

Christian Morel: A Company Takes Absurd Decisions

By Dominique Michel – L'Entreprise, May 2002

Q: *Why is the story of the Challenger space shuttle, that should never have been launched, exemplary to your eyes?*

A: First of all, there is a mistake in reasoning: the link between some malfunctions in the joints and the external temperature has never been made. Then, alert signs have been underestimated. [...] Finally, some big personalities have been made happy since they had travelled, losing focus of the initial objective of the mission's success.

Q: *Why this silence, evoked in several circumstances, by those that could have avoided the tragedy?*

A: This can be explained with hierarchical pressure, but not only. [...] There are also communication codes. [...] I analysed a plane accident: in any case the pilot or the co-pilot started to shout to the air traffic control they should have an emergency landing. They crashed due to fuel shortage, very close to the runway...

Q: *What makes a company switch off?*

A: It is a loss of consciousness, that makes consider the means, i.e., procedures' respect, as ends. Even when training is useless, one checks that trainees are attending. Or, one checks that evaluations took place, but not if they were performed well.

Q: *Has a company a monopoly over absurdity?*

A: Not at all. Mistakes - or the collective perseverance to mistakes - is a constant factor. They are produced within a family, in the army, in any human group.

About the Interviewee:

Christian **Morel** is author of *Les **Décisions absurdes**. Sociologie des erreurs radicales et persistantes.*