Inside GrainCorp’s safety turnaround
with group SHE director
Phil Caris
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Inside the safety turnaround of GrainCorp: Phil Caris, GrainCorp’s group HR and SHE director, discusses the business’ safety turnaround and how it reduced its LTIFR by 75 per cent and RIFR by 68 per cent over the past five years
The link between good leadership and good OHS

There are tangible links between the quality of an organisation’s leadership, financial results as well as OHS outcomes

One of the most significant factors in the quality of an organisation’s OHS is its leadership. It is well known that executives really set the tone for what succeeds (or fails) in organisations, and OHS is no different. Just as a CEO and the executive team need to take ownership and accountability for financial results, they need to take equal ownership and accountability for OHS, in a very real and personal way.

A good example of this can be seen in a couple of organisations – both profiled in this edition of OHS Professional magazine.

First, GrainCorp is a firm believer in the link between good safety and good leadership. Thanks to a concerted and ongoing effort to lift the quality of leadership across the organisation, GrainCorp has reduced its LTIFR by 75 per cent and RIFR by 68 per cent over the past five years. GrainCorp group HR and SHE director, Phil Caris, discusses the link between leadership and safety in this issue’s cover feature (beginning page 16).

Also in this issue, we explore how the global CEO and head of health and safety for engineering firm Aurecon work together to make safety a personal responsibility for everyone in the organisation. Shifting from a legal and compliance-based approach to a more engaging and personalised approach – which genuinely builds and supports a healthy and safe workplace culture – has proven much more effective for the business. See page 26 for the full story.

Investors, shareholders and analysts are also very interested in the links between leadership, financial performance and safety. There is a general trend towards more rigorous reporting by listed companies around safety in their annual reports. However, analysts are concerned that injury rate data is less robust and comparable than it first appears, and suggest that it could be more productive to see reporting that focuses on the more significant (including potentially life-changing) injuries. The news report appears on page 10.

This edition of OHS Professional also sees the introduction of a regular new member profile section. The SIA has a wide range of members among its ranks, with a significant amount of knowledge and expertise to share with others. Our first member profile feature (beginning page 8) looks at how Kristen Oswald, HSE co-ordinator at Jacobs Engineering Group, started her career in OHS, and she discusses the successes and challenges of her work as well as the evolving role of OHS professionals.

Lastly, the SIA is busy getting everything ready for the 2018 SIA National Health and Safety Conference, which will be held from 23-24 May 2018 at the Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre. The conference will explore a range of topics including neuroscience, diversity in leadership, health and wellbeing as well as the latest safety insights, and features speakers from organisations including WorkSafe VIC, Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games Corporation, University of Queensland and Ramsay Health. For the event rundown please see page 32.
Is it time to jump out of the box?

SIA Chair Patrick Murphy challenges the progress being made in health and safety, and the orthodoxy of current practice

Welcome to 2018. It is already evident that our challenge this year remains as important and urgent as ever. According to Safe Work Australia, as at 18 January 2018, eight Australian workers have been killed at work since the start of the year. This is a tragic start for many people throughout Australia, for the loved ones of those killed, or injured, their work colleagues and their families. One significant incident impacts many people significantly over a long period. Preliminary data shows that in 2017 there were 174 Australian workers killed at work. The ripple effect of such tragedies, long-term injuries and illnesses goes far and wide.

This year we must seriously challenge ourselves about what we are learning on the journey and be frank about what we need to be doing differently both in workplace health and safety policy and practice. The profession must seriously consider the role it plays in contributing to current health and safety outcomes and whether we can embrace the idea of breaking from the traditional mould of health and safety management.

The theoretical rhetoric is thought provoking, helpful and at times can be inspiring, however, the challenge for most people is far more practical – how do we translate this latest and emerging thinking into practice to break the orthodox mould and approaches? We already know that health and safety business as usual has been gaining only marginal step changes at best. More powerfully inculcating safe and healthy work practices into organisational culture appears on face value to be occurring, but far too slowly. We must look for ways to more quickly close the alignment gap between the health/safety needs of the business and the productivity/sustainability needs of the business. Our vehicle for this is the profession itself – by ensuring health and safety people are better equipped to lead those changes, working alongside company executives and boards.

It’s not a simple process. All of this has to occur in the context of the rapidly changing workplace and in particular the advances in technology which are transforming both business as well as the role of many health and safety people. The nature of work is evolving rapidly, new industries are being born, regulations and regulators’ approaches are transforming and in the face of all this the health and safety profession must ask itself, how agile are we? How are we adapting?

The health and safety outcomes of an organisation are arguably never more scrutinised than within the current socio-economic and political environments, and we are making progress in some areas more than others. There is undoubtedly work to be undertaken within the primary industries and agricultural sector, particularly related to foreign workers. Given the learnings of the profession from other industries, how can we meaningfully share these learnings to expedite the improvement journey for the agricultural and primary industries? This year, the Institute is establishing partnerships and making its own contribution.

The start of the year provides us all the opportunity to look ahead and reflect upon what will make this year different from the last, and how 2018 will be different from previous years. The Institute is already debating and discussing what we can do differently, to be more effective at enabling the profession to better help organisations realise our vision for safe and healthy people in productive workplaces. If you’re a person who works in the field or simply cares about workplace health and safety, you’re always welcome to join us and contribute to making a difference.

“This year we must seriously challenge ourselves about what we are learning on the journey and be frank about what we need to be doing differently both in workplace health and safety policy and practice”
Calculating the small number but big cost of mental stress claims

While mental stress claims only make up a small proportion of overall workers’ compensation claims, the median time lost and median direct cost associated with mental stress claims are significantly higher compared to those for all workers’ compensation claims, according to Safe Work Australia. The median direct cost of mental stress workers’ compensation claims due to work pressure, for example, was $26,299, while the median direct cost of claims due to work-related harassment and/or workplace bullying was $27,153 – compared to a median direct cost of $2,598 for all accepted workers’ compensation claims. The latest edition of Safe Work Australia’s *Psychosocial health and safety and bullying in Australian workplaces* national statement also found that the median direct cost of workers’ compensation claims for other mental stress factors was $20,744, while the cost for suicide or attempted suicide was $19,702.

Call for better safety testing for high-rise exterior claddings

Costly and sometimes fatal fires in some of the world’s newest and tallest buildings have recently been stoked by highly combustible exterior claddings chosen for aesthetics, energy efficiency, weather-proofing and cost effectiveness – and not safety, according to a global insurance company. Moreover, prevailing methods for testing the combustibility of exterior claddings enable potentially life-threatening product assemblies to sail through regulatory approvals and onto the façades of residential and commercial properties throughout the developed world, said Louis Gritzo, vice-president and manager of research at FM Global, one of the world’s largest commercial property insurers. Some product combinations are not subjected to fire testing, according to Gritzo, who said that their combustibility is instead judged through desktop assessments and the only real, physical test will come when they are within the built environment in a real fire situation.

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**Strategic partner organisations**

Our strategic partners are organisations which have strategic and other interests that intersect with the SIA, which create opportunities for partnerships in policy, advocacy, or in the commercial sphere.

Australasian College of Road Safety (ACRS)
Australian Institute of Management (AIM)
Australian Transport Bureau (ATSB)
Cancer Council Australia
Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)
Congress of Occupational Safety and Health Association
Presidents (COSHAP)
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Organisations (INSHP0)
KIDS Foundation
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National Disability Services (NDS)
New Zealand Institute of Safety Management (NZISM)
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The Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (AusIMI)
SafeWork NSW
WorkSafe Victoria

Would you like to become a Corporate Member of the SIA? Please contact SIA on 03 8336 1995 to discuss the many options available.
ROI of more than $4 for every $1 invested in mental health
Half of businesses located in NSW have no measures in place that specifically address mental health in the workplace, according to research released by the NSW Government. “That’s quite a staggering statistic when you consider that one-third of our adult life is spent at work and that work can therefore have a significant impact on our mental health,” said NSW Minister for Better Regulation Matt Kean. A return on investment (ROI) analysis of workplace mental health initiatives found strong, positive outcomes for businesses. “This research, the most comprehensive research ever conducted about mental health in NSW workplaces, found that businesses which invest in workplace health promotions can get a return of more than $4 for every $1 invested from reduced absenteeism and better productivity. So there’s a real opportunity for businesses to introduce valuable mental health programs in their workplaces while having a considerable impact on their business’ bottom line,” said Minister Kean.

