

CRM and Philosophy: September 2021

Knowing Yourself is the Beginning of All Wisdom

Many years ago, a mentor of mine shared that we must be willing to see all of ourselves in order to create a personal strategy for growth and success. Seeing all of myself meant that I had to be really honest about identifying my strengths, my weaknesses, the roadblocks to my success, the distractions that I allowed to take over my life, and how and where I spent my time, energy and money. You see, I was unable to build my strategy for growth and success until I understood all of the parts of me, good and bad, and how they fit together. I was unable to be my best self until I acknowledged my true self. Aristotle may have said it best when he said, “Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.”

While this can help us grow and learn as individuals and contributors to our work teams, how can this concept apply on a larger scale? In the pipeline industry, we see this all the time. We don’t sit around waiting for pipes to rupture. We analyze the history of the pipes, we track the volume of products rushing through each year (or day, hour or minute), we clear pipes out on a regular basis, we test and sample pipes and all other equipment to identify weak points, and we develop plans to rebuild or replace older lines and systems so that we can avoid problems before they become catastrophes. We learn, we study and we prepare.

Think about a pipeline control room. What do the Controllers do? How do they spend their time each day or each hour? Where are the distractions in the control room? What tasks occupy too much time? What tasks don’t get done? Do factors like fatigue, stress or time pressure throw things off track? Is there sufficient time to respond to abnormal or emergency conditions? We have to understand the Controller role, in detail, in order to ensure that our objectives for safety and success are attainable.

In the control room, one way to gain knowledge of the Controller’s roles and responsibilities is to conduct a workload assessment. A workload assessment also provides valuable insight as to the resource load on a console. The Control Room Management regulatory requirements 195.446(e)(5) and 192.631(e)(5) require that companies, on a regular basis, “monitor the content and volume of general activity being directed to and required of each controller at least once each calendar year, but at intervals not exceeding 15 months, that assure controllers have sufficient time to analyze and react to incoming alarms.”

We have partnered with over 88 U.S, Canadian and Australian control rooms since 2010 to conduct almost 350 workload assessments. During these assessments, we collect data to understand how Controllers spend their time during the work shift. Samples of shifts from every day of the week and under a variety of conditions are examined. Because these workload assessments are conducted using a structured and scientifically valid and reliable methodology, we can compare the information from one control room to benchmarks collected from the rest of the industry. It is through this assessment that we begin to understand how time is allocated in the completion of various tasks and potential distractions that are present. Is there sufficient time to respond to alarms and other abnormal or emergency conditions?

A workload assessment provides insight as to how the task load on the console impacts Controller workload levels during different hours of the day or shifts or days of the week. Knowing the Controller roles and responsibilities in your specific environment is key not only to success and safety, but Controller well-being. Each shift and each day are different, as is each Controller. Understanding how all of the parts, such as tasks and dimensions of workload, fit into the whole is key. Equip yourself with that knowledge to plan for emergency situations, console loading and continuous growth and success.