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A person with narrow vision has a restricted horizon; a person with wide vision has plentiful opportunities

Responding Fairly: Integrating Critical Controls, Incident Investigation and Human Factors to Strengthen Organisational Learning

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Background: High-potential incidents in construction are often initially understood through the actions of the person closest to the event. This can narrow investigations, obscure the operational and organisational conditions that shaped performance, and weaken both learning and trust. As HEB Construction's Critical Control Management programme matured, the organisation identified a disconnect between its prevention approach and the way incidents, individual actions and accountability were considered.

Aim: This practice case study describes the development and implementation of Responding Fairly, an approach intended to connect Critical Control Management, Incident Cause Analysis Method investigations, Human and Organisational Performance principles, and people processes. Its purpose is to support fair, consistent and evidence-informed decisions while maintaining accountability.

Approach: Rather than introducing a separate process, HEB aligned existing investigation, critical control and people practices around a shared sequence of questions. Investigations first consider which controls should have prevented the event, whether those controls were present and effective, how the work was designed and supported, and which conditions influenced decisions at the time. Individual actions are considered after this context has been established. The approach is jointly supported by Operations, Health and Safety, and Human Resources, with leader coaching and practical guidance used to strengthen consistency.

Practice example and findings: A service-strike investigation showed how an apparent failure by an operator was better understood when outdated plans, a changed work scope, conflicting site markings, unavailable technical support and time pressure were examined together. This broader analysis led to strengthened service verification requirements, revalidation following scope changes and clearer excavation controls. Early implementation experience indicates richer learning, more targeted corrective actions, greater leader confidence and improved worker perceptions of fairness.

Conclusion: Responding Fairly demonstrates how prevention, investigation and accountability can be treated as one connected learning system. Context does not remove accountability; it enables accountability to be located more fairly and supported by fuller evidence. The experience also suggests that a framework alone is insufficient: leaders require capability, support and confidence to pause, tolerate uncertainty and understand the conditions surrounding an event before reaching conclusions.