How OHS can help improve workplace wellbeing
OHS leaders need to be aware of the changing nature of employers’ responsibilities, according to a recent report on workplace wellbeing, which found that 73 per cent of Australian employees are stressed about work while 62 per cent are stressed about health and fitness. The Workplace Wellbeing report, which was conducted by not-for-profit workplace-based research organisation Reventure, said that workers believe employers should create an environment that increases employee trust and satisfaction (86 per cent) and an environment that proactively addresses stress in the workplace (85 per cent), but only two in five workers believe their employer understands how to improve wellbeing in the workplace. “This inconsistency between workers’ expectations and what employers deliver will need to be addressed,” said Reventure MD Lindsay McMillan.
Engineering a multifaceted OHS career

OHS Professional will profile an SIA member in each edition. In this issue, we speak with Kristen Oswald, HSE co-ordinator at Jacobs Engineering Group, about her career path, successes, challenges and the evolving role of OHS professionals.

How did you become an OHS professional?

It wasn’t the usual way. I started out doing something completely different. I did a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in geography. I then completed a Masters in Environmental Management, specialising in sustainable development, and became an environmental scientist for SKM in their graduate development program. That was where I was heading, and I didn’t really have any interest in OHS.

During this time, I completed an 18-month secondment with Chevron on their Gorgon Project. This was an interesting and pretty big introduction to safety, being a major oil and gas project. When I returned to SKM the market for environmental consulting had slowed and I felt that I needed to upskill to remain competitive, so I decided to do my graduate diploma. At the same time I found out SKM were planning on advertising a role for a HSE adviser. I went for an interview and I got the role. I then completed my OHS graduate diploma studying externally while I was working in my new role at SKM.

My role has evolved with the company and at present I work flexibly in dual roles, both as a HSE co-ordinator for WA, and as the environmental co-ordinator for the ANZ region.

What makes for a good OHS professional?

I think you need to be confident. You’re going to come across situations sometimes where people won’t necessarily agree with what you’re asking them to do. People generally don’t like criticism, being told when they’re perhaps not displaying the correct behaviours as well. So you need to be confident and willing to stand your ground to make sure things are actioned.

You also need to be flexible because, while we’re all trying to deliver a safe project, OHS is not one size fits all, so what might work for one project may not work for another project or site. As an OHS professional you need to be able to work with the project team, and understand the type of work involved, in order to work out the best way to deliver the job safely.

Is there anything that frustrates you about health and safety?

I think being seen as the bad guy sometimes, enforcing safety protocols or dealing with incidents. That can be a bit frustrating especially when you’re trying to promote health and wellness initiatives, and positive safety practices. I think the number one frustration and probably the number one challenge that we face as safety professionals is that constant battle to keep people mindful and thinking about the job they’re doing actively, avoiding complacency.

Could you give me an example of your contribution to the prevention of workplace injuries?

Part of my role is project governance, and also enabling others to be safe themselves. I don’t necessarily write the safety plans, but provide advice to assist others to understand the key risks associated with their projects. I see my role as more of a support function and to look for opportunities to improve on how we do things safely.

One of the major projects that I’m working on at the moment is The Great Northern Highway upgrade project. We have multiple construction contracts, early work packages where we’re upgrading utilities, surveying, and installing fencing. The project team are working on or next to a major road, and we are constantly improving our work methods based on where we’ve had near-misses, safety observations, or incidents.

An example is where we developed a ground disturbance permit, which also acted as a safety permit, to prevent uncontrolled ground disturbance activities.

How do you see the role of OHS evolving?

We’ve been impacted a lot by the changes in our industry. Projects are changing, and...
the big projects are fewer and further between – they’re smaller and a lot more competitive. So the market share for business itself has reduced quite a bit, which means that while there is still an emphasis on safety, the amount that clients are willing to spend on the overall project budget is reduced including as a consequence, safety. So you’ve got to be flexible, smarter, and more efficient in the way you do things.

The workforce is also changing, we’re more flexible in our workstyle and we have a lot of contractors that we hire and use, so how we manage those contractors is really important. And then there’s the changing legislative framework. There’s the potential for harmonised legislation to be implemented in WA, which could make things stricter, so we need to remain aware of that and keep up to date with legislative changes.

One of the ways we can do that is to embrace technology, so we can use online databases, for example, to help manage our legal compliance. Then there is the emergence of drones and other similar technologies which allow us to have eyes and ears on our sites without us physically having to be there, increasing our visibility and allowing us to respond faster to emerging hazards.

What advice would you offer other OHS professionals?

Look for opportunities, and let others know what areas you’re interested in so that they’ll keep that in mind. Speak up and ask questions. Get involved as well; don’t just limit yourself to your health and safety role. If there are opportunities to work on other things take those up.

We have at Jacobs our BeyondZero Committee, for example, which is demonstrating our culture of caring for our people. I’m chairing that at the moment, so that’s an opportunity for me to meet other people, to communicate, and demonstrate my passion for other things like corporate social responsibility, promoting positive mental health, environmental awareness, and other important issues. So don’t limit yourself in the role; take whatever opportunity presents itself, but also make your own opportunities through networking and letting other people know what your interests are.

Are you a member of the SIA, and interested in sharing your story in future editions of OHS Professional magazine? Please email communications@sia.org.au.
There has been increased focus on and interest in how and what companies report on when it comes to safety. OHS Professional speaks with Dr Sharron O’Neill about the latest trends in reporting and what these mean for companies.

How well do ASX-listed companies fare with regards to quality reporting on safety? Over the past couple of decades there has been a noticeable increase in the number of companies reporting on safety. This is not surprising really, given initiatives such as Citi’s Safety Spotlight reports, our reports for Safe Work Australia, and others that are helping focus investor attention on the need for greater corporate transparency around the nature and management of health and safety risk.

Investor groups and fund managers are getting much better at honing in on the best questions and calling companies to account, encouraging businesses to be more transparent. For companies, too, Safe Work Australia’s sponsorship of the WHS Category in the Australasian Reporting Awards is helping promote best (reporting) practice and recognising businesses who demonstrate transparency and quality in WHS communications.

Safety reporting often does more than reveal corporate processes and performance. What is included, or excluded, from reports can give important insights into the culture of the organisation and its management. That’s why the wide variation in the quality of safety reporting is so interesting.
While some listed companies are hitting the mark with succinct, high quality disclosures and meaningful (relevant and reliable) performance data, others have a surprisingly long way to go. There are still far too many producing “safewash”, misleading investors and other stakeholders with inappropriate performance data or generic motherhood statements and spin that provide nothing useful.

For example, I was looking at an annual report this week that unhelpfully identified the company’s WHS risks as the “actual or potential harm to workers”, and just as vaguely noted that the actions taken to address those risks were to develop a management framework, establish measurable objectives, use consultants to ensure compliance and identify areas for improvement, and provide training and supervision to employees.

Now, the company may be doing all this and may be doing it very well… but equally, it could have done nothing more than hire a public relations student to review guidance on WHS management systems and parrot back key steps so they appear to be doing the right things. The glaring omission in that report was any link to their business – industry- and organisation-specific evidence (such as examples) of the key risks this company faces and types of actions they are taking in response. Their claims may well be true, but can you really put any faith in them given they simply read like safewash?

Why do you think this is? Are companies trying to hide their performance?

Generally speaking, I would say no, I don’t think so. However, I think both companies and investors have found it challenging to identify the content that will be most useful. For example, in the past there was a lot of misunderstanding around injury outcomes – how to communicate them and even what it is they tell us.

Too many managers and investors relied on lost time injury rates, not realising that while these tell part of a story about lost productivity, they are not measures of safety, and furthermore, they potentially provide misleading evidence of injury frequency and severity. In some cases, investors were actually requesting LTIFR from companies that had been trying to provide alternative (better) measures.

