

IS THE JUST CULTURE POLICY OF YOUR ORGANISATION JUST?

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JUST CULTURE: WHEN, WHY AND WHAT

- **When:** response of an organization towards individuals or groups who were involved in a safety event, especially of high severity
- **Why:** investigation whether staff demonstrated offending behaviour or intentional violation of rules
- **What:**
 - unintentional errors and mistakes are tolerated by management
 - deliberate breaches of rules might incur punitive actions



JUST CULTURE: HOW

- Confidence in the fairness of managers and honesty of employees
- Management and improvement of workplace prior to introducing punishment as a tool
- Staff understand that individual errors may have an impact beyond their local environment
- Attribution of unacceptable behaviour to employees by a representative group of managers and peers
- Each case of violation should be examined in detail and thoroughly before taking any measures



JUST CULTURE: WHAT IF NOT

- Difficulty in convincing professionals to report
- Lack of reporting will deprive organizations from proactively managing safety
- Staff will not discuss their errors honestly and sincerely during safety investigations
- Second victims: stigmatisation of practitioners involved in high severity events

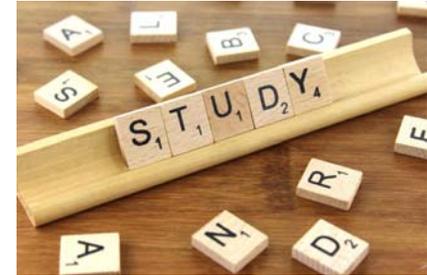
THE PLACE OF JUST CULTURE WITHIN THE OVERALL SAFETY CULTURE





THE CHALLENGES

- Just culture policy in a mature organization should ideally be shaped through a bottom-up path
- No published research about the feasibility of establishing a just culture policy where:
 - diversity of workforce perspectives is considered
 - potential measures to be imposed after the commission of unsafe acts are commonly agreed and defined



STUDY OBJECTIVES & CONTEXT

- **Objectives:**

- explore perceptions of employees regarding the punitive or preventive character of possible measures in cases of errors and violations
- evaluate the degree to which a commonly accepted just culture policy could be introduced

- **Context:**

- European military aviation organization (MAVO)
- Safety investigations are explicitly separated from administrative ones
- Lack of criteria for the suitability of possible measures against employees involved in safety events
- The decision for taking measures relies on the discretion and perception of managers



