Emergent Organizational Failure: Five Disconnections

Mattie Toia (they/them) | 2022-03-16
Reliability Leadership
Emergence
Emergent Organizational Failure: Five Disconnections

1. Believing there is a definitive “production” to be focused on
2. Forgetting how hard prioritization is
3. Having unrealistic goals for reliability over sustainable ones
4. Treating your organization as simple instead of as complex
5. Using incentives as a replacement for dedication
Disconnection #1

Believing there is a definitive “production” to be focused on

● We try to focus on “critical” parts of our systems

● Sometimes it’s difficult to understand what is contributing to reliability

● There is a need to avoid tunnel vision in our thinking
Is a deployment tool part of production?

Is source control?
Everything contributes to emergent behavior.
Disconnection #2

Missing how hard prioritization is

- Reliability requires extra consideration
- Poor planning will create cycles of apathy in teams
Reality Check: Each of our mental models is incomplete
Spend time understanding &
Plan to change priorities
Having unrealistic goals for reliability over sustainable ones

- Many goals are unrealistic
- Unrealistic goals are demotivating!
The realism of a goal is not related to the need!
Picking realistic goals is hard when we cannot calibrate from experience
Sustainable goals are about progress instead
Disconnection #4

Treating your organization as simple instead of complex

- Humans are hard to predict Yet we disregard this complexity
- Are we making room for creative thinking in SRE?
Create the right environment for your team’s best work to emerge
Moving the Needle Means Moving the Culture
Using incentives as a replacement for dedication

- Incentives are transactional
- Dedication is a reaction to trust and will persist
- Trust can only be earned through action and time
Actions are imperative to building trust
Does the team believe their services bring harm or good into the world?
Do people trust that doing the right thing will be recognized?
A Response to Emergent Organizational Failure

1. Believing there is a definitive “production” to be focused on
   ○ Take a holistic view, all things may contribute to the whole

2. Forgetting how hard prioritization is
   ○ Collaborate on mental models, make sharing & communication easy

3. Having unrealistic goals for reliability over sustainable ones
   ○ Progress not absolutes, let goals shift instead of compromise quality

4. Treating your organization as simple instead of as complex
   ○ Use simple messages, accept differentiation, focus on the cultural

5. Using incentives as a replacement for dedication from your team
   ○ Demonstrate trust through actions
Questions?

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● Mattie Toia
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