Constructive Leadership in a Strong Nuclear Safety Culture

The Role of Leadership Development and Succession Planning Strategies

Presented By:

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Abstract

“Organizations are like automobiles. They don’t run themselves, except downhill. They need people to make them work. And not just any people, but the right people. The effectiveness of an organization’s employees—particularly individuals in leadership positions—determines how the organizational “machine” will perform. What distinguishes great organizations from mediocre ones are the attitudes of its people! Organizations that will set the standard in the twenty-first century have leaders who will get the best out of their people because the people believe that their leaders are authentic, their colleagues are trustworthy, and their work is meaningful.”

--Dr. Manfred Kets de Vries
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Effective leadership is a key aspect of a strong nuclear safety culture. A conscientious assessment of the leaders’ mindset, skills, knowledge and approach to change is essential. It is necessary for leaders to develop an integrated strategy that will enable them to model the desired behaviors required to support an organizational capability that fosters commitment, accountability and the reshaping of systems, structures and skills that focus on building a strong nuclear safety culture.

Leaders are a key component of an organization’s strategic capability. It is important that organizations seek to promote expectations of leadership qualities and management skills that are required to build a strong nuclear safety culture. Achieving and sustaining improvements will require greater emphasis on leadership styles and skills, with a need for change management capabilities at the individual, team and organizational levels.

Leaders have the need to develop the capacity, capability and requisite skills to balance delivering on performance objectives and shifting priorities in order to support and sustain a strong safety culture. This may be accomplished in a number of ways, including:

- Aligning behaviors to Vision, Mission, Values and Expectations of a strong nuclear safety culture
- Identifying Individual behavior change and development needs
- Building team effectiveness and capacities
- Supervising others
- Leading change and transition; facilitating others through change and transition
- Implementing work processes that support nuclear safety
- Increasing management presence in plants
- Enhancing observation and coaching skills.

Senior leaders have the most influence and impact on the development of a strong nuclear safety culture. It is incumbent upon senior leaders to align themselves and model those constructive behaviors that will demonstrate their commitment to nuclear safety.
Leadership Development and Succession Planning: Their Role in a Nuclear Safety Culture

Leadership Development plays an extremely important role in shaping organizational culture and behaviors. Leaders have the single largest impact on organizational culture and behaviors. Therefore, a conscientious assessment of the leaders’ mindset, skills, knowledge, and approach to change is essential to the development of a constructive, strong nuclear safety culture. Edgar Schein, a leading authority on organizational culture, emphasized the importance of leadership behaviors in embedding the desired constructive norms into a culture. He states that the primary mechanisms for reinforcing and embedding the desired culture are:

- **What leaders pay attention to, measure and control** – What a leader systematically pays attention to communicates his/her major beliefs. It has a powerful influence on the culture if the leader is consistent in communicating the expected behaviors and application of the focus of attention.

- **How leaders react to critical incidents and organizational crises** – Experiencing crisis situations often creates new norms, procedures, and reveals the important underlying assumptions of leaders. Leaders must be prepared to meet unforeseen challenges with flexibility, perseverance and a healthy questioning attitude.

- **Observed criteria by which leaders allocate scarce resources** – How budgets and resources are allocated is an important part of a leader’s role and speak to the assumptions that leader may hold. WANO PO&Cs OR2. Organizational Effectiveness C.1 cites the standard as “Managers ascertain that staffing and resources are sufficient, including that personnel have requisite knowledge, skill and proficiency to accomplish tasks to achieve safe and reliable plant operation.” From a leadership development standpoint, these competencies are required of all leaders.

- **Deliberate role modeling, teaching and coaching** – In addition to written policies, leaders’ every day attitudes and behaviors have a tremendous influence on the organization. From a leadership development perspective, senior leaders must ensure that the managers and supervisors have the opportunity to build the necessary skills that will allow them to model the desired behaviors and visibly demonstrate their adherence to the organization’s policies, rules and procedures.

- **Observed criteria by which leaders allocate rewards and status** – High reliability organizations, like nuclear power plants, operate under the constant challenges of managing time and resources in accomplishing their work. Employees, in turn, want their contributions and efforts to be acknowledged by those they work with on a day-to-day basis, including managers and peers. To have the greatest impact in the workplace, reward and recognition activities should reinforce and encourage work that advances employee, departmental and other organizational goals and values. In INPO 04-003 Guidelines for Effective Nuclear Supervisor Performance, Sec. 3A. Key
Roles and Responsibilities of the Nuclear Supervisor, includes the following statements about supervisor roles to include:

- Maintain standards. Identify when worker performance does not meet expectations, and confront performance shortfalls;
- Coach workers in a positive manner (as opposed to criticizing)

The criteria by which leaders reward and recognize performance must be clearly based in meeting or exceeding performance expectations, or the consistency of meeting standards and not upon subjective criteria that may shift based upon circumstances or the individuals involved.

