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Is safety becoming over-bureaucratised?

Businesses, board directors and safety leaders are often frustrated by what they see as excessive and onerous OHS red tape, however, there is a fine line to be walked in this while managing safety in a practical and efficient manner, writes Craig Donaldson.

There has been a significant increase in both the amount and complexity of safety legislation, regulation and rules – both outside of and within organisations – in recent times. This has sometimes caused frustration among businesses, board directors and safety leaders, who are bound by what they see as excessive and onerous OHS red tape, which makes it harder to manage safety in a practical and efficient manner.

There is a fine line to be walked here for organisations and OHS functions. As Sidney Dekker argues in this issue’s opinion article (beginning page 14), safety has become “over-bureaucratised” and companies often hinder their employees from acting autonomously to reduce and tackle safety risks. Interestingly, companies themselves are responsible for the most significant increase in the bureaucracy of safety, according to Dekker, who says this is primarily thanks to what he calls the “illusion of liability management”. “The more rules you write for yourself, the more you will be able to be held accountable to... so specifying more is not necessarily good liability management,” notes Dekker, who instead recommends organisations give employees more freedom and accountability to manage and tackle safety risks in the workplace.

Also in this edition, Herbert Smith Freehills’ Steve Bell and Nerida Jessup explore the topic of safety due diligence. With a heightened awareness of officers’ WHS due diligence obligations, there is a risk that the lines between governance at the board level and management at the executive level are blurred – which is potentially bad for safety, they argue. To address this issue, more sophisticated organisations have begun to implement overarching WHS governance frameworks to ensure that clarity is provided to leaders at all levels of the organisation (including those not in the corporate “officer” class) to ensure that there is clarity about expectations regarding health and safety management. However, it is important that this is done in a way which is consistent with prevailing cultural and organisational norms regarding governance. For the full article see page 17.

The management feature in this edition explores the topic of complacency in the workplace from a neuroscientific approach. In this article (beginning page 28), Carl Tinsley observes that, for the past few decades, neuroscience researchers have been looking into how to manage behaviour more effectively. However, OHS professionals have not always effectively used this research to reduce human-caused errors in our workplace. “We tell workers to not get complacent, to remain focused, but that does not fix the underlying problems. The ‘problems’ are natural behaviours, our task and job design and the mismatch between our attitudes to safety versus the task risks and hazards,” he says. Instead, there are four important steps organisations can take to improve safety training systems in order to help mould attitudes, values and beliefs to perform a task safely, says Tinsley.

Lastly, the cover story for this issue (page 20) features an interview with Rod Angus, group manager of health & safety for diversified property group GPT Group. With a $20 billion corporate property portfolio and approximately 3000 contractors, GPT Group faces a unique array of OHS challenges. Angus explains that “safety is everyone’s business” is strongly reinforced throughout the business, and this is supported by (1) strong leadership by the management team and safety governance that informs, (2) a sound culture based on maturity and transparency of health and safety information, and (3) safety systems that enable individuals and teams to manage health and safety effectively. “While these elements are not new to the OHS profession, they are extremely effective and strike the right balance for a business that is geographically spread across the east coast and varies in the type of environment unique to each asset,” says Angus.

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Craig Donaldson, editor, OHS Professional

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SWA: worker fatalities fall to record low

The rate of worker fatalities has reduced by 49 per cent since a peak in 2007, according to a Safe Work Australia report, which found that last year had the lowest recorded number of workplace fatalities. There was a total of 182 fatalities in the workplace in 2016 (or 1.5 per 100,000 workers), and NSW recorded the highest number of fatalities (53, or 1.4 per 100,000 workers) followed by QLD (45, or 1.9 per 100,000 workers) and Victoria (31, or 1.0 per 100,000 workers). The report also found that of these fatalities, 168 were men (2.6 per 100,000 workers) with the remainder being women (14 or 0.3 fatalities per 100,000 workers).

The Key Work Health and Safety Statistics, Australia 2017 report provides an overview of latest national statistics compiled from workers’ compensation data and data on worker fatalities sourced from jurisdictions, the National Coronial Information System and the media. Vehicle incidents were responsible for the majority of fatal workplace incidents (45 per cent) followed by being hit by moving objects (29 per cent), falls, trips and slips (14 per cent) and heat, electricity and other environmental factors (11 per cent).

Safety warning issued to tradies over silica dust cancer risks

With recent estimates showing that more than 230 lung cancer cases in Australia each year are caused by exposure to silica dust in the workplace, tradies need to be more aware of cancer risks on the job, according to Cancer Council Australia. It is estimated that around 600,000 Australian workers each year are exposed to silica dust at work, including miners, construction workers, farmers, engineers, bricklayers and road construction workers, as well as those working in demolition. Many Australian DIY home renovators may also not be aware of the invisible cancer risks when their bathroom tiles or new granite kitchen benchtop are being cut to size by themselves or contractors, said Terry Slevin, chair of the occupational and environmental cancer risk committee for Cancer Council Australia, which has published a fact sheet on silica and cancer risk. “Silica is surprisingly common – it’s found in stone, rock, sand, gravel and clay, as well as bricks, tiles, concrete and some plastic materials,” said Slevin. “When these materials are worked on or cut, silica is released as a fine dust that’s 100 times smaller than a grain of sand. It’s so small you can’t see it – but if you breathe it in, in some cases it can lead to lung cancer.”

Call for ACCC & government to take quad bike safety action

The Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety recently called on state governments and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to play a more active role in regulating and enforcing standards associated with quad bike safety. Dr Tony Lower, director of the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety, said there is a role for the ACCC with regards to the safety of these quad bikes – particularly for children – and also for the state governments in developing and enforcing more proactive legislation. He cited a US study published in the Journal of Pediatrics, which highlighted highly significant reductions in child hospital admissions and emergency department visits related to quad bikes. The study looked at the impact of “Sean’s Law” introduced in 2010 in the state of Massachusetts, which restricted the use of quads by children less than 14 years of age, and put other steps in place for those aged 14-18 years. “This study provides strong support for Australian efforts to minimise deaths and injuries to children,” said Lower. “We really need to question the safety of these products, including the inappropriately named youth and child-sized quads that can weigh up to 120kg.”
The big questions are always the big questions. How are we framing them?

In raising the standard of the OHS profession, it is important to support the big questions being asked, capture what is learnt and reflect it back in a way which progresses knowledge, skill and capability, writes Dave Clarke.

Is health and safety really “a profession”? Will health and safety roles exist in 20 years? If so, what will they look like? Is “professionalisation” a good thing? Does the defining of best practice put a damper on creativity and innovation, or does it provide a context for innovation? How strong is the link between current education content and industry skills requirements? How can we have an impact on the quality of training in a fragmented training environment? How can we change industry attitudes towards the profession, building the status place of the profession within the company? How do we most effectively use limited resources to impact company culture? Where is a benchmarking system that makes sense identifying success rather than simply counting the level of failure? Schools of thought are changing – which direction should people head? How is technology changing the work we do?

These are some of the big questions in the field of health and safety today. You can see them being wrestled with at conferences and symposia, in discussion and debate in networks both formal and informal, calmly in reflective discussions, and sometimes hysterically on social media where the level of anxiety and fear of the unknown future is reflected in the strident language of particular ideologies.

There is absolutely nothing new about these questions. They have been asked for decades and will be asked for decades to come – in all professions. There is always room for improvement. There is always an active case for change being prosecuted. There is always a rear-guard action to argue against that change. There is always discussion about policies and standards impacting the profession. There is always tension where state and federal laws intersect, or where national systems apply legislation via state law – a commonplace scenario in a commonwealth of states. There is always endless debate about schools of practice, and ours is not the only profession where science and psychology and/or human systems and human behaviours intersect, creating complexity in practice. In every profession there is anxiety about the future of work, technological change in its many forms and its impacts on the future of jobs and whole professions. “Will there be a place for us in the future, and if so, what will that place be?” is the ever-present question, and as the pace of change accelerates, the level of anxiety about the answers escalates.

Some in the profession are strongly focused on the debates on these questions and consider them at the heart of all things, while others consider them a distraction to the real work and simply get on with the job, looking for the tools they need to produce better results. In a healthy profession, the truth is somewhere in-between. So much of the debate can be hot air, but on the other hand, great evidence-based knowledge, well shared in a way which can be well heard, floats to the top and influences systemic change and evolution.

