

Barriers and Challenges to Implementing a Just Culture in DevOps

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Course: CSD-380 DevOps

What is a Just Culture?

A just culture is an environment where people feel safe to report mistakes without fear of punishment.

It focuses on learning from errors, not blaming people.

According to Ingram (2018), it creates trust and openness, helping organizations grow and improve safely.

In DevOps, this helps teams work better, fix issues faster, and feel respected.

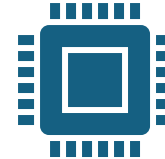
Why a Just Culture Matters?



Without a just culture, fear can spread across teams.



People might hide mistakes which makes problems worse over time.



According to *The DevOps Handbook* (Kim et al., 2021), the authors mention that DevOps relies on trust and quick feedback, so a just culture is a foundation for success.



It makes teams stronger, more transparent, and better at solving problems together.

Barrier 1 – Fear of Punishment

Many people are scared they will be blamed or punished if they admit mistakes.

According to Shorrock (2023), fear is one of the biggest blocks to building a just culture.

How to overcome: Leaders must clearly show that mistakes are learning opportunities, not reasons for punishment. Regular meetings and honest conversations can slowly remove fear.

Barrier 2 – Lack of Trust

- Trust is often missing between teams and leadership.
- Page (2007) explains that if leaders have punished workers before, it takes a long time to rebuild trust.
- **How to overcome:** Leaders need to walk the talk. Apologize when leadership makes mistakes and be consistent in fair treatment.

Barrier 3 – Poor Communication

- Sometimes people are too scared or unsure of how to talk about mistakes.
- Ingram (2018) says poor communication can lead to confusion about what behavior is acceptable.
- **How to overcome:** Train teams on how to speak up without fear. Make reporting normal and even praised.



Barrier 4 – Organizational Hierarchies

- Strong hierarchies can make people feel like their voice does not matter.
- Shorrock (2023) mentions that when workers feel small, they stay silent.
- **How to overcome:** Flatten communication channels. Let everyone, no matter their title, have the chance to speak and be heard.

Barrier 5 – Misunderstanding of Just Culture

- Some people think just culture means no accountability at all.
- Kim et al. (2021) point out that just culture still holds people responsible, but it separates honest mistakes from reckless behavior.
- **How to overcome:** Teams should be taught that just culture balances fairness with responsibility (diagram displaying such a balance is shown in the next slide). Examples and real stories should also be shared during training.

Finding the Balance: Punitive vs Blame-Free

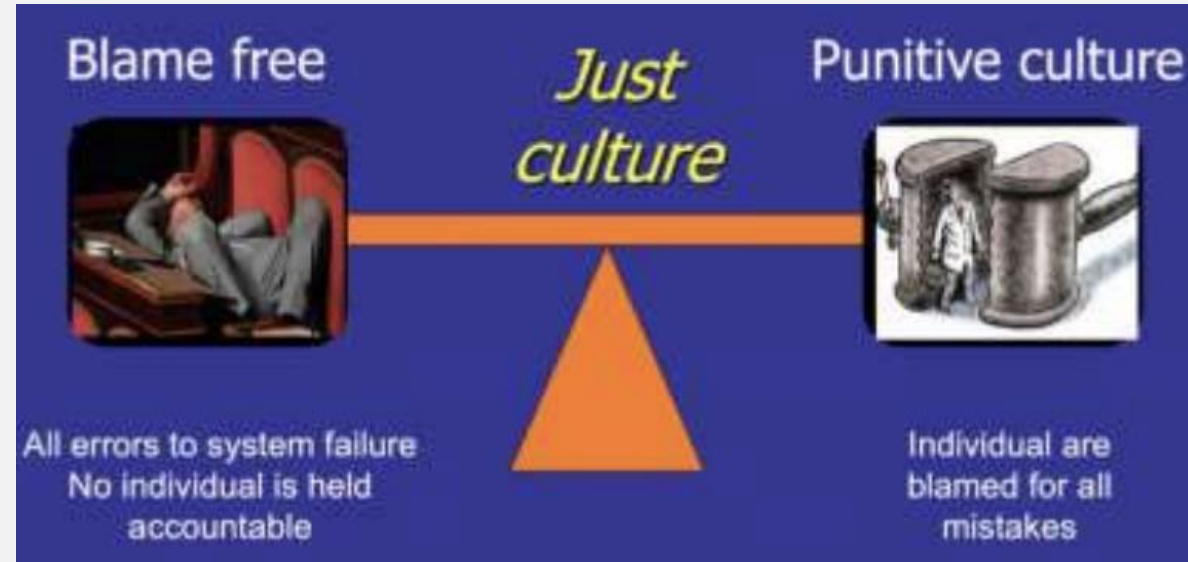


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- Organizations often swing too far between strict punishment and total blame-free environments.
- A punitive culture creates fear and silence. A blame-free culture can ignore accountability.
- Building a just culture is about finding the middle where people feel safe and responsible at the same time.

Key Takeaways



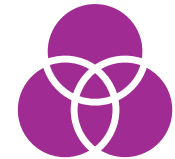
A just culture is about fairness, learning, and growth.



Fear, mistrust, poor communication, strong hierarchies, and misunderstandings block just culture.



Leaders and teams must work together to remove fear, build trust, and promote open conversation.



According to Page (2007) and Shorrock (2023), it is possible with time, honesty, and leadership commitment.

References

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