



>> Mindfulness

“Most people don't recognize opportunity when it comes, because it's usually dressed in overalls and looks a lot like work.”

Thomas Edison's observation above helps to explain why some people do not recognize the Active Agenda project. The free nature of the project creates further confusion in an economy built on: vapor, hype, cronyism, appreciation junkets, kickbacks, Ponzi schemes, failure bonuses, unconscionable commissions and secretive contingent commissions. In a culture defined by making money while we sleep, “free” looks a lot like work.

High reliability organizations (HRO), however, do not shy from work, because cutting corners in these industries is not an option. High reliability industries are generally considered to be: health care, nuclear energy, petrochemicals, aviation, military operations, genetic engineering and space flight. As we began researching the HRO concept, we were drawn to the five characteristics of mindfulness identified by Karl Weick and Kathleen Sutcliffe in their

2001 book “Managing the Unexpected – Assuring High Performance in an Age of Complexity”



ACTIVE AGENDA

► **Preoccupation with failure:** Mindful organizations develop well-defined systems for reporting. They encourage upstream reporting of near and actual failures of all kinds.

► **Reluctance to simplify:** Summaries influence decisions in a manner of the author's choosing. Mindful organizations are reluctant to discard information because it's this information that may be required to predict, and thereby prevent, loss.

► **Sensitivity to operations:** Mindful organizations rely on highly informed front line operators and encourage them to report on their experiences. Weick points out that “people who refuse to speak up out of fear enact a system that knows less than it needs to know to remain effective.”

► **Commitment to resilience:** Mindful organizations are not disabled by errors or crises. They mobilize themselves into informal, ad hoc networks and engage in “expert” problem solving.

► **Deference to expertise:** In mindful organizations, senior managers defer to the expertise of those with the greatest knowledge and expertise of a problem, irrespective of certification, formal degree or hierarchy.

Environmental, health and safety professionals looking to get to the next level might want to adopt the characteristics of mindfulness that define high reliability organizations. To expedite adoption, I propose a sixth characteristic of mindfulness: openness.

Organizations can improve mindfulness by insisting

on openness. Openness and transparency reveal potential for failure, add to the breadth and truthfulness of operational knowledge, empower “operators” to influence outcomes, improve response and collaboration in crisis and deconstruct organizational barriers to problem solving. Openness enables mindfulness. Of course, openness and transparency also reduce the ability to hide one's performance and accountability (or lack thereof), which may be why more organizations have not embraced open and transparent business practices.

Leveraging a project like Active Agenda requires systemic change in organizational mindset and the abandonment of tools, methods and business practices formulated in an era before transparency was possible.

Environmental, health and safety can only get to the next level when the entire organization is engaged in the process. Engaging an organization, in a meaningful way, is the hardest part of the job. If Active Agenda is viewed as too complex, we suggest the evaluator is not being mindful of their responsibilities and/or their understanding of organizational change is prohibiting them from recognizing the opportunity.

WHAT GETS MEASURED

A variety of charts can be used to reveal organizational mindfulness. A single module is used to chart, simplify and encourage reporting of near and actual failures of all kinds. Mindfulness can be charted with the number of users, level of permissions granted, ratio of anonymous reports, number of participating organizations and the distribution of participant involvement and accountability. Active Agenda helps to manage almost 100 business processes (the what) and also can be used to measure mindfulness (the how).

WHAT GETS DONE

When it comes to environmental, health and safety, the “what” is easy (e.g. compliance) but “the how” determines efficiency, effectiveness and reliability (e.g. preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience and deference to expertise). Created by and for openness, Active Agenda enables mindfulness, but it does look a lot like work. **EHS**

This Month's Links:

Demo: demo.activeagenda.net/list.php?mdl=acc

Forum: activeagenda.net/discussions/viewforum.php?f=18

Wiki: activeagenda.net/documentation/index.php?title=Accountabilities_Module