

ACCOUNTABILITY AND BLAME: BREAKING UP FOR GOOD

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**BLAME-FREE MAKES
AS MUCH SENSE AS
ERROR-FREE**



shame and guilt are
social emotions

**BLAME AND SHAME
ARE JUST AS LIKELY
TO ENCOURAGE
UNSAFE BEHAVIOR AS
SAFE ONES**



safety is not a
performance

safety is not a
behavior

**SAFETY IS THE
CAPACITY TO
ABSORB THE
CONSEQUENCES
OF FAILURE**

ACCOUNTABILITY

1. People are **unaware** of the expectation
2. People are **unable** to fulfill the expectation due to capability (lacking the required skills) or capacity (lacking time and resources)
3. People are clear on the expectations, have the capability and capacity, and **do not** perform as expected

**WHICH IS
BLAME-WORTHY?**

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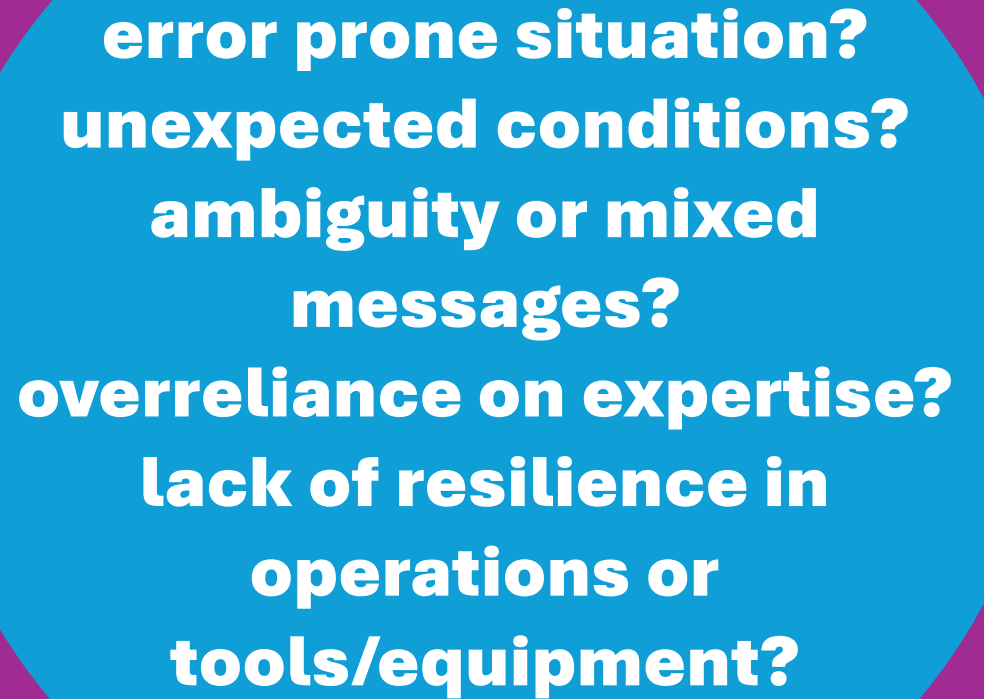


Which is blameworthy?

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ACCOUNTABILITY

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2. People are **unable** to fulfill the expectation due to capability (lacking the required skills) or capacity (lacking time and resources)
3. People are clear on the expectations, have the capability and capacity, and **do not** perform as expected



**error prone situation?
unexpected conditions?
ambiguity or mixed
messages?
overreliance on expertise?
lack of resilience in
operations or
tools/equipment?**

**ACCOUNTABILITY
ISN'T PERSONAL
RESPONSIBILITY,
IT'S A SYSTEMS
INTEGRITY
CONTROL**





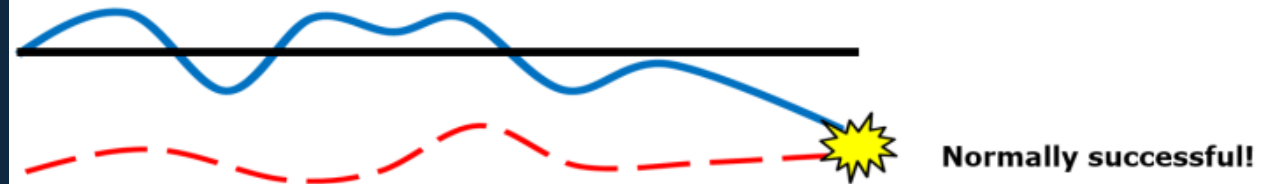
What organizational systems are involved in accountability?