Our work at the Institute is to support the growth of capability within the profession, and the way we do this is to provide the framework for this change and evolution to occur. We support the big questions being asked, seeking to capture what is learnt and reflecting it back in a way which progresses knowledge, skill and capability. The core elements of this framework are:

**Building on the evidence base:** The Australian OHS Body of Knowledge is today creating greater consistency in higher education for health and safety. It is constantly evolving and being updated as evidence flows from research and evaluation of health and safety in practice.

**Working towards quality and consistency in education:** We auspice the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board through its accreditation of OHS higher
“Our work at the Institute is to support the growth of capability within the profession, and the way we do this is to provide the framework for this change and evolution to occur”

education courses in Australia, and undertake advocacy to provide both content and delivery of WHS VET curriculum.

**Having clear descriptions for roles at different levels, and their knowledge and skill requirements:** Historically, the health and safety profession has lacked a framework which describes functional WHS roles at different levels as well as the knowledge and skill requirements of each. The Global OHS Professional Capability Framework now provides this for the first time.

**Providing certification of the profession:** With certification already underway for decades in the UK, USA and Canada, we are slow to the party but are now underway. We certify health and safety people at three levels in an international-standard program designed to help promote the profession and provide greater confidence in the profession among industry.

**Improving the standard of professional development for health and safety people:** The health and safety training and professional development market is fragmented and ill-targeted. Rather than just becoming another provider in the training space, we are currently working on a new national framework for training, articulated against the Global OHS Professional Capability Framework, to identify and promote training that meets standards we can attest to.

These five key elements which are described in more detail in this edition, are a standard part of virtually all well-developed professions. They enable us all to bring together and capture new knowledge and put it to work.

The big questions will continue to be discussed and debated, and to support this we will keep providing spaces and places for rational discussions and debates. As the evidence emerges to evolve what is seen as good practice, we fold the new knowledge into the Body of Knowledge, the capability framework, certification assessments and CPD, so that we maintain momentum in evolving health and safety practice.

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How the SIA helps improve OHS capability

The Safety Institute of Australia serves the profession in two key ways: it acts as a voice for the profession, and it works to grow the capability of the profession to ensure the highest quality advice to industry.

By doing these two things, the SIA is doing its part to work towards its vision for safe and healthy workers in productive workplaces. As part of the capability agenda the SIA takes a broad strategic perspective, seeking long-term change. It holds the view that successful professions have most or all of the following key elements, and works to ensure that the profession has these things in place:

1. OHS Body of Knowledge
The OHS Body of Knowledge (OHS BoK) was developed to define the collective knowledge that should be shared by Australian Generalist OHS Professionals as a basis for understanding the causation and control of work-related fatality, injury, disease and ill-health. This BoK is utilised as a basis for accreditation of education programs giving entry to the profession and as a guide for professional certification, and also provides important benchmark information for continuing professional development.

From its first publication in 2012, four new chapters were added in 2014-15, and a further three chapters were commenced in 2016. These included a very successful joint project with the Institution of Chemical Engineers Safety Centre resulting in two chapters on process safety: “Process hazards (Chemical)” and “Managing process safety”. With the support of a Victorian Enforceable Undertaking (EU), work also commenced on a chapter on “Engineered Safe Design”. 2016-17 also saw the beginning of a major review of the chapters first published in 2012. This review will be ongoing.

A number of topics have been identified for future development (see www.ohsbok.org.au/development/future-development/), and input is welcomed on other topics and their priority for development.

The Institute has a longstanding commitment to both maintain the BoK and provide it on an open source basis. Although this creates challenges in sourcing the investment needed to ensure its currency, it is too important a resource for the profession not to take this approach. Recent funding with donations from Enforceable Undertakings has been welcomed. These not only benefit the workplace, industry and the community, but can also have both national and international impact given the

Continued on page 10
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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 Safety Bureau (ATSB)
- Cancer Council Australia
- Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)
- Congress of Occupational Safety and Health Association Presidents (COSHAP)
- Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ)
- Human Factors and Ergonomics Society of Australia (HFESA)
- International Network of Safety & Health Practitioner Organisations (INSHPO)
- KIDS Foundation
- Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC)
- National Disability Services (NDS)
- New Zealand Institute of Safety Management (NZISM)
- O2Help
- Professions Australia
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- Standards Australia
- SANE Australia
- The Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (AusIMM)
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increasing referencing of the BoK by other countries as well, and add a legacy aspect to the Enforceable Undertaking through the enduring impact of the BoK.

The OHS Body of Knowledge website continues to be the main window to the public for the OHS Body of Knowledge (www.ohsbok.org.au). The website is being continually upgraded and next year will see a major development in the resources provided as extensions to the chapter content, with a framework introduced which will allow input and discussion on the various chapters of the BoK, by interested parties, including discussion on emerging research and trends. We will also be making a print version of the full BoK available, with chapters that can be separately updated.

2. The Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board

The Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board, auspiced by the Institute, has now completed its sixth year of operation, writes Mike Capra, Chairperson, The Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board.

During 2016-17 the Board undertook a review of their strategic plan, which resulted in a five-year vision statement for the Board:

- Accredited OHS professional qualifications are sought by aspiring professionals and valued by practising OHS professionals and employers.
- All Australian OHS professional education programs are accredited.
- Higher Education providers value OHS professional education accreditation and the accredited status of their programs.
- The Safety Institute of Australia, as represented by the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board, is recognised by the Australian Government as an assessing authority for OHS qualifications for the purpose of migration.
- The Board and registrar will work towards this vision with a focus on six operational areas:
  - Conducting individual accreditations
  - Conducting an annual review of accredited programs
  - Administering the accreditation process
  - Administering the Accreditation Board
  - Influencing the OHS Body of Knowledge
  - Providing information, developing influence and advocating for OHS professional accreditation and education.

Accreditation

There are currently 15 universities offering a total of 30 OHS professional education programs. Two new programs were assessed in the year, 13 universities have one or more accredited programs, five have bachelor level programs and 20 have graduate diploma/masters programs.

Annual reviews

All accredited programs are required to submit an annual report on the status of action plans developed as a result of accreditation as well as other priority focus areas as determined by the Board on an annual basis. This review process results in ongoing improvement in programs. Currently, there is no collated information on numbers of people studying OHS in the Higher Education sector or of the number of graduates. As part of the annual review process the Board is developing a census of student and graduate numbers to address this information gap.

Accreditation process

The accreditation process is based on eight underpinning principles which include that the accreditation process will as far as is possible, be aligned with other externally required quality assurance processes with minimal complexity in the application process. Following this principle, the OHS education accreditation criteria have been revised to reflect the Higher Education Standards Framework with which universities have to comply from 2017. The accreditation process also aligns with the Joint Statement of Principles for Professional Accreditation agreed in 2016 by Professions Australia and Universities Australia.

During the year the Board participated in a government-sponsored review of professional accreditation and is in the process of signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA).

Administration of the Board

Professor Mike Capra was appointed to continue as chair for the period 2016-17. The Board welcomed three new members as part of the routine renewal process. Dr Alison Bell replaced Dr Margaret Cook as a representative of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society of Australia, and Genevieve Hawkins and Graham Jackson were brought to the Board as independent OHS professionals. Chris Sutherland, Managing Director of Programmed, resigned from the Board due to the demands of work. The Board is appreciative of the contribution made by both Chris and Margaret as inaugural Board members.

Influence and engagement

The Board provides information on OHS education and qualifications through its website and also answers many email
queries on OHS qualifications. The registrar liaises with the universities on OHS education, providing regular email updates and briefings on the accreditation criteria and process, and maintains informal contact with program coordinators.

The view ahead to 2018
The next 12 to 18 months will be a busy period for the Board with the implementation of the new accreditation criteria, new accreditations and five programs due for re-accreditation. It will also be a period of transition as the new registrar takes on the role.


In the coming year the SIA aims to build awareness of the The OHS Professional Capability Framework, writes David Clarke, CEO of the SIA

The new Global OHS Professional Capability Framework represents an exceptional step for the field of health and safety in the international health and safety arena, where for the first time a number of countries have come together to agree on a common language and framework for the range of OHS roles within the company – wherever that company may be.

