Senior Managers’ Chronic Unease
A Mindset for Managing (Process) Safety Risks
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What is Chronic Unease?
Chronic unease reflects a state in which managers experience discomfort and concern about the management of risks (Fruhen et al., 2014).
Chronic unease has traditionally been applied at the organisational level. High Reliability Organisations are described as existing in a state of constant wariness towards the control of safety risks (e.g. Weick, 1987).

Why apply it to Senior Managers?
- They have a critical influence on organisational safety (e.g. Christian et al., 2009).
- Their work is complex and often abstract.
- They can be removed from the ‘shop floor’.
- They deal with uncertain and ambiguous information.
- Unease has been associated with their influence on safety (Burns, 2002).

What makes some Senior Managers more Uneasy than Others

What is a Healthy Level of Unease?
Unease can be a form of strain - so more unease will not necessarily be better.
- Too little unease might lead to complacency, so that warning signals are ignored, ambiguities are marginalised, and negative indicators, and adverse consequences are rarely considered.
- Too much unease might lead to the experience of anxiety, affecting decision making, action and over the long run, (mental) health.
Each manager is likely to have a healthy level of unease (the margins will differ for each person), where he or she is alert and manages risks effectively. So there might be a level of unease that is just right for you.

How we developed the Concept
1. We conducted a systematic review of the academic literature to identify the components of unease.
2. We conducted an interview study with 27 senior managers from the oil and gas industry to explore the content of chronic unease, and the responses associated with it.
3. We developed a questionnaire that can assess the components of unease in managers.

References
Fruhen, L.S., & Flin, R. (in press). ‘Chronic Unease’ for safety in senior managers: An interview study of its components, behaviours and consequences. The academic work the poster has been based on: