G&S Engineering: #HandsUp for mental health

Tomago Aluminium: keeping the lines of safety open
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Accident investigations within the tier-one construction industry
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Why OHS needs to focus on mental health and wellbeing

*SIA Chair Patrick Murphy* looks at some safety challenges in the year ahead and highlights the importance of mental health and wellbeing as a priority for OHS

The year is well and truly in full swing, and 2019 will undoubtedly bring new and different challenges that we will need to overcome as a community. Some challenges may not be so new or different and will require us to think differently and innovate.

One such problem is mental health and wellbeing. Its prominence across the community is increasingly evident and it continues to be a risk that businesses strive to mitigate. It is perplexing, however, to see and hear of health and wellbeing still described as an emerging risk. It is not. The statistics speak for themselves and serve as evidence that this is something which should be considered a material HSE risk.

The health and wellbeing of ourselves and our people is so vitally important to ensuring positive safety outcomes. Too often we consider mental health in a negative context, and yet for such a widely used term it is still widely misunderstood and this doesn’t make our task any easier in trying to think about mitigating health and wellbeing risk. There is no logical engineering control that can instantaneously eliminate or reduce the risk.

This is because health and wellbeing is complex and it’s about people – a company’s greatest asset – and people are complex. The health and wellbeing of our people is absolutely connected to how engaged our people are with the organisation, their work and their performance; it’s absolutely connected to the culture of an organisation and the performance of the company. If this is the case then health and wellbeing is also connected to how we lead and how we drive and implement change.

We have to get better, and the fact that we have seen the APRA report, the recent Royal Commission into banking and the finance industry, the heightened focus of bullying and harassment across many sectors means the spotlight will be on the response to how organisations manage health and wellbeing.

While this growing level of attention and interest continues and is warranted, we should also not lose focus of the hazards and risks associated with the more traditional aspects of health, especially in relation to occupational hygiene and environmental health. We have also in recent times seen examples of where such risks have been too easily disregarded or not fully assessed, namely, the re-emergence of black lung disease and silicosis.

As the profession evolves and changes, it is apparent that the traditional aspects of health risk are potentially seen with less importance and yet require substantially more technical expertise to manage. As we move forward, it’s clear that we can do better at understanding the full spectrum of health and wellbeing hazards and risks and that we need to be thinking differently in how we manage health and wellbeing risks. In recent years we have started to see an emergence of thinking differently about safety, and so what could be gained if such thinking was extended to how we manage health and wellbeing risk?

Have a safe and healthy year.

“The health and wellbeing of ourselves and our people is so vitally important to ensuring positive safety outcomes”
Tackling the mental health challenge

Many organisations are struggling with mental health and wellbeing challenges among their workforce, however, there are steps that can be taken to proactively address the issue, writes Craig Donaldson

However, there are a number of employers who are increasingly taking a more proactive approach to handling mental health and wellbeing in a sensitive and effective manner. One such employer is Queensland-based professional asset management services provider G&S Engineering, which has taken an innovative and holistic approach to improving mental health and wellbeing across the business, following the suicides of two workers. “So, these unfortunate events woke us up to the fact that we were completely focused on the physical safety of everybody,” explains Mick Crowe, MD of G&S Engineering in the cover story for this issue (beginning page 18). “We hadn’t cut a finger in six months, but we’ve got two dead people. We came to the realisation that if you’re out of touch with the real threats or fears that people face in life, you’re not dealing with mental illness. What we’ve come to believe is, by embracing and helping people with awareness and dealing with mental illness, you actually help others helping people with awareness and dealing with mental illness, you actually help others... if you’re out of touch with the real threats or fears that people face in life, you’re not dealing with mental illness. What we’ve come to believe is, by embracing and helping people with awareness and dealing with mental illness, you actually help others helping people with awareness and dealing with mental illness, you actually help others...

“We hadn’t cut a finger in six months, but we’ve got two dead people... if you’re out of touch with the real threats or fears that people face in life, you’re not dealing with mental illness”

Also in this issue we speak with Simon Mitchell, the people, safety and environment manager for Tomago Aluminium, one of Australasia’s largest aluminium smelters, producing 580,000 tonnes of aluminium every year. Mitchell explains that one of the main drivers of the business is safety, and the smelter recently reached a milestone of 1 million hours without a serious or significant onsite injury. “We’ve spent a lot of time working with our employees to focus away from external factors which can influence business, and really focus on their behaviours – what they can control and have influence over in order to control our own outcomes,” says Mitchell, who adds that this is underpinned by an unwavering commitment by senior leaders to role model behaviours. “I’ve worked for different CEOs, who I would suggest all talk about how important safety is. It’s one thing to say you’re committed to safety; it’s another one to demonstrate the behaviours that go with it – and this is on top of the visibility of the leader. “The role of leaders in the business is to actively listen to employees’ concerns and not pay lip service to them.” For the full story turn to page 10.