The importance of language to the expression of culture is well understood and we know that when groups find a common language they work more effectively and smoothly together. The health and safety field has been historically fragmented in a number of ways, and this has included differing expectations and understandings of the many roles that health and safety people undertake within the company, both between and within countries.

The Global OHS Professional Capability Framework had its genesis in a workshop conducted by a working party of the International Network of Safety and Health Practitioner Organisations (INSHPO) in 2011 as the group began its work to seek to develop international standards for OHS practice. Over five years the group undertook extensive research and a series of workshops to build a framework which could be both accepted and adopted by the global OHS community. The working party collected and reviewed the documentation from national professional associations and certification bodies to define the role, functions and competencies of OHS Practitioners and Professionals. Given the great diversity of approaches across countries, the working party developed a new overarching structure designed to encompass all approaches.

Recently adopted by more than 20 countries under the Singapore Accord, for the first time all of these countries share a commitment to promoting the use and acceptance of the Framework as a common platform to develop capable, knowledgeable and skilled OHS Professionals and Practitioners across industry sectors and geographic borders.

The Framework, which had significant input from the Institute, recognise that the knowledge and skill requirements for the profession vary significantly depending on the level at which people are working, from entry level positions through the range of tasks practitioners are required to undertake, and on into senior management and executive roles. It articulates six levels of work: Practitioner 1-3 and Professional 1-3. The

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The Master of Occupational Hygiene and Toxicology is accredited by the Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists (AIIOH) and the British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS).

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SIA’s Certification Program for the health and safety profession is articulated against these levels, and the SIA Training and Development Framework currently in development, draws directly from the Framework as well.

In the year ahead the Institute aims to build awareness of the Framework, alongside the other key components of our capability agenda, promoting the widespread use of the common language it contains.

4. Certification of the health and safety profession

Since the introduction of the OHS profession Certification Program in 2015, it has continued to gather momentum with those working in health and safety and across industry, writes Jo Kitney, Chair, Certification Governance Committee.

By the end of June 2017, 1344 OHS Practitioners, OHS Professionals and Chartered OHS Professionals were certified. The two in-training categories of certification – OHS Trainee and OHS Graduate – provide those newly qualified in OHS to begin their journey to full certification.

Certification governance and program development

The Certification Governance Committee commenced its work early in 2017, with initial meetings used to formalise its role and scope. Along with the Committee Chair and Deputy Chair, the Committee has professional representation across the three levels of certification, as well as positions for a WHS regulator and education, industry and business representatives. The group also has an experienced lawyer working within health and safety as adviser to the Committee. Together this group provides wide-ranging experience and skills to drive good governance and continued development of the Program.

Reciprocal recognition with overseas programs

We have begun to receive applications not just from within Australia but also overseas, demonstrating a widening international recognition of Australian OHS certification. There is also interest from certification bodies internationally, looking at how the SIA’s OHS Certification Program is structured, and we are in separate discussions with different agencies about reciprocal recognition.

Assessment and pathways to certification

Certification assessment is different for each level of certification applied for. Applications are evaluated against qualifications and experience in an OHS role, as well as demonstrated capability in practice through written practice reports and references for all applicants, relative to the level applied. Personal interviews are conducted for those seeking certification as Chartered OHS Professionals. The Program’s team of demonstrated capability assessors complete the assessment elements of certification. These assessors hold OHS certifications and senior health and safety roles in industry.

We know that a number of people working in OHS have developed their careers in a different educational landscape and so may have extensive experience and capability at OHS professional level, but not necessarily university-level OHS qualifications. This group is acknowledged in the Program by having access to the Professional Knowledge Assessment (PKA), which involves a combination of an exam, case study and viva interview to defend results achieved in the exam and case study. Avenues for knowledge assessment for the other two levels of certification – Practitioner and Chartered Professional – are being explored, as well as Australian law assessments for overseas applicants.

Mentoring

Certification is not just about an application and assessment. It is a process which can take time and professional development. Within the last year the Program has provided certification mentoring to support applicants who have had specific development needs identified, in order to eventually achieve certification.
The Certified Professionals who provide this mentoring give invaluable support for applicants through their own experience of applying for certification and working in the OHS profession.

**Continuing professional development**

Certified OHS Practitioners and Professionals must undertake continuing professional development (CPD) to retain their certification. The combination of OHS certification and ongoing CPD provide the underpinning framework to maintain and raise the standards and capability of people working within the health and safety profession. The SIA's CPD Committee is currently working with the Certification Governance Committee to implement CPD monitoring.

5. OHS training and professional development: a new framework for the profession

It is important to build a structure which, over time, will improve the quality, consistency and focus of CPD for the OHS profession, writes David Clarke, CEO of the SIA.

People come to practice health and safety from many different backgrounds. They may work their way up within the company from a trade, semi-skilled or unskilled work, gaining practical experience, and gravitating to health and safety. They may enter practice from a range of professional qualifications, historically in science- and engineering-related disciplines, but more recently they may also come from specialist OHS higher education, psychology, allied health, or through VET training in WHS, as just some examples.

Once people are on the job, how do they refine their health and safety knowledge and skills in a planned way and continue to grow in capability? Work experience is critical, but so too is taking some time outside the workplace to learn new things. The roles people undertake and the knowledge and skill requirements of those roles are varied, so their CPD needs can be diverse. Some need to review basic understanding health and safety concepts and ideas, some want to see what new tools are available to assist them in the technical aspects of the job, some need to dive deep into specialist areas, some need to work on their leadership and communication – the list goes on.

This all occurs in an environment where the current training offered to the profession is ad hoc, delivered in an unstructured way, by a range of providers making offerings which may or may not be meeting industry needs. This is not the fault of the providers – it is the result of a lack of structure, and in this case, the market has no natural mechanisms to ensure quality.

This is where the Institute is stepping in. Rather than simply writing our own curriculum and becoming another provider, we see the importance of building a structure which, over time, will improve the quality, consistency and focus of CPD for the profession.

In 2017-18 we are implementing the first two elements of a long-term approach to building the quality of training and professional development in the field of health and safety.

For people working in the field, we have introduced an online CPD planning and reporting tool. The online tool allows the user to identify their own continuing professional development goals, monitor their progress, and re-plan. It is available to all members of the SIA for voluntary use, but is also a requirement for certified members.

OHS profession CPD is not a points-based system, which is seen as too restrictive in a field where people need to take a wide variety of approaches to identifying and achieving their CPD goals. The tool allows individuals to set their own targets and monitor their own progress.

For providers of training and professional development to the profession, we are introducing a training and development framework and endorsement program. The Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Professional Capability Framework - A Global Framework for Practice outlines the general knowledge and skill requirements at each of six levels of work in the field of health and safety. The OHS Body of Knowledge provides a range of subject matter content. These two key pieces of work will inform the OHS Training and Professional Development Framework. Training organisations will have the opportunity to map their proposed training against the Framework and submit it to the Institute for consideration for endorsement. Once endorsed, the Institute will actively support and promote the training. Ongoing quality assurance will be based primarily on user feedback.
Why companies over-bureaucratise safety – and how to fix it

Safety has become “over-bureaucratised”, according to Griffith University professor Sidney Dekker, who says that companies themselves are responsible for the most significant increase in the bureaucracy of safety.

“Safety has become increasingly bureaucratised over the past 20 years,” he said. “There has been an increase in government regulation, but this has only contributed a little bit to this. And the number of statutes has only increased by two-fold over the past 20 years, but the number of interpretations of these has exploded like 100-fold – but that’s not the major contribution.”

The majority of safety bureaucratisation originates in organisations themselves, according to Dekker, who estimated that about 60 per cent of all compliance demands are internal. There are a number of reasons as to why companies do this, and Dekker said one of the primary ones is the “illusion of liability management”.

“I say illusion, because the more rules you write for yourself, the more you will be able to be held accountable to – which means that if you start managing the minutia of what your workers do every day, then a smart lawyer has more to work with in case of an incident. So specifying more is not necessarily good liability management. It’s easy to make things difficult, and difficult to make things easy; I think that’s just another reason for bureaucratisation,” said Dekker, who recently spoke at the Perth Safety Symposium 2017, held on Friday 13 October at Edith Cowan University.

He explained that it is relatively easy to add a rule, but it can be very difficult to convince the system to take rules out. Dekker said the railways are a great example of this, and even though the industry has been around for at least a century and a half (or more), there are still rules in place for outdated technology which no longer really applies.

