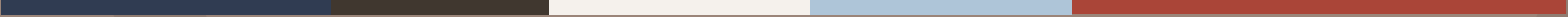


EAGLES FLIGHT™



Performance Breaks Down Under Pressure



WHY STANDARDS FAIL WHEN
IT MATTERS MOST



When Pressure Increases, Behavior Changes

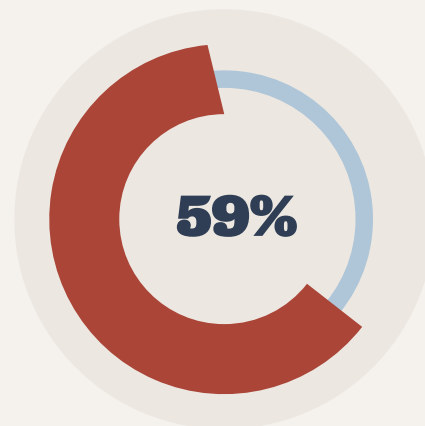
CLEAR EXPECTATIONS ARE RARELY THE PROBLEM.

The challenge is what happens when those expectations are tested under pressure. Standards are defined. Processes are documented. Training is delivered. Leaders communicate priorities and reinforce what matters.

People understand what they are expected to do, yet when pressure increases, behavior does not always follow.

In moments of time pressure, competing priorities, or operational strain, decisions begin to shift. Standards are interpreted differently. Trade-offs are made. Shortcuts appear where none were intended.

Not because people lack knowledge, but because the conditions in which decisions are made have changed.



59% of workers say deadline pressure causes them to cut corners – not because they don't know the standard, but because the conditions changed.

– SAFETYCULTURE.COM

The Pattern Leaders Recognize

THIS PATTERN IS FAMILIAR ACROSS LARGE ORGANIZATIONS.

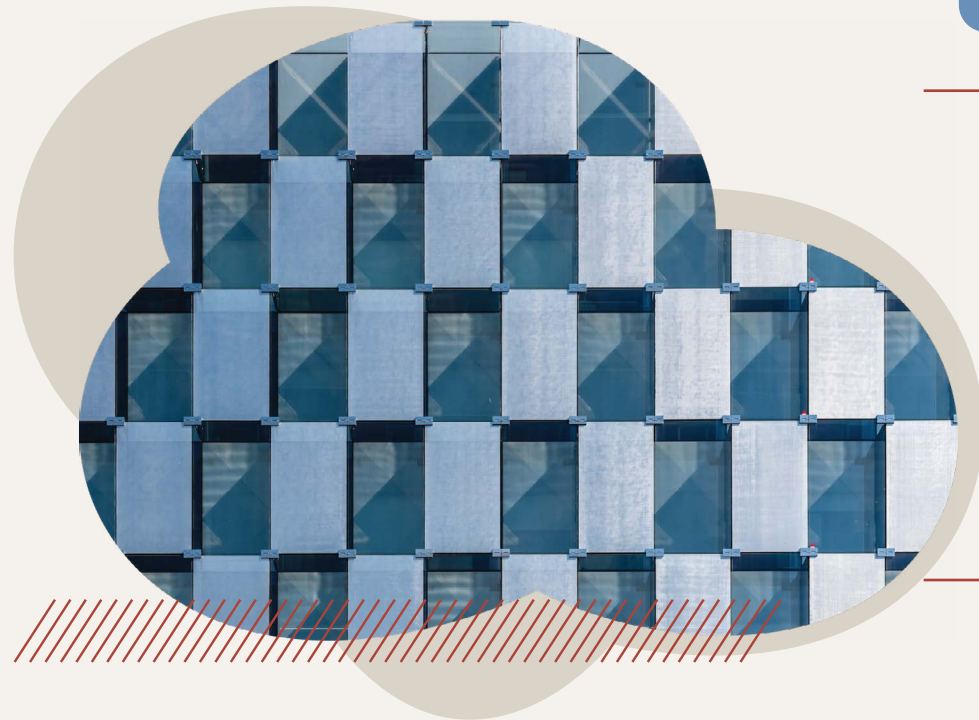
A **safety standard** is well understood, yet under production pressure it is applied differently across sites.

A **customer commitment** is clear, yet when capacity is constrained, teams respond in inconsistent ways.

A **compliance requirement** is clearly defined, yet in high-pressure moments, teams make different judgments about what is acceptable.