For the risk management feature (beginning page 28) of this issue, we speak with Deb Ryan, CEO of aged care and disability provider Community Care Options. The not-for-profit faces a unique range of OHS challenges and has introduced a range of initiatives to drive improved OHS outcomes. One of these includes “yellow cards” that are issued for breaches of WHS responsibilities, such as failing to report an incident or wearing unsafe footwear. “Three yellow cards can result in dismissal,” says Ryan. Thanks to this and a range of other initiatives, Community Care Options has reduced workers’ compensation claim costs from over $30,000 (2015) to $1500 last year (2018).

Lastly, the regulatory feature for this issue features new WorkSafe WA Commissioner Darren Kavanagh. He explains that the most effective means of regulating and trying to improve workplaces is through proactive initiatives, both in the government and private sector. In this feature he also talks about the rise of mental health and wellbeing and how this is a key focus for the WA Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety, which is also working on a Code of Practice looking at mentally healthy workplaces for fly-in fly-out workers in the resources and construction industries. For the full story turn to page 28.
Union appeal to High Court over abuse of safety powers case rejected

The High Court of Australia recently refused to grant special leave to the CFMEU to appeal against a Full Federal Court decision to impose $306,000 in fines for the illegal conduct of its former Queensland President, Dave Hanna. The appeal stemmed from a 2017 decision to impose penalties on the union for its abuse of safety powers to illegally gain access to a Fortitude Valley construction site in 2015. In the original decision, the Court found then union president, Dave Hanna, guilty of refusing to leave the site, squirting water in the face of a site manager, and threatening the manager by saying “take that phone away, or I’ll f***ing bury it down your throat”. The Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) was successful in the Federal Circuit Court in Brisbane in October 2017, and the ABCC successfully defended a union appeal on penalty in the Full Federal Court in August 2018. The High Court also ordered that the CFMEU pay the ABCC’s legal costs of defending the special leave application.

Clearing up OHS confusion under HVNL changes

Following changes to the Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL) late last year, there is some confusion as well as a number of common misunderstandings within the transport industry about certain OHS-related changes, according to Sue Bottrell, senior safety consultant and lawyer with SOS Safety and Legal. For example, employers across the chain are being wrongly advised that they will be held liable in the event that an incident occurs involving a heavy vehicle, regardless of their role or actual influence over the factors which lead to an incident. “Examples have included that a consignor may be held responsible if a transport operator fails to maintain their vehicles, a consignee may be held responsible for a driver being fatigued, for example, where these operations are outside the control of the consignor or consignee,” said Bottrell. Changes were made to the HVNL on 1 October 2018, and the changes clarify the way existing duties to ensure the safe operation of heavy vehicles are to be interpreted, and how the legislation will be applied in the event of an incident.

Workers fake sickies rather than taking time out for mental ill-health

Employees would rather take a sick day and attribute it to a fictitious illness than admit it is for mental health purposes, according to research from Allianz Australia. It found that the vast majority of full-time working Australians (93 per cent) are uncomfortable discussing or disclosing a mental health condition to a manager, and instead would prefer to lie when taking a sick day. The research, which was conducted in collaboration with YouGov and took in 1046 full-time working Australians, found that most employees are generally afraid to talk about mental illness for fear of stigma (90 per cent), and fear of losing their job (78 per cent), and are concerned that mental health issues won’t be taken as seriously as physical illnesses in the workplace (84 per cent). The Awareness into action: A holistic approach to cultivating mentally healthy workplaces in Australia research paper highlighted the stigma associated with mental ill-health in the workplace and the need for a perception shift to see mental ill-health treated like other physical illnesses.

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I’ve been in construction for 20 years, working for various tier-one companies which have all contributed to large-scale infrastructure across NSW and two territories. In my time, I have been fortunate enough (fortunate from my outlook) to participate and lead various degrees of workplace incident investigations.

Like many WHS professionals, the investigation is one component of our position descriptions that we infrequently participate in. Thankfully, my employers over the years have prepared me for this by placing me on investigation training courses which have put me in a position of competence to deliver quality reports when the need to investigate arises. Like me, I’m certain many of the readers have undergone similar training for their roles.

The ugly

On my journey I have observed a heap of variation in the quality of investigations among the construction industry, which is the basis for this article. Some of these observations on quality involve a lack of thoroughness in investigating, where investigators have not collected and analysed all available data. Some investigations have not identified the true root cause(s) of the incident (root causes pending the complex nature of the incident circumstances & the sometimes-multiple causation paths), and other observations include people who are tasked with reviewing and approving the final investigation have not given the investigation review process the necessary time to scrutinise the quality or integrity of the completed work. They simply sign and approve the report. Bias is another observation, and even before the investigation team has determined the incident factors, stakeholders outside the investigation team have solved the problem(s) before any report is finalised.

I’ve observed (and am even guilty of having done this in my early years) WHS professionals giving a blank witness statement to the witness, only to then leave the witness to complete the statement in isolation. The WHS professional would later return to collect the finished statement and not conduct interviews to clarify the details provided.

The idea of taking a statement and conducting an interview with the witness is to understand and capture details from the initial stages of any incident, while information is fresh in the mind of a witness, and not contaminated. It is extremely hard for anyone to deliver a high quality investigation when they are reacting to a major incident some 24 to 48 hours post-incident, and further work is needed on the statement as the initial statement collected was less than adequate. Meanwhile, the witness has since been silenced by external parties advising them not to provide further information in fear of liability. How can quality investigations be achieved in such circumstances when the WHS professional does not get a good quality statement or interview in the first instance? It’s no wonder that our industry suffers recurring fatalities.

Those days of leaving the witness in isolation to complete a statement are over (or should be)! We need to invest in our witnesses by being present when obtaining a statement, and pending your company procedures, potentially writing the statement on behalf of the witness for them to adopt on completion, all the while seeking
clarification from the witness by way of interview.

Contributing factors
The whole point of the investigation process from a construction WHS perspective is to identify the contributing factors or cause(s) and establish corrective action to prevent recurrence. If you read this piece and can argue that generally the quality of investigation is good from within the construction industry, then why do we have repeat fatalities?

Every time that I conduct an inspection or an investigation, I’m looking at the three common variables which should always present themselves (I’m happy to stand corrected). These variables include humans, safe systems of work and the environment in which the work is conducted. If we removed the human variable, there wouldn’t be incidents. So, let’s move beyond the human blame game and focus on the safe systems & environment. Humans have established or maintained these, and so we need to look at these variables to improve our investigations. Holding someone accountable is still acceptable but is not the answer to construction investigations.

On a different tangent, what I believe is also affecting the quality of investigations is the use of logic diagrams in investigation reports. There must be good reason why coroners’ reports, lawyers’ investigations, police reports, and even regulators’ and insurers’ reports do not use logic diagrams. The logic diagram simply attempts to support the rest of the investigation findings which are outlined within the report. From my perspective, there are more poor quality issues associated with logic diagrams than there are good quality investigations! A truly well-constructed logic diagram that resembles the circumstances of an investigation can add value and be considered high quality, however, often, the quality of the logic diagram observed within construction investigations is less than adequate and does not reflect the written investigation details.

Construction industry investigations
I recently completed research for a thesis for a Masters in Accident Investigation through Central Queensland University, and the notion that the quality of investigations within tier-one construction is not sufficient is supported by the following data collected:

- 60 per cent of research participants believe investigations are not done well within the construction industry
- 66 per cent of research participants believe legislation should prescribe investigation techniques & fundamentals to improve quality investigations conducted within construction.

Supporting this, Phil Clarke, the Queensland Ombudsman, conducted a report in 2015 for the Office of Fair and Safe Work Queensland, which was an internal review on the quality of investigations done by Queensland WHS inspectors. The two key findings from the report identified planning for investigations, and ensuring that the investigation identifies all legislative breaches & potentially relevant issues impacting on deaths are addressed and improved within an investigation report.