Benchmarking was also part of the problem, as hopes for comparability began to override the more important need for usefulness (relevance and reliability). Again, this is where Safe Work Australia and Citi reports have been able to help educate both managers and investors. This is also where multi-stakeholder-developed reporting guidance can be so helpful. For example, the Global Reporting Initiative’s new standard on voluntary “OHS reporting” (GRI 403) is due to be released soon (draft available late March, official release in April), and is likely to address many inconsistencies in approach and help companies improve the quality of their annual report disclosures.

What are three key areas companies should focus on in improving safety reporting for investors?

Investors want to understand the risk exposure for a company and whether the company is doing to manage that risk. This means identifying key hazards, briefly describing how they are managed and providing some form of evidence that those actions are effective. That may include, but is not limited to, measures of injury/illness frequency and severity. Provide examples, evidence, but be concise. You don't need to write a novel to be informative, it’s not War and Peace.

Be transparent around the WHS hazards and risks for your business

A good report will show you understand your business risks. It gives readers assurance that the company knows what WHS risks workers are exposed to; that they actively identify important hazards and appropriately assess related risks. Can you really identify which three to five risks you associate with the most frequent injuries, and which three to five

Why OHS needs a multidimensional KPI framework

There are significant pitfalls in relying on one-dimensional injury data such as lost time injury frequency rates (LTIFR) as an overarching measure of OHS success, according to Safe Work Australia’s Measuring and reporting on work health and safety report. Instead, organisations need to adopt a more multidimensional framework for identifying critical risks and monitoring measures of implementation (lead KPIs) and effectiveness (lag KPIs) of relevant control measures they are taking in response. Their claims may well be true, but can you really put any need for effective officer due diligence full circle and reinforces the critical importance of providing officers with high quality, valid and timely WHS performance data.”

It found that WHS KPIs which support officers’ due diligence fall into three categories. First is information about how up to date an organisation’s WHS “risk picture” is, which involves officers constantly refreshing their knowledge of general WHS concepts and practices and their understanding of the WHS risk associated with the business enterprise and its operations.

Second is data relating to WHS performance: understanding processes of hazard identification, prioritisation and risk control, and the outputs of the WHS performance management system.

Third is information relating to oversight and assurance: the verification of legal compliance and of the implementation and effectiveness of managerial and resource allocation processes needed to eliminate or minimise risk.

Safe Work Australia also noted that reporting dilemmas, such as finding the balance between generic KPIs that can be benchmarked within and beyond the organisation, and more nuanced KPIs that are highly relevant to the business’ unique issues and risks, can be tempered by an appreciation of the distinction between KPIs for informing management decisions and KPIs for informing oversight and governance. “In the end, the sophistication of the performance indicators available to inform officers’ due diligence will determine the strategies available to management and the level of control they ultimately have over an organisation’s WHS performance,” the report said.
might help you answer questions such as, to new forms or sources of evidence that of this for OHS leaders? What are the implications WHS management.

Safe Work Australia, provides some work health and safety — available from Our paper — illustrate key processes and outcomes. and performance data as evidence to support of these claims using examples prove it. It provides assurance in Most importantly, a good report will provide evidence and targeted way.

A good report will reveal how you manage those risks. For example, can a reader of your report identify things like: …do you follow the hierarchy of controls? … do you use a systems approach? …what does your reporting culture look like? … how do you decide which incidents to investigate and how do you ensure the quality of investigations? …does safety operate as a silo, or is “safe work thinking” integrated into broader business practice? …how engaged are senior management? Examples, graphics or a case study can be effective in helping to communicate a lot of this information in a relatively succinct and targeted way.

Provide evidence
Most importantly, a good report will prove it. It provides assurance in support of these claims using examples and performance data as evidence to illustrate key processes and outcomes. Our paper — Measuring and reporting on work health and safety — available from Safe Work Australia, provides some guidance on this.

High quality reports link these three together to convey a coherent picture of WHS management.

What are the implications of this for OHS leaders?
First, I think it is important to be alert to new forms or sources of evidence that might help you answer questions such as, “but, how do you know?”. I am not just talking about “numbers”; also examples — stories and surprises that help make your point in management and annual reports. Second, as much as we all love the communications team, we see too many WHS reports that look like they have come off a production line — beautifully presented but overly reliant on similar motherhood statements and buzzwords with very little context or evidence. Where possible, and I appreciate it is not always possible, I would encourage safety leaders to be involved in the preparation — and review of the final draft — of the WHS section of the annual report and keep it transparent and current.

It undermines a company’s credibility when we see reports with the same generic text copied across from year to year, with a few simple updates to the number and rate of injuries. It suggests two things: first, WHS is really not that important to management, and second, nothing has really changed, improved or been learned in the past year.

Maybe you can instead harness the creativity of the comm’s team and look for new and interesting ways to showcase the WHS challenges, actions and outcomes for the past year. Looking at things from a different perspective might even generate insights and ideas for the year ahead.

Dr Sharron O’Neill is a senior lecturer in the School of Business at the University of NSW (Canberra). She holds academic (BCom, MCom) and professional (CPA) accounting qualifications, as well as a PhD in corporate accountability for work health and safety (WHS).

Citi shines the spotlight on ASX safety

Citi’s most recent Safety Spotlight highlighted a number of important safety reporting trends in ASX-listed companies. The report analysed injury and fatalities data from FY05 to FY17 where available in ASX100 companies plus 28 others. Elaine Prior, Citi’s senior environmental, social and governance analyst, said there have been ongoing concerns in conducting the research that injury rate data is less robust and comparable than it first appears. “Aggregate injury rate data does not distinguish between minor injuries, which might perhaps result in only a day or two off work, and major life-changing injuries or fatalities,” she said. “It could be productive to see reporting that focuses on the more significant, including potentially life-changing, injuries.”

While injury frequency rate targets may appear the most straightforward and apparently objective to implement, Prior observed that they may not necessarily be the most useful. “We have numerous concerns about the limitations and comparability of injury rate data, and safety practitioners will no doubt know of many more issues,” she said. Companies may use a variety of definitions of injury rates, which may lead to different reported numbers.

There is also a raft of anecdotal examples of how injuries/lost time might not be reported — for example, if the employee takes sick leave rather than having a workers’ compensation claim, or if the worker was not due back on shift for several days. Prior also said workers may be under pressure to take on “alternative duties”, which may be a good thing but might be an attempt to avoid recording a lost time injury.

Prior also said investors increasingly expect companies to report safety data and demonstrate active programs to manage safety. If companies do not publicly report on workplace safety, this raises doubts about whether safety is being actively managed. In the Citi report, out of the 78 companies (out of 128) who specify that safety is a part of executive remuneration criteria, only 30 of those companies detail safety performance targets in their remuneration plans, according to Prior, who said lagging injury measures (usually LTIFR and/or TRIFR) are most frequently used to assess safety performance.

For the news story on ASX companies with the lowest and highest injury and fatality rates please see the SIA member enewsletter.
Safe Work Australia released a research report last year titled *The Efficacy of Safe Work Method Statements and WHS Management Plans in Construction*. Prepared by the National Research Centre for OHS Regulation together with the Australian National University, the research report found a series of problems with SWMS, which affect their usefulness and effectiveness.

**Core problems with SWMS and plans**

Unfortunately, SWMS are often treated as paperwork for “covering backsides” (for legal and corporate risk management purposes). This has led to the common problems that SWMS contain more information than they need to, and are used for work that is not high risk (as defined in the WHS regulations). Another common problem is that workers are not consulted in the preparation of SWMS. Some of the other problems are that “back office” employees or third-party consultants sometimes prepare SWMS, that subcontractors have to prepare their SWMS to suit head contractors’ formats, and that generic SWMS are not amended for particular work. Further concerns are a lack of substantive review of subcontractors’ SWMS by the head contractor before work commences, and no one revising the SWMS in the course of the work or checking to ensure the SWMS is followed. In addition, workers do not always receive instruction and training in the SWMS, and may not read SWMS before signing them or see them again once the job starts.