“This is just part of the encrustation of rules that have accrued over the years,” he said. “So it takes not only courage to take them out, but also an incredible, rich insight into what creates safety in an industry like the railways. We keep adding rules and pretty much keep killing the same number of passengers each year – and the same is true for aviation – but we’re not making a big dent with having more rules.”

Often, safety frameworks which are over-bureaucratised lack opacity and transparency, and Dekker said this can lead to uncertainty about what accounts for specific safety measures or products. “So we’re afraid to pry anything loose from it. That doesn’t mean that it cannot be done – but it needs to be done, of course, in a safe-to-fail, controlled manner.”

Dekker said there are a number of other contributors to the bureaucratisation of safety within organisations, including the large increase in contracting and virtual organisation in many industries. “You see this a lot in construction, where the actual firm that takes on the job doesn’t employ anyone to do the work. They have a whole web of delivery partners, contractors and subcontractors who will do the work,” he said.

“The way to manage this is through bureaucracy, which introduces a sense of fairness and consistency and standardisation, particularly so in a way to centrally control the processes that happen onsite. There is a clear association between an increase in contracting and a burgeoning of bureaucracy around how to manage that work, including its safety.”

Dekker said another reason for increased
“It’s easy to make things difficult, and difficult to make things easy; I think that’s just another reason for bureaucratisation”

bureaucratisation can come down to what sociology calls “bureaucratic entrepreneurism”, which suggests that bureaucracies have an incentive to grow on themselves.

“And they do,” he said. “Because the way they stay in business as a bureaucracy is to create more demand for whatever it is that they do. Now, bureaucracies tend to have a monopoly in this. They can both specify the rules that need to be followed and then build the apparatus to police and monitor compliance with those rules. There’s very little around governance and checks and balances in this, particularly if it comes from an internal function like HR, where you have people who write the rules which they themselves then need to police and monitor. “This then invokes job security, or perhaps even expansion of bureaucracy,” he said.

Dekker said there is a significant amount of literature in sociology documenting this, and that this is easy to trace in safety as well. “When we get to the point where people are doing risk assessments in a refinery (which I have seen) whether to use paper towels or cloth towels in their break room, or whether to have individually wrapped teabags or teabags in a pot, you know that clearly, it could be construed as evidence of bureaucratic entrepreneurism, and almost overreach. I don’t think you have to do a teabag risk assessment if you run a refinery. I think your risks are different,” he said.

**Focusing on human work**

Dekker also explained that more enlightened companies are beginning to understand the importance of giving people “freedom in a frame” in their roles. He gave the example of an electric utility company which employs linesmen who climb poles to conduct their work.

“I’ve seen this happen, in fact,” he explained. “So these linesmen are operating during fire season, and a pole can catch fire. Now these poles are impregnated with creosote – the green stuff which is toxic when it burns. In many of these utility and electrical distribution companies, an occupational health assessment will acknowledge
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“The first step to fixing all of this, like any 12-step program, is for people to first acknowledge the problem that they’ve created for themselves”

that it is not good for employees to breathe this stuff. So – the electricity pole catches fire, but the linesmen cannot put it out. They need to run away and get away from the scene so they can avoid breathing toxic fumes.

“But in terms of the enterprise risk associated with having electricity poles burn, there are some more significant risks, especially during fire season. So you can get wires falling, poles collapsing – all kinds of nasty things can happen. So there might be a linesman who recognises this and says to himself, ‘I’m going to put this fire out’. So they have to breathe the fumes to do this, but the freedom to make this decision is what I call the discretionary space, which is the discretion to decide what’s the right thing to do, and what’s the wrong thing to do.”

Dekker said it is important that there is a “frame” around this space – a frame which is defined, discussed and decided, in part, by those who live with the dangers of risky work – and not executives and managers who work in a corporate head office and who are not immediately associated with the risks. “They might be part of it because they probably have some perspectives that the guy on the ground doesn’t have. But it needs to be a collaborative effort, and in this we should give people the discretion to use their insight and initiative to manage risk locally – because they’re right there to see and manage it.”

Dekker gave the example of a train station master in Brisbane who put out a smouldering cigarette butt that was on a sleeper between the rails of the train line. This station master used a bucket of water to douse the butt, but they were stood down because this action was a breach of a particular safety risk guideline, which stipulated that the area should have been cordoned off and trains should have been stopped. “Just think about the knock-on effects of managing that putative risk by the actual process that the organisation has put in place for it. Trains would have been delayed, passengers get upset, and this can impact the whole network,” said Dekker.

“I think that’s a great example where it is almost ludicrous to not give people freedom within that frame – the frame being, don’t hurt anyone. Keep your station safe. And keep yourself safe as you’re doing that. I think the station master’s action would have fit very comfortably within that frame, and I think most station masters would fully agree – and probably most managers inside of a railway organisation would agree with that, right? So, this is about the impulse to shrink the bandwidth of human performance to the safest way of managing any liabilities. But it denies the autonomy and some of the mastery and the purpose that they would bring to their work. People need freedom to do this, not punishment.”

**Steps to removing safety bureaucratisation**

“The first step to fixing all of this, like any 12-step program, is for people to first acknowledge the problem that they’ve created for themselves – that by over-bureaucratising safety, they are doing no one a favour,” said Dekker.

“They’re not making work safer for their people. They’re making it more inefficient. They’re making it probably more uneconomical and expensive for themselves. And ultimately they are probably not managing their liabilities very well, because the more they’ve got written down, the more they can get nailed for.”

The correct way to fix this is not to advocate for or even encourage wholesale, overnight change, said Dekker, who added that one company had brought together a group of construction firms and sub-contractors to do a micro-project. They were encouraged to identify comparable areas of work and then take away something in each of those areas that can be safely taken away, without removing them from the corresponding comparable area. “Over the period of a half year, measure core safety measures, and for that matter, wellness, or culture, whatever you want to measure – but at least that gives you a controlled comparison,” he said.

“This generates data from the inside. So rather than taking this on face value, you can actually look at your own data as a company and say, ‘Now, for six months we didn’t have, for example, a supervisor both from our own organisation plus a supervisor from the contractor on site when this work was done. We only had one of the two supervisors.’ So this sort of duplication was deemed to be unnecessary and was really just a legacy of the way that work was merged, but the bureaucracy had resisted or proved incapable of relinquishing that requirement,” said Dekker.

After six months, if the micro-project shows that there is not only an increase in relevant safety outcomes but also an increase in efficiency, happiness and autonomy, however you want to measure that, this is a learning for the organisation – which is ready to be scaled up and rolled out more broadly across an organisation.

“However, be willing and able to shut down any experimental project if it turns out that you’re actually increasing risk. That makes it safe to fail; probably your regulator (and/or insurer) will want to know that as well,” said Dekker.
Safety due diligence: one size cannot fit all

With a heightened awareness of officers’ WHS due diligence obligations, there is a risk that the lines between governance at the board level and management at the executive level are blurred – which is potentially bad for safety, write Steve Bell and Nerida Jessup

It has been some years since the introduction of the Model Work Health and Safety laws in nearly all Australian jurisdictions. The introduction of these laws placed a renewed emphasis on the role of company officers – for example, directors, CEO or executive – to exercise what was referred to as “due diligence” over health and safety matters.

Health and safety professionals well-know the importance of senior company “buy-in” on health and safety cultural programs, resourcing and responses to change or workplace incidents. Indeed, it is beyond doubt that senior leaders within an organisation have an important role to play in the way in which health and safety is perceived and dealt with throughout the organisation, and it is a near-universal characteristic of organisations that manage health and safety well that senior leaders, from the board of directors down, are actively expressive of the importance of health and safety management.

However, issues do arise considering the

"Safety, like all operational matters within an organisation, requires certainty and clarity about who has accountability and ownership, and who has responsibility for exercising governance and oversight"
way in which health and safety “due diligence” can be exercised at different levels within an organisation. Unfortunately, there is little distinction drawn in guidance materials or court decisions which can assist.

**Corporate governance norms in Australian business**

It is an accepted feature of corporate governance in Australia that the role of the board is to exercise governance and oversight over the decisions of management. On the whole, they would not be expected in any ordinary sense to avail themselves of the close operational details that may arise throughout the organisation.

Instead, this is properly seen as the providence of management.

