NORMALIZATION OF DEVIANCE

Aram Attarian North Carolina Outward Bound School

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2015

Wilderness Risk Management Conference

- Deviation a violation of a policy or a variation in practice so that it departs from what a rule or standard requires.... Creates an unreasonable increase in risk... (Banga, 2010)
- People within an organization become so accustomed to a deviant behavior that they don't consider it as deviant, despite the fact that they far exceed their own rules for safety" (Vaughan, 1996).
- Natural tendency to take shortcuts, deviate from standards.
 Nothing bad happens, continue, create new norms.



Document an organization's policy for operation and the procedures necessary to fulfill that policy.

Create an internal control framework.



Some Well Known Examples

- Space Shuttle Challenger
- Space Shuttle Columbia
- 🗆 Costa Concordia
- Common denominator
 - Long incubation periods
 - Rule violations
 - Events that accumulated unnoticed
 - Cultural beliefs about hazards that prevented interventions

WILDERNESS RISK MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

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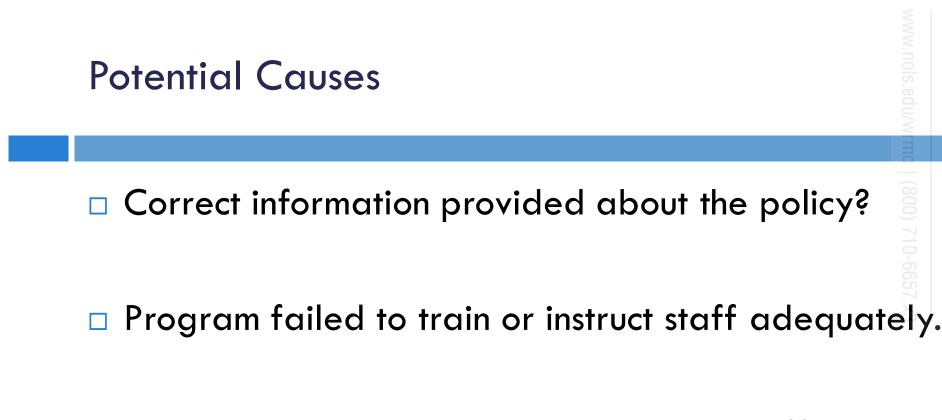
"Gradualism Phenomenon" (Starbuck & McMilliken, 1988)

Occurs as a process of steps sometimes over an extended period.

- Behavior doesn't occur all at once, instead multiple decisions made or avoided with no noticeable negative effects.
- Potential for disaster is never seen as an option until it occurs.

Factors - Normalization of Deviance

- Institutionalization. Exposes new staff to deviant behaviors, often performed by authority figures.
- Socialization. Will they or won't they? New staff join the group by adopting the group's deviant behaviors.
- Rationalization. Enables everyone involved to convince themselves that their deviances are not only legitimate, but acceptable and perhaps necessary.



- Is the policy routinely ignored by most staff?
- Were there mitigating circumstances that invited the deviation?

Adventure Programs

- Risk Management
- Programs
- Training
- Enrollment, screening, admissions
- Emergency procedures
- Facilities

- Human Resources
- Transportation
- 🗆 Food
- Equipment
- Manuals, policies, procedures
- Marketing/PR

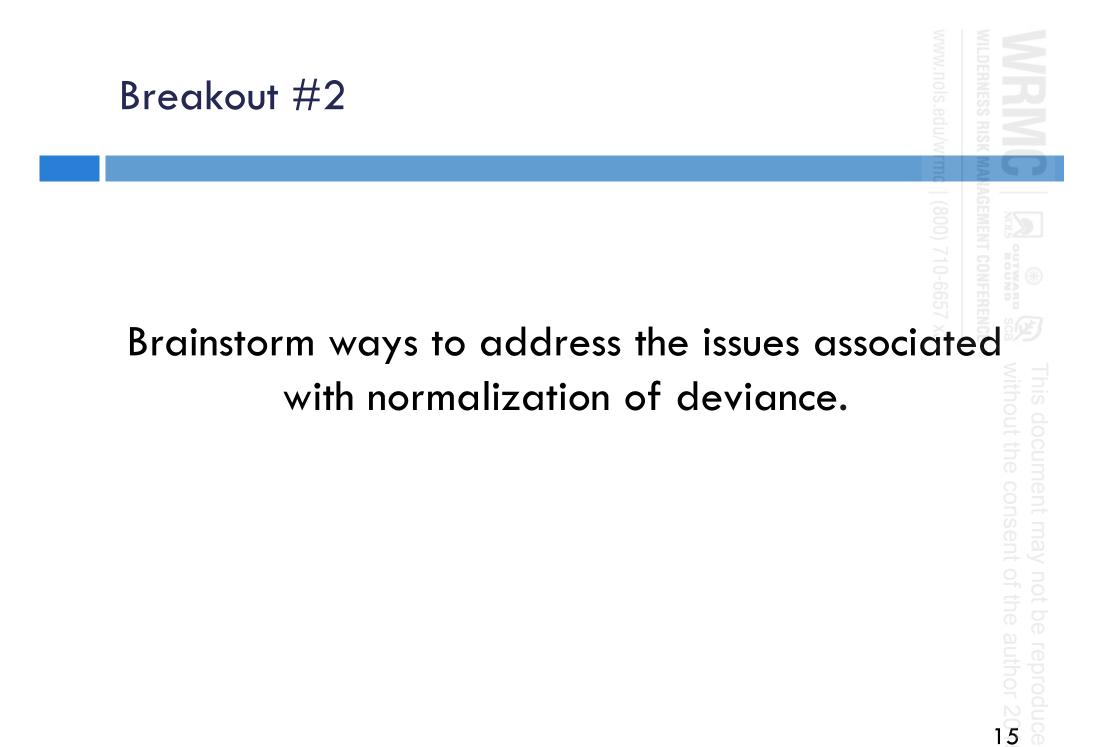
Breakout #1

Identify potential deviances that might occur in adventure programs.

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Potential Factors that Account for the Normalization of Deviance in Adventure Programs

- The rules are stupid and inefficient
- Knowledge is imperfect
- I'm breaking the rule for the good of my student(s)
- The rules don't apply to me/You can trust me
- Staff are afraid to speak up
- Leadership withholding or minimizing findings on program problems



Recommendations - Normalization of Deviance

- Early Intervention. Become vigilant about deviant behaviors and practices, and be ready to take aggressive steps to stop their occurrence before they reach normalization.
- Educate. Deviations are common in most work environments.
- Emphasize. Unsafe deviations should not to be tolerated.
- Eliminate. Deviations must be identified, examined and stopped whenever safety is jeopardized.

Recommendations - Normalization of Deviance

- Teach staff how to conduct uncomfortable conversations.
- □ Staff need to feel safe when speaking up.
- Realize that oversight and monitoring for rule compliance are never-ending.