When it comes to plans, one of the main reasons they are required is to set out arrangements for co-ordination, consultation and co-operation between the different contractors. So it is a problem that plans do not always do this well. In addition, plans sometimes contain unnecessary information, and some plans are generic and not amended to be project specific. There is also confusion about when plans are required, as the value of a construction project that needs a plan differs between some jurisdictions.

**SWMS problems in practice**

In practice, these problems mean that SWMS and plans are often not “fit for purpose” and are not taken seriously. They challenge the whole reason for having SWMS and plans. The problems with SWMS undermine their primary purpose as a tool to identify work that is high risk, and to help supervisors and workers implement and monitor the control measures for the specific hazards and risks of that work. This need is not met by SWMS that are long or complex, that don’t reflect circumstances at the workplace or worker experience, and do not contain reliable information about the hazards, risks and controls for the work. Rejigging formats to suit head contractors or clients is not helpful for prevention purposes, and neither are SWMS that are hard to read or access, and not updated as work changes.

The problems with plans undermine their primary purpose as a tool for the principal contractor to provide the different contractors on a project with ready access to specific and up-to-date information about arrangements to manage various WHS matters for the project, and to facilitate co-ordination, consultation and co-operation between the principal and subcontractors. This need is not met when plans don’t clarify these arrangements well, are not project specific, are long and complex, or are prepared separately by subcontractors rather than the principal contractor for the project.

**Recommendations for improvement**

There was support from research participants for a change to WHS regulations so they prescribe a single template for SWMS that applies nationally. They saw this as a way to tackle the problems of unnecessary information in SWMS and their use for non-high-risk work, and to ensure that subcontractors are working to the same standard for every head contractor they deal with.

There was also support for WHS regulators working with key actors to develop and implement a set of initiatives to raise awareness, educate, inform and support the preparation and implementation of SWMS and plans by workplace parties. Suggested initiatives included an interpretive guideline, workshops, e-media, self-assessment tools, and education and training, as well as enhancing advice in the Construction Work Code of Practice.

Participants also supported more active inspection of SWMS and plans by WHS regulators (not just after an incident). This would include establishing specific procedures for inspecting SWMS and...
plans, and writing constructive notices to focus attention on the efficacy of risk control measures and the quality of processes for preparing and implementing SWMS and plans.

Crucially, participants felt that SWMS should not be “the only hammer in the safety toolbox”. Rather, they should be treated as one of a suite of ways to help supervisors and workers implement and monitor control measures for high-risk work, along with pre-starts and toolbox talks, and generally walking around the site, identifying uncontrolled hazards, and having conversations about fixing those problems.

Whether there is an appetite for meaningful action is really a question for WHS regulators and stakeholders. The scheduled review in 2018 of Australia’s model WHS laws could provide an opportunity to address some of these recommendations.

Implications for OHS leaders and functions

It would be easy to say that there is a need for co-operation and co-ordination among WHS leaders and functions to resolve the problems with SWMS and plans. The fact that there are many actors involved with SWMS and plans could be a good thing if everyone is pulling in the same direction. But this has not been the case so far. Participants in this research told us that influential head contractors, volume builders and clients – including the Commonwealth Government through the Federal Safety Commissioner, state/territory governments, local government, utilities, large retailers and universities – expect or allow different contents and formats for SWMS and plans, and different approaches to their preparation and implementation.

Employer associations and unions provide advice and resources to their members, but the nature of that differs between these bodies, and between state/territory branches of particular bodies. Other key actors are construction safety forums and providers of training for construction induction (white card) and high-risk work licences, construction trade and manager/supervisor education and training, and accreditation for WHS management system auditors.

Looking beyond the influential actors, a fundamental challenge for the success or failure of SWMS and plans is the practical knowledge and skills of those who need to prepare and use them. For some sectors of the construction workforce, low literacy/language skills, low affinity with paperwork, and weaknesses in capacity to source and apply WHS information seriously challenge the potential for SWMS and plans to work effectively.

So, how to resolve the issues with SWMS and plans really is a wicked problem. Trying to be optimistic, this research made specific suggestions about amendments to WHS regulations and the construction code, the development of core competencies for key courses, and the contents of a comprehensive package of resources and guidance to support SWMS and plans across jurisdictions. The implications are that real improvements with SWMS and plans will require WHS leaders across all relevant sectors and actors to unite around common goals, and successfully work together to achieve change.

Dr Liz Bluff is a research fellow in the School of Regulation and Global Governance (RegNet) at the Australian National University and was part of the team which conducted the research for Safe Work Australia’s The Efficacy of Safe Work Method Statements and WHS Management Plans in Construction report.

“Unfortunately, SWMS are often treated as paperwork for ‘covering backsides’ (for legal and corporate risk management purposes)”
Inside the safety turn around of GrainCorp

Multinational grain and commodity business GrainCorp has reduced its LTIFR by 75 per cent and RIFR by 68 per cent over the past five years. Craig Donaldson speaks with its group HR and SHE director, Phil Caris, about the journey GrainCorp has undertaken to demonstrably improve its OHS results

2013 was a watershed moment for GrainCorp’s board, when Citi released its then annual research report into safety in Australia’s top ASX-listed companies. The analysis ranked GrainCorp 99th out of the ASX100 on LTIFR and very last on RIFR. “This was a day of reckoning for us,” says Phil Caris, GrainCorp’s group HR and SHE director. “In terms of injury rates, GrainCorp was one of the worst-performing organisations in the ASX100 that reports on these. It was a real turning point for the organisation from a board perspective, and we realised that there needed to be a concerted effort to improve safety performance.

Thanks to a concerted, focused and holistic approach, GrainCorp has reduced its LTIFR by 75 per cent and its RIFR by 68 per cent since the 2012 financial year, and Caris, together with GrainCorp CEO Mark Palmquist (who both joined GrainCorp not long after the 2013 Citi report), started out by following the board’s lead in working towards GrainCorp’s aspirational vision of zero harm.

Turning safety around

“We have worked back from there in looking at effective strategies to manage, minimise and eliminate the risk that occurs,” says Caris, who explains that safety is the first of GrainCorp’s four core values. “We see Mark as our chief safety officer, and that’s really his responsibility. He chairs our global SHE committee, which comprises myself, other members of the leadership team as well as some other key stakeholders in our business. He has to lead safety from the top, and it really is front and centre in everything that we do. It just needs to be that way for a range of reasons.”

Caris says the focus of the SHE committee is to help embed safety into all levels of the business, and this is directly tied to success of GrainCorp as well. “The better the leadership capability we have, the better the safety performance in our business. So we put a lot of time into that, and it’s a very intentional strategy that we’ve embarked upon,” he says.
Phil Caris, group HR and SHE director for GrainCorp, says better leadership capability equates with better safety performance.
“Mark and the executive leadership team need to be leading the way and very visible in the business. We have a series of questions and conversations that all of us at an executive leadership team level ask and address when we talk to the front-line staff, to make sure that they understand that safety's paramount to us,” says Caris. “We talk about all issues in the business, but we talk about safety in particular, how we can improve it and any ideas employees might have.”

This feedback helps formulate GrainCorp’s SHE strategies, including its “towards 2020 program”, launched in March 2017, which sets clear goals over the next three-year period to drive further improvements in OHS. This program covers five areas, including safety, environmental sustainability, leadership and culture, health and wellbeing, and risk management. Each area has a series of actions and targets attached, which Caris says the business is looking to achieve over the coming two years. Palmquist sponsors the overall strategy and each of GrainCorp’s executives has been assigned to one of the pillars. “These five areas are most important to our business, and we approach the implementation of this program from a business perspective rather than a business unit or functional perspective, so we drive consistency across the business and don’t reinvent the wheel. Business units often have the same sorts of issues, so this whole-of-business approach avoids individual business units going off and doing their own thing – when they can benefit from a more holistic approach.”

