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Saving Lives: A Case Study of Operational Behaviors and Continuous Improvement at a National Communications System Contractor

Dr. Volney L. R. Douglas

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National communications systems (NCS) are critical elements of a government's infrastructure. Limited improvements to the Operational Behaviors or non-functional requirements (NFR) of NCS have caused issues during national emergencies such as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. The literature indicates that these issues result from a deficiency in understanding the roles NFRs and continuous improvements play in NCS. NCS contractors play a vital role in the design, implementation, and support of NCS, and this perspective provides valuable insight into these issues. There are three major purposes for this case study: (a) to add to the existing theoretical framework on the issues between operational behaviors and continuous improvement, (b) to define the scope of these concepts, and (c) to provide strategies for managing these issues in NCS. Management concepts of continuous improvement and operational behaviors form the conceptual framework for the qualitative case study methodology. Four research questions focus on definition, scope, models, and strategies. Data collected from nonproprietary documentation, interviews, and observations was analyzed using nVivo 8, which provided for a definitive classification framework. Coding and classification of major themes using nVivo 8 allows for the establishment of relationships between concepts. The results defined 11 major relationships focused on cost, risk, schedule, communication, and quality perceptions. These results provide a framework for strategic system optimization based on collection and analysis of operational information. Strategies for optimizing NCS, based on these findings, can have a positive social impact by improving operational quality and reducing cost, schedule, and risk impacts, which allows a greater capability for NCS to save lives.

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