Accordingly, it is for a CEO to set the overarching operational strategy and structure of the organisation and to ensure that plans are properly implemented, risks understood and measures taken to ensure that the culture and expectations set by the board are in fact met by the organisation.

In turn, it is the accountability of senior executives to ensure that, so far as their executive accountability in the organisation is concerned, matters are properly executed and dealt with in respect of their teams, or across their functions.

There is no reason to break this model when it comes to health and safety “due diligence”.

**Applying this model to health and safety governance**

In terms of health and safety management then, it could be reasonably said that it is the responsibility of a board to understand the overarching hazard and risk profile of the business, have a general awareness of the manner in which those hazards and risks are dealt with, and satisfy themselves that management are turning their proper attention to the ongoing operationalisation of those systems.

Conversely, it is the role of the CEO and the executive team to have a more detailed understanding of the operational expectations of the business to properly manage safety risks and hazards, and to ensure that resources are applied appropriately within the organisation to guarantee that these matters are properly dealt with.

In practical terms, this is likely to be the structure in which most large organisations are approaching the accountability for WHS “due diligence” throughout their organisations.

There is a risk, in the current environment of heightened awareness of officers’ WHS “due diligence”, that the lines between governance (at the board level) and management (at the executive level) are blurred.

In our view, there is a real risk that this is bad for safety.

Safety, like all operational matters within an organisation, requires certainty and clarity about who has accountability and ownership, and who has responsibility for exercising governance and oversight. If we are to express an expectation that all officers (that is both directors of the board, CEOs and their executive teams) are to act in the same way by undertaking the same activities, we run the risk of diluting the impact and effect of ordinary corporate governance structures.

Unfortunately, for those seeking to implement WHS leadership and governance frameworks within their organisation, there are some mixed messages from regulators and from recent case law which it may be helpful to clarify.

**Interpreting guidance materials and cases**

The primary guidance available from regulators regarding the effective implementation of steps to meet the personal duty of due diligence is contained in both the guidance material and the Act itself. As OHS professionals will be aware, section 27 of the Model WHS Act outlines a range of specific steps as comprising “reasonable steps” officers may take to meet personal due diligence obligations.

This legislation is further supported by guidance material, including for example the Safe Work Australia guidance material which is an “Interpretative Guideline to Section 27”.

A casual reader of the Act and the Guideline may not identify the nuanced messages contained within – which hint at a distinction between the roles of different levels of officer within an organisation. Indeed, a reading of this Guideline, and other statements produced by health and safety regulators, may seem to suggest the same steps that should be taken by directors, CEOs and executive officers to meet their duties.

Respectfully, we disagree

In our experience it makes no practical sense to suggest the directors of large organisations undertake a detailed management review or operational engagement with a particular health and safety system or steps taken to address particular hazards or risks. That is simply not their function or skill-set, nor is it consistent with the overarching framework for governance of corporate entities in Australia.

Rather, we would prefer a system where, properly educated about the hazard and risk profile of an organisation, the board seeks to address the overarching culture, performance and prioritisation of health and safety issues in the organisation and rigorously test management on this.

On the other hand, it is far more appropriate for those executive officers involved in management, to more closely understand the hazard and risk profile of the organisation (for example, through induction into overarching health and safety management systems, risk registers, etc) and to test and drive improvement in the business aligned to that risk profile. It is for executive
management to allocate appropriate resources within their power of delegation, although noting of course that some capital improvement works to improve safety may require board oversight and supervision.

Recent case law does not help either
The situation is further complicated by the fact that many health and safety prosecutions of “directors” in recent times have been of individuals who performed not just a nominal “director” function in a corporate law sense of a small to medium enterprise, but more practically performed an operational management role on the frontline.

When the New South Wales District Court recently concluded that compliance with section 27 of the Act required a director to satisfy themselves that a business had in place systems which were in compliance with the Code of Practice for Falls, this is an unfortunately confusing message when one considers the breadth of persons to whom the section 27 duty applies.

It is unworthy to expect that a director of a large corporate would be in a position to personally satisfy themselves that all of the business’ operational systems were compliant with all of the various environmental, safety or other regulatory laws, requirements and codes of practice. This is simply an impracticable standard to set.

Developing a WHS governance framework
To address this issue, more sophisticated organisations have begun to implement overarching WHS governance frameworks to ensure that clarity is provided to leaders at all levels of the organisation (including those in the corporate “officer” class) to ensure that there is clarity about expectations regarding health and safety management.

When we advise large corporate entities on addressing this question, we recommend that a structured and thoughtful process be put in place for developing a WHS governance framework. This framework should accurately, and realistically, reflect the capacity of individuals within the organisation to address health and safety and to encourage improvement. It should reflect that the board will have an important and powerful role in setting the overarching health and safety culture of the business and holding management to account. Similarly, it should also reflect that it is the executive leadership teams who should conceive of and implement overarching strategies, supported by safety professionals, and empower their management team and workers to effectively implement those systems.

So what are officers to do?
We recommend that each officer, mindful of their existing role and ordinary level of influence and accountability, focus on the following questions:

- What are our main hazards and risks?
- Are there any new ones emerging I should know about?
- In terms appropriate to my level of involvement in the business, what do we do to control them?
- How effective does it appear that these controls are (including considering any incidents, near misses, or other metrics)?
- Are we applying the right resources, can we do more?
- What can I do, in my role, to be seen to support the safety strategy of the business?
- What steps are we taking to verify all of this is appropriate and effective at reducing risks to our people?

The level of detail required of each officer to answer these questions will necessarily change based on their role. It may be the case that an appropriately drafted WHS governance structure should provide some support for officers to receive appropriate verification, targeted at their appropriate level, in line with the questions set out above.

Horses for courses
The contentions in this note are not to dilute the importance of all officers engaging in health and safety matters, but rather to ensure that when they do so it is consistent with prevailing cultural and organisational norms regarding governance, and not to seek to act contrary to those.

To do so is to risk levels of involvement or intervention which are potentially amateur, or uninformed, and so reduce (not improve) health and safety performance within the business.
GPT Group: creating a place for safety

Diversified property group GPT Group faces an array of complex OHS challenges. Craig Donaldson speaks with its group manager of health & safety, Rod Angus, about these challenges and the group’s holistic approach to managing and mitigating safety risks.

The GPT Group is one of Australia’s largest diversified property groups and a top 50 ASX-listed company by market capitalisation. It owns and manages a $20 billion portfolio of offices, logistics, business parks and prime shopping centres, including the MLC Centre and Australia Square in Sydney, Highpoint Shopping Centre and Melbourne Central in Melbourne and One One One Eagle Street in Brisbane.

With approximately 3000 contractors and their employees providing works or services across GPT’s assets, health and safety is of a consistently high priority across the group, according to its group manager of health & safety, Rod Angus, who explains that the OHS challenges faced across the group are unique in nature. “While property is not generally thought of as a high-risk sector in OHS terms, relative to say mining or manufacturing, the challenges in premium-grade property lay more with the complexity of an environment as place,” he says.

Managing contractors and their workers, for example, presents a real potential for hazards or risks, particularly in close proximity to members of the public when upgrading commercial office facilities or in shopping centres.

Leading OHS from the top

In meeting such challenges, Angus says it is important to have a highly engaged executive which leads health and safety outcomes, supported by a number of systems and underpinned by a proactive and positive culture of safety. A key priority for GPT Group CEO and MD, Bob Johnston, is ensuring the operations of the group are conducted in a manner which safeguards the health and wellbeing of all GPT stakeholders, including employees, tenants, contractors, customers and members of the public, according to Angus.

The group’s commitment to safety is underpinned by the following objectives:

- Fostering a strong safety culture where our leaders hold themselves to account in ensuring that risks are identified and mitigated
- A focus on clear objectives and targets to meet the intent of the health and safety policy
- A comprehensive risk management system based on continuous improvement
- Compliance with all relevant health and safety legislation
- A focus on training and education to ensure that our employees have the appropriate skills, resources and support to identify and manage risks and to contribute to ongoing improvements in our safety performance
- Ensuring contractors working on behalf of the group are suitably qualified to perform the tasks safely and in compliance with applicable standards
- A proactive and transparent approach to reporting and investigating incidents.