Major OHS risks
GrainCorp operates the largest grain storage and logistics network in eastern Australia, spanning regional storage facilities, rail and road operations and bulk grain ports, and its workers face a considerable number of safety risks. “A major risk for us is falls from heights, as we’ve got silos, bunkers and refineries which require our people to work from height at times. The other big risk is around traffic management across all parts of our business, including all pedestrians such as employees, contractors, visitors to our sites, farmers and other growers, so they are separate and safe away from our mobile plant and equipment,” says Caris.

“The third big risk for us is tarping of bunkers. We’re not building as many silos compared to what we used to, and we’re shifting more towards bunkers. Those big blue or green tarps are put over the grain to keep them safe from the elements, wildlife and the like. They also present quite a big risk to us. If you put it in perspective, one of those tarps is about twenty times the size of a spinnaker of a Sydney to Hobart yacht. So in the event that you get some wind underneath them, they generate a lot of force and can throw objects or people around. So we’ve got to be really careful around those.” GrainCorp is using a number of measures to reduce these risks, including suction pumps which suck all the air out between the tarp and grain, thereby bringing the tarp down onto the grain and removing chances that wind may get underneath the tarp.

The other major risk for the business is electricity, and Caris says this is a constant hazard. Wildlife including cockatoos and rodents, for example, can chew on cables at installations, while the elements can also erode and decay equipment. “So we’ve got to have a really strong management and inspection program across all of this to make sure we remove a lot of the risk associated with electricity and the generation of electricity,” he says.

Creating the right culture through leadership
GrainCorp employs a range of different strategies to manage, minimise and mitigate such risks. The main one is based on building leadership capability in safety performance as well as financial and operational performance. “We’ve spent a lot of time and money investing in leadership capability,” says Caris. “We have a number of programs and tiered levels of leadership capability interventions for various leaders throughout our business, from the front-line levels with our launch program, through to our elevate, accelerate and discover programs which go all the way up to our executive leadership team.” GrainCorp has put up to 60 per cent of its leaders (about 600) through this training to date.

The intention of this focus is to lift the level of leadership capability in the business as well as the...
quality and style of leadership which enhances and helps build the right kind of safety culture in the business. “What we're talking about here is situational leadership where collaborative, coaching and open leaders can have effective safety conversations with their teams,” he says.

“In a crisis sometimes you need someone to take a lead and be more directive, but on the whole we want to create a culture where people feel very comfortable to raise the things that make us feel uncomfortable. News travels really fast from the bottom up, so if there are issues that we need to get our heads around, we want those to travel quickly so there is a genuine culture of reporting in the business, so we can determine very quickly if we need to put more resources forward – whether that be people or dollars – to manage those risks more effectively.”

GrainCorp is also a geographically challenged business, and its grains business has almost 200 operational sites on the east coast of Australia. As such, Caris says it is important to provide frontline and middle leaders with the appropriate skills to be able to drive the right culture down through the business.

**Designing out critical risks**

Another key safety strategy for the business is critical risk management. “While we’re getting much better at managing incidents and injuries which have enabled us to reduce our LTIFR and RIFR, the things that keep Mark, the executive leadership team and myself awake at night are those real, critical risks,” he says. “We’ve identified 10 critical risks in the business, and we’re continually improving the effectiveness of how we manage or control those risks. For example, in our oils business we’ve put in place remote, guided vehicles in one of our West Footscray manufacturing plants. We don’t have operators in our forklifts and they operate within an exclusion zone where pedestrians cannot enter, and even if a pedestrian does enter through a gate, that will shut everything down.”

Another key focus in the business is to make sure that there is the right amount of capital expenditure on equipment with a strong focus on safety. If new equipment or plant is purchased, or if upgrades are planned, then Caris says this is a key step in designing safety risks out the business – similar to the example above.

**Reducing and removing manual handling**

Over the past 30 years with GrainCorp, Caris has seen a lot of manual handling removed from the business, and this has reduced injuries significantly in the business. With a large amount of manual tasks in the past, this often limited the recruitment pool to males. However, with the
reduction in manual handling, combined with an increased focus on diversity, GrainCorp is now able to open up recruitment to a broader pool of candidates. In NSW last year, for example, there were about 1000 casuals who joined the business for harvest season, and more than 50 per cent of those casuals were female.

Caris gave the example of a sampler, which was a role that involved significant manual work in the past. “So a truck would pull up alongside a sampling stand, and you had to clamber over rails on top of the truck, push big, heavy probes into the back of vehicles and pull samples of grain out. Now, this process is automated and we have probes which are on an electronic arm controlled by a joystick. So these probes now do the same job but take better samples, and obviously don’t have the same manual handling risk associated with those tasks. So females are now able to do those tasks, and this has opened up a new talent pool at a time where we’re facing staff shortages, particularly in regional Australia,” he says.

Leading the operationalisation of safety

Caris grew up in country Victoria and started with GrainCorp as a grain handler back in the mid to late ’80s. He has been through multiple blue collar roles in the business, and as such, he says he has a good understanding of the risks associated with them. Over this time he has observed a significant change in community expectations. “From an employee value proposition, employees just don’t want to work in places that are unsafe anymore. So we won’t attract the right quality of talent into our business if we don’t provide a safe workplace, it’s very simple,” he says.

There has also been a shift in expectations from customers as well, and Caris says they now look at their complete supply chain. “They don’t just look at their own businesses, they look at labour arrangements and how sustainable they are. Our customers are continually auditing our businesses for sustainability and other factors. And then on the other side we have investors, and all of our big investors are continually looking at sustainability...
and what we report every year. So our licence to operate these days is dictated by stakeholders, not just in our business but in the broader community.”

As the head of both SHE and HR within GrainCorp, Caris has strong influence over the leadership programs in particular, and he says it is important to make sure leaders understand what is expected of them in terms of behaviours and results. In his role he sits across all business units, which gives him a “bird’s-eye view” of best practice throughout the business. “We have an online tool called ‘germinator’, which is a continuous improvement tool which helps employees review and promote ideas and share best practice across the entire business, from the east coast of Australia to Europe, the UK, the US and Canada. Getting all parts of the business to talk and communicate can be a challenge,” he says.

“So we introduced germinator as a way of helping people share best practices, and this leads to our SHE awards where teams across the business compete for prizes based on their innovative solutions to reduce injuries, improve wellbeing and minimise the impact of our operations on the environment. In the process, all the business gets to learn about these particular initiatives, so there is no reinventing the wheel and we can become better and more effective as a business overall.”

**Measuring OHS success**

GrainCorp employs a range of lead and lag indicators. “We measure engagement of people right across the business, and our engagement to safety is continually at the high 90 per cent level,” says Caris.

Line leadership is also assessed regularly on a range of measures that need to be done on a daily, weekly and monthly basis, including pre-start meetings, closing-out actions and incidents. “All of these proactive steps mean that we remove risk from the business, and with our line leadership we are at the high 90 per cent level right across our business in the past couple of years.”

Caris explains that these suggest that GrainCorp should be driving down injury rates, and this is reflected in a continuing downward trend for both LTIFR (now at 3.0 as of last financial year, compared to 7.0 in FY14) and RIFR (now at 11.5 compared to 38.8 in 2013). “We look for about a 30 per cent year-on-year reduction in each of those, and they’re in our balanced scorecard for all of our executives and all people throughout the business who are responsible for driving those injuries down,” says Caris.

This year, GrainCorp is also putting benchmarks and targets in place for reductions in critical risks. “This really brings the rubber to the road, not only from a safety perspective, but it also makes good business sense with the impact these sort of things have on our workers’ compensation,” says Caris, who adds that GrainCorp reduced its total workers’ compensation cost premium in Australia by 29 per cent last year due to reductions in both number and severity of injuries.

“It’s all trending in the right direction for us. From an executive leadership team perspective I think we’re doing an admirable job, but safety is a journey and not a destination, so it’s all about a continuous improvement. So we’re taking every opportunity that we can to make the workplace safer, and to remove, manage and mitigate risk where we can.”
What are the priority areas/industries that WorkSafe Victoria is focusing on to improve OHS outcomes?

Our commitment is always to reduce the number of physical injuries in workplaces across Victoria, and that never waivers. The number of physical injuries continues to decline in Victoria, which is a fantastic outcome. However, one injury is one too many. Victorian workplaces have never been safer. So a key priority for us at the moment is to continue to improve on that.

