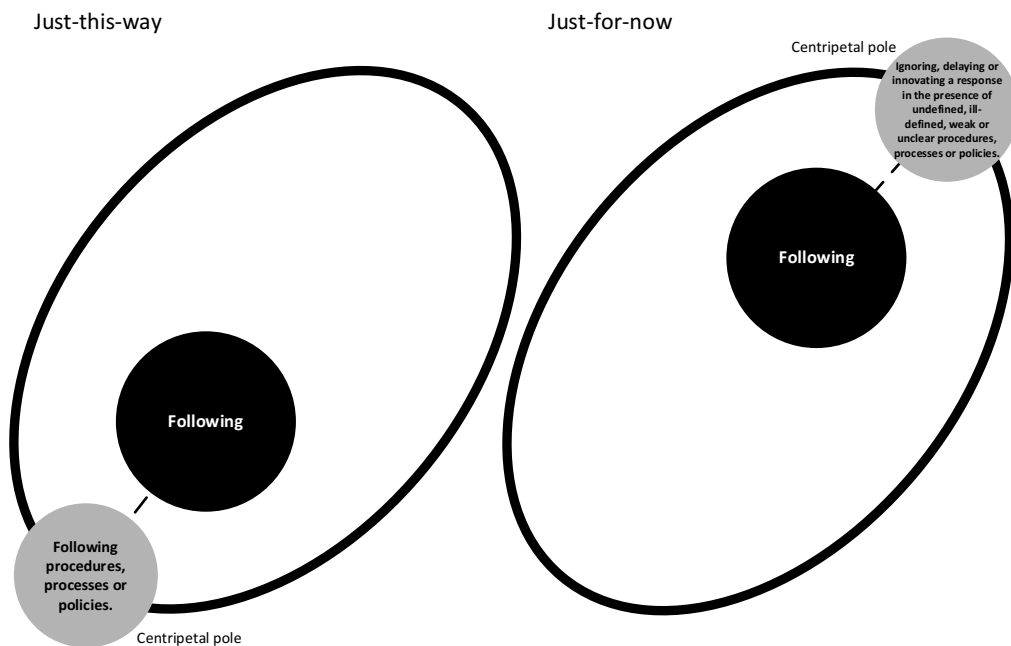


Figure 5.8: Just-this-way and just-for-now polarity (Following)

Let's assume the opposite just-for-now pole is centripetal to our argument of anticipating and containing near-misses and accidents. This would imply that operators would question manuals and processes; even their experience and routines need to be examined whenever they run a power plant. Even when faced with low hazard tasks or tasks that do not immediately affect critical function, these would have to be continuously scrutinised. This extreme polar opposite of following procedures, processes or policies seems as nonsensical as strict conformity to automated, compliance-based management of adversity.

The discourse on just-this-way and the opposite just-for-now has been widely covered in academic literature. To quote just one contribution on the pros and cons of being compliant:

“On the one hand, the traditional view assumes that the increasing standardisation of individual, group and organisational behaviours leads to higher predictability of safe outcomes. Therefore, managers have defended the adoption of strict compliance based on the argument that if procedures or rules are not strictly followed, workers could easily fall into deviant practices that can lead to catastrophic consequences. On the other hand, according to recent research, safety compliance alone is not sufficient to ensure the best possible safety levels, and it has even been considered dangerous under certain special or unexpected circumstances. This perspective argues that any complex system susceptible to unpredictability and uncertainty should accept ‘necessary deviations’ or ‘make adjustments’ to the rules and procedures in order to manage a given situation while being as resilient as possible.”
(Martínez-Córcoles *et al.*, 2014, p. 1258)

Just-in-case and Just-in-time

As we are habitual creatures, we are tempted to routinise experiences. It is commonplace to think that rigid adherence to rules and routines is the one best way of anticipating and responding to near-miss and actual incidents. We reason that it reduces our fallibilities and the possibilities for us to make mistakes. So we automatise our actions; we are made and conditioned to switch to an autopilot mentality, being compliant with a regiment of front-loaded decisions and actions. Essentially, conforming and complying is effortless, straightforward and uncomplicated; it is more efficient.

The opposite pole to strict compliance and conformity is one of improvisation and stretching our thinking beyond norms, authority and status. Here, we may come up with solutions the rulebook does not provide. We create novel solutions to the novel problems signified by near-misses and accidents, although the activity of improvising is not sustainable in the long run.

