

Navigating differing cultural and ethical frameworks during organizational change: a challenge for RPEs

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Need to strengthen radiation safety culture in health care

The Bonn Call-For-Action (Action 8) identifies the need to strengthen radiation safety culture in health care.

Ethical foundations of system of radiological protection

ICRP has recently consulted on a draft report on the *Ethical Foundations of the System of Radiological Protection*. The report notes that the system is built on three pillars: the science of radiological protection combining knowledge from different disciplines, a set of ethical and social values, and the experience accumulated from the day-to-day practice of radiological protection professionals.

Basic Safety Standards

IAEA BSS require formal recognition of qualified experts, and that they be consulted as necessary in the proper observance of these standards. European BSS define an RPE as a recognized individual/group having the necessary knowledge, training and experience to give rad. prot. advice (and identify MPE responsibilities, which include responsibility for dosimetry of medical exposures).

New corporate management hierarchies

A feature of New Public Management, sometimes referred to as corporatisation, is the empowerment of senior management executives, leading to the creation of new management hierarchies. If this results in disempowerment of RPEs, radiation safety can suffer.

What is culture?

Amongst many definitions, Matsumoto has defined culture as 'The set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviours shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next.' Culture can vary widely between different groups.

Driving and embedding RP culture throughout organisation

IRPA has identified knowledge, skills and competences required by an RPE, noting that competences of an RPE include substantial elements of radiation safety management. IRPA emphasize that RP professionals within an organization must take the central role in supporting management to drive and embed RP culture throughout the organization.

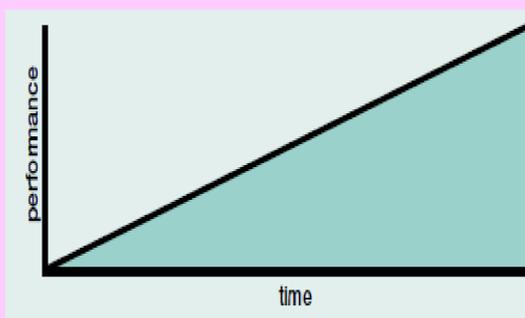
RPEs have substantial management roles & responsibilities

RPEs have been instrumental in creating the systems designed to ensure the safe use of radiation in medicine, and play a leading role in managing radiation safety in healthcare. There is a risk that these management roles and responsibilities may be overlooked during organizational change.

Management unfamiliarity with radiation safety fundamentals

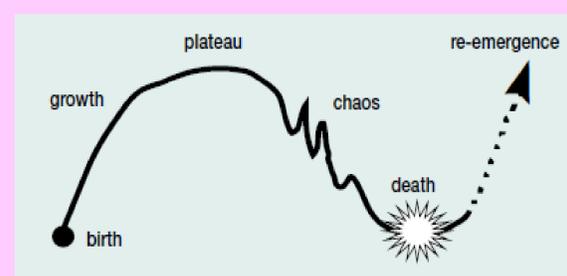
General managers, particularly those from a non-scientific background, may well be unfamiliar with fundamental radiation safety concepts, such as justification, optimisation, and statistical uncertainty. Few doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals, let alone managers, have a good understanding of radiation dosimetry, or radiation risk.

Fig 1: Organization Change: Developmental change*



Developmental change, improvement of an existing situation, is incremental. It is change that enhances or corrects existing aspects, often focusing on the improvement of a skill or process. The global radiation protection system, largely driven by RPEs, is an example of developmental change.

Fig 2: Organization Change: Transformational change*



Transformational change is radical and can lead to chaos. The emergence of a new state out of the remains of the chaotic death of the old state takes place over a time period which is not easily controlled. Transformation can result in an organisation that differs significantly in terms of structure, processes, culture and strategy.

RP professionals – “the most difficult of leadership roles”

In their guiding principles for establishing a radiation protection culture, IRPA have noted that *RP professionals have to achieve the most difficult of leadership roles – that of indirect leadership of their non-RP colleagues, who in many cases may be their business leaders or managers.*

*Figs 1 & 2 are reproduced with the kind permission of Valerie Iles & Kim Sutherland, authors of *Organisational Change: A review for health care managers, professionals and researchers* (2001). Full references to this and other sources from the literature are included in the associated paper submitted as a contribution to the IAEA International Conference *Radiation Protection in Medicine: Achieving Change in Practice* in Vienna, 11-15 December 2017.

Good communication between RPEs and senior hospital management is crucial

Management must support their Radiation Protection Experts, recognizing that RPEs are qualified experts who provide expert professional advice. RPEs have substantial, and frequently difficult, managerial roles and responsibilities. Hospital managers must ensure good communication between RPEs and senior management. If they ignore or over-rule the advice of RPEs they place the safety of patients and staff at risk, and must be prepared to be held to account.