

Insurance **POST**

## Blog: The inclusion risk factor



The Deepwater Horizon disaster

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**A number of major disasters are all said to have involved flawed decisions, driven by individual perceptions, according to Angela Peacock, CEO of diversity and inclusion training specialists PDT Global.**

Disasters such as the King's Cross fire, the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion and the Chernobyl nuclear accident are all said to have involved flawed decisions, driven by individual perceptions.

According to a [paper on behavioural safety in construction](#), individuals' behaviours – and the perceptions that drive those behaviours – are key to determining the safety performance of an organisation.

In the wake of the Deepwater Horizon disaster, for example, it was reported that rig staff had tested the concrete seal on the excavated well before removing the drilling column. The results indicated that the seal was not secure and removing the column might result in a catastrophic blowout. So why were the signs ignored? A disaster analyst said workers viewed the test as a means of confirming that the well was sealed – rather than a way of finding out whether it was sealed or not.

So the same part of our brain that can count someone out of the running

for a job because they trigger some unconscious negative associations can also prevent us properly assessing risk – leading to some tragic outcomes.

Underpinning behavioural safety is a belief cycle linking beliefs, feelings, behaviours and results in a self-affirming loop. If we believe something is lower risk than is actually the case, our confidence and bravado will drive positive behaviours that may (with a measure of good fortune) carry us through. Our perception is then reinforced and confidence increased.

But how does this play out in a group situation where differing opinions and assumptions should make us look more deeply and assess risk more honestly?

Truly inclusive working cultures empower everyone in an organisation and drive the strategy. But if the culture is undermined by bias that restricts who or what we include, it can severely affect safety and [risk management](#).

Research has revealed that ‘macho’ cultures place high value on the need to prove oneself and a perception that revealing one’s weaknesses exposes incapability. A macho culture engenders an atmosphere that stifles speaking out, the ability to question or point out flawed decision making and, worse still, the capacity to highlight hazards or accident risks.

Consider what this means in the insurance profession today. We have to ensure that the cultures we create differ from the macho-dominated ones of the past to ensure we hear from everyone. But why on earth would they want to speak up, given the recent frightening sexual harassment figures? And we can only guess what other forms of harassment exist around race, LGBTQ and so on.

Despite brave efforts, it seems things are moving slowly – coupled with an even more dangerous element of proclaiming commitment to diversity while allowing such environments to continue.

A strong organisational risk culture requires more than easily apparent

dimensions of diversity based on factors such as gender, colour, age and professional background. We need to turn our attention to the blatant underplaying of lack of inclusion in the London Market that is still allowing sexism to flourish – with all the associated risks to brand and reputation.

What's essential is a strong and deliberate 'tone from the top' which welcomes constructive dialogue with all employees about how the organisation is keeping true to its purpose and, crucially, how it behaves in doing that.

Organisations need to create an inclusive environment where all individuals at every level of the business can be appreciated, respected and, above all, heard to help their – and the company's – growth and development.

That change can only start with individual recognition of our own behaviours and biases – and leaders who take responsibility for building their own and then others' awareness.

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