PUTTING THE ORM IN nORM

The IIRSM Organisational Risk Map (ORM), developed by the IIRSM Ambassadors Network, encourages a different way of thinking – one that recognises risk as dynamic, interconnected and shaped as much by leadership, culture and decision-making as by hazards themselves.

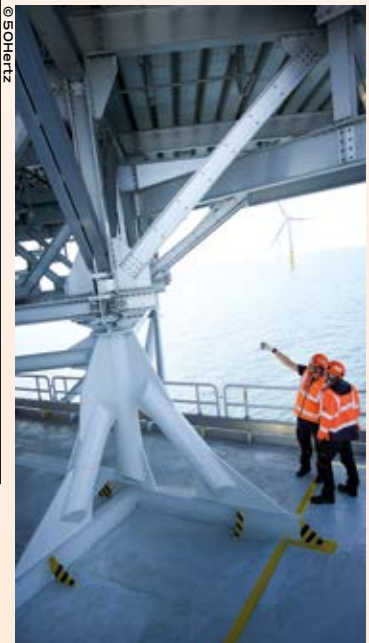
The ORM is already being applied by professionals working in high-risk industries, where the consequences of poor decisions can escalate quickly.

This practical application was one of the key themes explored during IIRSM's recent *Putting the ORM in nORM* webinar, where Jonathan Gawthrop, Group Chief QHSE Officer, and Hugh Maxwell, Managing Director of Maxwell Safety Ltd, discussed how the framework can move beyond theory and support better operational decision-making in the real world.

Drawing on his work on offshore energy projects in the Baltic Sea, Hugh demonstrated how the ORM helped teams understand the relationship between external pressures, organisational systems, operational realities and human factors in some of the most demanding working environments.

The offshore projects formed part of Germany's Energiewende energy transition programme and involved the Ostwind 3 and Ostwind 6.1 offshore grid connection systems, developed by 50Hertz Transmission GmbH. The projects are designed to connect offshore wind farms to the mainland electricity grid and support large-scale renewable energy generation. Ostwind 3 will connect the Windanker offshore wind farm through the Jasmund offshore platform and approximately 40 kilometres of submarine export cable, ultimately supplying electricity to around 260,000 households. Ostwind 6.1 is one of the largest Baltic Sea grid connection systems, designed to connect the Gennaker offshore wind farm with a transmission capacity of around 900MW.

The work involved extremely complex offshore construction activity, including unexploded ordnance survey and clearance, cable route preparation, offshore platform installation, diving operations, subsea construction, heavy lifting, cable protection systems and landfall connections. Multiple contractors, specialist teams and vessels operated simultaneously in harsh offshore conditions where weather, fatigue, logistics and programme pressures constantly influenced operational risk.



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For Hugh, the projects demonstrated why a systems-based risk approach is now essential. "Offshore, risk doesn't sit in silos – it exists in interfaces," he explained. The ORM helped teams analyse how external risks such as weather windows, regulatory requirements and client programme pressures interacted with organisational risks including contractor interfaces, differing safety cultures and leadership alignment. At operational level, the ORM highlighted the impact of simultaneous operations, permit conflicts, vessel movements and diving activity, while also drawing attention to people risks such as fatigue, communication breakdowns and confidence to speak up.

One of the strongest messages was that most incidents in high-risk environments do not arise from a single hazard but from failures between systems, organisations or decisions. The offshore projects regularly involved simultaneous operations between survey vessels, construction vessels, unexploded ordnance teams, diving teams, cable installation contractors and marine support craft. This created constant potential for collisions, dropped objects, conflicting permits and communication failures.

The ORM provided a practical way of visualising these interdependencies and supporting operational decision-making. Hugh described how daily meetings, shared dynamic risk registers and clear marine coordination structures became essential controls offshore. Visual planning boards, common permits and joint

At the IIRSM Forum on 21 May, discussions around the ORM built further on how organisations can translate the framework into everyday operational practice. **See pages 15-17 for more.**

Watch the IIRSM professional development webinar: **www.iirsm.org/orm-webinar-recording**

Find out more about the ORM: **www.iirsm.org/learn-and-develop/the-iirsm-organisational-risk-map**

toolbox talks also helped different contractors understand how their activities affected others. "The ORM helps us see the whole system, not just the task," he said.

The offshore environment also demonstrated how changing operational conditions can expose weaknesses between "work as imagined" and "work as done". Plans that appeared robust had to be adapted offshore due to weather changes, vessel movements, fatigue, changing sea states or shifting programme pressures. Rather than treating risk management as a static process, the ORM encouraged teams to continually reassess how operational, organisational and human factors interacted in real time.

The projects highlighted the importance of conscious decision-making under pressure. Offshore teams frequently faced difficult operational trade-offs involving safety, schedule, weather windows and client expectations. Hugh described examples where operations were delayed due to deteriorating weather conditions or simultaneous operations (SIMOPS) conflicts, exclusion zones were adjusted or work was paused altogether to reassess operational risk. "We weren't eliminating risk, we were consciously managing trade-offs," he explained.

Leadership behaviours also emerged as a critical operational control. The webinar repeatedly reinforced the point that procedures alone do not manage risk in high-consequence environments. Offshore projects test how people think, communicate and behave under pressure. Some of the most effective controls were highly visible and people-focused: leadership presence on vessels, daily engagement with crews, toolbox talks conducted on deck, open discussions during shift changes and strong stop-work authority.

Hugh linked this directly to his work around Visible Felt Leadership (VFL) and high-performing teams. Projects performed best when leaders were visible, approachable and actively engaged with the workforce rather than relying solely on paperwork or formal systems. Crews who felt listened to were more likely to report near misses, raise concerns early and challenge unsafe conditions. "Psychological safety is not a soft concept, it's a critical control within the ORM," Hugh said.

The offshore projects also reinforced the importance of communication in complex operational environments. Teams often worked across multiple languages, organisations and safety cultures while managing radio traffic, shift changes and differing procedures. What proved most effective were simple, practical measures: clear handover logs, repeat-back communication, straightforward English, on-vessel leadership presence during crew changes and regular informal discussions in work areas.

Fatigue management was another major consideration offshore. Long shifts, weather delays, travel demands, confined spaces and constant vessel movement created risks that could undermine judgement before workers fully recognised the impact. The ORM encouraged organisations to view fatigue as part of a broader interconnected operational system involving scheduling, supervision, leadership and communication.

Another key learning from the webinar was the importance of reporting culture as an indicator of organisational health. Hugh explained that projects showing the strongest safety performance were often those with higher levels of near miss reporting, hazard cards, workforce engagement and early escalation of concerns. Silence, by contrast, was often a warning sign of disconnect and weak engagement.

Hugh and Jonathan also demonstrated that the ORM has applications far beyond offshore operations or traditional health and safety management. The framework deliberately integrates wider organisational considerations including governance, wellbeing, strategy, sustainability, cybersecurity, supply chain resilience and reputation.

Feedback from participants suggests the framework is already resonating with practitioners. Jonathan Vibert, Health and Safety Business Partner at Law At Work, said: "The ORM is a powerful tool for understanding how internal and external risks interact and impact different functions, helping move risk management beyond silos into a more integrated, strategic approach."

Toufik Gahit, Team Lead at the Marine Petroleum Terminal – Skikda Oil Port, Algeria, added: "In high-risk industries, our goal shouldn't be to create more complex rules, but to integrate strategic risk-thinking into our norm – making it a natural part of how we lead and operate every day."