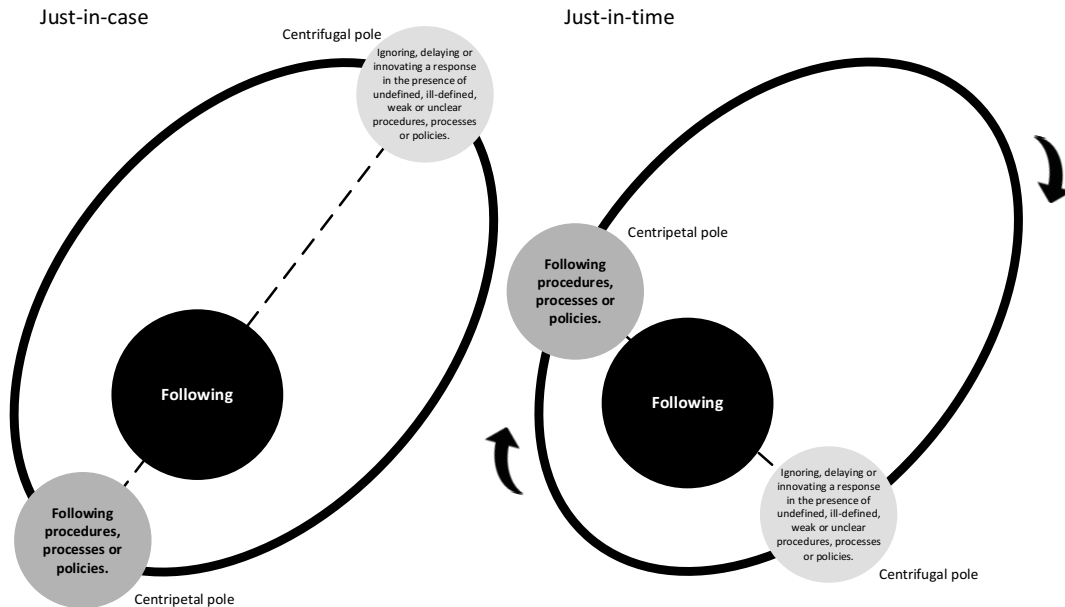


Figure 5.9: Just-in-case and just-in-time polarity (Following)

Although this chapter started with the centripetal wisdom of compliance to a regimen of rules, procedures and rules, it is reasonable to assume that we need both centripetal and centrifugal wisdom to be integrated into a third option, a less polarised set of Just-in-case (see Figure 5.9) principles:

JUST-IN-CASE, we are compelled to adhere to an organisational regime WHILE appropriating and creating new rules, routines, procedures, and policies. In every organisation, there certainly will be a regimen, a regulated system that we may have to obey, although hopefully not in a slavish manner. That is not to suggest that we should join an organisation with the intention of being a rule bender and breaker. Still, a culture that fosters mindful rule appropriation provides us with 'wriggle room' to continuously challenge, define, and adapt our actions to the environmental challenges we face – within limits. Ergo, we need to recognise the existence of top-down rules (Argyris 1998) while exploiting the limited adaptive space we are given.

JUST-IN-CASE, we defer to authority, rank and status WHILE assuming power to deviate from rules, routines, procedures, and policies. Within the stretch zone, we empower each other and take power and authority to prevent or contain the consequences of an incident. The process of supporting each other or claiming power by ourselves needs to be value-adding, though. This requires us to understand the ramifications of our actions and the boundaries of inappropriateness, which limit the extent of rule and routine appropriation. We need to understand what we want to do while always being mindful of what we must not do!

JUST-IN-CASE, we commit ourselves to an organisational regimen WHILE stretching our thinking beyond it. Operating in a stretch zone, applying in-the-moment skills such as improvisation, may quickly end up as a daunting, overwhelming, and ultimately chaotic experience. Mentoring can re-establish some form of structure through active listening, reflecting, clarifying, coaching, and providing constructive feedback. Mentoring can make us understand the breadth and depth of the choices we have in a stretch zone; it helps us learn in which situations it is best to adhere to a rule or routine and when not to.

JUST-IN-CASE, we tick off a checklist for repetitive tasks WHILE being mindful of impending adversity to which we have no prescribed answer. This principle means that our primary approach to managing adversity is one of being 'on autopilot' that enables us to deal with repetitive tasks which are not critical to the functioning of operations or to performance. While routine-like reliability define our management of near misses and accidents, we also put aside time, effort and space to create new routines, rules, procedures and policies, in real-time:

"The first time you go through a checklist, it's fine. But after that, most people tend to do it mindlessly. So in aviation you have flaps up, throttle open, anti-ice off. But if snow is coming and the anti-ice is off, the plane crashes.

Checklists aren't bad if they require qualitative information to be obtained in that moment. For example, 'Please note the weather conditions. Based on these conditions, should the anti-ice be on or off?' or 'How is the patient's skin color different from yesterday?' If you ask questions that encourage mindfulness, you bring people into the present and you're more likely to avoid an accident." (Langer and Beard, 2014, p. 72)

The just-in-case integration of both centripetal and centrifugal poles of the construct of Following seems reasonable. Still, the third option that results from such integration must not remain static in its configuration. Just-in-time, these principles require a timestamp that bounds constancy over time. To take only the first just-in-case principle, that might be expanded as follows:

JUST-IN-TIME, we are compelled to adhere to an organisational regimen WHILE appropriating and creating new rules, routines, procedures, and policies AS LONG AS we are sensitive about the consequences of our actions. As long as we have established, maintained, and updated a bigger picture than the one we are sensitive about (see Chapter 7), we understand the ramifications of our actions. If that bigger picture is lost, incomprehensible or too ambiguous

(see Chapter 2), the management of incidents should be delayed until the bigger picture has been reestablished.

Towards a paradox mindset

Centripetal wisdom may dictate that following processes, procedures, and policies is the only legitimate way to avert adversity. The biases we face may amplify the propensity to routinise our practices. In essence, we are tempted to run on autopilot, meaning that we are expected and bound to things without any real, conscious, mindful involvement. That requires less effort; it is efficient; and accountability for action can be deflected away from us and instead towards the front-loaded autopilot.

And yet, as absurd as it is for an autopilot mentality to be put forward as a universal solution, it is equally absurd to see the extreme opposite idea of continuously stretching our minds and actions as occupying that role through improvisation, and operating beyond the realm of routines, rules, processes and policies.

As a consequence, your high reliability management of near misses and accidents may well be defined by warring principles that are paradoxical and yet beneficial, not set in stone but constantly challenged, questioned, elaborated and evaluated, in case you need them, just-in-time.

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