

MORT and all that: a 40-year old technique still of value

The Management Oversight and Risk Tree (MORT) method was developed in the 1970s by the US Government to help ensure high levels of safety and quality assurance in the American energy industry. MORT is a generic analytical procedure still used for inquiring into causes and contributing factors of events. It can also be used to analyse risks.

The MORT method is a logical expression of the functions needed by an organisation to manage risks effectively. These functions are set out in a generic chart, supported by a user manual, that allows MORT to be applied to different industries. For example, Chris Peace has used MORT with a construction company, large food retailer, robotic workshop, thermal insulation products manufacturer and an emergency service organisation.

MORT reflects a philosophy which holds that the most effective way of managing risk is to integrate business management and operational risk controls.

The MORT chart is, essentially, a generic fault tree analysis that can be used to help analyse the causes of undesired events. It can also be used to analyse identify points of uncertainty in a system and therefore has applications in risk analyses.

Some people outside the US used MORT, including those at the Accident Compensation Corporation who brought it to New Zealand in the 1980s. Support for and use of MORT died away in the 1980s but some people kept using it in its original US version.

In the late 1990s, a small group of people got funding to update and “anglicise” the language in the chart and manual. The 2002 edition was published by the Noordwijk Risk Initiative Foundation (NRI) and published on the Foundation’s website (www.nri.eu.com) with further revision in 2009.

MORT is supported by some related techniques (Energy-Trace and Barrier Analysis and 3CA), also available on the NRI website. These help make MORT compatible with some other techniques described in ISO 31010: 2009 *Risk Management – Risk Assessment Techniques*.

Chris Peace and Dave Thompson are starting work on a sub-tree for analysis of business continuity management and Chris wants to develop sub-trees relevant to natural hazards in New Zealand.

Chris is willing to facilitate workshops using MORT, including for

- learning exercises
- risk assessments
- following undesired events.