Another key focus for us is around mental health and wellbeing. Mental health problems are a growing issue for the entire Victorian community, and it’s not surprising that we’re starting to see this reflected in a rise in workplace mental injury claims. Mental injuries are complex to treat, and they can actually have a long-term impact on the individual. So we are really focused on why we need to continue to work with employers to ensure that they understand what they need to do to keep employees not just physically safe at work, but mentally safe as well.

We are also very focused on big construction projects in the state, which have either begun or are about to begin. Safety and wellbeing in the construction sector is always a major priority for us, so we’re continuing to work with the employers and the unions to make sure sites are as safe as possible.

The first is to be a stronger, more proactive prevention-led health and safety regulator, and the second is that we are designing our services with the needs of workers and employers at the heart of everything that we do. So we want to make sure that every inspection, every notice, or every treatment of an injured worker is designed to make it as easy as possible for people to interact with us and to understand our message.

For WorkSafe as an organisation, we’re focused on removing red tape because we recognise that sometimes this can block progress. We are building modern systems so our inspectors are not slowed down when they’re in the field. And we’re also looking at utilising latest technology that will allow us to capture information about workers, employers and workplaces. And we want to be able to do this in real time, and then use this information to develop prevention strategies.

When we talk to employers and workers, this means they’ll be able to interact more easily with WorkSafe on issues that are important to them – knowing their obligations, what they need to focus on with regards to health, safety and wellbeing in the workplace, and importantly, having information and guidance that’s easy to understand, so this can be used to educate workers – and then have processes finalised online.

What major trends are you experiencing that are impacting WorkSafe as well as government and employers?

There’s quite a significant amount of change going on. We recognise that jobs and workplaces are changing more rapidly than ever before, and that’s why we’ve decided to embark on our strategy.

We also recognise that we can’t stand by and just watch things happen around us. New jobs and new ways of working are springing up, and some of these are actually blurring the line between work and home. We’re recognising that workers are much more mobile. They work more flexibly, and that means that they can work anywhere and often at any time. We’re seeing contractors and casuals often having more than one employer and one workplace.

“Leading the safety way in Victoria”

Australia’s OHS regulators play a fundamental role in improving health and safety outcomes. OHS Professional speaks with WorkSafe Victoria’s chief executive, Clare Amies, about the evolving role of the regulator, priorities in compliance and enforcement, and the hallmarks of organisations with good OHS
“It’s only a small percentage of employers that we would say exhibit the three R’s. So they’re our repeat offenders, the recalcitrants, or the recidivists”
“The best employers actually use our interactions with them as an opportunity to learn and improve their safety systems”

We recognise that there’s better communication and this is enabling more people to work alone. We’re also focused on our multicultural community, and we understand that this becomes more diverse over time. And we also recognise in Victoria that our workforce is ageing and that there’s more people working well past the age of 65.

There are also new growth industries in Victoria, especially in health, education, finance, communications, hospitality and government, while other sectors like manufacturing, mining, and agriculture are in decline. For us this means the mix of hazards and risks is also changing. So technology, automation and artificial intelligence are continuing to reshape workplaces and the way we all do business. As a regulator, we have to evolve and adapt to these challenges. And that’s why we developed our strategy and are investing in thinking about our systems, capability and our interactions with employers and workers.

**What are the red flags you watch for in organisations, which are likely to indicate poor OHS?**

It’s only a small percentage of employers that we would say exhibit the three R’s. So they’re our repeat offenders, the recalcitrants, or the recidivists. And these are normally employers who understand the risks but actually choose to ignore them. They’re employers which are happy to take or demand shortcuts and not think about the consequences. And we work very hard to find these companies, and we do prosecute them.

There’s no doubt that if you’re trying to find ways to ignore risks or not engage with your people, you’re actually putting your employees at greater risk, and you’re actually putting your business at risk. We’re always thinking about how we can better engage with the community. We want the Victorian community to think about health and safety like wearing a seatbelt or putting on sunscreen. We want everyone to understand that keeping ourselves healthy and safe at work is not an add-on to work. It’s actually core, and it should become second nature to all of us.

Over the next 10 years, we recognise that this will change again, so we have to keep thinking of new ways to reach all Victorians. So when we think about workplaces that are not doing the right thing, through to workplaces that are actually focused on health and safety, it should just become core to how we work. And so we demand a step up from every workplace around a safety culture where we prevent people from being harmed.

Conversely, what are the common indicators of good OHS within organisations?

It’s not uncommon for even best practice employers to be issued with improvement notices. The best employers actually use our interactions with them as an opportunity to learn and improve their safety systems.

The safest workplaces are those where everyone gets involved in safety prevention – where employers, managers and workers are all committed to and engaged in making their workplaces safer.

This has to start from the top. We have to recognise that leaders in any organisation play an important role in actually walking the talk. You can’t have a culture where the leaders are not engaged in health and safety. And that’s not just about sitting in a boardroom receiving reports; it’s actually engaging with staff and understanding how to solve age-old problems and new issues that come up in the workplace, and working together to find solutions that are going to work for everyone to keep them healthy and safe.

Leaders and their organisations need to encourage everyone to be involved – where they actually don’t see it as something that’s an addition to business, but as core to how you do work; and where they are constantly engaged with their workplace around how to improve and ensure that everyone’s safe at work. And as I said earlier, it has to come from the top.

**What advice would you offer OHS leaders to improve health and safety outcomes?**

I want to recognise just how important it is to acknowledge OHS professionals, because they are always at the forefront of trying to drive good safety and wellbeing outcomes in the workplace. They need to be well supported and encouraged, and we really do need to see every workplace valuing their work and really recognising the important role they play.

It’s important that there’s regular training, and refresh of courses is also important. OHS leaders also need to continually learn new ways in terms of how we do things. They need to have the opportunity to mix with like-minded people. This should definitely be encouraged, so that this is seen as a way to build their OHS network – so good ideas can be shared, and that we don’t have to all reinvent new ways of working.

As I said earlier, safety is everyone’s responsibility. No one intends to go to work to hurt a colleague, so it’s critical that everyone works together to promote safety and wellbeing in their workplace. I like to think about it in terms of the next time you walk past a potential safety issue, if you do nothing, you’re part of the problem. So with a workplace that is engaged and communicating, this is a much more powerful way to drive good health and safety outcomes in workplaces.
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S.I.A. Safety Institute of Australia
26 YEARS OF SAFETY, LEARNING AND FRIENDSHIP
Aurecon is a global engineering, management, design, planning, project management and consulting company based in Australia and South Africa. It provides advisory, design, delivery and asset management services on projects across a range of markets and locations worldwide. It employs some 7500 people globally, and last year the company generated almost $1 billion in revenue – the majority of which was derived from its engineering consulting in Australia.

Aurecon has implemented an OHS strategy which helps bring safety home for all employees. Craig Donaldson speaks with the firm’s global CEO and head of health & safety about how they work together to improve OHS outcomes and make safety a personal responsibility for all employees across the globe.

Collaborating on OHS outcomes
Aurecon’s health and safety strategy is based on establishing the “why” of health and safety, explains Paul Cook, global head of health & safety for Aurecon. “We wanted to win people’s hearts and minds, given there are competing priorities in the workplace. We collaborated with the marketing and communications team to come up with an engagement plan around this strategy which would really resonate with our people. As health and safety people, we sometimes undervalue the importance of this and jump straight into process, procedures and behaviours and we skip over engagement, which is in fact vital.”

The result was a communication plan called “Because people depend on you”, which tapped into staff’s “what is important to you?”
to win their hearts so that their heads would follow, says Cook (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=v54WqdPrhTk for an overview).

“By remembering the true reason as to why health and safety is important, Aurecon employees are proactive in keeping themselves and their colleagues safe. The concept ‘Because people depend on you’ is more than a slogan, it is a call to action that empowers our employees to take time to do their work safely and stop any unsafe acts or work. We take our humanistic approach to health and safety to our clients and joint ventures, including our culture as well as our tools, knowledge and competency.”

