

Governing Energy

Cultural Sinistry

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Grammarians will forgive the made up word in the title—it is meant to convey a sense of how culture can be used for ominous purposes as well as noble deeds. The Europe of the 1930s is a subject of the political dialogue as of this writing.

Whether nationalism is being resurrected (perhaps it has never left us) is not the subject of this piece. Rather, one's culture can become a tool for the unthinkable.ⁱ

The German military had historically pledged allegiance to the state. However, in 1934 the oath was changed from allegiance to the country to one of allegiance to an individual. Feeling duty bound officers obeyed him even as he led the country and the world to destruction.ⁱⁱ

Pundits talk of cultural transformation and/or change all the time as if management can will it on the organization. However, Nilofer Merchant noted in her 2011 blog, "If the strategy conflicts with how a group of people already believe, behave or make decisions it will fail."ⁱⁱⁱ

Changing behavior is a challenge. Losing weight, stop smoking, start exercising, be a nicer person are all good New Year's resolutions that for most (88%) have fallen off by this time of year. Vague aspirations not tied to specific behavioral modifications are not internalized or institutionalized by us humans. Making new behavior habit is the key.^{iv}

This author still hears industry conversations that suggest that the need for a culture of "more" and systemic safety is overblown. Can it be that this resistance and even denial is based on the overall industry long standing beliefs and behaviors?

The clarion call to leaders changing the culture is keep the pressure on. Old habits die hard. And yes, use the Idiosyncrasies of your culture that can provide transformation advantage in a positive way.

What stands in your organization's way of making safer operations habitual?

About the Author

Dr. [Scott M. Shemwell](#) has over 30 years technical and executive management experience primarily in the energy sector. He is the author of three books and has written extensively about the field of operations management. Shemwell is the Managing Director of The Rapid Response Institute, a firm that focuses on providing its customers with solutions enabling operations excellence and regulatory compliance management. He has studied cultural interactions for more than 30 years--his dissertation; *Cross Cultural Negotiations Between Japanese and American Businessmen: A Systems Analysis*

(Exploratory Study) is an early peer reviewed manuscript addressing the systemic structure of social relationships.

End Notes

ⁱ <http://alphahistory.com/nazigermany/hitler-and-the-reichswehr/>

ⁱⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hitler_oath

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://blogs.hbr.org/2011/03/culture-trumps-strategy-every/>

^{iv} <http://blog.bufferapp.com/the-science-of-new-years-resolutions-why-88-fail-and-how-to-make-them-work>