- **Observed criteria by which leaders select employees or remove people from senior positions** – the importance of providing a clear strategy and roadmap for identifying potential candidates and future leaders for critical jobs within the organization are set forth in the standards and criteria articulated INPO 05-003 PO&Cs OR 4. *Management and Leadership Development* “Individuals with management and leadership potential are identified, developed and assessed on an ongoing basis to prepare the candidates for positions of increased responsibility.” WANO PO&C OR. 3 states, “Utility executives and senior nuclear managers are personally responsible and accountable for identifying, developing and assessing qualified replacements for senior nuclear manager positions.” The industry standards and expectations are clear regarding the importance of leadership development and succession planning.

Most nuclear organizations have recognized that leaders are the key architects responsible for building a strong, constructive nuclear safety culture. Senior leaders must create a vision that reflects the desired state or outcome of the leadership development initiatives. In addition, they must align and model those behaviors that support nuclear safety and that provide for the sustainable development of desired leadership capabilities and capacities at all levels. This may include:

- Driving organizational safety performance improvement through planned change management processes
- Developing a strong commitment to excellence, fostering accountability
- The integration of leadership development into key management processes in partnership with Human Resources and front line organizations
- Developing and sustaining leadership development and desired nuclear safety behaviors through formal and informal learning and practice
- Developing a comprehensive approach to leadership development that identifies the desired competencies and skills required of leadership in support of shift to a more constructive nuclear safety organization.
- Fostering an environment where leaders at all levels can effectively contribute to shifting behaviors to create a more robust safety culture, that is inclusive, accountable and focused on delivering excellent results.
• Developing a common platform of skills, competencies and desired behaviors shared across the leadership spectrum at all levels, including managing towards excellence in human performance and timely, effective communications

Middle managers and front line supervisors are the most important articulators of safety culture and of the organizational messages underscoring need for a sense of urgency in developing a strong nuclear safety culture. They must possess a set of core skills and competencies that will allow them to effectively coach, monitor and reinforce those behaviors that are critical to nuclear safety. This may require:
  • A strategy to align middle managers and front line supervisors around nuclear safety culture goals, objectives and expectations
  • A phased approach designed to assess, engage and align of the middle managers and supervisors around a set of core skills and competencies that will increase their effectiveness in support of key nuclear safety culture initiatives.
  • A focus on building observation and coaching skills, setting and reinforcing standards and employing effective communication skills and processes

It is imperative that organizations understand the role of leaders in nuclear safety. Leaders need to continually build awareness and understanding of the uniqueness of nuclear power; the foundational principles of a strong, constructive nuclear safety culture as defined by WANO, IAEA, and INPO. They must especially focus on building those high priority skills that will enable them to:
  • Set clear expectations for performance and organizational/departmental goals and objectives
  • Conduct effective behavior-based performance observations
  • Provide effective coaching of subordinates for performance improvement or behavior change
  • Effectively evaluate the performance of organizations or personnel

Many organizations may find themselves with leaders, managers and supervisors with varying levels of experience, capabilities, knowledge and skills. This may highlight the need for a comprehensive approach to setting a standard for core leadership competencies, while at the same time, developing stronger people management skills in leaders. The focus for training and development programs in nuclear power plants is often technically-based. Few programs provide leaders the opportunity to acquire enhanced managerial skills in the areas of self-awareness (emotional intelligence), coaching for performance improvement, effective communication, influencing others and team-building. The hierarchical and directorate-based structure of many plants often challenges leaders with the need to meet performance targets while holding oneself and others accountable for delivering a strong nuclear safety culture.

Successful culture change to enhance nuclear safety requires executives to be deliberate in the selection, placement and development of future leaders, which in turn will send clear messages to the workforce regarding expected behaviors. Strong leadership development and succession planning processes are fundamental for the identification of future leaders, knowledge transfer and the development of critical leadership skills and competencies.
Implementing Leadership Development and Succession Planning in a Strong Nuclear Safety Culture

The Fukushima disaster of 2011 has increased scrutiny of the safety and security systems of nuclear power plants by regulatory bodies and environmental activists around the world. Responding to the concerns about the safety and viability of their plants, post-Fukushima, requires a significant investment of time, energy and resources in building future leaders within nuclear power plants. In order to improve human and plant performance, senior leaders must understand and support the need to develop the management and technical skills of all leaders to perform their assigned tasks. This support should be in the form of modeling constructive behaviors and providing the resources and funding to develop and implement management and technical skills enhancement programs.