Employees are encouraged to take responsibility for their own health and safety and report hazardous conditions and/or practices and to make suggestions that will improve the safety of the workplace. Angus adds that the group’s proactive approach to health and safety is also supported and led by a committee comprising senior management and GPT board members, which meets quarterly to consider in detail health and safety measures and outcomes across the group and other sectors.

OHS risks and challenges

In 2016 there was an increase in the number of electrical incidents related to contact with live electricity by contractors, where residual current device (RCD) protection was not established due to the as-built age of some properties. “On closer
“The challenges in premium-grade property lay more with the complexity of an environment as place”
examination, it was noted various standards were being marked by qualified and experienced contractors where fundamental electrical safety prestart risk assessment practices were not adequate, or partially being undertaken,” says Angus.

In response, the group audited around 40,000 electrical circuits across its property portfolio for RCD protection. RCDs are electrical safety devices designed to immediately switch off the supply of electricity when electricity leaking to earth is detected at harmful levels.

GPT then assigned resources to upgrade base building lighting and GPOs where there was no RCD protection. “This initiative had an immediate two-fold effect in applying a higher control and increasing awareness of electrical safety, and as a result there have been no further electrical contacts occurring from the time when the initiative commenced in June 2016,” he says.

“This example highlights the complexity of managing older properties where the as-built requirements may not be up to present-day standards, and also the practices of multiple contractors engaged to maintain, repair, modernise place and presentation such as common areas and tenancy.”

Another challenge faced by GPT in creating new environments is construction work which may be required in close proximity to the public. “While these areas are controlled, it’s important to understand that, for example, within a shopping centre you may have demolition or heavy construction works and next door is a tenant trading, or when working on floors above presents a fall of materials risk. It is this complexity of mixed-use development and safety that requires a constant focus for above, below or adjacent to activated areas,” says Angus.

A third related challenge can be found in ensuring safe environments within a complex community of overlapping duties within a premium-grade property, such as property managers and tenants – each having a duty of care to employees and the asset community. “Health and safety considerations such as fire, life safety, property and the environment, and security in a changing world of threats, are all critically important while being constantly tested by commercial pressures, compliance requirements and social responsibility examinations,” explains Angus.

Safety is everyone’s business

While the challenges of property can be complex in nature, Angus says GPT has a number of strategies in place for managing health and safety. GPT has a cultural statement of “safety is everyone’s business”, and this is based on three elements that support this: (1) strong leadership by the management team and safety governance that informs, (2) a sound culture based on maturity and transparency of health and safety information, and (3) safety systems that enable individuals and teams to manage health and safety effectively.
“While these elements are not new to the OHS profession, they are extremely effective and strike the right balance for a business that is geographically spread across the east coast and varies in the type of environment unique to each asset,” he says, “whether it is a super sub-regional shopping centre such as Highpoint Shopping Centre in Victoria with 474 trading tenants and 18 million visitations over 154,000 square metres, or an iconic Sydney office building such as the Harry Seidler-designed MLC Centre at Martin Place, Sydney.”

As the head of health and safety for the business, and as part of its risk and safety team, most of Angus’ time working within the business is spent supporting the group’s centralised framework which enables the business to manage OHS that is not event driven, but rather “the way we do business”, says Angus.

“Our policy has a nice statement that reflects this, and that is: ‘No undertaking is so urgent or important that it cannot be done safely.’ That is certainly true and is reflected in the way in which health and safety is spoken about, which is positive and aimed to inform and educate at all levels – whether it is an initiative or near miss,” he explains. “This is really pleasing and fundamental, as what strikes you most in property – particularly premium-grade assets – are the places and presentation of the environments are fantastic. However, the level of risk is not as apparent relative to a hazardous operation, so complacency could easily occur.”

Angus adds that the outcomes from GPT’s approach to OHS are measured somewhat differently, as it doesn’t have a physically demanding work for employees or directly manage construction.

“Our results predominantly pertain to the number and severity of incidents relating to the contractors undertaking work or services, impacts to activated areas or members of the public,” says Angus, who explains that some of the results it measures include contractor notifiable incidents (which have reduced significantly over the past year by 60 per cent), impacts to activated areas from construction works (down 50 per cent) and customer incidents in shopping centres (which are predominantly slip trip and fall incidents, down to 3.1 STFs per million visitations from above 4.2 the previous year).”
"With more automation in work processes, particularly manual processes, there’s a real opportunity to design out hazards with interfaces between humans and hazards"
Taking the safety pulse of NSW

Australia’s OHS regulators play a fundamental role in improving health and safety outcomes. OHS Professional speaks with Peter Dunphy, executive director of SafeWork NSW, about the evolving role of the regulator, priorities in compliance and enforcement, and the hallmarks of organisations with good OHS.

What are the priority areas/industries that SafeWork NSW is focusing on to improve OHS outcomes?

There are six key industry sectors that we are focusing on: agriculture, manufacturing, construction, transport, healthcare and government. We’re in the process of developing sector-specific strategies for each of these six critical areas. Although we’ve seen reductions in injuries, illnesses and fatalities over the long term, there’s still a lot of work to be done in these sectors to drive those improvements further and to meet national targets. We are looking to meet the national targets of a 20 per cent reduction in fatalities over 10 years by 2022, and a 30 per cent reduction in serious injuries and illnesses over the same period.
What we identified as part of our consultation with industry and stakeholders was that there are a couple of areas where the level of fatalities and serious incidents is still unacceptably high. We have a strong focus on targeting towards zero, in terms of no fatalities in those areas. These include falls from heights, which will include some of the high-risk plant such as forklifts and quad bikes, and the other areas that we are focusing on are working with live electrical hazards, and traumatic injuries from poor machine-guarding.

We’ve also put a particular emphasis on targeting reductions in stress and mental health, chemical hazards, and musculoskeletal disorders as well.

How is the role of SafeWork NSW evolving from both a regulatory perspective and in its work with industry?

One of the things that we’re working towards as part of our roadmap is the need to be an exemplar regulator. So there is a lot of effort going into how we can best influence outcomes in terms of workplaces – not only in securing compliance but also driving good (and ideally best) practice in terms of work health and safety in workplaces.

Part of this journey is to be more customer-centred in terms of understanding the needs of workplaces and their OHS journey, particularly small businesses. So this is about how they might comply with legislation, but more importantly, how they focus on preventing harm in their workplaces. We’ve moved from just focusing on compliance to trying to get people to focus on the important things that will really prevent harm from occurring in workplaces from a WHS perspective.

The other thing that we’ve been working on is the need for us to be more innovative in looking for new insights into research. At the moment, for example, we’re in the process of establishing the Centre for Work Health and Safety in New South Wales. Through this we’re trying to build good relationships with the research community to ensure that outcomes of good research have been applied to our practices – whether that’s our inspector practices, or whether it’s our interventions, or just our approaches to work health and safety.

We’re also interested in data, too. As part of the Centre for Work Health and Safety, we’ll be building more data-analytical capabilities so we can better predict where harms may occur and where we can intervene early to prevent those from occurring.

What are the major trends you are witnessing and experiencing, that are impacting SafeWork NSW as well as government/employer organisations?

There is a big focus in NSW on making it easier to do business, in terms of complying with all legislation (not just work health and safety laws and regulations). For example, we have a “commerce regulation program”, which is about simplifying and working more collaboratively with other regulators, so that we’re not duplicating work but working together on issues that are broad in their scope, such as asbestos.

Some health and safety issues are also consumer safety issues, such as quad bikes. So we look at how we can work together to get better outcomes, and also improve compliance by making information provision more simple.

Another major trend is the changing nature of work. Many more people are in different and less-secure forms of employment, outside of the scope of more traditional employment arrangements. So we’re looking at how we can provide guidance and support and ensure safety in those different work environments. The demographic profile of the working community is changing with the ageing of the workforce. We’re seeing this with quad bikes, for example, where a lot of the fatalities are either young workers, or workers over the age of 60 who are still working on farms into their 70s and even 80s. So we’re looking at how some of these risks can be managed and the factors behind some of these risks.

The nature of work is also changing. With more automation in work processes, particularly manual processes, there’s a real opportunity to design out hazards with interfaces between humans and hazards in these areas.
Are there any “red flags” that you notice in organisations which are found to be in breach of OHS laws or prosecuted for workplace incidents and fatalities?