Allison Hutton, Deputy Head of Courses from Central Queensland University Safety Science department & a PhD candidate, has identified that there are now more than 180 investigation techniques and analysis tools (e.g. ICAM, TapRoot, Why-tree, etc) readily available to industry. Allison’s research will aim to identify how many of these techniques have been validated for effectiveness and use in the profession, and to build a body of evidence on how these tools are used. Could this volume of tools contribute to lack of quality standards from within the WHS profession, especially if current employers and the transient nature of construction employment requires the WHS professional to change techniques with employment? Do these techniques meet any quality-assured standard before being approved for use within industry?

The not so ugly
I need to highlight that there are improvements within the construction investigations, as internal and external forces place pressure on the industry to proactively do better. These observations of improvement are associated with workplace safety systems evolving to prevent incidents (people could argue the opposite as complexity can prevent improvement, and I have observed complex systems). Other improvements associated with the investigation process that improved our performance have stemmed from the mining and mineral sectors overlapping with the construction industry, and those industries investing in up-skilling their WHS professionals in investigation techniques.

Other observations where the quality of the investigation was higher involved consultation between stakeholders with varying degrees of experience. Engaging stakeholders with varying skill sets for a holistic understanding of incident circumstances is necessary. No one person should claim to be able to “go it alone” with the investigation process. It’s up to the trained investigation leader to judge appropriate evidence from inappropriate evidence through analysis, however, every decision and piece of evidence must be justifiable. Additionally, today’s construction leaders (mainly observed from within tier-one construction) who see the benefits of constructing safely, and who don’t see safety as an over-extracost, are generally proactive, enthusiastic and have a vested interest when it comes to ensuring quality outcomes are achieved with workplace investigations.

What can we do to improve?
In conclusion, I don’t mean to upset, frustrate or irritate the profession with this article. My own professional vision is to work in an industry free of fatality. This vision can be achieved by improving the quality of investigations and is supported by a mission of mine which is to deliver quality investigation reports and findings to prevent recurrence. I would like industry to consider achieving similar.

For commonality and improvement in the quality of your workplace incident investigations, readers can seek further guidance from AS/NZS IEC 62740:2016 Root Cause Analysis (RCA). This standard is designed to specify the steps that root cause analyses should include. It explains some techniques for identifying root cause(s), and the strengths and weaknesses for each RCA investigation technique.

Ted Ferry, the author of Modern Accident Investigations and Analysis (2nd ed.), also prescribes the various components of the investigation process, while the SIA provides a cheaper alternative with the OHS Body of Knowledge series – specifically, #32 (Models of Causation), which outlines fundamentals of investigations. Together, we can move the line of scrimmage on quality investigations conducted within the Australian construction industry.

Andrew Summers is WHS Manager NSW/ACT for CPB Contractors, and a member of OHS Professional magazine’s editorial board.

“Even before the investigation team has determined the incident factors, stakeholders outside the investigation team have solved the problem(s) before any report is finalised”
Tomago Aluminium is one of Australasia’s largest aluminium smelters, producing 590,000 tonnes of aluminium every year, which is 25 per cent of Australia’s primary aluminium (and 95 per cent of which is exported to the Asia-Pacific region). The smelter has been operating 24 hours a day since its establishment in 1983 and contributes $1.5 billion annually to the Australian economy (of which $800 million is spent locally).

Tomago operates as an independently managed joint venture between partners Rio Tinto Aluminium, CSR and Hydro Aluminium. The smelter operates as what is known as a tolling company in which the owners provide raw materials to Tomago that are converted to aluminium at the plant, and the product is supplied back to the owners who then take it to market. The smelter employs approximately 950 full-time staff as well as some 250 contractors from the Hunter Valley and Central Coast of NSW.

Tomago’s people, safety and environment manager, Simon Mitchell, says one of the main drivers of the business is safety, with the smelter achieving significant improvements in their safety performance.

Talking the talk
One of the biggest business challenges for Tomago is competing on an international scale, against a backdrop of managing other factors outside of its control, such as the demand and external pricing for the product (which is set by the London Metal Exchange), the costs of electricity (aluminium production relies heavily on electricity and Tomago Aluminium uses around 12 per cent of NSW’s power supply in the process) and raw materials.

“We’ve spent a lot of time keeping our employees informed. It is important for them to understand the business position but focus on factors within our control which can influence the business, effectively being clear on their behaviours, outcomes they control and influence and providing feedback on how they are performing,” he says. “We’ve done that through using multiple channels to engage with employees. We have the normal measures like toolboxes, safety meetings, as well as consultative meetings, where employees can raise concerns about safety and what is getting in the way of them doing their work effectively.”