*In each case, the expectation is known. **What varies is how behavior holds when it is tested.***

Leaders respond by reinforcing standards, communicating expectations again, or adding controls. Yet the same pattern returns, because behavior under pressure follows a different logic than behavior in controlled conditions.



The Missing Link:

The Breakdown Happens in the Moment of Decision



MOST ORGANIZATIONS BELIEVE THEY ARE CLEAR. Strategy is defined, standards are documented, and expectations are communicated across the enterprise.

At that level, clarity exists. But performance is not determined at that level. It is determined in real moments, where people are required to make decisions under pressure.

In those moments, clarity must extend beyond what to do. It must define how decisions should be made when conditions change.

When this level of clarity is missing, people do not stop or escalate. **They decide.** And those decisions are shaped by experience, context, and personal interpretation:

- Not because people are **unwilling**.
- Not because they **lack knowledge**.

But because the organization has not been clear where it matters most.

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What Leaders Think Is Clear

- The task is defined
- The expectation is communicated
- The process is documented

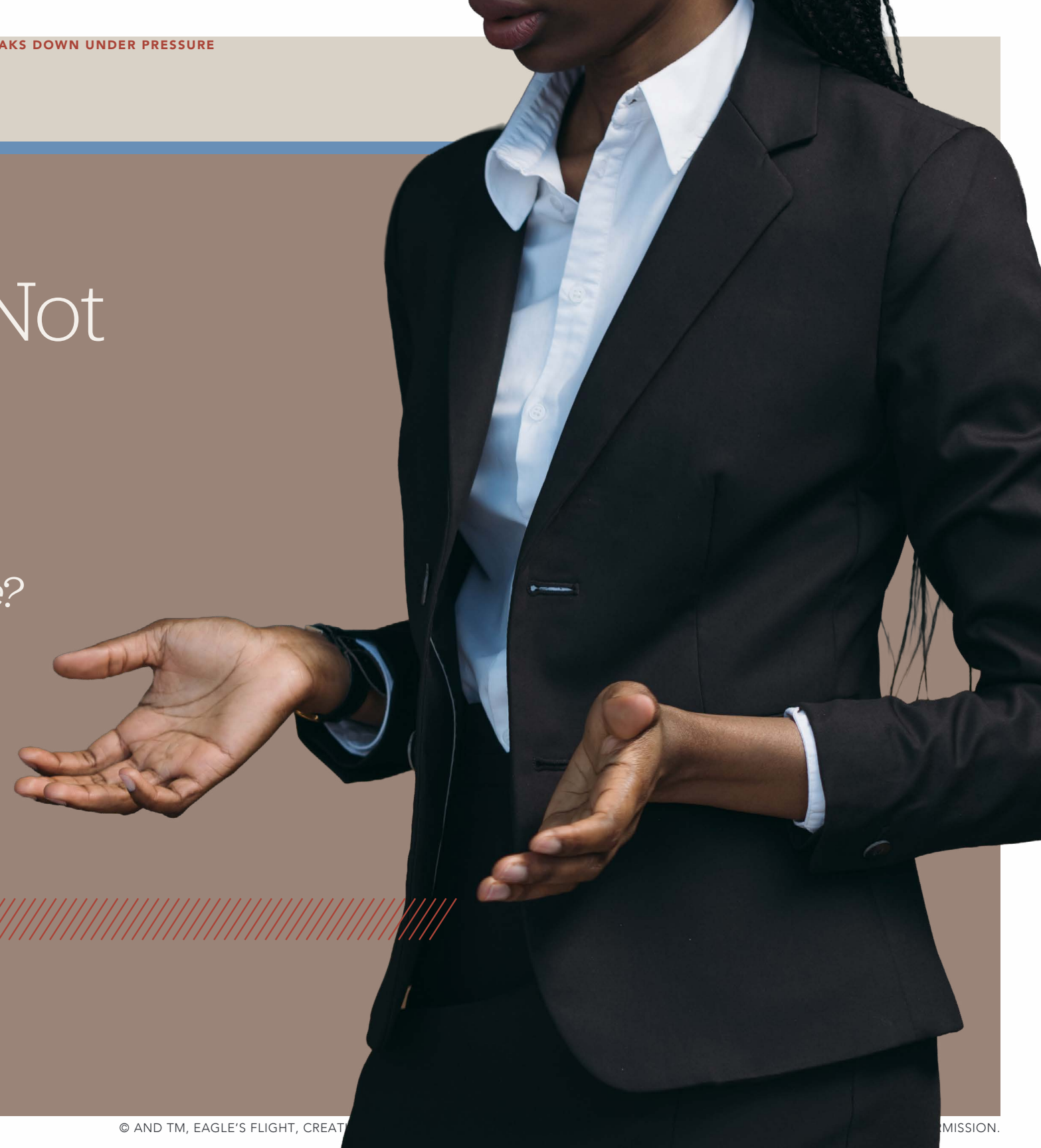
What Actually Drives Decisions Under Pressure