One of the things we identified in the roadmap was the need for cultural change. We talked about this with many stakeholders, and what the real elements are that people needed to focus on to actually achieve a good safety culture. We call it the “safety landscape” in the roadmap, so this is one of the important things that should be in place for risk to be controlled in workplaces.

When it comes to good OHS, we’re looking at commitment and leadership from the top to work health and safety. So is it just lip service? Are they looking for guidance? Or do they have policies and procedures on the shelf which don’t translate into practice? These are quite important indicators.

We’re also interested in consultation in the workplace, and the importance of taking corrective actions. So do people understand good incident reporting, and are they actually taking the corrective actions required to drive improvement in safety practices?

Another indicator can be found in the culture of the organisation and its approach to skilled workers. So have people been given the right skills to do their jobs safely, and is there a culture in which workers look out for each other in terms of their health and safety in the workplace? All these factors underpin what we would define as a good workplace.

We also know in some industries that there are things that give rise to new hazards or hazards in particular workplaces. In NSW, for example, there has been a significant increase in construction, so when workers are rushing to finish at the end of a contract – so it is on time and on budget – there’s a greater risk of injury. So projects that are at that stage of completion are things that we keep an eye on.

Also, in particular industries which involve high-risk and major-hazard facilities, there is a significant increased likelihood of an incident occurring in the setting up or decommissioning of high-risk facilities. So we use a lot of different indicators that help flag when we might want to intervene or check on safety in certain industries and workplaces.

What do you notice among “best practice” organisations that consistently have good OHS outcomes?

This links back to what we call the safety landscape. But it is more than this – workplaces that are not focusing purely on compliance in trying to protect themselves legally from accidents. What is more important is that workplaces have a genuine interest in preventing harm to their workers and to the public. Good leaders are genuinely concerned about identifying, addressing and controlling harm.

Consultation is also important, in its use as a genuine way of uncovering issues around harm in the workplace and getting people involved in identifying solutions and understanding what controls are available. So it’s not about adopting procedures off the shelf for these issues, but about understanding the correct behaviours and their application in the workplace.

What advice would you offer OHS leaders in driving and realising good OHS outcomes?

The first thing is being responsible for implementing work health and safety systems in the workplace, and being the person who’s trying to drive those changes. This can be a lonely job. So what we’ve been trying to do is link people who are seeking further guidance, with people who are further along their health and safety journey. We have mentor programs in which we bring mentors and mentees together – people from large organisations who have got good skills and a good record in terms of implementing work health and safety, with smaller organisations that need support and guidance.

I would certainly encourage anybody who would like to better understand what they need to do in terms of work health and safety, to use those sorts of opportunities to link up inside the safety network professional group. We also have mentoring partnerships, which are communities of practice in which people can bounce ideas off their counterparts and get some practical advice on how they might control and manage safety in their workplace.
The neuroscience of complacency in the workplace (and how to manage it)

There is more to complacency than an unsafe state of mind, according to Carl Tinsley, who explains that OHS professionals can benefit from neuroscience research to reduce human-caused errors in workplaces.

In OHS we often define “complacent” as “failing to have a due regard for the hazards and risks associated with our task and/or our environment”. A “complacent” incident could be an unintentional slip (“I accidentally used the wrong oil”), an unintentional lapse (“I forgot to check the oil level”), an intentional mistake (“I thought this oil would be OK”) or an intentional violation (“I couldn’t be bothered checking the oil”).

For the past few decades, neuroscience researchers have enlightened us on how we can manage our behaviour more effectively. But are we OHS professionals effectively using the lessons from this research to reduce human-caused errors in our workplace?

Many of us continue to view “complacency” as a single state of mind and blame it for the cause of many human factor incidents. What would happen if we adopted a neuroscience approach and viewed complacency not as the cause of incidents, but as an outcome of the causal behaviours? How many errors and incidents could we prevent, how many lives could we save if we focused on reducing the behaviours that cause complacency instead of blaming workers for getting complacent? The following simplified scenarios, prove there is more to complacency than an unsafe state of mind.

Scenario 1:

A competent factory worker makes a “dumb” mistake

We’ve likely all suffered that repetitive drive home from work, when our mind wanders from the task of driving safely. Sometimes we only recognise we were daydreaming when we pull into our driveway. We know we should focus when driving but we can’t help drifting off. It’s the same at work when we do a repetitive job – our thoughts wander. A competent factory worker can make a simple slip if something out of the ordinary occurs while their mind was wandering.

For example: failing to notice a small error in a quality control check. Our biology allows this to happen; it is not a conscious decision. When we are becoming competent in a task, our basal ganglia (among other brain areas) automates that task to conserve energy. This lets us do those tasks without conscious thought, which in turn allows our brains to wander. Our mind wanders because we no longer need to focus on the hazards and risks of our task. Yet, the real cause of this complacency is not us choosing to think of something else. Energy-conserving instincts cause it. Our ancestors evolved these instincts when energy supplies were precious and dangerous to acquire. There is no conscious decision to allow the mind to wander; no laziness. When daydreaming, most of the time we are lucky and nothing out of the ordinary occurs. But the problem is we can’t predict when something out of the ordinary will happen, we can only react to it. If we are too late and an incident occurs, we are often blamed as being complacent because we failed to prevent our natural and unconscious instincts from taking over.
“Our training systems fail to ensure when unconscious competence occurs, we unconsciously manage the risks and hazards associated with our task and environment”
Scenario 2:

A skilled forklift operator completing a rush order makes a costly mistake. A forklift operator must load a truck quickly because an order for a client was forgotten. To make sure the load is completed quickly the supervisor watches the process. This added perception of pressure causes the forklift operator to make a mistake, losing the load.

A perception of pressure can cause “complacency”, according to Your Brain at Work. The forklift operator’s limbic system recognised the threat the supervisor presented and this caused a fight, flight, freeze or appease response, which depleted the oxygen and glucose available for the prefrontal cortex, created tunnel vision, impacted decision-making, and overall behaviour became agitated. The operator’s brain released the stress hormones cortisol, adrenaline and norepinephrine, as described by Judith Glaser in her research on the chemicals of conversations (Conversational Intelligence: How Great Leaders Build Trust and Get Extraordinary Results).

Sometimes a dump of adrenaline may cause us to feel focused in situations like these, but it only degrades performance capability. It’s the perception of pressure and the operator’s physiological response to it that caused the limbic system to become over-aroused. This natural behaviour caused a decrease in performance and the incident. There was no malintent or lackadaisical attitude involved.

These are only two examples of many (up to 12) “behavioural traits” that cause us to become complacent naturally. What has neuroscience learnt that OHS professionals should apply?

Competence leads to complacency

Herein lies a conundrum. We aim for level IV unconscious competence in our company and national training system. Yet, we often fail to plan for the pitfalls of unconscious competence. This is a problem, because when we are unconsciously competent, we are programmed to daydream. Our training systems fail to ensure when unconscious competence occurs, we unconsciously manage the risks and hazards associated with our task and environment. Special Forces do this well. Obviously, we can’t all train like the SAS, but there is certainly room for improvement in how we design our training to ensure we are doing things safely when working on autopilot.

What and how we train is reflected unconsciously

If a worker is trained poorly, without gaining a proper appreciation of task hazards and risks, when they become competent that is the standard they will work at when their thinking wanders. If they don’t learn to look left and right before driving into an intersection when they are learning, then they will never do it unconsciously later. The same principle applies with all hazards and risks and safety training. If we don’t check the labels on the oil drum correctly when learning, we will never do it while daydreaming.

Remedial solutions are often competency based

When we have an incident, many of our remedial actions focus on refreshing knowledge by way of issuing a safety bulletin, or in some cases ordering refresher training. These are knowledge or competency based and may have short-term benefits but will not change automatic behaviour. These kneejerk responses fail to re-calibrate our internal “risk barometer”, our amygdala.

Unfortunately, much of our task design unintentionally promotes situations where workers become complacent. Yet when this complacency occurs and things go wrong, who gets the blame? Rarely is the design of the job or the training system itself identified as a contributing factor. Rarer still is the case where a worker’s unconscious competence or natural behaviour is identified as a contributing factor.

Some opportunities in our safety training systems

Our attitudes, values and beliefs unconsciously drive our behaviour. Our competency-based “safety training systems” often focus only on knowledge and skills. But does this training mould the attitudes, values and beliefs to perform a task safely? Probably not. What needs to happen to improve this?