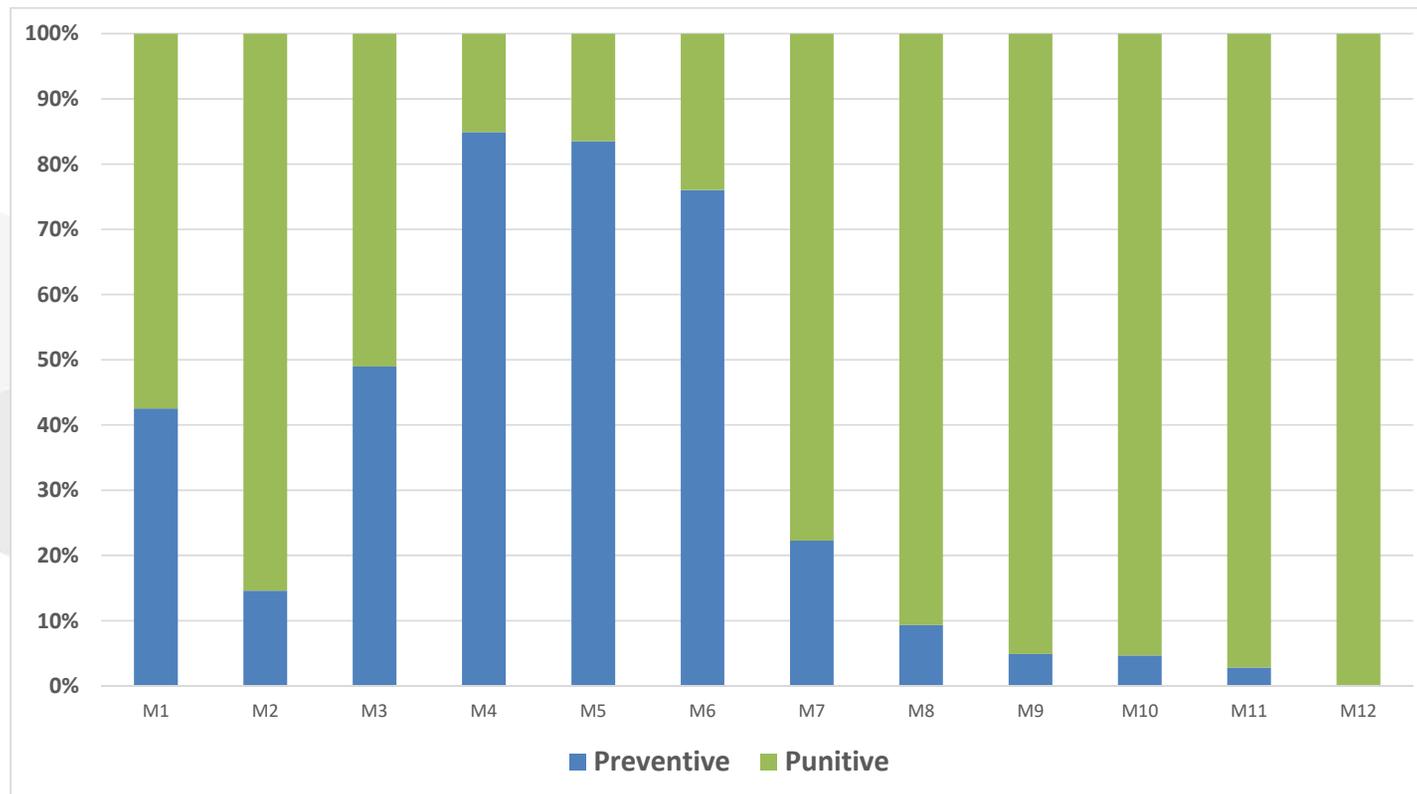
RESEARCH OUTLINE

- Online, voluntary and anonymous questionnaire to collect perceptions of staff towards measures that can be imposed after a safety event
- Main part - generic statement along with 12 possible measures. Employees were asked to:
 - choose whether each of the measures is preventive or punitive in the cases of error or violation separately
 - add any comment for each of the measures listed in the questionnaire
 - suggest any other measure that could be appropriate for the case given
- Sample: 163 valid responses
- Assumption: frequencies equal to or higher than 80% sufficient to claim an accepted level of common views

