



What Human and Organizational Performance (HOP) is Missing

There are many similarities and some KEY differences between Latent Cause Analysis and Human and Organizational Performance (HOP). HOP focuses on understanding how humans perform within complex systems and organizations. HOP aims to improve safety, reliability, and performance by designing systems better suited to the people operating within them and fostering an organizational culture that values learning over blame.

Here is a list of HOP principles from Todd Conklin's book, *The 5 Principles of Human Performance*:

1. Error is normal, and people make mistakes. Errors are a normal part of human behavior and should be anticipated.
2. Blame fixes nothing. Blaming individuals for mistakes does not improve operational efficiency. Instead, it discourages the disclosure of important operational data and hinders learning and improvement.
3. Learning and improving is vital. Organizations have two choices when responding to failure: learn and improve or blame and punish. Choosing to learn from failures is a strategic choice towards improvement.
4. Context drives behavior. The conditions under which work is done greatly influence worker behavior. Good systems and processes help manage the uncertain operational outcomes always present in organizations.
5. How you respond to failure matters. Leaders can choose to use failures as opportunities for learning and improvement, or they can choose to punish those involved. The former encourages disclosure of failures while the latter discourages disclosure, hindering improvement.

The bottom line is HOP's objective is to change the way people think about their organizations and how to improve. Todd Conklin said it this way, "All these principles have the same positive objective, to shift, guide, and reinforce the way people think about their organizations and their organizational improvement pathway."¹

These principles are good and necessary for a shift in organizational learning. Since you are reading this paper, you are probably already familiar with Failsafe's approach to learning from things that go wrong. You should recognize that these principles are also the foundation of our Latent Cause Analysis (LCA) process. Bob Nelms, who founded

¹ Conklin, Todd. *The 5 Principles of Human Performance: A contemporary update of the building blocks of Human Performance for the new view of safety* (p. 105). Kindle Edition.



Failsafe in 1985, was ahead of his time. He developed the LCA process using these fundamental truths long before being embraced by industry.

However, there is a fundamental difference between HOP and our approach to learning from things that go wrong. Whereas HOP seems abhorred at the thought of individual people "looking at themselves as a part of problems," we understand that when something goes wrong, people MUST see their part in an incident or problem in order to change the way they think, act, and behave in the future.

Most certainly, blame is to be avoided at all costs. But note what this really means; no-one ought to be blaming OTHER people and things, but each of us ought to be looking at OURSELVES as part of the problems around us.

One unique aspect of LCA is our approach to learning from mistakes. HOP believes human error is acceptable and unavoidable; while we see it as inevitable, it is also the key to understanding, learning, and improving as individuals and an organization. This belief is at the core of our approach to addressing human error and improving our organizational culture.

We not only acknowledge that people cause problems, but we also embrace it. We understand that when something goes wrong, those affected must play a part in the solution. People must see their part in an incident or problem in order to change the way they think, act, and behave in the future. Why would you ever change if you do not recognize you are part of the problem? This is just one of the underlying problems caused by blame and our inherent disdain to look at ourselves.

When we blame others for a problem, we tell ourselves we don't need to change something or someone else does. We ban blame because it keeps people from understanding. You cannot allow blame and learn. Learning from things that go wrong is an organizational choice that is accomplished by the individuals who make up the organization. Then, we may begin to identify and understand latency, the conditions that influence all work and contribute to incidents. The goal of LCA is to understand to such an extent that people, everyone involved, change the way they think.

To truly understand, we must take the time to look at the evidence to understand why someone did what they did. When we understand we do not condone poor decision-making, we understand that we would have done the same thing if we were in the same situation with the same thoughts. Now, we can truly learn. Now, we can identify what needs to change to avoid putting people in this position again. All learning is evidenced by change. Far too often, we find ourselves in the ditch, saying we learned this, that, or the other, but we continue to do the same things. Learning results in change, always.

The results of this process go beyond improvements to our equipment, systems, methods, and procedures. It also results in restoring and building trust. TRUST is the



foundation for all healthy relationships. If your organization is serious about improving its performance, it must increase its trust. Trust must improve from top to bottom and side to side. It is the oil that keeps teamwork moving smoothly. This only comes through people AT ALL LEVELS looking at themselves as part of their problems instead of blaming other people and things. When we learn, then we improve. Learning should be for all involved. Everyone needs to see their part, own it, and decide what to do differently in the future. That is how Latent Cause Analysis helps people and organizations improve.

HOP is a wonderful and valid endeavor, but it could be so much more valid if it embraced our human need to see ourselves as part of our problems.

