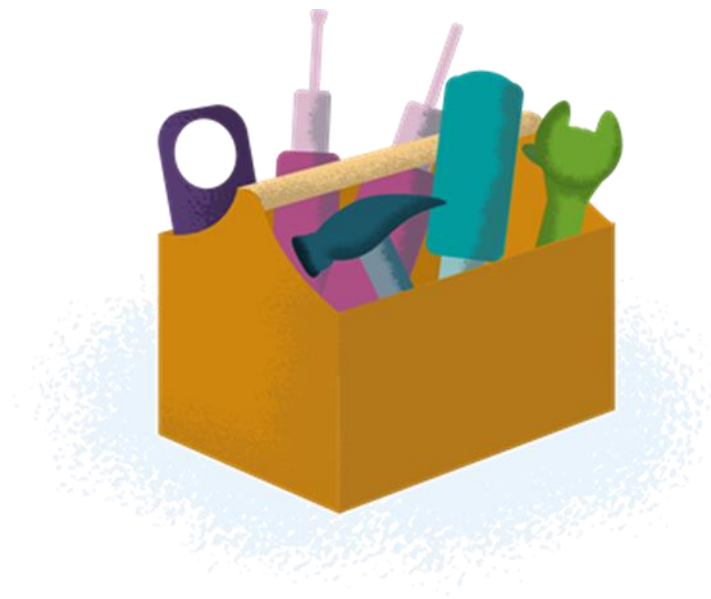




# Improvement Cymru Academy Guide



## A Just Culture Guide

## Introduction

Culture is an important aspect of any organisation and is one of the two foundations of the Safe, Reliable, and Effective Care framework set by the Institute of Healthcare Improvement (IHI). Culture has been recognised as an important aspect of safety for several decades. Professor James Reason was a Safety Psychologist and, in his 1997 book, 'Managing the risks of Organisational Accidents' he suggested that a strong positive safety culture is made up of five key component cultures that overlap with each other:

1. **Informed Culture:** In this culture, individuals have an awareness and knowledge of safety that is appropriate for their job role. There is a requirement from leaders and managers to be open and transparent with safety information.
2. **Reporting Culture:** In this culture, individuals can raise concerns (risks, near misses and errors) without fear of blame and punishment. Individuals who submit concerns know that information will be acted upon.
3. **A Just Culture:** In this culture, the right act occurs after an incident has happened. We will discuss this more later in the document.
4. **Flexible Culture:** In this culture, an organisation and its workforce can adapt to differing demands.
5. **Learning Culture:** In this culture, an organisation and its workforce can analyse safety data, draw correct conclusions, and learn from mistakes by acting up on recommendations.

Patient safety is dependent on a positive safety culture. There are a several other factors in that contribute to a positive safety culture. James Reason (Reason, 1997) and more recently, the IHI (2017) and Amy Edmundson (2018) recognise the importance of having psychological safety for staff to feel safe enough to speak up about safety concerns without fear and/or blame. Clear teamwork and communication are vital for a positive safety culture. Teamwork and communication are described by the IHI as 'Developing a shared understanding, anticipation of needs and problems, and agreed-upon methods to manage these, as well as conflict situation'. Negotiation is also needed for managing conflicts and promoting teamwork and communication. Each of these elements need to be present in each type of safety culture. In this guide we will focus on a Just culture for patient safety.

## What is a Just Culture?

A 'Just Culture' originated in the aviation industry where safety errors can have catastrophic results – just like in healthcare. Professor James Reason was the first to publish a fully developed theory of a Just Culture in his book 'Managing the Risks of Organizational Accidents' in 1997. He proposed that a Just Culture was an important component in safety culture. A just culture refers to a fair culture where staff members are not unfairly blamed for incidents that were not their fault (Human Factors) but are held accountable for their actions if there is evidence of wilful misconduct or gross negligence. This type of culture is a fair culture for both staff and patients.

## Principles of a Just Culture

A Just Culture is built upon two key principles. Firstly, it is built upon the understanding that as humans we will make mistakes and we must look to our processes and systems to manage human error. This is the study of Human Factors. The second principle of a just culture is accountability. Accountability is described by the IHI as 'the importance of holding people to account for their actions, but not for flaws in processes or systems.' This fosters an environment where staff must take responsibility for their actions, but the organisation will treat them fairly for outcomes that are out of their control. Accountability lies with the organisation and the employees of the organisation.

Table one below shows where accountabilities lie within an organisation (IHI, <https://www.ihi.org/resources/tools>).

<b>Leaders are accountable for:</b>	<b>Employees are accountable for:</b>
<b>To role model the employee's accountability responsibilities (the next column)</b>	<b>To act consistently and fairly within their scope of practise</b>
<b>Promote a Just Culture</b>	<b>Avoid harm to patients</b>
<b>Assure respectful behaviour</b>	<b>Report any safety concerns and good catches within their own work and the work of others</b>

<b>Set high performance standards and enable employees to achieve these standards and coach for improvement</b>	<b>To stop potential unsafe acts</b>
<b>Provide safe and reliable equipment</b>	<b>To identify unsafe systems and report them</b>
<b>Develop teamwork skills amongst the team</b>	<b>To know what resources (e.g. colleagues, leaders etc...) are available to ensure safe, reliable and effect care and how to use them</b>
<b>Actively seek and listen to employees concerns about safety concerns.</b>	<b>To improve policies/procedures</b>
<b>To develop reliable systems with stakeholders</b>	<b>Actively participate in review critical events and risk analysis to learn from them and prevent them from happening in the future.</b>
<b>To role model leadership behaviours</b>	<b>Contribute to the design and implementation of reliable systems of care.</b>
<b>To review and learn from critical events and understand how the system failed.</b>	

## **A Just Culture Guide**

Applying a Just Culture to a workplace can be done using a simple algorithm. There are a few different algorithms you could use. There is the 'Just Culture' algorithm that was created by David Marx (2019) and the Incident Decision Tree (Reason, 1997) that was created by Professor James Reason. This guide will focus on NHS England's 'A Just Culture Guide'. A Just Culture guide was created to support managers to treat staff in a consistent, fair, and constructive way when they are involved in patient safety incidents. The guide asks a series of questions to help clarify whether the individual involved needs support, or whether there are wider issues such as problems with the process, equipment etc... Having a guide helps to reduce unconscious bias and will help to treat individuals equally and fairly. The purpose of the guide is not to use it routinely but when there is a suspicion that a member of staff requires support or as part of a performance/case investigation. The guide does not replace patient safety investigations.

The guide asks several questions in 5 different areas:

- Deliberate harm.
- Health test.
- Foresight test.
- Substitution Test.
- Mitigating Circumstances.

Based on the answers to the questions in these areas, the guide provides a series of recommendations. Sidney Dekker (2007) stated that 'It is important not to blame individuals for what went wrong, but to understand what they did and the reasons why it made sense to them.' A just culture guide provides learning for organisations and looks at how to best support staff.

### **Case Study: Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust**

Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust were facing several challenges when responding to patient safety incidents. The trust was over reliant on HR processes when responding to incidents, increasing costs due to suspensions, agency staff, staff turnover etc... And a decrease in staff wellbeing.

The trust decided to train over 400 individuals in a Just and Learning culture. The programme was aimed at Managers, Patient Safety Leads, Operations Managers, Organisational Development and Human Resource (HR). There was also a request that a board member commits to supporting those who attend the training. Board members provide an open comment or letter to learners to support their attendance and give permission to act upon their learning. Results from this have shown that staff are more engaged, feel psychologically safe to speak up, increase in staff morale and job satisfaction, an increase in staff engagement at Senior Management level, which resulted in cost savings of over £2.5 million since 2016. Great work has been undertaken at Mersey Care and the trust admits to not getting it right all the time but do take ownership, apologise, and learn. One of the organisational values is accountability which is a key principle in a Just Culture.

Other trusts have seen the success at Mersey Care and want to learn from them, therefore Mersey Care, in collaboration with Northumbria University have developed an accredited programme to enable other organisation to undertake the training as well. Find out more about Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust from the references below.

## Getting started with a Just Culture

For everyone working in an organisation you should start with building an awareness of a just culture by educating yourself and other members of staff about the principles and benefits of a just culture. You could start by looking at the references found in this guide. From here you can build Just Culture principles into your processes, encourage staff to report incidents, promote learning and continuous improvement. You should monitor and evaluate the impact of your just culture efforts and celebrate the successes.

## Promoting a Just Culture

You can promote a just culture by ensuring that you have psychological safety, positive teamwork, communication and that you work in collaboration with other stakeholders. Using a Just Culture guide is a useful tool to promote a just culture. By taking this approach you will be able to consider any contextual factors surrounding an incident that need addressing. These factors could be distractions, poor management, physical environment, equipment/product design, work processes, culture, bullying, discrimination, low staffing levels, high workload, skill mix during the incident and personal issues e.g., health and stress. Taking this approach can help to understand the decisions staff make in the environment at the time. It can allow you to decide the best action to take for everyone involved in services. Organisations can also provide staff with training and develop skills about human factors, situational awareness, and a just culture through crisis resource management, effective communication tools and simulation. There are several resources available for you to start learning about a just culture. You could start with the references listed in this guide.

## Conclusion

There are many benefits to promoting a just culture. It will help staff understand the cause and consequences of error, ways to mitigate error, develop strategies to enhance staff performance, teamwork, communication, decision-making and psychological safety. It could also provide staff with strategies to manage stress, fatigue, and workload. It creates a positive and supportive environment and creates a culture of learning and continuous improvement. Start conversations with your team today about how you can promote a just culture within your workplace.

## Additional resources

If you would like to learn more about making improvement to your workplace take a look at our website for what we offer you <http://improvementcymru.net/academy>

Or email us [improvementcymruacademy@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:improvementcymruacademy@wales.nhs.uk) to find about the improvement courses we can offer.

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