

## ASL – Affective Safety Leadership

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### Abstract

New Ground Rules and Rollout of Essential Offshore Training. Years of internal post-fatality reviews and regional research have led DONG Energy Exploration & Production, DONG E&P, one of the leading energy groups in Northern Europe, to a new set of behavioral Ground Rules for the essential role of the Offshore Company Representative (CoRep). The resulting focus in the increasingly complex drilling business must be “what not how”, demanding the CoRep to engage with all parties in a safe, professional and meaningful way. This requires more than being right, it requires the greater level of interpersonal attention only found in ASL Affective Safety Leadership.

This paper introduces the multifaceted sequence of corresponding, short- and long-term initiatives that have driven the desired change effort offshore and resulted in updated behaviors of the 60+ CoReps who have participated in the now mandatory ASL program.

### Introduction

The instant a Company Representative (CoRep) steps out of the helicopter on the North Sea drilling rig helipad some 90 minutes offshore, he or she steps into a very demanding leadership role. The CoRep must navigate a multitude of special interests, expertises and contracted obligations while literally standing on top of a very real and dangerous pressure: The sub sea oil well. Aside from the landside support organization referred to as “town”, doing surveillance, and being ready on call, the CoRep is often alone with nothing but authentic leadership and the overarching trump card of “Stop All”, forcing a shut down of the entire operation at a per minute cost often running to thousands of dollars.

In addition to the fiscal consequences, the CoRep faces two compounding challenges: Having to lead interpersonal interactions across multiple cultures, education levels and backgrounds, and having to lead in real time. Frequently the CoRep needs to identify, diagnose and decide across multiple interests in a matter of minutes – or less, if the pressure is rising.

In the past, the CoRep would rise from the ranks of the technical drilling expert, often with the capacity to explain exactly how to do specific procedures. With present day’s ever more complicated drilling conditions, the entire operation is dependent on the best possible, collaborative input from all parties, requiring an entirely different and more facilitating, less directing approach by the CoRep’s leadership. This in turn necessitates the unlearning of old habits and installation of new; new habits, which must be strong enough to provide the best possible outcome of split second interpersonal decisions.

### Background

In November 2009 a British citizen died in an accident on the Maersk Resolute drilling rig, operated by DONG E&P. Eigil Hannedest Head of Drilling and Senior Director at DONG E&P have lead the efforts to reduce the risks of this ever happening again:

*“When an incident occurs, we examine what transpired. We typically find that the problem is in the interaction between us as the operator and all of the subcontractors, who are contracted through DONG but are a part of the rig owner’s work processes and safety systems at sea. Getting communication to function between all of these parties is quite difficult.”*

In consequence, DONG E&P developed a set of Nine Ground Rules, guiding the behaviors of the CoRep – ranging from job planning to safety and covering topics such as execution, responding to change, improvements, leadership, communication, motivation and trust. To implement these Ground Rules, DONG E&P contracted CfL, Danish Centre for Leadership to co-develop and deploy a comprehensive leadership program that would meet and satisfy the need of every CoRep, whose background and career path leading in to the role varies greatly.

Realizing the challenge of changing behavior in a safety critical environment, DONG E&P’s design request referenced the work of Tim Marsh and the concept of ASM, Affective Safety Management (ref. 1) requiring managers to consider the emotional (affective) response to inconvenient safety options.

For the purpose of the ASL program, the history of safety awareness has been summarized as the following five levels:

- Level 1: **Protection** ... fenced off the dangerous pit and gave workers a protective hardhat.
- Level 2: **Rules** ... required workers to stay on the safe side of the fence and wear the hardhat.
- Level 3: **Management** ... told the workers to follow the rules, or face strict consequences.
- Level 4: **Culture** ... made the team appreciate and follow the rules, even without a manager present.
- Level 5: **Affective** ... addresses emotional and inter-human reactions and the leverage of purpose and motivation to choose the safe option in all cases and regardless of circumstances.

Level 5 allows for the split-second consideration and motivational communication that places the safe behavior on the path of least resistance by all parties involved. Level 5 requires you to understand and utilize the speed of gut reactions vs. the demanding time of logical deduction (ref. 2). Level 5 requires an unwavering, robust and authentic leadership core extending such fundamental leadership behaviors as taking time, making agreements and remaining observant no matter what distractions are present (ref 3).

