

# Operational HRO Questions

*What do we want to avoid? What could go wrong?*

*What small mistakes have been made?*

*What are the consequences of failure?*

*How many times have we done this the same way?*

*What assumptions or shortcuts have been made?*

*Will we comply with agency policy and guidelines?*

*What are we doing? Why is it important?*

*Do we have crystal clear intent and expectations?*

*Who's doing it, and what do they think about it?*

*Who has the skills to make us successful?*

*Who's giving us feedback about mistakes / successes?*

*What will we do differently this time? . . . next time?*

*Who knows how to do this? . . . Who's done this before?*

*Who will make the decision(s)? Who is accountable?*

*Have we encouraged input and ensured feedback?*

Preoccupation  
with Failure

Reluctance to  
Simplify

Sensitivity to  
Operations

Commitment  
to Resilience

Deference to  
Expertise

# Principles of High Reliability Organizing (HRO)

## Anticipate the Unexpected

**Track Small Failures.** Pay attention to small failures signals which may indicate more serious problems. Be wary of the potential liabilities of success, including complacency, temptation to reduce margins of safety, and drift into automatic processing.

Preoccupation  
with Failure

**Resist Over-Simplifying.** Less simplification allows you to see more details and variable pictures of what you face. Don't settle for simple interpretations to complex problems. Seek multiple perspectives and opposing viewpoints.

Reluctance to  
Simplify

**Be Extra-Sensitive to Operations.** Listen to the advice/concerns of the people who are actually doing the work. Check for comprehension; acknowledge what you hear. Withholding information because of fear, ignorance, or indifference is unacceptable.

Sensitivity to  
Operations

## Contain the Unexpected

**Maintain a Strong Capability for Resilience.** Develop capabilities to detect, contain, and bounce back from inevitable errors that are part of a complex and dynamic environment. Learn to improvise with what you have. Ensure continuous learning.

Commitment  
to Resilience

**Utilize Different Levels of Expertise.** Push decision-making down and around. Authority migrates to the people with the most expertise, regardless of their rank. Not necessarily the "most experience," which is too often the same experience over and over again.

Deference to  
Expertise