

CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE: HOW SAFETY PROFESSIONALS CAN MOVE FORWARD THROUGH THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF RESILIENCE ENGINEERING TO THEIR ROLE

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Abstract

Complex socio-technical systems require significant on-going efforts and resources to understand and manage safety risks. To support these efforts, organisations have invested considerable resources in dedicated safety roles, teams and entire departments. The fundamental purpose of the safety profession within organisations is to create foresight about the changing shape of risk and facilitate action before people are harmed. However, 30 years of research demonstrates that safety professionals are largely not performing this role in practice. Safety professionals find themselves in a dilemma between Safety-I and Safety-II; between the needs of management and the needs of the workforce. Managers demand predictability, control, good news and measurable improvement. However, work is not like this on the front-line as workers need to constantly adapt to the emergent situations they face. We have reframed this paradox between Safety-I and Safety-II in the context of the role of a safety professional. Through the application of resilience engineering theory and research we will outline the practical tasks and activities that can be adopted by safety professionals across industry to support the resilient performance of their organisations. To further illustrate how this works on the ground we apply these practical tasks and activities to the events surrounding major safety accidents from within the Aerospace and Oil and Gas Industries.