As the 5th level, in particular, requires more than management, more than systems and measurements, the CoRep program focuses on impacting interpersonal reactions through strong leadership behavior, and thus the title of the DONG E&P CoRep program: ASL – Affective Safety Leadership, of which the satisfactory completion is now a requirement for employment in DONG E&P Offshore Operation as Company Representative. The multifaceted and comprehensive CoRep Program satisfies its objectives through strong preparation, casd based training in class and a unique set of mutually supportive technologies, from playing cards to iPads, on-site simulations with business actors and ILO-driven offshore coaching, summarized and connected in Figure 1:

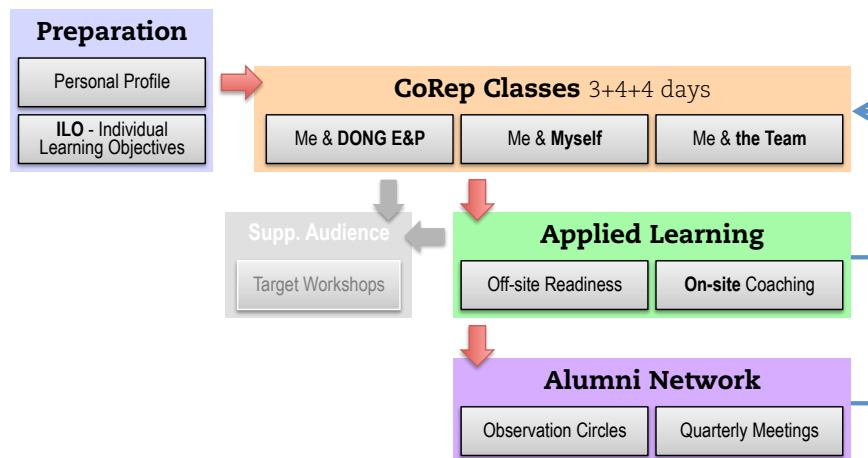


Figure 1 — DONG E&P CoRep program architecture and building blocks

The following pages highlight the building blocks and deliver an inspirational checklist describing the mutually supporting components that hitherto have brought about the desired changes in CoRep behavior.

Personal Profile: To realize the learning journey’s starting point, all participants complete a 360 Survey with ratings from self, manager, peers and clients. The survey focuses on execution within five recognizable and specific leadership competencies: Coordination, motivation, communication, delegation and intervention – a refined

distillation driven by DONG E&P’s post-incident investigations including Petro Skills requirements, SHL skill gap analysis and the 2010 Ground Rule folder’s gross list of 69 behavioral considerations.

Individual Learning Objectives (ILOs): Armed with the personal profile’s concluding spider web, the participant must develop and refine a specific set of SMART (ref. 4) individual learning objectives, which must be co-signed by the participant’s manager in order to align with business needs and subsequent follow-up.

Buddy Pairs: No participant can sign up without a known and paired “buddy”. Referring to the buddy system of diving, where two divers are mutually dependent of each other for proactive and reactive safety measures, the learning buddies share their ILOs and help each other to get the most of the program during training and in particular in the subsequent testing and continued implementation through coaching and network initiatives.

High-Impact Classes: The in-class training is delivered at conventional off-site facilities such as they may be found with conference partners close to port almost anywhere in the world. The format utilizes group settings with roughly one third devoted to plenary facilitation, one third to individual, pair and team reflections and one third to real exercises – often in the mixed format of private role plays followed by facilitated forum theatre (ref. 5).

Simulated Environment: To create the best possible conditions for achieving real experiences, DONG E&P locates parts of the third and final module on the International Research Institute of Stavanger’s “Ullrigg”, by their own account “the worlds most advanced full-scale testing site” (ref. 6). Professional business actors are trained to play the counterparts in forum theatre exercises carried out with on-site complications from noise, distractions and overall production pressure. The participants meet their own ILO-driven cases and have to face their own most challenging situations – from complex encounters to conflicting roughnecks and in-your face confrontations.

