

“Ladies and Gentlemen, brothers and sisters, please be seated and feel very welcomed and loved this morning.”

A broad smile amplifies the warm welcome and an anticipatory silence settles throughout the congregation.

“Today we shall explore the Gospel of Hollnagel and hope we can welcome more of you into our FRAMily”

A sense of enthusiastic agreement radiates from the crowd upon hearing the plan.

“But before we do, is there anything you would wish to share?”

An earnest fellow sat in the middle of the throng gets to his feet.

“Yes my brother, what do you wish to share?”

“Reverend... I killed a man.”

Shocked gasps and disquiet enveloped the whole group.

“My brother, thank you. Please tell me, what happened?”

“I just made an error.”

Disquiet gave way to unease.

“Error isn’t a cause,” a gruff voice from the back shouted. This was echoed with baritone hummed agreement throughout the congregation.

“The system failed you my friend” came from a supportive voice sat somewhere the far side. This was greeted with even wider approval.

“You see my friends”, replied the Reverend with a twinkle in their eye, “we are all flawed. Try as we might, see how the veil of blame descends onto us all too readily. What does our brother need?”

“Restoration!” boomed the universal response.

“Amen to that. Tell us your story my friend.”

“It’s quite simple really...” he started calmly.

“Not in a complex system!” mumbled a lady sat at the front row unhappily.

“...I was asked to check something important. I missed it. I shouldn’t have missed it. I never have before. But the other day I did. My colleague also missed it. But it wasn’t difficult. And someone died as a result.”

“Your honesty is humbling. Your harm is manifest for all to see. But can you see the system failed you and the other poor tragic individual? We need to consider the efficacy of those double checking systems. Error is normal my friend.”

“Blame fixes nothing” shouted an approving voice. Scattered applause resonated around the room.

“Take a systems approach” chimed another with gusto.

“This is the psychological safety we need my friends,” smiled the august Reverend. “So tell me my friend, how does this system function normally? What can we learn about a normal days work?”

“The system works perfectly sir.”

“Surely your adaptive capacity is what creates the condition of safety, despite this flawed system? In the harsh context of your lack of time and resource, you make sure people are safe in this work?”

“I understand sir. I do try to make sure people are safe. I am devastated this happened...”

“You are a second victim my man”

“Thank you my friend, but I do think the first victim is the main issue here. You asked about the system, but the system didn’t fail. I did...”

“Blame fixes nothing” repeated the voice from the back.

“My friends, I feel your support. I hear your wisdom. But in this case I am highly trained and well paid professional. It was very clear what I was expected to do and something I have always done in the past. My role was to ensure I didn’t miss this. I did. This starts and stops with me. Trust me, I’ll never make that mistake again. I will be better in the future.”

The sense of brotherhood began to evaporate. Support was morphing into discomfort.

“Behaviourist!” dissented one.

“Don’t blame!” shouted another.

“Don’t succumb to such Reasonous thoughts my friend” offered a calmer comrade.

A large man at the back stood up furiously, “human error is never a cause!”

“You just needed a third checker!” smiled an elderly lady as the emotion settled once again.

“Or one!” added the Reverand genially. “We should explore the socio economic factors that put you into that position. We should make our system more resilient. We need to understand performance variability”.

“But I just made a mistake. A tragic mistake. But it is all on me”.

A disappointed, resigned look fell across the seemingly irrepressible pastor.

“Ladies and gentlemen, my brothers and sisters. We are all on our own journey. Human Factors is a broad field. Systems thinking is for everyone everywhere. We are joined in our mission to do safety differently. We need to be patient with our friend here. He is lost and he has not yet found us. We need to continue to illuminate the way until he does”.

We live in a world where slogans are confused with policy. The complexity of life is distilled into three word wisdom. Whilst comforting, and possibly containing helpful, accurate or wise ideas, we should be careful perspectives don't become crystallised and approach's simply regurgitated dogma. I'm increasingly disheartened by the tyranny of the devout, amplified on social media channels. More thoughtful scrutiny and flexibility of minds may help our ability to manage risk better I feel.