



Tazmin Somerville CSD 380 - DevOps

# MODULE 9.2: ESTABLISHING A JUST, LEARNING CULTURE

# WHAT IS A JUST CULTURE?

A just culture promotes accountability while encouraging open learning from mistakes.

It avoids blame and fosters an environment where safety and learning come first.

Engineers feel safe to report errors without fear of retribution.

“Our goal should always be to maximize opportunities for organizational learning...” — The DevOps Handbook



# WHY JUST CULTURE MATTERS IN DEVOPS



Encourages transparency and continuous improvement.

Reduces fear, increases collaboration.

Helps prevent recurring failures through learning.

Example practice: Blameless post-mortems after incidents.

# CORE BARRIERS TO A JUST CULTURE

Fear of blame or  
punishment

Lack of leadership buy-in

Misunderstanding of  
accountability

Existing punitive policies

Cultural resistance to  
change

(source:  
[humanisticsystems.com](http://humanisticsystems.com))



# LEGACY THINKING & “BAD APPLE” THEORY


Older mindsets focus on eliminating errors by eliminating people.

This 'bad apple' theory is invalid.

“Human error is not the cause of trouble... it is a consequence of the design of the tools.” — Dr. Sidney Dekker

# ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE CLASHES


Siloed departments and rigid hierarchies can block communication.



Failure to align on shared values like trust and openness.



Cultural inertia—'this is how we've always done it.'



(source: [hackernoon.com](https://hackernoon.com))

# BARRIERS TO JUST CULTURE: VISUAL OVERVIEW



- Blame Culture



- Fear of Reporting



- Rigid Policies



- Leadership Resistance



- Misunderstood Accountability



# MOVING TOWARD A JUST CULTURE

---


Promote safety over blame

Train leaders to model vulnerability

Reward transparency and learning behaviors

Use retrospectives to build systemic understanding





A just culture is essential to achieving high-performing DevOps.

Shift from blame to learning.

Understand that human error is inevitable.

Use mistakes as catalysts for improvement.

“Our goal at Etsy is to view mistakes... with a perspective of learning.” — John Allspaw

---

## CONCLUSION & CALL TO ACTION



Kim, Gene, et al. The DevOps Handbook. IT Revolution, 2021.

<https://alertops.com/devops-barriers/>

<https://hackernoon.com/cultural-challenges-in-devops-adoption-and-how-to-overcome-them>

<https://www.justculture.healthcare/defining-just-culture/>

<https://humanisticsystems.com/2023/10/18/why-is-it-just-so-difficult-barriers-to-just-culture-in-the-real-world/>

<https://wtcs.pressbooks.pub/nursingfundamentals/chapter/5-4-culture-of-safety/>

---

## SOURCES: