NetworkRail

Planning and safety

everyone
home safe
every day

Dear all,

I want to share with you some of my thoughts around the important relationship which I believe exists between planning and safety, and what I believe is the underlying psychological drivers that establish a direct link between the two.

I'll start with a rather unusual example, which I was reminded of last weekend when I went hiking with friends. Two of my friends had done the walk before and knew what it entailed, and two of us didn't know how long it was going to be, or how the terrain would be or what equipment and clothing would be appropriate.

Rob Cairns,
Regional Managing Director

Being a member of the uninformed two, I noticed that much of our energy would be depleted in worrying about how much further we must walk, whether we were halfway or not, and if the walk would get harder towards the end. That reminded me of some of the more subtle elements of planning, such as correct equipment, but also psychological preparedness, ranging from making sure your energy levels are preserved so you can complete the task, in addition to the extent that you're thinking about the risks in advance, and how we might deal with them rather than just reacting, at the point they present themselves. It became obvious that the two of us who were not informed, didn't anticipate fully water involved with the tube that got tired most quickly and were moaning about sore feet, which create negative energy that affects the whole group.

Linking this story to my experience of safety related paperwork, I think it's true to say that this paperwork does not create a safe environment on its own, and I also think it's quite boring and informative. However, the process of contributing and creating risk assessments, documenting them and recording them in the right way is a hugely important psychological step in making sure that people have the chance to think, anticipate, and psychologically prepare for the works that lies ahead of them, and of course that is linked to making sure that the risks have been perceived, in a way where we can contemplate what we think and feel about them so that we aren't just reacting to risks.

Therefore, I want to make the direct link between the importance of planning, and recording not just what the activities are but how the risk of events could present themselves, and by doing this in advance we

psychologically prepare ourselves for not just our reaction, but the most appropriate response, and the adequacy of the controls needed to keep people safe every day.

So whilst this wasn't supposed to be a philosophical message, I want to share with you the priorities that I hold to clear planning, and very clear focus on outcomes so that we give ourselves the ability to plan and prepare such that we can pay ourselves, use our energies effectively, and avoid all of the downsides of not doing these, which I consider to range from everything from exhaustion, burnout, all the way through to fatigue and health and safety related risks.

I see lots of situations that present themselves where the opportunity to plan and prepare is often not there, or taken from us – ultimately we are in a high intensity environment that is fast moving and highly changing, and therefore it is incredibly important to think dynamically about how we respond to the situation that faces us, and how we preserve and protect the critical elements of planning and anticipation so that we don't just sleepwalk into situations that can be best for optimal, at worst dangerous.

I see examples more and more, where we must insist planning and preparation, in situations that really don't lend themselves to it, and therefore the importance of being dynamic and agile with our thinking is something I would call everybody to do. Sometimes it can be very unpopular to take a break or pause from what you are doing to reflect and regroup your energies, and despite it being unpopular, it can sometimes be the critically ingredient to high-performance, success and save outcomes. I would urge everybody to think about the trade-off and conflict between those things in the context that they environment.

Stay safe

Rob

This update is provided by the Wales and Western Communications team. For any queries, please contact walesandwesterncomms@networkrail.co.uk