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A police officer specialized in criminal investigations, and a director of enquiries into accidents and/ or major crimes, Nicola has in-depth expertise in investigation and incident analysis. He is a graduate of the Specialized Master's in Human and Organisational Factors of Industrial Safety programme. His wide-ranging experience in human and organizational factors provides a solid foundation for his work with the consultancy team in training activities and safety culture diagnoses.



Managerial trust in operators gives them room to take initiatives that reflect the full extent of their professionalism. This requires the manager to be able to calibrate the relationship so that frontline actors feel supported and guided.

### Trust: the default option when control is impossible?

When control appears to be too expensive and complex to implement, or when the activity is too poorly understood to be planned and therefore managed, there is a great temptation to replace it with trust, by default and by necessity. An example is the gas pipeline manager who is forced to trust his team because he is physically too far away to exercise any kind of control, or because he does not have sufficient technical knowledge. However, this approach seems overly reductive. Trust and control are two inseparable and complementary concepts that must go hand-in-hand.

### Trust... what does it mean?

Trust describes a type of informal

## Trust and control: a subtle interaction between two intimately-linked concepts

relationship between people. It provides a basis for a consensus on how to proceed with a joint project. This requires a high level of commitment from the various parties, which generates, in turn, expectations.

In industry, trust is a strong cultural trait. It characterizes a particular management style that puts human relations in a prime position. It results from a rational approach by managers that integrates various factors: understanding the risks, the criticality of the task, the skill level required, the context in which the operation is carried out, the profile of the operator, the composition of the team, the history of collaboration within the team, etc.

It is clear that trust regulates individual activities, but it goes further and extends throughout the organization, all the way to safety management tools.

### Trust and control for better safety synergy

For an organization to learn from its mistakes, it must be able to draw upon

an efficient information collection system. However, the effectiveness of learning from experience depends directly on the extent to which the actors who are involved in data collection trust how it will be processed.

This necessary collaboration can only be envisaged on the condition that there is climate of trust within the company. However, to be “trusted”, employees must be sure that there is a fair and just sanction policy that establishes the rules to be respected and boundaries that must not be crossed. Each actor is clearly responsible for the consequences of their actions. These rules and boundaries, which are based on a prior agreement, allow the manager to encourage the operator to take initiatives and to take action when faced with the unexpected. One example is a technician in a refinery, who detects a hazard in a situation that is not covered by procedures. He knows that closing the valve will slow down production, but he also knows that management will support his decision to



be prudent. This “managed” safety introduces greater flexibility into the system and improves resilience.

### **Trust: an asset for safety management**

Managerial trust is a clear signal to the workforce that their skills are recognised and acknowledged, and it creates a positive climate. It is an environment that managers can benefit from, provided they correctly formulate their expectations, and are careful to give safety due priority!!!

*“If you do what I asked you to do, but you didn’t follow the safety regulations, then I won’t be satisfied, and you won’t have met my expectations”*

The person who is trusted will aim to meet the expectations of their manager. For experienced operators, the trust placed in them by their managers enables them to demonstrate their professionalism and confirms their expert status among their peers. For younger workers, it is an opportunity to demonstrate that they are up to the

job. Anxious to preserve the trust placed in them, they will strive to meet the expectations of their managers.

### **Trust and control: a win-win combination ...**

Managerial trust should not be excessive or irrational, as this risks putting teams in a situation where they resent their autonomy or have unwanted responsibilities. Worse, it can lead to a failure to note incidents that are detrimental to safety and lead to a feeling of abandonment. This marks the boundaries of management exclusively based on trust and is where control becomes an indispensable, complementary tool. While it is true that integrating trust into management fosters commitment and stimulates initiatives, control remains an essential tool to guide the activity. It allows everyone to be sure that they are following the action plan. It is also a way for the manager to validate the

work of the operator, to support their teams and show interest in their activities. If the manager him/herself is credible, exemplary and consistent, they can build their relationship with their team members around selected values (e.g. safety). As a result, control appears to operators as necessary, legitimate and normal.

### **... for an integrated safety culture**

A high degree of trust is established when a manager is confident that they will be alerted as soon as an operator finds themselves in a situation where they don’t know what to do. Conversely, this level of performance is achieved when the operator does not perceive control as a sign of mistrust on the part of management, but rather as an opportunity to ensure that the work is consistent with the project’s aims. The emergence of this type of operation provides a natural anchor for safety in daily practice.