Applied Learning: With training complete, the participant will arrange for offshore coaching delivered by the same team of facilitators that they have worked with during the 11 days of training above. Coachee and coach meet prior to departure to define roles and observation points before flying out together, often spending several days and nights reflecting on the best possible application of tools towards deep impact on the individual participant’s ILO.

Alumni Network: All CoReps are required to participate in no less than two annual network meetings focusing on continued leadership development and best practices in the implementation of the behaviors needed to satisfy the Ground Rules. To secure output and processing efficiency through shared terminology and tool base, the network is alumni only. Former DONG E&P CoReps in new roles outside the organization are still welcome as the network’s focus is leadership and their new vantage points serve as relevant inspiration to all former program participants.

### Unusual Content and Delivery Vehicle

As the matching element to the architecture components above, the following section highlights the content and two special content containers satisfying the odd needs of being allowed within the weight allowance of offshore heli transports and usable in meetings as conversation catalysts.

Extensive Syllabus: To bring individual value across the varied background AND deliver the desired behavioral results, the actual subject matter topics needs to cover both practical tools and personal development perspectives – picking best practices from all the areas and selected reasons in Table 1 (not listed in actual training sequence):

Table 1 — DONG E&P CoRep program subject matter areas and reasons

Category	Area	Reason
Organization	Role alignment	Exactly what is expected of and offered by the CoRep?
	Cultural utilization	Working together and making the best of cultural strengths
	Change management	Making sure change is a continued opportunity, not an obstacle (ref. 7)
	Networking	Understanding benefits and obligations of sharing

Category	Area	Reason
Me	Value driven leadership	Defining organizational and individual leadership space
	Authentic leadership	Walking the talk and leading from a sustainable inner core and out
	Communication	Strong, relevant and motivating messages leading to action (ref. 8)
	Situational leadership	Meeting individuals where and in-a-manner that creates mutual success
Team	Decision Styles	Realizing how decision behaviors change with time and pressure
	Emotional reactions	Understanding the brain, emotions and thinking, fast and slow (ref. 2)
	Team development	Creating and maintaining high performance teams
	Conflict management	Identifying conflict escalation and how to “step down the stairs”
	Coaching & questions	Asking questions to define goal, reality, opportunity and will
	Feedback	Giving and receiving the gift of real feedback (ref. 3, 9)

Playing Cards: Almost all of the essential materials, models and mindsets are summarized in a single set of high quality colored playing cards, given to the participants in a small hardcover plastic box. The cards ace through nine covers the CoRep Ground rules 1 through 9 with each suit providing its own perspective: Spades ♠ are company requirements, hearts ♥ hold the leadership obligation, clubs ♣ are team considerations and the diamond ♦ cards carry the unique and brief sayings and mantras of the truly experienced CoRep. The tens and all face cards – knight, queen, king and jokers – provide the twenty most important leadership models. Using cards as the distilled and refined summary of what would otherwise take a considerable amount of slides, prints and binders provides a number of distinct advantages:

- Non linear use, allowing the participants to easily jump to any relevant rule or model.
- Individual reordering for personal prioritization and selection of improvement areas.
- Explicit pick-from-stack application of both Ground Rules and leadership models to any particular case.
- Present cards in the real-life meetings for clarifying and visual focus during the “toolbox talk”.
- Extreme portability and thus ready at hand for application and learning recollection.
- Playing cards – and thus revisiting the rules and models even in social, card playing settings!

Reference and Process iPads: As a vehicle to deliver the included reference pages adding details to the printed cards, for assignments, hand-outs and other process enhancers such as electronic reviews and co-capturing of best practice through small but focused ESN apps (Enterprise Social Network template driven CoRep applications on Podio and Yammer in particular), all participants are given the full, unlimited and personal use of an Apple iPad with appropriate environment covers and iTunes giftcard to download the needed books and applications. In addition the participants are encouraged to develop their own efficiency platform using a portfolio of best practice apps covering PDF-view, file sharing and note taking for hand, voice, keyboard and camera. Lastly the iPad serves as an excellent video tool, bringing web conferencing capabilities to the offshore location, allowing both town (the mainland office) and partners such as an ASL program coach to engage in a rich and very visual dialogue.

