

PERFORMANCE VARIABILITY

In a workplace system, performance of the same task or activity varies. This is a natural characteristic of the workplace system.

Continual adjustments are often necessary to cope with the unpredictability of the work context. For example, changes related to the work environment, available equipment, manpower, goals, time available, internal/external demands, and pressures may drive adaptation by workers.

Processes and procedures cannot be written for every potential scenario and condition. Without adaptive problem solving and the resulting performance variability, organizational success would often be limited.

For more information on performance variability and performance influencing factors see [Canadian Standard Association. \(2022\). Human and organizational factors for optimal pipeline performance \(CSA Express Document No. 16:22\).](#)

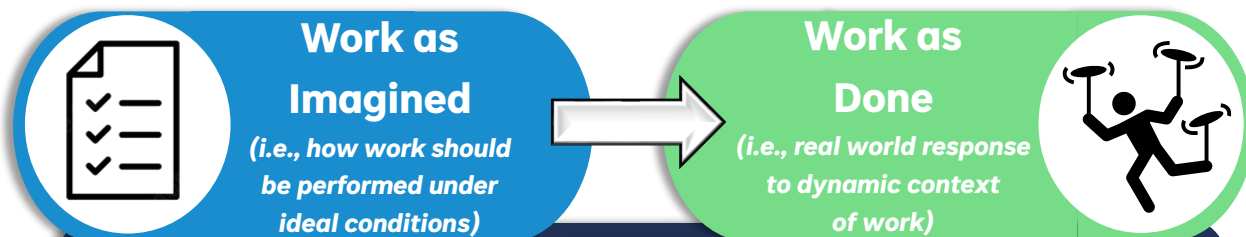
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Employees are very good at adjusting their behaviour to meet expectations and desired outcomes. They often use adaptive problem solving to get things done because the context within which work is performed is so dynamic and unpredictable.

Performance variability is often deliberate, but it is not always well considered and managed to reduce unintended consequences. As a result, new risk(s) may be introduced in the workplace system. Sometimes deliberate variability is new and unexpected. In these cases, the variability may be associated with abnormal or previously neglected workplace issues. Employees may be compelled to try to resolve threats and deficiencies in real time to get the job done.

It is important to identify the nature and sources of all types of variability to better understand the system's functioning and its tolerance for variability. This allows organizations to proactively address underlying system issues and build increased resiliency.



To understand work (and workplace system functioning), organizations need to understand how and why performance varies. Then, resiliency to control variability and potential negative impacts can be built.

Reflective Questions:

- (1) When has performance variability facilitated success within your organization? When has variability led to undesirable outcomes? In each instance, what specific workplace context changes drove the performance variability? What do these reflections tell you about your organization's resiliency?
- (2) Do you have a mechanism for collecting information about performance variability within your workplace system? If not, why not? What steps could you take today to better understand and learn from existing performance variability?