The basic principles, standards and criteria for building strong Leadership Development and Succession Planning processes may be found in several documents issued by industry oversight groups:

- IAEA-TECDOC-1024 “Selection, Competency Development and Assessment of Nuclear Power Plant Managers”
- INPO “Leadership Fundamentals to Achieve and Sustain Excellent Station Performance”, Sec. Supportive Leadership Team
- INPO 05-003 Sec. III “Corporate Leadership and Management CO.1.12
- INPO 05-003 Sec. III “Human Resources” CO.4
- INPO 05-003 OR.4 “Management and Leadership Development Overview”
- WANO PO&C OR.3 “Management and Leadership Development

All of these documents address the expectations and responsibilities of nuclear senior leaders to develop and implement Leadership Development and Succession Planning programs that enhance nuclear safety and prepare new leaders for critical positions.

Succession Planning and Leadership Development is a systemic approach to identifying the best candidates for critical or key positions and preparing them for future responsibilities through the development of desired skills and competencies. It is anchored in building a leadership pipeline/talent pool within the organization to ensure long term continuity. The requirement for senior leaders to look ahead and plan effectively to fill critical positions creates the need for an effective succession planning process to be implemented. In building a comprehensive system, senior leaders need to make the process of developing people and filling leadership positions explicit, documented, communicated to all and supported by a robust technology-based infrastructure. There are several critical elements to developing a strong succession planning process:

1. **It must be linked to the organizational strategy** – A succession plan should change as the organization’s strategy changes.
2. It must be managed by senior leadership – Senior leaders have the responsibility to ensure the future of the organization. Senior leaders must make decisions about future potential, developmental assignments and job movement. Senior leaders are personally involved and hold themselves accountable for growing leaders.

3. It must document a consistent and transparent methodology to fill key positions – A fair and consistent process makes sure that all eligible candidates for key positions receive the same consideration.

4. It must create a pipeline of candidates through developmental programs and work assignments, at all levels – Candidates must participate in specific developmental programs and job assignments geared towards developing their leadership skills.

5. It must be integrated with the organization’s Human Resource strategy and processes – Goal setting, performance appraisal, individual development plans, recognition and rewards systems and compensation should all be aligned with the succession planning process.

6. It must be facilitated by a useful technology base – An automated means of documenting and monitoring progress is a key success factor.

7. It must be helpful to line and staff organizations – Line organizations and Human Resources must work collaboratively (in partnership) in order to successfully support a succession planning process.

Good Leadership Development and Succession Planning processes use a systematic approach for the selection, development and assessment of potential future leaders. These approaches may differ from station to station, but the underlying principles for success are consistent. The following example combines the four phase systematic approach outlined in IAEA-TECDOC-1024, with the criteria for a strong Leadership Development and Succession Planning process outlined in INPO 05-003 OR.4, in order to provide a clear picture of the actions and activities required:

Conclusion

According to fundamental safety principles identified in documents such as IAEA Safety Series No. 75-INSAG-4, Safety Culture, the responsibilities of managers are directly connected with the establishment of a nuclear safety culture. A 2009 INPO study, The Organizational Culture Inventory, Leadership and Plant Performance seems to reach a similar conclusion: “For senior leaders at the strong performing sites the primary and secondary styles were Humanistic-Encouraging and Achievement. Humanistic-Encouraging behavioral statements include: resolve conflicts constructively, help others grow and develop, take time with people, and involve others in decisions affecting them. Achievement behavioral statements include: pursue a standard of excellence, knows the business, think ahead and plan, and work for a sense of accomplishment. Leaders at strong plants have a style that focuses on building healthy
relationships, developing people, and high-quality results while leaders at challenged plants use a style that overly focuses on details and tasks, views work as more important than people and treats rules as more important than ideas. One can conclude that there is a relationship between the constructive styles at the Senior Leader levels and the overall performance at the sites.

It is a part of their wider role that leaders set expectations and standards in all aspects of the company business, to visibly meet these standards and to help employees understand why the standards are appropriate. Therefore, there seems to be a strong correlation between the strength of a nuclear safety culture and the level of development of the leadership within that culture. Strong nuclear safety cultures require and build strong leadership teams and strong leadership teams build strong nuclear safety cultures. For weak safety cultures or weak leadership teams, the converse seems to be true.