Tomago also employs informal channels such as “Brekkie with the Boss”, where every fortnight Tomago’s CEO Matt Howell and Mitchell (who reports directly to Howell) sit down and have breakfast with 12 to 15 employees. “This is a voluntary thing, in which we invite employees to turn up, have a bacon and egg roll, cup of coffee, and just talk to us about what’s concerning them across the site: what’s working well, what’s not working well, and what rules don’t make sense to them from a safety perspective. These provide really valuable insights because it’s a more relaxed environment where people have a voice,” says Mitchell.

Tomago also organises “listening lunches” where department managers ask guys off the floor to have lunch with...
“The role of leaders in the business is to actively listen to employees’ concerns and not pay lip service to them”
them, and they can talk over a hamburger or sandwich about what’s frustrating them – similar to Brekkie with the Boss, but at a managerial level.

“One of the key learnings for the site was for leaders to work at the right level and connect across the plant rather than operate in silos,” says Mitchell. “Every morning at 8:45 the leaders meet collectively to reflect and discuss performance in the past 24 hours, and what as been learnt over this period. We discuss the safety and environmental issues that have cropped up the past 24 hours of concern to us. These conversations run for about 10 or 15 minutes, before we review the business performance. It is really important for us to be a learning organisation, cultivating a psychologically safe place for leaders to learn from mistakes.”

**Forums for safety**

Another significant contributor to improved OHS within the business is using safety as a vehicle to engage with employees. “We don’t separate safety and production; they are interrelated. Frustrations that get in the way of someone doing their job smoothly and efficiently, have an impact on the safety as well. Poor reliability of equipment can lead to frustration, which may lead to higher-risk choices being made. It is important employees feel their concerns are heard and feedback provided on decisions to remedy their concerns,” explains Mitchell.

Tomago Aluminium has a couple of channels to help operations run more smoothly and safely, including a “Good Ideas” intranet page where any employee can submit an idea that they think could make the business run more effectively, efficiently or safely. “This encourages innovation through sharing ideas which are visible to all employees. Harnessing the collective brainpower of 1000 people is powerful to finding solutions,” says Mitchell. Tomago’s management team (which comprises the CEO, CFO and six other leaders) meet weekly for up to a full day, and the very first thing on the agenda is safety. They also review the “Good Ideas” page to help get a feel for what is happening in the business and what needs to be acted on.

“This has been a real help for us to get a sense of what’s going on at the floor level – and this is in addition to your normal expectations as a leader, to be visible and walking the floor, talking to people and conducting your normal observations in the workplace,” says Mitchell.

Another way communication is employed effectively through the business for the purposes of improved safety is through the power of storytelling in order to engage the hearts and minds of employees. Mitchell observed the importance of positive storytelling and recognising the contributions of employees. “We have a weekly newsletter called ‘Wins of the Week’, which has a strong focus on safety where people have demonstrated behaviours of caring or looking after each other, or maybe someone identified an improvement and we acted on that, or it might be just an employee who stayed back to help out his team get through a difficult time. We’ll tell

“We don’t separate safety and production; they are interrelated”
those stories of how people have actually helped out to recognise those employees.”

**Walking the walk**

Underpinning the above and a culture in which safety is prioritised is an unwavering commitment by senior leaders to role model behaviours, according to Mitchell. “There are no secrets on how critical the drive and support of the CEO of a business is. It’s one thing to say you’re committed to safety; it’s another one to demonstrate the behaviours that go with it, role modelling to other leaders, to build trust,” he says.

“The role of leaders in the business is to actively listen to employees’ concerns and not pay lip service to them, which in turn builds relationships.”

To help develop senior leaders (comprising the management team of eight and the next level down with up to 20 leaders at the superintendent production and maintenance superintendent levels), the business engages an organisational psychologist. “This is to help us understand our own mindsets and beliefs that drive our behaviours. This exercise helps hold the mirror up to develop emotional intelligence which is critical for leaders to be effective,” he says. “The psychologist has helped provide the brutal facts to leaders about what behaviours people are seeing in us that we’re not seeing in ourselves. We did a 360-degree feedback lifestyles inventory (LSI) assessment, where others give you honest feedback around the behaviours that they’re seeing. You get to see the gap between how you see yourself and how others see you. It’s a powerful tool to help you understand your blindspots and what you need to improve on.”