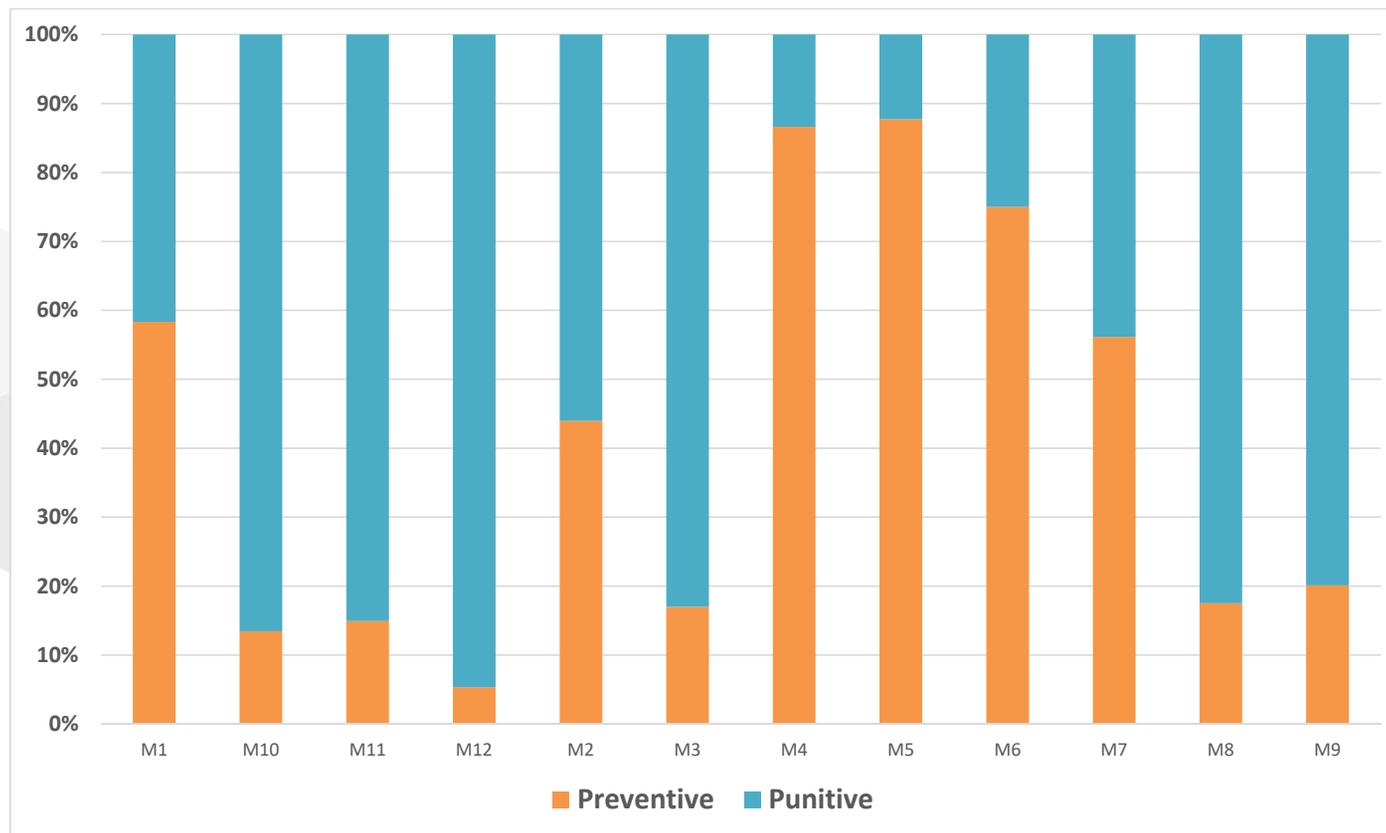
THE GENERIC STATEMENT USED

Assume that a safety event with severe consequences or potential for such occurs in your close working environment, that event resulting from errors or violations of a MAVO employee. Which of the following measures do you think is preventive or punitive in the case of errors or violations separately, regardless the contribution of other factors into the event (e.g., influence of the physical environment, inadequate training, poor supervision)? It is reminded, that according to the MAVO policy, any measure aims at building a culture that will help in avoiding similar events in the future and ensuring the safety of staff, material assets and the environment.

RESULTS FROM QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS: ERRORS



RESULTS FROM QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS: VIOLATIONS





RESULTS FROM QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

- Additional measures proposed:
 - suspension of employment for a period up to 6 months (n=3)
 - additional safety training (n=3)
 - suspension of license for the specialty hold (n=1)
 - criminal prosecution (n=1)
 - temporary suspension of the right to apply for high-profile positions within the organization (n=1)
- Enhancements suggested:
 - evaluation of knowledge level (n=2)
 - safety coaching/mentoring (n=1)
 - avoid/mitigate re-positioning of staff (n=1)

WHAT DO THE RESULTS SUGGEST FOR MAVO?

- MAVO's personnel judged similarly enough 6 out of the 12 measures in the cases of error or violation → the organization could “safely” maintain the specific measures
- Measures M6 and M7 collected highly diverse perspectives in both cases of error and violation:
 - M6 insufficient if not accompanied by psychological support from a qualified person
 - M7 was viewed as highly punitive
- Measures M1, M2, M3 and M12, which were approached by the participants differently, refer to a permanent dissociation of the end-user from his/her working environment
- The assignment of a measure as punitive or preventive was influenced by the (un)intentional nature of the unsafe action



THE OVERALL MESSAGES

- It is highly challenging to establish a commonly agreed just culture policy
- Staff was highly concerned about the possible stigmatization of the persons: necessity to consider the context and intention of actions and decisions
- Employees suggested that type and intensity of measures must depend on:
 - poor or successful past performance of individuals
 - severity of safety occurrences
 - evidence of wilful misconduct
- Errors were judged in a less strict manner than violations
- Management should visibly support the reintegration of persons involved in safety occurrences

TAKE AWAYS

- Implementation of a just culture policy and its support by the workforce might be feasible and achievable via a bottom-up approach
- Reconciliation of the diverse views of different groups can be challenging, but is necessary
- Justice and Fairness are not binary concepts: no view is absolutely right or wrong
- Perceived justice might dynamically change depending on the composition of workforce
- An ever alternating just culture structure is neither feasible nor advised, but we propose:
 - communication to job applicants of the current just culture policy and structure of the organization
 - revision of the just culture policy into predefined intervals

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Thanks for your attention!

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