



Just Culture

Balancing Safety and Accountability
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December 2007
166 pages
978-0-7546-7267-8

219 x 153 mm
Paperback
\$29.95



A just culture protects people's honest mistakes from being seen as culpable. But what is an honest mistake, or rather, when is a mistake no longer honest? It is too simple to assert that there should be consequences for those who 'cross the line'. Lines don't just exist out there, ready to be crossed or obeyed. We - people - construct those lines; and we draw them differently all the time, depending on the language we use to describe the mistake, on hindsight, history, tradition, and a host of other factors.

What matters is not where the line goes - but who gets to draw it. If we leave that to chance, or to prosecutors, or fail to tell operators honestly about who may end up drawing the line, then a just culture may be very difficult to achieve.

The absence of a just culture in an organization, in a country, in an industry, hurts both justice and safety. Responses to incidents and accidents that are seen as unjust can impede safety investigations, promote fear rather than mindfulness in people who do safety-critical work, make organizations more bureaucratic rather than more careful, and cultivate professional secrecy, evasion, and self-protection. A just culture is critical for the creation of a safety culture. Without reporting of failures and problems, without openness and information sharing, a safety culture cannot flourish.

Drawing on his experience with practitioners (in nursing, air traffic control and professional aviation) whose errors were turned into crimes, Dekker lays out a new view of just culture. This book will help you to create an environment where learning and accountability are fairly and constructively balanced.

Contents

Preface; Prologue: a nurse's error became a crime; Why bother with a just culture?; Between culpable and blameless; The importance, risk and protection of reporting; The importance, risk and protection of disclosure; Are all mistakes equal?; Hindsight and determining culpability; 'You have nothing to fear if you've done nothing wrong'; Without prosecutors there would be no crime; Are judicial proceedings bad for safety?; Stakeholders in the legal pursuit of justice; 3 questions for a just culture; Not individuals or systems, but individuals in systems; A staggered approach to building your just culture; Epilogue; Index.

About the Author

Sidney Dekker is Professor and Director of the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia. Previously Professor at Lund University, Sweden, and Director of the Leonardo Da Vinci Center for Complexity and Systems Thinking there, he gained his Ph.D. in Cognitive Systems Engineering from The Ohio State University, USA. He has worked in New Zealand, the Netherlands and England, been Senior Fellow at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, Visiting Academic in the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, Monash University in Melbourne, and Professor of Community Health Science at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Manitoba in Canada. Sidney is author of several best-selling books on system failure, human error, ethics and governance. He has been flying the Boeing 737NG part-time as airline pilot for the past few years. The OSU Foundation in the United States awards a yearly Sidney Dekker Critical Thinking Award.

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