

Just Culture



www.cyber-smv.dk

Just Culture

Purpose

- To promote reporting and learning rather than blame and silence.
- To promote reporting and learning.
- To become comfortable speaking openly about mistakes, near misses, and uncertainty.

Mental model

- *Hidden mistakes are more dangerous than mistakes that are made.*

Participants

- All employees.
- Management has a special role.

Input

- Clear messages about blame-free reporting.
- Examples of previous incidents (possibly anonymized).

Input

A. Short introduction

- *"Just Culture means that we separate mistakes from blame. We do not punish honest mistakes - we learn from them."*
- Key points:
 - Mistakes ≠ carelessness.
 - Accountability still exists.
 - Deliberate gross negligence is not the same as a mistake.

B. Everyday scenarios (examples)

- Participants are given 5–6 short situations, for example:
 - An employee clicks on a phishing link.
 - The wrong product is sent to a customer.
 - An alarm is ignored because it is often false.
 - A procedure is skipped due to time pressure.
 - A mistake is discovered but not reported.
 - A new employee misunderstands an instruction.

Step 1: How do we typically react? (10–15 min.)

The participants discuss each scenario:


- What is the typical reaction in the company?
- What does the employee fear the most?
- What could make someone choose not to speak up?

👉 **Focus:** Blame, shame, silence, and consequences.

Step 2: The Just Culture perspective (10–15 min.)

The participants now look at the same scenarios and answer:

- How should the situation be handled in a Just Culture?
- What can the organization learn from the incident?
- Which systems, frameworks, or processes contributed to the error?

 The **focus** shifts from ‘who did something wrong?’ to ‘what made it possible for the error to happen?’

Step 3: Psychological Safety and Action in Practice (10–15 min.)

The participants work with:

- What needs to be in place for employees to feel safe speaking up?
- What can colleagues do when someone admits to a mistake?
- What can management concretely do differently?

The participants formulate:

- 3 behavioral statements, for example:
 - “Mistakes are shared - not hidden.”
 - “We talk about learning first, not blame.”
 - “It is okay to say I’m unsure.”

Possible answers for Step 1: How do we typically react?

What is the typical reaction in organizations?

- In many companies, the following are often seen:
 - Focus on who made the mistake.
 - Quick explanations or excuses.
 - Silence or minimization (“it turned out fine anyway”).
 - Informal reprimands or irritation.
- Example:
 - Phishing link → “You should have known better.”
 - Wrong item → “Who packed the order?”


What does the employee fear the most?

- Being seen as unprofessional.
- Being blamed or publicly exposed.
- Creating extra work for colleagues.
- Losing trust from their manager or team.”

Possible answers for Step 1: How do we typically react?

What can cause someone not to speak up?

- Time pressure (“we don’t have time for this”).
- Previous negative reactions.
- Unclear reporting guidelines.
- The feeling that “it won’t change anything anyway.”

 **Key point:** In a blame culture, silence becomes rational behavior.

Possible answers for Step 2: The Just Culture perspective

How should the situation be handled in a Just Culture?

- The mistake is acknowledged without personal attacks.
- Focus on learning before judgment.
- Quick measures to secure operations and safety.
- Open dialogue about what happened.

→ Example:

→ 'Thank you for speaking up — let's look at what made the mistake possible.'

What can the organization learn from the incident?

- Typical learning points:
 - Was the instruction clear enough?
 - Was there time pressure or unclear priorities?
 - Was the system designed to prevent the mistake?
 - Were warnings or procedures realistic in practice?"

Possible answers for Step 2: The Just Culture perspective

What systems, frameworks, or processes contributed to the error?

→ Examples:

- Too many alarms → alarm fatigue.
- Complex or unrealistic procedures.
- Insufficient training for new employees.
- A culture where “fast” is valued more highly than “correct.”

 **Key point:** In a Just Culture, the question is: ‘*What in the system made the error likely?*’ - not ‘*Who made the mistake?*’

Possible answers for Step 3: Psychological Safety and Action in Practice

What needs to be in place for employees to feel safe speaking up?

- A clear message that honest mistakes will not be punished.
- Visible support from management.
- Simple ways to report errors and near misses.
- Follow-up, so employees can see that their input is being used.

What can colleagues do when someone admits to a mistake?

- Listen without interrupting or judging.
- Acknowledge the openness (“I’m glad you spoke up”).
- Help find solutions.
- Avoid rumors and gossip

Possible answers for Step 3: Psychological Safety and Action in Practice

What can management concretely do differently?

- Respond calmly and with curiosity when mistakes happen.
- Share their own mistakes and lessons learned.
- Reward openness rather than perfection.
- Clearly distinguish between:
 - Honest mistakes.
 - Risky behavior.
 - Deliberately irresponsible actions.

Examples of shared Just Culture principles:

- 'Mistakes are shared - not hidden.'
- 'We talk about learning first, then about improvement.'
- 'It is okay to say: *"I'm unsure."*