Finally, in addition to the buddy works, role plays and live simulations it is also relevant to note the extensive, ongoing time investment in individual learning prioritization and final commitment speech, where each participant’s high ranking officer attends and appreciates in order to increase overall organizational visibility and relevance (ref. 10).

### Findings

The final section of this paper reveals some of the collective and a selected few of the individual findings that the first two years of the program have revealed (ref. 11). Given the aggregated measurements of class and meeting evaluations along the Kirk Patrick scale (ref. 12), personal interviews, management feedback, individual profiles, ILO sign-offs, real-life simulations, onsite coaching and network meetings as well as the use of internationally

validated tests such as Decision Dynamics' Decision Style test, the overall picture seems to be one of significant appreciation and real behavioral change.

Throughout the training, the CoReps are asked to consider the Ground Rules from a personal perspective. One exercise in particular has been captured consistently on day four of all flows. The participants are asked to lay a flip board-sized paper on the floor and draw a matrix of four quadrants in which they place cards ace through nine of spades, hearts and clubs i.e. requirements, leadership and team according to where they “do enough” or “do too little” with respect to the things they “find easy” or “find difficult. In aggregation of the first 46 conclusions, figure 2 reveals a clear picture, with the team cards of clubs causing nearly double the amount of concern in comparison to the organizational requirements of spades:

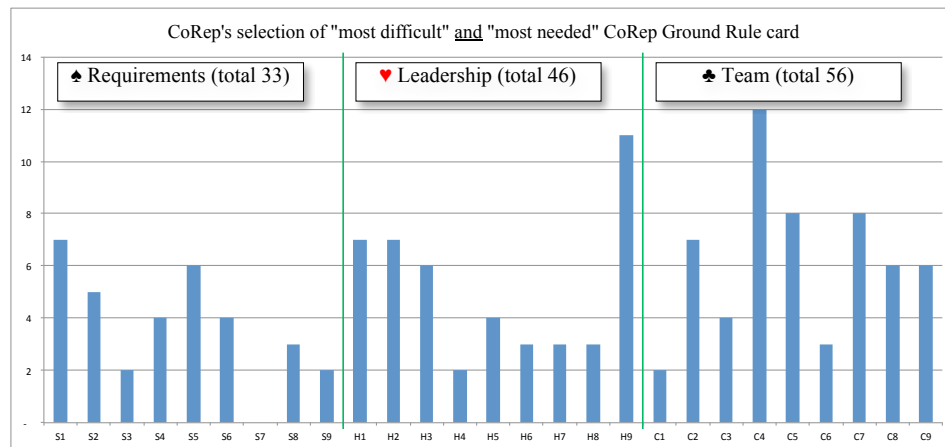


Figure 2: DONG E&P CoRep challenges as identified by prioritizing ground rule cards

**Mandatory participation:** Following the ASL Program, communication between DONG’s CoRep and the employees on drilling rigs and support vessels in the North Sea has improved to an extent where the ASL program has now been made mandatory for all of DONG’s CoReps going offshore.

**Clarified leader role:** The results are apparent for those who completed the training program in 2012. CoRep Anders Stjernholm, who has 20 years of experience in the oil and gas industry, gained a much clearer understanding of his CoRep role on the drilling rig:

*“Previously, I was expected to know everything, which is obviously impossible in such a big and complex operation involving so many subcontractors and technical fields. We have to optimize performance through leadership of the rig, instead of optimizing performance by knowing everything and doing everything ourselves. We have to get the different teams from about 15 different companies to work together for the rig’s performance”.*

**On level with reality:** Over the years, Anders Stjernholm has participated in many training courses with similar goals, but on a very theoretical level and always in the form of a one- or two-day crash course, where the question afterwards is whether the participants are truly able to practice what they have learned.

