

Governing Energy

What Management Wants to Hear

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As of this writing, the US Veteran's Administration is under increasing scrutiny. One physician interviewed on television indicated that management did not want to hear about problems. Have we heard this story before?

I am not sure that this culture is one incorporating the Tenets of Safety we have discussed in this blog before—read satire.ⁱ Actually, it is just the opposite; a case can be made that it violates all nine canons. All the more troubling is that the medical industry is often held out as one that is very good at implementing and sustaining High Reliability.ⁱⁱ

The VA discussion suggests that once veterans have an appointment with a medical professional, their medical care is of high quality so it is simply a bureaucratic process problem. Isn't getting to see a physician part of the medical care process?

The *systemic nature of large complex organizations* (and their ecosystems) requires that management have a holistic perspective towards addressing and fixing process problems. Through the blinders of "the actual medical care is high quality," the VA response intimates that the organization does not meet the test of a High Reliability Organization—perhaps management does not even understand what an HRO is.

Regardless, this organization's customer is ill served and its reputation is badly tarnished. The customer experience is poor and even the top individual practitioners' character may be negatively impugned.

An Emperor's New Clothes culture will end up exposing an organization to unacceptable risks and maybe even ridicule.ⁱⁱⁱ Years, even decades of only hearing about the good stuff rots the foundation of even the best and most well intended organizations.

Does your organizational culture "shoot" the messenger of bad news?

About the Author

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End Notes

ⁱ http://www.bsee.gov/uploadedFiles/BSEE/BSEE_Newsroom/Speeches/2013/COS%20Speech.pdf

ⁱⁱ <http://www.jointcommission.org/highreliability.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheEmperorsNewClothes_e.html