10.4 Management Influence on the Program

Management actions will have a strong influence on the way the incident investigation program is implemented.

A primary driver of the process is how the organization evaluates its investigations, investigators, and investigation program.   Using the criteria in the left-hand column in Table 10.2 will tend to deter the effectiveness of the program. Using the criteria in the right-hand column will encourage thorough investigations that generate effective recommendations.

These questions will help you think about the criteria your investigators use to judge themselves and their analyses. This largely determines how they will perform their analyses.

TABLE 10.2: Destructive and Supportive Investigation Evaluation Criteria

Destructive Evaluation Criteria	Supportive Evaluation Criteria
Was the investigation completed quickly?	Did they take the time to discover the underlying causes of the incident?
Was there minimal impact on mission operations?	Did the investigation gather the data needed to reach valid conclusions in the most efficient manner?
Did they get to the answer management thought of before they began?	Was the investigation thorough, with factual support for each conclusion and recommendation?
Did they emphasize short-term costs?	Did they develop recommendations that will be effective in preventing future losses?

10.5 Common Investigation Problems and Solutions

The following are typical reasons why most incident investigation programs fail to live up to the organization's expectations.

10.5.1 There Is No Business Driver to Change

If the organization is performing acceptably with its current practices, then there is no significant driver to get personnel to change from their current behavior. The organization and the individuals in the organization need a reason to change, as most people do not like change. Investigating and learning from mistakes usually requires a change in the organization's mind-set or behavior, and a powerful reason is needed to drive such change.   This driver must be clearly tied into the rollout of the RCA program.

10.5.2 There Is No Organizational Champion for the Program

A program that changes the way the organization operates needs a champion within the organization who will lead by example. Such a person needs to participate in and encourage the performance of investigations and review any reports generated by the teams. They need to take an interest in ensuring that corrective actions are implemented.

The program champion should be someone in a leadership position who can reassure the investigators and investigation team members that performing investigations is consistent with the organization's expectations and that they will be rewarded for participating on the RCA teams.

10.5.3 The Organization Never Leaves the Reactive Mode

Operating in the reactive mode means that the organization reacts to incidents rather than planning ahead in an effort to prevent them. Planning does not occur in reactive organizations; if it does, the plans are seldom carried out or used to guide decisions.

Investigating accidents is reactive because the investigation only takes place after the incident has occurred. However, investigating near misses is proactive because they are investigated before actual losses have occurred.

Incident investigation is also proactive in that the corrective actions taken to prevent the next occurrence are long term in nature. The investigation process requires personnel to stop, analyze what happened, and implement corrective actions to eliminate the causes of incidents and prevent them from recurring. This requires a long-term focus.

Organizations that remain in the reactive mode never have time to conduct thorough incident investigations. They may label them RCAs, but they do not dig deeply enough to identify the underlying causes. They view investigations as a waste of time. "Let's get on with it and do the investigation when we get time." No one ever has sufficient time to perform the investigation.

Management must be willing to take a longer-term view. This requires a change in workplace culture. Management must also be convinced of and willing to see the value of performing quality investigations. This is the only way they will invest the resources now for a payoff in the future.

To help make this change, the organization needs to find areas where repeated problems, failures, accidents, or near misses are occurring and estimate the true cost of these losses in terms of lost production, repair costs, labor costs, wasted product, and wasted resources. An investment in incident investigations now will prevent or reduce these losses in the future.

10.5.4 The Organization Must Find an Individual to Blame

If management insists on blaming someone rather than figuring out how to prevent the losses from occurring in the future, then the investigation program is destined to fail. It is easier to blame someone than to fix the real problems, which are the management systems. Blaming someone is quick, pinpoints the problem, and can be easily fixed by training, relocating, or terminating the individual, or so it is believed. It eliminates all the effort required to understand the operation of the organization and to fix the underlying causes. However, there is no perfect employee who can perform flawlessly, especially in a flawed environment, and organizations are left with the recurring, underlying management system problems. In addition, placing blame discourages reporting of near misses.

Focus on the management system, not blaming individuals. This will lead to the long-term solution of the organization's problems.

10.5.5 Personnel Are Unwilling to Critique Management Systems

This goes along with the previous point. Management may not be willing to admit that it has ever done anything wrong. A management system focus indicates that somewhere in the organization's management systems, something needs improvement. In other words, there are performance gaps not just at the front-line level, but at the management systems level too. Some managers are unwilling to accept that they could contribute in any way to a deficiency in the organization. In addition, they usually have an incentive not to admit that things did not go quite right.

Again, keep the focus on what needs fixing (i.e., management systems, not managers). This will lead to long-term solutions and better performance from your personnel in the long run.

10.5.6 Reward Implementation of Recommendations

If you want your managers and other staff to implement the recommendations, you will need to provide some sort of incentive. Reward the implementation of preventive and corrective actions at all levels in the organization, including management. Rewards may need to be different for the different levels of the organization because not everyone views the rewards as having the same value.