- What matters most when priorities compete
- What trade-offs are acceptable
- What outcomes take precedence
- What consequences are real

Why Behavior Does Not Follow Intention

If expectations are clear, why does behavior still break down under pressure?

Because behavior does not follow intention. It follows the forces that are already in place.

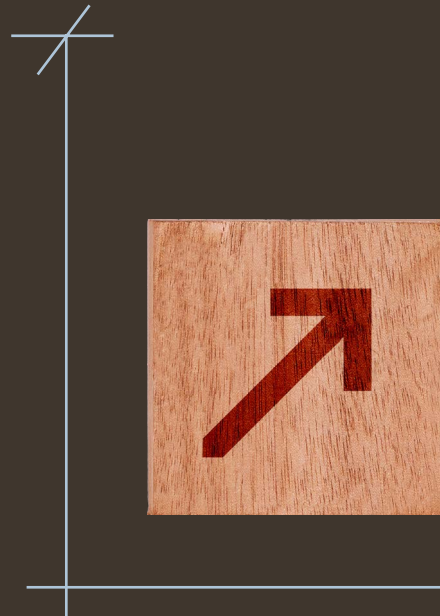


Three Forces Shape Behavior Under Pressure



Consistent behavior under pressure depends on all three. *When one is weak or missing, behavior begins to break down.*

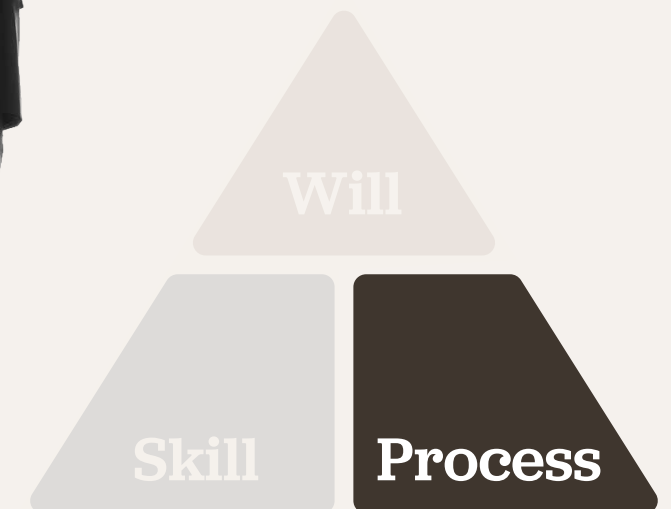
Process: People Follow What Is Available



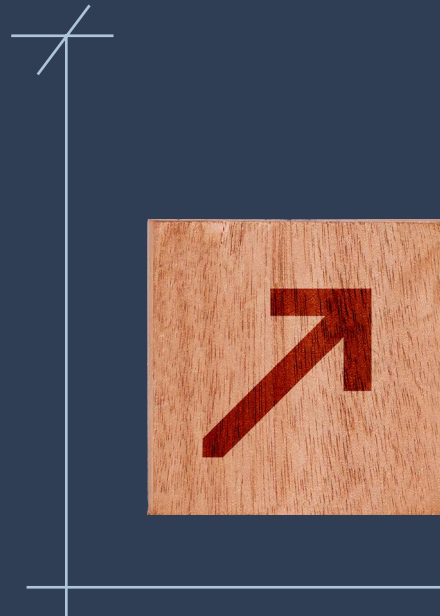
UNDER PRESSURE, PEOPLE DO NOT STEP BACK TO INTERPRET STRATEGY OR REVISIT TRAINING. They act using whatever structure is already in place.

If there is a clear, practiced way to respond, behavior is consistent. If there is not, people improvise. Effort increases. Activity increases. But outcomes begin to vary.