The assessment was recently repeated, to help understand shifts in behaviour and the change associated with this. “It’s been a journey of three to five years for most of the leaders in the business, with a commitment to act on those behaviours. Our leaders are held to account for those behaviours by each other as well as their direct leader. It’s about getting that balance of accountability right with psychological safety, demonstrating vulnerability, where people feel comfortable to speak their mind and share concerns, ideas and thoughts.”

**Safety and contractor management**

Tomago has also made a concerted effort to bring its contractors on the safety journey. About 20 per cent of its workforce (about 250 people) are contractors, and Mitchell says it’s important to engage the contractor group in the business initiatives and programs.

The business has a strong selection process for the assessment and approval of contractors. This includes Tomago looking at the safety systems of that business and interviewing their leaders, employees and referees to get an understanding of their approach to safety.

“One they’re on board though, we give them access to many of our own systems onsite: our incident reporting system, and hold monthly meetings with all contractors onsite in one group to share how the business is going, what incidents have happened, what we are concerned about, and listen to their concerns and frustrations,” says Mitchell.

A technology change was recently implemented through the business’ gate entry system, which can identify any contractors who are new to site (less than 100 hours of work), which is highlighted on a daily basis. “If you’re doing a high-risk job, and we know that you haven’t been onsite at all for 90 days or if you’ve done less than 100 hours of work onsite, we would consider you to be a new employee,” he says.

“If the system flags when a relatively new or inexperienced contractor is onsite, we assess the risk of the work the contractor is planned to perform. If it’s high risk, then additional controls are considered such as higher levels of supervision or buddying the person with an experienced worker for the day to manage the risk more effectively.”
“When people report, you need to have good systems and mechanisms in place to feed back to them what’s happening with the hazard or near miss that they reported.”

**Metrics and indicators**

Tomago Aluminium employs an electronic system to record and report all WHS data, and the business has made it clear that it expects everyone across the site to be involved in looking for hazards and reporting near misses. About five years ago, key safety metrics changed in the business and lead indicators such as hazard numbers and near misses reported needed to be recorded.

“When people report, you need to have good systems and mechanisms in place to feed back to them what’s happening with the hazard or near miss that they reported,” says Mitchell. “We created a system where it is easier to obtain feedback. Any employee can access the system, which improves engagement through providing feedback that is more effective. While it is not perfect, it is significantly better than was the case previously, which in turn encourages further reporting of hazards.”

At present, the severity rate within Tomago stands at 0.86 lost shifts per 200,000 hours. There has also been significant improvement in metrics such as a hazard event ratio of 21.5 (total hazards/near misses reported/injuries) and an AIFR of 0.48, particularly in the past three to five years. “Leading HSE indicators in the business include tracking compliance to safety-critical core competencies, others include hazard and near miss reporting, risk reduction projects, emergency preparedness, the management of actions and investigations along with voluntary participation in health and wellbeing activities,” says Mitchell.

Continuing to drive risk lower is an ongoing requirement across all parts of the business. Tomago uses the review of risk registers, incident reporting data, as well the various direct employee engagement forums which all provide input into which activities are targeted to reduce risk. “The business allocates funding to reduce the highest residual risks where it’s practical to do so. Each year we have capital money to spend on safety-critical risk reductions across the...
site. A measure of performance is the risk reduction achieved from that work along with the number of employees with less exposure as a result,” he says. “Preparing for when or if something goes wrong is also important for us. We want all employees to know how to manage or control the impact of a more serious incident. This is not just fire extinguisher drills, but potential incidents including gas leaks or furnace explosions where there are multiple fatality risks. We have a responsibility to ensure all employees know what to do in a pressure situation. The best way is to practise,” says Mitchell. “We’ve assessed the highest risks and designed our emergency response drills to mitigate those. When we practise we can always find a way to improve our response further.”

Another leading indicator is Tomago’s auditing system, which is championed by leaders and encompasses operators throughout the business. “The life-saving controls we complete onsite validate that the vital risk controls are current and are well understood and are working. So, leaders walk around the site and talk to people to make sure they understand what those are, but also validate that they are in place. We assess trends in non-conformance, and track actions that have been implemented as a result,” he says.