Aurecon has health and safety committees

“As health and safety people, we sometimes undervalue the importance of this and jump straight into process, procedures and behaviours and we skip over engagement, which is in fact vital”
around the world, and the “Because people depend on you” campaign was tested with them all. Aurecon also spoke with its customers and got their feedback on the strategy, too. “At a regional level, we have geography-based tactical plans to suit local practices and culture. We recognised one size does not fit all and that ownership must sit at a local level,” says Cook.

Giam Swiegers, global CEO for Aurecon Group, plays a critical leadership role in the strategy, and he said that at least 60 per cent of any health and safety meeting had to be focused on shifting people’s hearts, rather than focusing on compliance. “We still do enough work to make sure we comply and get our reports out, but we spend a lot of time debating how we would actually convince people to take this very seriously, particularly in Asia and Africa,” he says.

Leaders in the business actively encourage and share as well. “They tell very personal stories, and share very personal photographs, of when and where they have their safety moments. And that encourages other people to open up, too, to recognise how important it is to come home safely,” says Swiegers.

Supporting strategies
Aurecon employed other programs to help support the “Because people depend on you” plan, the first of which was “#MyWhy” to help harness the power of social media. “This had an enormous impact on spreading the right message. And it really did get people to think about why health and safety’s important,” he says.

“Previously, in many places I think we did have a compliance-based attitude, where, as long as the appropriate documentation was in place, there was an attitude that things would probably be okay. ‘Because people depend on you’ and #MyWhy has personalised health and safety and provided a much better platform for genuinely getting our people on board.”

Another important strategy is “My lifesaving rules”, which provides Aurecon’s people with the critical controls they need to keep safe when undertaking high-risk activities. This involves looking beyond the traditional construction risks, which in Aurecon includes everyday issues like driving, working alone and mental health.

“Co-creation was the key to us developing a program that would resonate across the entire organisation. By working with our delivery and support teams, we were able to better understand the risks they are exposed to and the controls that would reduce those risks. The program truly has been designed by our people for our people,” says Cook.

Swiegers says that this strategy is successful because people do want to take safety as a personal responsibility. “It’s not a group responsibility, it’s not somebody else’s responsibility; this goes back to the individual,” he says.

Leading safety effectively
Swiegers said lifting the quality of leadership in Aurecon has played an important role in improving OHS outcomes. “We didn’t restrict ourselves in terms of defining what leadership activities are. I know some organisations take a narrow view of that, and it’s sometimes down to a structured, behavioural, post-conversation intervention. We’ve seen our leadership add a lot more value than just having those conversations. Instead, the conversations they are having are brilliant, whether they be association meetings, huddles at the start of work, or coming along to inductions to meet new people and set the tone.”

Health and safety has also been integrated into some other training courses (which focus on other areas or functions in the business). “So, we’ve led our people to behaviour and think more broadly around health and safety activities. We are measuring the number and nature of activities people are doing, and the numbers are increasing rapidly,” he says.
For Aurecon’s operational leadership group, there are a number of defined metrics in place about the number of safety leadership activities they should undertake. While there are no KPI-based obligations in place, Swiegers says leaders are actively adding a range of activities into a database to assist with tracking and retaining this information.

“I’ve made very sure that I constantly communicate my role as the global health and safety committee chair,” says Swiegers. “I made very sure that people knew I was really committed to this. I can’t over-emphasise the importance of the CEO being seen to be supportive, and being part of the whole campaign.”

Cook explains that Swiegers has helped change the culture of the business through storytelling. “I get constant feedback of where Giam’s been, and I can trace where he’s been around the world by the stories that come back. That’s really effective, because it’s person-to-person, face-to-face communication, on the issue of safety,” he says.

**OHS risks, challenges and interventions**

Aurecon faces a range of OHS risks and challenges. Driving is one of the more significant safety risks, according to Cook, who explains that Aurecon employees drive a multitude of different vehicles, and sometimes in remote and difficult locations.

To address these risks, Aurecon put in place a range of new standards and procedures that focus on areas such as driver behaviour and competency, vehicle specification and journey...
management planning. “We are also progressively implementing in-vehicle monitoring systems – which will monitor with a goal of improving driver behaviour as well as assisting in emergency response when needed,” says Cook, who explains that monitoring includes harsh braking, acceleration and speed and length of time spent driving, for example.

Another safety challenge for Aurecon is that it operates from a wide variety of sometimes complex construction and field sites. “We are often not ‘permanent residents’ of these sites; we have a very distinct job to do, and often we are largely left to our own devices to ensure we are safe,” Cook explains. “So, beyond the basic induction, we’re often left to our own devices to keep our people safe. That’s a major risk, because we cannot rely on others to keep our people safe, in the type of work they do and in the environments they operate in. We are working hard to improve this and our integration with the overall health and safety plans of our larger projects.”

Another OHS challenge facing Aurecon is in mental health and wellness, according to Cook. “We have a lot of people with pressing deadlines, and customers who have high expectations. And that’s to be expected, so we are doing different things in different regions to improve that situation,” he says. Aurecon makes an employee assistance program available to employees and also has mental health first aiders in its ANZ offices – where it has also begun to roll out resilience training and improving communication around mental health with the help of organisations like beyondblue. “Our communication supports the de-stigmatisation of mental health illness and we have run many events in this regard,” explains Cook.

### Managing OHS across regions

Given Aurecon operates across a range of countries – some with good (and not so good) OHS practices – Cook explains that the business has regional plans augmenting its global health and safety strategy. “We recognise that the challenges are different, and the approaches are different. We recognise that we may work with people who have not been exposed to many other mature cultures, and are closer to the beginning of the health and safety journey,” says Cook.

Swiegers recalls that when he first started travelling for the business through Asia and Africa, people did not take safety as seriously. “Our health and safety campaign has really captured the imagination of people on those continents. And it’s been fantastic, because, especially in Asia, it’s not common to share family photographs at work. Yet, people were very happy to bring those in and speak very personally about the people who are important to them. It has really been remarkable to see how we have leapt
forward on those continents, where it is often difficult to get the safety message through,” he says.

**OHS outcomes**

Aurecon is putting less emphasis on injury rates and more emphasis on high potential injury rates and lead indicators. “We are focused on leadership activities as a key measure, and there are very specific targets set for our leadership team to achieve,” says Cook.

“We also measure staff perception of our commitment to health and safety through an ‘as one survey’, and health and safety scores highly in terms of uptake of initiatives and is constantly improving. We see opportunities to improve, and ‘as one’ is very valuable in showing us where to direct our attention.”

The survey also indicates that levels of leadership activities are far higher than they were previously. “What is really encouraging is we are seeing lots of people who do not have a defined performance KPI associated with completing leadership activities, recording them anyway – because it’s the right thing to do,” says Cook.

He also says there has been a big push to improve incident management processes. “You can only solve a problem you have identified and properly understand. Thorough, disciplined investigation and reporting will likely see metrics reflect more realistic numbers which we will then work to improve,” he says.

The survey found 85 per cent of staff in Australia/New Zealand are either “committed” or “supportive” of Aurecon’s health and safety strategy (with similar figures in Africa and the middle East, while Asia is slightly lower). There has also been a year-on-year trend increase among owners towards the health and safety strategy, while Cook says levels of leadership activities are far higher than they were previously.

“The level of commitment towards health and safety increases with age and tenure – which is encouraging, as it shows our people do not become disillusioned as time passes, but rather the opposite,” he adds.

Aurecon is also able to demonstrate favourable year-on-year increases in reporting of incidents and hazards.

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**Driving and operationalising safety**

As global head of health & safety for Aurecon, Cook says there are a number of important measures and steps he takes to help support OHS outcomes. He sits on the global health and safety committee alongside Aurecon’s regional managing directors, CEO, head of major projects, chief risk officer and chief operating officer. This committee focuses primarily on change management and less so on reporting, and Cook says this was a strategic decision.

