

## IS PROFESSIONALIZATION A SAFETY ISSUE...OR THE OTHER WAY AROUND?

### Refining the scope

Safety and professionalization can refer to a wide range of areas that reach beyond the former question the Foncsi was asked to address by its industrial partners. Therefore, in the framework of the envisaged workshop, the scope will be defined and limited as follows:

- Safety in this context refers to prevention and control of process and product related risks in hazardous industries or activities.
- The targeted actors are all employees and contractors, from frontline operators to top managers, and hence not limited to those holding safety managers jobs.
- As for “professionalization”, it encompasses all kinds of learning and training situations, including mentoring, situated learning, companionship...and not only traditional classroom training and/or specific safety-related training.

### 1- A current view shared by the industry

As worded by industrial actors, the former question asked to Foncsi originates from a common statement: resources dedicated to safety related training are already very important and increasing but are perceived not to be paying off any longer, especially in industrial fields already achieving a high level of safety. Despite all the efforts made in terms of training in a broad sense, there is no clear evidence as to the actual safety outcomes.

### 2- Problem statement

Assuming the existence of an implicit model positively linking the level of safety to training programmes, this model may have reached its limits. In this current model, safety is to a certain extent addressed:

- in isolation from other dimensions: safety is often considered as a specific domain demanding specific actions conducted by specific actors.
- disembodied from the actual working situation: safety is usually highlighted as a priority without taking into account the necessary trade-offs resulting from the multiple stakes (business continuity, productivity, profitability, innovation etc.), that characterize the actual working conditions.
- defined by actors driven by accountability issues and exogenous norms: the increasing importance of risk issues in the public debate leads to a considerable production of standards, regulations and procedures largely defined through the prism of accountability, with strong administrative and legal components.

Therefore, in order to move beyond the implicit model, Foncsi questions the academic community as well as experts in direct link with the industry about existing or possible alternative approaches in terms of safety, particularly through professionalization issues.

### **3- Reflection axes**

Three main research axes are proposed. The first one addresses safety through professionalization strictly limited to the domain of safety, the latter appearing as an obvious means to improve the former. The second one focuses on professionalization largely speaking in terms of occupation, assuming that “doing the job well” is partly contributing to safety. The third research axis questions the individualistic dimension underlying the professionalization issue. If safety is achieved through an integrated system of tools, processes and organizations, then professionalization should go beyond the individual or small group level and take into account these organizational dimensions.

#### ***3a- Does professionalization in/of safety make any sense?***

What does being a professional mean in the safety domain? Does highlighting safety as a priority actually makes safety a priority? To what extent can one reconcile professionalization in safety and integration of safety at all levels of the organization? Is being a safety professional a dead-end in terms of career?

#### ***3b. What part could professionalization in the job play in safety?***

Shall the concept of professionalization be extended? Should a change of methods be considered? a change of model? a paradigm shift? Would professionalization be better addressed through occupation than through safety? Working well vs. working safely: is there any difference? What does working well mean? To whom and what for? At what level? Under which circumstances? How to depict and understand the link between ordinary practices and the extraordinary nature of the accident? What would it take to make professionalization in the job a way forward to enhance safety? Is safety soluble in a quality policy? We are in the era of formalization, description, standardization, measurement, yet is it necessary to describe and measure skills and competencies to foster professionalization?

#### ***3c. Safety at the organizational level: beyond the individualistic viewpoint of professionalization?***

Achieving a safe environment is a collective and organizational effort. Hence professionalization of individuals can only be part of the equation. The processes and tools and the organization itself also require professionalization. Professionalization and professionalism are related to people, as individuals or groups. But should it be considered from a systemic point of view, such as safety and therefore carried by actors, processes, tools and organizations, not only people? What are the risks of focusing too much on professionalization ? Could professionalization even be identified as blocking careers ?