Major risks and hazards

Being a high-risk business (the smelter is not classified as a major hazard facility by definition), Mitchell says Tomago Aluminium faces a number of hazards with the potential consequence of single or multiple fatalities. These include the risk of explosion (interaction between moisture and molten metal along with gas), working at heights, mobile equipment, confined space, cranes and lifting, energised work, hazardous substances, electricity and molten material.

“For a WHS professional, it’s an exciting place to work as there are plenty of things to learn,” says Mitchell. “The major challenge for us is to really nail high-risk events, particularly fatal risk and multiple fatality risk events, and make sure all of our employees really understand those risks and controls well. We use the language of life-saving controls, which is not dissimilar to any particular business that is in high risk. Some places call them golden rules, but we spend a lot of energy and time making sure all our employees really understand those life-saving controls.”
Taking the safety pulse of Western Australia

Australia’s OHS regulators play a fundamental role in improving health and safety outcomes. OHS Professional speaks with WorkSafe WA Commissioner Darren Kavanagh 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 for WorkSafe WA over the coming 12 months?

The WHS Commissioner position in Western Australia has been established with a new capacity, which is essentially an independent role. Historically, it sat within the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety, but the Minister (Bill Johnston, Minister for Mines and Petroleum; Energy; Industrial Relations) recently changed this, so my current role is as an independent WorkSafe WA Commissioner. Essentially, WorkSafe WA works collaboratively with the industry’s employers and employee representatives, to look at the key areas of focus and address these. WorkSafe has identified priority areas based on trends and statistics and collaboration with the industry. The priority areas we see regularly are based around things like manual handling tasks, slips, trips and falls, working at heights, and all the hazards that I mentioned earlier such as manual handling, slips, trips and falls, et cetera.

How is mental health and wellbeing evolving as an issue in the industry and also for WorkSafe WA as a regulator?

Mentally healthy workplaces are a key focus, and at the moment the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety is working on a Code of Practice. The Code of Practice is looking at mentally healthy workplaces for fly-in fly-out workers in the resources and construction industries, and it’s also very important in other sectors including the public sector. The Code is intended to be published in 2019, and incorporates and guides material, so that’s a really good start to tackle what is a significant and emerging risk in West Australian workplaces.

WorkSafe WA has engaged a couple of specialist inspectors, and those inspectors broaden the skill sets of our inspectorates to allow us to take a more proactive approach and regulate matters such as mental health and wellbeing, and all the hazards that I identified earlier such as manual handling, slips, trips and falls, et cetera.

“One of the key areas of focus that I’m keen to look at is the health side of OHS, and WorkSafe will have a continued focus on health”

Even though mental health issues have been around for some time, in terms of addressing them in general workplaces, we’re still in the very early stages. There was some substantial work done in the development of mentally healthy workplaces for fly-in fly-out workers, and the work that was done included surveys, statistical reviews, and information reviews related to mental health. What was learnt through that process is that there is an increased risk with fly-in fly-out activities, and this is why that Code has attracted some priority attention for Western Australia. It will cover a large part of West Australian workplaces, and that’s why we’re now looking at implementing the Code.

In terms of other industries, there are certain ones that will fall into a high-risk grouping when it comes to mental health. There’s evidence that construction and even some of the retail industry sectors, where there are customer service interactions, raise issues around mental health and safe workplaces. That’s going to require a lot more conversation about the best methods for managing those circumstances in those industries.

How is the role of WorkSafe WA evolving with regards to government and employers, in getting the best outcomes for all?

The most effective means of regulating and trying to improve workplaces is through proactive initiatives, both in the government and private sector. There is benefit, obviously, in reactive inspections – for example, dealing with complaints made by workers at workplaces, and queries by employers at workplaces. Those reactive inspections are important. But the proactive inspections are useful in identifying issues and raising industry awareness of particular hazards.

WorkSafe has a range of proactive campaigns which we’re planning to implement. For example, there is a proposal to engage with demolition licence holders in 2019. Essentially, that is providing educational material to demolition licence holders, to focus on particular hazards and improve their compliance for that particular sector of industry.

There’s a compliance project targeting the solar panel industry, with a focus on prevention and management of work-related musculoskeletal disorders. Something else that is particularly important in the health space is a campaign in relation to fabrication of stone benchtops. We’ve got some data now and some feedback from industry, that we need to look at the risk around silicosis and raise awareness of the control measures to prevent silicosis, particularly in the stone...
Another area that is going to increase, will be a significant motivator to improve government safety.