“Some people say the health and safety people should be sitting in the background, supporting. But I came to Aurecon, and I was given an executive role, and I should be able to be upfront like any other member of the executive,” he says. “This has actually enhanced the status and standing of health and safety professionals internally, by virtue of me being used as the front person. I spend a lot of time visiting our offices and projects around the world to better understand the issues our people face and to personally take the health and safety message to them,” says Cook.

He also leads the development of systems and procedures behind strategies to ensure they are aimed at the end users, and not the health and safety team (only). “We want to develop tools which staff can and will use, like our safety app, virtual reality health and safety training, and so on. The goal is to put the user at the centre of all of that,” he says.
Exploring the future practice of OHS

The 2018 SIA National Health and Safety Conference will bring together stakeholders from across the health and safety profession to discuss challenges facing WHS professionals and practitioners as well as the latest ideas, innovation and research.

The neuroscience of successful safety communications

One of the speakers at this year’s conference will be applied behavioural safety specialist Carl Tinsley, who will present on the neuroscience of effectively decreasing resistance to safety messages. Speaking ahead of the event, he explained that many (if not most) organisations don’t deliver safety messages effectively, because they often mix the need for due diligence and legal compliance with the goal of behavioural change.

“So supplementing written communication with a simple video, where the message is spoken, works wonders,”

“By that I mean we send out written notices that people sign off against, once they have read it. So, we are meeting our legal obligations. However, most of these written notices do little to change or manage unsafe behaviour. Why? Because reading written, linear words is not the way we humans learn best. We need messages we can ‘see’, with clear ‘survival’-based benefits for us,” said Tinsley.

Most safety professionals write logical and analytical safety messages that are processed by the pre-frontal cortex, said Tinsley, who explained that this approach uses lots of energy. As such, if people are low on energy they often ignore complex messages. A better approach would be to add meaningful images to a safety message, and Tinsley said this makes a “huge difference”.

There are some basic principles organisations can adopt to reduce resistance and improve the effectiveness of safety communications, and it is important to pitch the message the right way and deliver it in the most cost-effective way to promote the behaviour wanted.

“Supplementing written communication with a simple video, where the message is spoken, works wonders. If you need the ‘sign off’, do so after watching the video. Of course, the video must be good,” said Tinsley, who further explained that messages produce behaviour change when someone who is knowledgeable, passionate and a good speaker, delivers it.

“We tend to underestimate the importance of verbal communication. Tone, inflection, even pausing, convey hidden messages of emotional content, authority, power and confidence,” he said.

An important element in successful communication of safety is to leverage leaders on the floor verbally, with visual support, to deliver safety messages. “Of course, this means our supervisors should be good communicators and passionate about safety – as many are – because if they are not, then they are just building more resistance,” he said.

There are an important number of implications in this for OHS professionals, who often focus (for good reason) on developing capability and competence in OHS, said Tinsley.

“Essentially, to reduce resistance we need to be trusted, but being competent is not enough. People trust us in three areas: capability, character and..."
communication. We also get judged on our personal character and communication skills. We need to put more effort into developing these last two areas, because a failing in either of these leads to increased resistance to any safety message we give,” he said.

Safety professionals should be drivers of change within an organisation, because they are able to communicate effectively to all levels of the organisation, Tinsley added. “But this can be tricky, because by our nature, many safety professionals are often detailed, black or white, data-driven individuals. This is almost the opposite of what is needed for communication. Safety professionals who are great communicators reduce resistance and improve the adoption of their safety messages.”

How to build employees’ physical resilience
Another topic to be covered at the conference will be building physical resilience in an ageing workforce and how to reduce injuries, improving wellbeing and promoting career longevity. When it comes to companies building physical resilience among employees, most companies are across what are considered “move more” strategies like step challenges, group exercise classes and on-site gyms or subsidised gym memberships, said GM of Move 4 Life, Terry Wong.

There is also an increasing number of technology platforms designed to try and help employees achieve their health and wellbeing goals, according to Wong, who observed some companies promoting high-intensity exercise to address the time-poor nature of their employees and specific strength programs tailored to their job.
“An important element in successful communication of safety is to leverage leaders on the floor verbally, with visual support, to deliver safety messages”

“What’s often not considered is that even if employees are moving more, moving faster and moving heavier, if the quality of their movement patterns is not sound, then they are likely to do more damage than good. The need for employees to ‘move better’ is quite often what’s missed,” he said.

Wong also pointed to the ageing of the Australian workforce as an issue, and said that average retirement age is increasing, with projections that it will be 70 by 2035. “We know that our risk of suffering a manual handling sprain & strain injury is 180 per cent higher in our 50s compared to our 20s; we know that by the time we hit our 50s we can expect to be losing up to 15 per cent of our muscular strength per decade – unless we do something about it,” he said. “Not having a physically resilient workforce is a potential issue if you have an increasingly ageing workforce, especially if that workforce is required to do a physically demanding job that is unlikely to change.”

Wong suggested companies first get their workforce moving well, and then build on that with other more commonly used strategies. “Getting a benchmark is important; be it muscular strength, flexibility, fitness or health risk scores, so at least you know where people are at and it provides a means of comparison and evaluation. For movement quality, we use a tool that we designed to measure movement intelligence – not dissimilar to an IQ test for the brain, but for movement,” he said.

Once you have data and a benchmark, you should design strategies that will best fit the employees and the goals of the organisation. Also, keep in mind that there is no evidence that standard stretching exercises are an effective warm-up strategy. You can’t stretch a cold muscle, but you can injure one. There is more to an effective pre-start routine than stretching, but it doesn’t have to take a long time.”

As OHS professionals are often responsible for sponsoring these programs, Wong said they have an interest in making sure they not only work, but are well participated in, and suggests some tips to improve engagement:

- Benchmark physical resilience by getting data on strength, flexibility, fitness and movement intelligence.
- When offering initiatives/programs, test the waters. Run a pilot and gather feedback.
- Ask for input from the workforce or set up a working group. Ownership at the ground level is essential to its success.
- Be sure to have executive sponsorship. These initiatives need to be supported both culturally and financially.

How safety training is evolving

There are a significant number of trends in the field of safety training, and these will have a range of implications for OHS professionals, according to the MD of BuildUp Research, Marilyn Hubner. “If we made some radical changes to our thinking about safety training it could evolve into improved learning opportunities and change in behaviour in our workplaces,” said Hubner, who explained that there are three significant trends in safety training – based on the provision of a clean slate, time and some capital investment.

One potentially significant trend can be found in the adoption of virtual reality, augmented reality or other forms of gaming technology, according to Hubner, who said the technology, price and effort for using VR and its friends is fast becoming more accessible for safety professionals. “Investment into these areas could provide valuable engagement opportunity for participants and reap rewards for positive safety behaviour,” she said. Scenarios can be developed that match the workplace context using recordings from smartphones, and changes can even be built into the programs to implement lessons learnt in a faster, more engaging manner.

Another trend can be found in the application of blended learning – which is not new, however, Hubner said it hasn’t been utilised in the safety industry with any real impact. “Online training was the new big thing through the 2000s, and many organisations saw it as a way of demonstrating compliance with legislative requirements in an inexpensive manner that also helped out with remote locations and smaller workplaces,” she said.

The next step in online learning is to link it with shorter and more practical face-to-face sessions in order to improve retention, learning and social impact. Blended learning also allows for increased human interaction and facilitates interpersonal relationships, and can provide the safety professional delivering the program opportunity to demonstrate passion and add practical activities. “The online component offers the participants opportunity to undertake learning at their own pace and at the time they choose, and allows face-to-face sessions to focus on application of theory instead of explaining concepts,” said Hubner.

Thirdly, she said there is an increased trend towards “bite-size chunks” of learning. “In this fast-paced and pressured environment that we all work in, taking a day or two out of a week for training will always cause a lack of motivation toward safety. Safety professionals need to learn to change the way they think about delivering content,” she said.

“Cutting down training sessions into smaller ‘bite-sized’ chunks can offer a way to re-invigorate training sessions. Scheduling smaller training sessions, or sessions that fit at the end (or start) of a day’s work, or targeting workplace activities with related training topics can all lead to improved perceptions and behaviour towards safety. Developing bite-sized training also lends well to blended learning opportunities.”

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