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BLAME FIXES NOTHING

Source: Todd Conklin

Work as planned
vs.
work in practice



**blame and guilt enforce
the false tyranny of the
black line**

THERE IS NO BLACK LINE

LOW

Uncertainty

HIGH

failure is an
indicator of
system
weaknesses



**ROUTINE, WELL-
UNDERSTOOD**



**VARIABLE, UNCERTAIN,
COMPLEX**



**INNOVATIVE, NOVEL,
UNKNOWN**

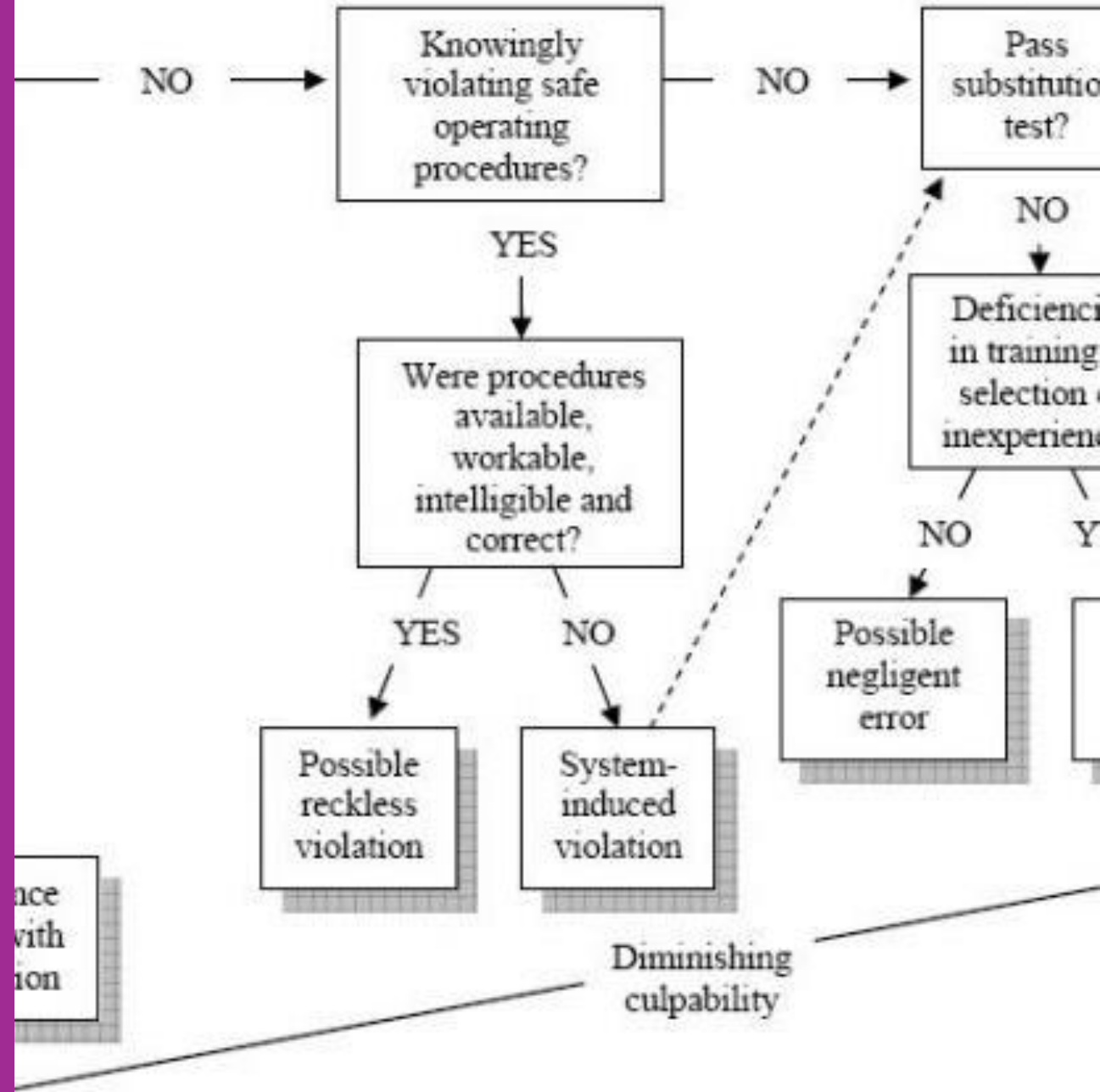
failure is the
mechanism for
discovery

LOW

Failure Rates

HIGH

**DON'T TRY TO
REASON AWAY AN
EMOTIONAL
PROBLEM**

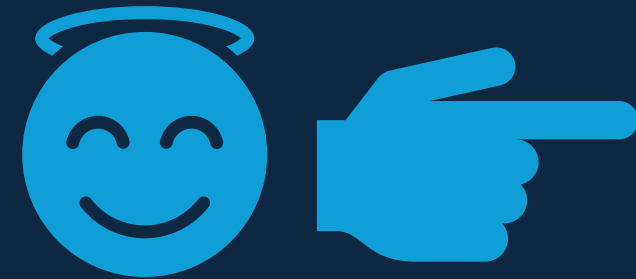


BLAME IS AN EGO DEFENSE AGAINST PAINFUL EMOTIONS

by not processing painful
emotions, we build
psychological and
organizational defenses
against learning



EXTRAPUNITIVE



IMPUNITIVE



INTROPUNITIVE

ACCOUNTIBILITY REQUIRES CURIOSITY ABOUT THE UNKNOWN UNEXPECTED AND UNPLEASANT

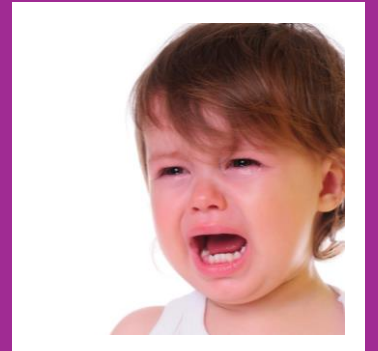
process emotions and
challenge defensive
narratives to get
curious about failure



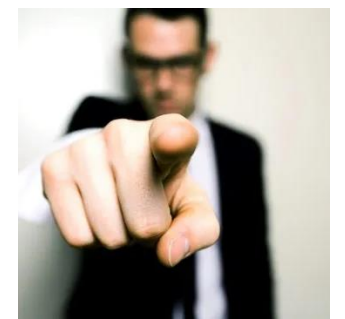
TRIGGER



EMOTION



**DEFENSIVE
NARRATIVE**



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What are your defensive narratives?

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SYSTEMS FAIL

PEOPLE TRY



**TO CREATE SAFETY
CAPACITY, RESPOND
TO INCIDENTS WITH
EMPATHY, NOT BLAME**

COGNITIVE EMPATHY

curiosity

EMOTIONAL EMPATHY

vulnerability

EMPATHETIC CONCERN

compassion

**empathy is not
agreement**

THE BREAKUP

**build accountability by
strengthening organizational,
operational and psychological
systems through inquiry and
learning**

**actively manage the emotions
that arise from uncertainty and
surprise and disappointments
separately from managing
performance**

PRE-ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION MEDIA

SAFETY CAPACITY

Leadership Practices for Failing Safely



MARTHA ACOSTA

