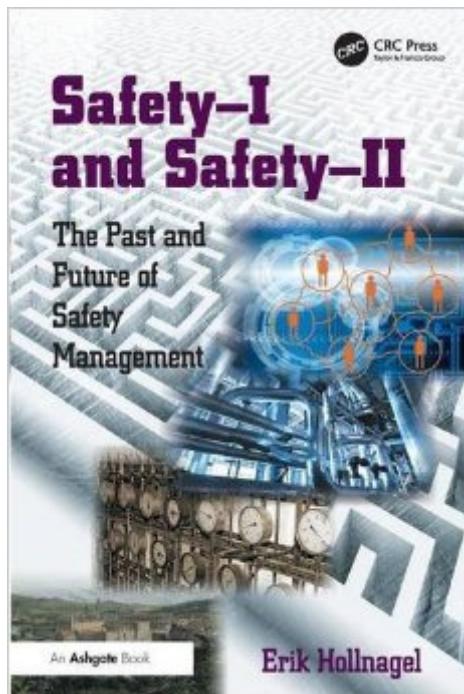


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Safety-I And Safety-II: The Past And Future Of Safety Management



Synopsis

Safety has traditionally been defined as a condition where the number of adverse outcomes was as low as possible (Safety-I). From a Safety-I perspective, the purpose of safety management is to make sure that the number of accidents and incidents is kept as low as possible, or as low as is reasonably practicable. This means that safety management must start from the manifestations of the absence of safety and that - paradoxically - safety is measured by counting the number of cases where it fails rather than by the number of cases where it succeeds. This unavoidably leads to a reactive approach based on responding to what goes wrong or what is identified as a risk - as something that could go wrong. Focusing on what goes right, rather than on what goes wrong, changes the definition of safety from "avoiding that something goes wrong" to "ensuring that everything goes right". More precisely, Safety-II is the ability to succeed under varying conditions, so that the number of intended and acceptable outcomes is as high as possible. From a Safety-II perspective, the purpose of safety management is to ensure that as much as possible goes right, in the sense that everyday work achieves its objectives. This means that safety is managed by what it achieves (successes, things that go right), and that likewise it is measured by counting the number of cases where things go right. In order to do this, safety management cannot only be reactive, it must also be proactive. But it must be proactive with regard to how actions succeed, to everyday acceptable performance, rather than with regard to how they can fail, as traditional risk analysis does. This book analyses and explains the principles behind both approaches and uses this to consider the past and future of safety management practices. The analysis makes use of common examples and cases from domains such as aviation, nuclear power production, process management and health care. The final chapters explain the theoret

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Customer Reviews

This is the most recent book written by Erik Hollnagel, a prominent safety researcher with decades of experience in the field. That alone is sufficient reason for anyone involved in safety to read the book. I personally found the book to be stimulating and thought-provoking (as expected), but also tantalizingly frustrating. The author describes two frameworks for thinking about safety. Safety-I aims at preventing failure by reacting to failures via investigating them, identifying their causes, and implementing measures to prevent recurrence of those causes in the future. Safety-II aims at maximizing success by proactively trying to anticipate how the system may evolve and promoting actions believed to foster success. There's some merit in this classification, but at some points in the book, the author argues that nearly all modern systems have become so complex that Safety-I is obsolete and we must move towards Safety-II, at other points he suggests that Safety-I may be fine for many systems, and in the end he seems to argue that we need a combination of Safety-I and Safety-II. I agree with the last perspective, but would argue that preventing failure and promoting success are largely two sides of the same coin - I'm not convinced that the distinction is as sharp as he suggests. And I would go further and argue that, rather than generalizing, we need to look at the specifics of each particular system we're dealing with, including understanding the *modes* of failure and success for the system, as well as possible *degrees* of failure or success in each mode.

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