*“The CoRep training course is 11 days long. We didn’t just talk about the tools, but have actually tested the theories in practice through role-playing exercises. We have also trained situations where people have previously been in doubt or handled a situation incorrectly. So there has been a lot of focus on keeping things close to reality and the practical aspects of our daily work”.*

Better equipped on a personal level: Lars Bidstrup Sørensen is new to the position of CoRep, after many years in the Well Services organization. By participating in the training course, he gained a clearer understanding of a very important and personal matter:

*“I have probably always known what type of person I am, but this course has given me answers as to why I am who I am, and why I do things my way. And I have learned how to set limits for what I will accept. Being able to address disagreements before they turn in to conflicts has meant a lot for my job satisfaction. If you allow things to happen several times without putting a stop to it, they become bad habits, even if you do not like it. Now I have some tools for engaging in a good dialogue with people about the tasks they are to perform for us”.*

Simulation Works. Frank Hartmann Rasmussen has an additional catch to the CoRep role, having to lead colleagues through mandatory and safety related upgrades that interfere with an already challenging production plan. As bearer of serious news, he often faces stiff opposition and notes about the program:

*“I have learned a great deal about myself. How I act and how other people see me. How we make decisions. Bot most important is the relationship with my colleagues, many of whom I’ve worked with for years but never met. On this learning journey we left as colleagues and came back as brothers in arms. The exercise on the Ullriggen was a tough but true way for us to try out our new skills in front of outstanding actors. Coming home, I realized stepping in to the needed leadership had become easier and with much more control”.*

High Impact on Safety. Morten Nielsen Højgaard, Subsea Engineer and CoRep, highlights that his already keen safety awareness has received a new set of operational and confidence building tools that allows him to engage with the surroundings sooner rather than later:

*“Observing an unsafe operation without fall protection from a ladder, I was able to combine the appropriate Ground Rule with situational awareness in my immediate and required approach. What could have been a conflict was accepted as constructive feedback that prevented an incident while increasing our overall safety awareness and team coherence”.*

Usable in other industries: Eigil Hannestad, head of drilling and Well Constructions, a division of DONG E&P, on the results of the ASL Program:

*“On a scale of 1 to 10, we’re up there at a 9 or 10 when it comes to the training course. In fact, the course has been made mandatory as of 2013 for all of our CoReps. The most efficient operations are also the safest. It’s a matter of people planning and communicating well and knowing where they stand. Then everything blends together in a very satisfactory and productive way. Good leadership, efficiency and safety are inextricably linked.”*

Hannestad further stresses that although the training programme is tailored to DONG’s purposes, it could undoubtedly be used in the training of leaders in other industries.

Added importance by the Macondo accident: In the subsequent reviews of the Chief Counsel’s Report following the Macondo incident – the Deepwater Horizon well blowout in the Mexican Gulf of April 2010 – the DONG E&P management have summarized the key leadership learnings of the report’s executive summary and chapter 5 in three pivotal statements, all lending additional support to the focus and efforts of the ASL program: A pivotal cause of the crisis’ fatal consequences was “*overarching failures of management*”. Indeed there was “*robust risk analysis and planning*” but “*bad decisions during execution*”, a disastrous combination leading to the essential recommendation for future execution, where all parties must “*ask questions until they are certain they get it right*” (ref. 13).

## Conclusion

The multifaceted DONG E&P CoRep ASL program is needed, comprehensive and appreciated, giving the participating CoReps an updated, personalized and applied toolbox through which to expand their leadership capability and thus the efficiency of the overall operation in a meaningful and safe way.

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## Biography

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Ulrik Ramsing is a senior program architect and executive advisor at [CfL Danish Center for Leadership](http://www.cfl.dk). Ulrik works as a development catalyst, guiding leaders and organizations along unusual paths towards greater purpose and productivity, often employing rather unusual methods ranging from board games and social media to large-scale near-site simulations.

As an international consultant, Ulrik have helped make leadership exciting, efficient and safe by focusing on the Leadership TAO – taking Time, making Agreements and being Observant, which is also the framework for his most recent book “[Unplugged – your path to authentic leadership](http://www.ramsing.com)” published by Gyldendal Business.

After six years in the US working with mission critical installations in the material handling industry, Ulrik Ramsing returned to Denmark in 2006, focusing on strategy, innovation and team performance.

In recent years the interpersonal experiences have been leveraged by energy and offshore companies towards developing and delivering the [Affective Safety Leadership](http://www.affectivesafety.com) needed in complex, high-risk real time decisions.

Speaking, facilitation, workshops and consulting have been provided in the Nordic countries, across most of Europe as well as Turkey, India, and China and throughout the United States.

More information, history and references are available on LinkedIn: <http://www.linkedin.com/in/ramsing>