We need to incorporate genuine experience of hazard and risk in our training. Neuroscience research shows we need to calibrate our unconscious “risk barometer”, our amygdala, correctly for a task. For example, Learner drivers who had an incident while learning to drive most likely will be more safety conscious than a Learner who did not have an “incident”. Consider the high incidence of P-Plate accidents. Their lack of “safety-related” experience fails to calibrate their “risk barometer”, resulting in their attitudes, values and beliefs about driving and safety being skewed. This also applies to work in hazardous jobs.

We need to review and redesign tasks where repetitive, mundane work leads to a “wandering mind”, particularly when this puts the worker at risk. When thinking about one thing, we often miss other important things (think back to the invisible gorilla videos). Our workplaces are filled with hidden energy sources. If we are thinking about something else, we fail to recognise many hazards let alone control...
them. Yet, how many tasks or training systems effectively train us to manage this?

We need to **learn and train through the path of Experience, Reflection, Insight and Action.** This applies to all forms of learning. If our workers learn poorly, they will perform poorly. Often, we don’t teach our workers how to be switched on and focused. We just tell them “don’t get complacent” or “stay focused”. Consider the SAS again. They spend months, even years, undergoing realistic experience; learning to be unconsciously predictive, not just reactive, all to keep them safer. Our safety behaviour should be like wearing a seatbelt – when we unconsciously reach for one, if it is not there, we consciously become alert to it. James Zull, in his book *The Art of Changing the Brain*, says that to help achieve this, when learning, our workers need to experience the potential consequences of errors even if only by simulation.

Finally, **we should audit for tasks that create complacent behaviour.** We should identify causal situations or conditions (e.g. fatigue at the end of the day, repetitive tasks etc), and depending on the level of hazard and risk in your business, consider having a complacency management plan.

How well do we manage complacency in the workplace? Not very well. **Many of us treat complacency as the causal problem, but it is an outcome.** We tell workers to not get complacent, to remain focused, but that does not fix the underlying problems. The “problems” are natural behaviours, our task and job design and the mismatch between our attitudes to safety versus the task risks and hazards. How many more incidents could we prevent, lives save and profit regain from only a marginal improvement in managing complacency. In times when we are turning more and more to avatars and computer-based training systems, the skills of an experienced, passionate and skilful OHS professional are becoming more valuable.

Carl Tinsley is a leading trainer of behavioural leadership and behavioural safety and founder of Breaking Ground.
Celebrating diversity in OHS

In September 2017, the Women in Safety & Health (WISH) national network came together for the first time to launch their strategic plan, to cross-promote the SIA mentoring program and to set a new standard of action towards the issues surrounding diversity and inclusion across the WHS industry.

The WISH network is steered by the deeply committed SIA members of Kelly Lovely, Alena Titterton, Sarah-Jane Dunford (NSW), Julie Gratton, Sarah Cuscadden (Victoria), Samantha White (QLD), Lauren Jago (Tasmania), Amanda Day (ACT), Ria Smith (WA) and Andrew Barrett along with the SA Branch.

Supported by Clyde & Co for our launch, we achieved some great numbers with 200 people (both female and male) in attendance and six new formal mentoring relationships recognised after the event.

WISH is committed to the feedback from the OHS profession on the:
• current balance of participation in the WHS profession in Australia from the perspectives of gender, ethnicity and orientation
• current balance in leadership representation in the WHS profession in Australia from the perspectives of gender, ethnicity and orientation
• current position on gender pay equity in the WHS profession in Australia
• needs and interests of the WHS profession, and those considering entering the WHS profession, for further research and exploration.

"The benefits of and access to mentoring and the role that mentors and sponsors play continues to be poorly understood and inconsistently applied"

Improved diversity in the OHS profession

The WISH network stands by its goal of diversity and inclusion across the Australian WHS profession and in practice and its strategic actions around mentoring, research and thought leadership, social media & marketing and collaboration with other forums to network and create events.

We know that we have a lot of work to do, but we are determined, prepared and supportive of our male champions of change to lend a hand along the way.

Diversity by the numbers

Supported by Steve Coldicutt and the team at safesearch, WISH recently conducted a survey about diversity and leadership in OHS. The response we received was overwhelming with, as at close of business on 30 October 2017, 445 people responding and submitting a full response to our online survey.

While time is needed to more deeply analyse the results, the demographics of those that responded continue to be those employed in high-risk industries, with experience and long lengths of service employed on a full-time basis and identifying as heterosexual and Australian.

Interestingly, the majority of respondents were male and largely degree (and above) qualified. This beggars the question – are we tapping into the market that is most likely to influence positive change across the WHS profession (yes!) or are we still thinking about action? By our standards, we’re ready to change.

Implications for OHS

From an early review, the key themes that are emerging are:

Barriers: A wide-ranging list of barriers and challenges exist that are preventing the
You have to have confidence in your ability, and then be tough enough to follow through

- Rosalynn Carter
Women in Safety and Health Network
Strategic Plan 2017 – 2018

Our Goal: Diversity and inclusion across the Australian Health and Safety profession and in practice

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<th>Mentoring</th>
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<th>Social Media &amp; Marketing</th>
<th>Research &amp; Thought Leadership</th>
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<td>To improve the value proposition for mentor / mentee participants; to increase and sustain participation rates; to raise the profile of male mentors to female mentees (and vice versa) &amp; their effective relationships; &amp; to support &amp; promote sponsorship.</td>
<td>To launch the WISH network &amp; provide a forum to grow participation; to provide both networking &amp; learning experiences; to provide a variety of environments in which participants can interact.</td>
<td>Using online, print &amp; social media accounts, raise the profile of the WISH network.</td>
<td>To understand the current gender balance of participation &amp; leadership representation in the OH&amp;S profession; current position on gender pay equity; as well as the needs &amp; interests of women who are entering, or are in, the OH&amp;S profession.</td>
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advancement into leadership positions of our respondents. They range from interpersonal concerns (such as a lack of confidence and a lack of support) to structural issues (such as inadequate resources) and finally towards concerns around the longstanding and entrenched cultural issues of unconscious bias, a masculine/male-dominated working environment and the lack of flexibility across the profession.

Mentors: The benefits of and access to mentoring and the role that mentors and sponsors play continues to be poorly understood and inconsistently applied. It remains a “sand-pit” of the “haves” and “have-nots”.

Outside pursuits: Most respondents reported that they are heavily committed to their roles as carers and volunteers and they enjoy their non-work pursuits, additional study and flexible working arrangements.

Gender pay equity: While some intent does appear to be there, diversity and gender equality follow-through (i.e. action!) remains inconsistent with basic activities like the auditing of business and teams around gender pay equity (wages, salaries and bonuses for WHS professionals) largely not started or, if started, has largely not realised any benefits for the people of our profession.

The ageing of the profession (and feelings around discrimination on the basis of maturing age and an inadequate level of support for those younger people entering the profession) was a continual commentary and should be an area of leadership improvement in the years to come.

The full results of the Leadership Survey will be available in early December 2017.

Next steps for WISH
We at both the WISH network and across our combined social media and marketing platform are all-keen to hear your stories and make sure we are representing your concerns and experiences as we progress our strategic plan into 2018.

Should you like to help, or if you think you have an action area for us to focus on, please drop any of us a line. Currently we are looking for expertise and action in:

• the area of research on gender equity and the safety profession
• support for the SIA mentoring program in order for it to be more highly promoted/ utilised/effective and responsive to the needs and wants of women and girls in (or wanting to join) the WHS profession
• stand-out males who are prepared to be our #malechampionsofchange
• collaboration with other relevant and relatable forums to network and create great events – so that we can move forward!
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#Safetyscape
Connect | Collaborate | Innovate

What is #Safetyscape?

The #Safetyscape Convention will provide an opportunity for the wider health and safety profession to come together, exchange ideas and explore industry trends via a week long program of events, workshops, forums, seminars and conferences.

The event will feature within the 2016 #Safetyscape program:

- Workplace Health & Safety Show 2018
- SIA (Safety Institute of Australia)
- National Health & Safety Conference

Connect
Meet face to face with like minded OHS professionals from a range of industries.

Collaborate
Explore the latest industry trends and hear from local and international thought leaders.

Innovate
Discover the latest innovations in health & safety and learn how to implement them in your workplace.

To register go to: www.safetyscape.com.au