People don't choose to be inconsistent. They behave based on what is actually in front of them.



Skill: People Act Based on the Judgment They have



IN MOST ORGANIZATIONS, PEOPLE UNDERSTAND WHAT IS EXPECTED.

Under pressure, they are required to interpret those expectations in real time. **That interpretation is not automatic. It depends on judgment.**

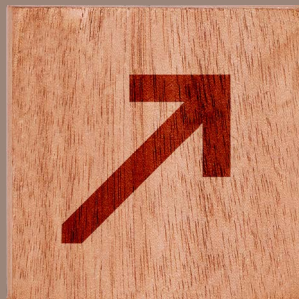
Judgment is rarely aligned. Organizations assume that once something is taught, it can be executed.

Two capable people can face the same situation and make different decisions, both believing they are right.

*Not because the standard is unclear, but because the **application** of that standard has never been fully defined or practiced.*



Will: People Prioritize What They Believe Matters Most

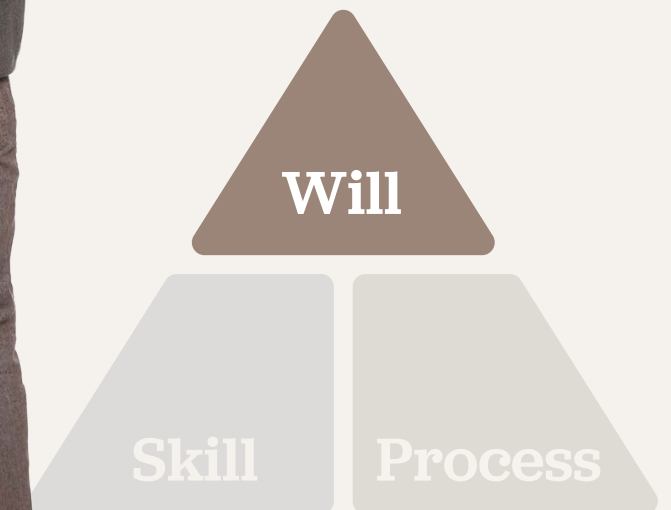


UNDER PRESSURE, PEOPLE MAKE TRADE-OFFS. They choose what to protect, what to push, and what to let go.

Those choices are not driven by what is written or communicated. They are driven by what people believe matters most.

And that belief is shaped over time. It is shaped by how leaders respond, what is tolerated, what is rewarded, and what carries consequence.

When those signals are inconsistent, behavior becomes inconsistent.



Execution Does Not Break Down Randomly



IN COMPLEX ORGANIZATIONS,
EXECUTION DOES NOT FAIL BECAUSE
PEOPLE LACK EFFORT OR INTENT.

It breaks down in predictable ways: when people rely on what is available instead of what is intended, when they act based on their own judgment, and when they prioritize what they believe matters most.

Over time, these patterns compound. They do not appear as isolated issues, but as a system of behavior that shapes how work actually gets done. **This is what leaders experience as inconsistency.**

It is not a failure of strategy, but a gap between what is defined and what is lived. That gap becomes your culture over time.

Not the culture described in values statements, but the **culture teams experience** every day through the behaviors leaders model, the decisions they tolerate, and the trade-offs they



allow under pressure.

Addressing this does not begin with more communication, tighter controls, or clearer messaging. It begins with understanding the forces that shape behavior in the moment, because until those are aligned, consistency will remain out of reach.

Where do we see this?



01. ***Where** in the organization do clear expectations still break down under pressure?*
02. ***When** decisions shift under strain, what are people actually relying on: process, judgment, or signals about what matters most?*
03. ***Which** trade-offs are being made repeatedly, even though no one intended them?*
04. ***What** do leaders consistently reinforce, tolerate, or reward when pressure is high?*
05. ***If** behavior changes under pressure, what is the organization teaching people about what really matters?*

EAGLES FLIGHT™

Since 1988, Eagles Flight has partnered with organizations around the world to strengthen leadership, improve execution, build stronger cultures, and help people perform at their best when the outcome matters. Our approach combines behavioral science, experiential learning, practical application, and reinforcement to create behavior change that lasts.

If you're exploring how to build stronger leaders, create more consistent execution, strengthen risk performance, or help organizational change stick, we'd welcome the opportunity to continue the conversation.

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