How do you see this evolving over the coming 3-5 years? What are the major trends that will likely impact WorkSafe WA as well as government/employer organisations?

Looking at those trends, we need to make sure we develop educational tools as well as enforcement actions to make those areas safer.

How is WA progressing with regards to the “nationally harmonised” WHS laws, and implementing these?

The West Australian government has stated its commitment to modernising WHS laws. Prior to my arrival, the Minister had established a Ministerial Advisory Panel, and that Panel came up with a variety of recommendations to adopt the model Work Health and Safety Bill in April 2018, and the recommendations from the Ministerial Advisory Panel were put out to a public consultation period between July and August. Those comments can be found on Minister Johnston’s website. That’s a really good initiative, and the intention will be that Western Australia will look at harmonising not just the OHS Act, but also the Mines Safety and Inspections Act, as well as laws covering the petroleum and dangerous goods areas.

It’s a key area of reform for the government, consolidating those into a single Act while retaining the separate regulations. This will be a marked improvement for our laws in Western Australia.

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

Most workplace deaths relate to a failure to identify and control well-known hazards, such as falls from heights, being struck by mobile plant and so on. We’re seeing an increase in the prevalence of psychosis, and, of course, electricity is in the higher end of the bracket of those hazards that cause workplace injuries and fatalities.

Anecdotal information indicates that organisations that have good, robust consultancy systems – those systems that include communication with their workers, election of health and safety representatives, and implementation of health and safety committees – are typically best placed to identify and control workplace hazards.

Another area that is going to increase, will be a significant motivator to improve government safety.

Additional, in the government sector, we’re looking at working with government agencies to deal with common interests. That includes regulation of asbestos and pesticides. So, it is a large body of work to address these particular hazard areas.

Finally, it’s worth mentioning the increased penalties for breaches of workplace laws in Western Australia. That came into effect on 3 October, and the intention there is that those increased penalties should motivate workplace participants to improve their compliance, and send a message to industry where such penalties are applied.

There was a recent case where WorkSafe was successful in prosecuting a director, and that director was found guilty of failing to provide a safe workplace. Those enforcement activities, when the increased penalties kick in, will be a significant motivator to improve government safety.

One of the key areas of focus that I’m keen to look at is the health side of OHS, and WorkSafe will have a continued focus on health, particularly with regards to asbestos, silica, noise, and psychosocial hazards. We are keen to look at trends in these areas, and improving overall safety management systems for management of those hazards.

Another area that is going to increase, in terms of the risks as well as the number of people it affects, is the ageing of the workforce. There are ongoing issues around manual handling tasks, slips, trips and falls.
G&S Engineering Services is a provider of professional asset management services covering engineering, construction, maintenance and optimisation to the resources, energy, ports and infrastructure sectors in Australia. Based in Mackay, Queensland, it is a division of DRA Global and employs about 1000 people across the country.

The organisation’s capabilities range from structural, mechanical, piping, electrical and instrumentation, through to manufacturing and fabrication, and engineering disciplines. With clients including BHP, Anglo American, Fortescue Metals Group, Roy Hill, Glencore and Rio Tinto, its services cover entire project lifecycles from feasibility to construction and commissioning, through maintenance and optimisation, to final decommissioning.

G&S Engineering Services’ managing director, Mick Crowe, has been with G&S for 24 years and has overseen its growth and expansion from a small local firm to a national organisation with offices and operations across the continent. G&S has always focused on the physical risks at work, fundamentally making sure we have zero fatalities. “In 2003 one of our employees was injured on duty, which resulted in the loss of his eye. Since then, the mantra has always been ‘just make sure that’s our worst-ever injury’, says Crowe. “Along the way we realigned over and above the physical risks of work, looking at what harms our people outside the work environment for which we now have a wide range of controlling measures.”

G&S Engineering Services has taken a holistic approach to workplace health and safety. Craig Donaldson speaks with the firm’s MD and head of HR about how it has fostered a genuine culture of care and how it goes about improving mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

#HandsUp for mental health
Identifying and responding to critical risks

There are a number of risks that the firm, and its employees, have identified including working at heights, confined space work, energised systems, scaffolds, lifting and craneage. A second major risk relates to fatigue while driving, and Crowe says this is a “big deal” in Central Queensland for the organisation’s workforce, particularly where staff are working on a drive-in, drive-out basis. “That is a big risk to people, and managing that risk around travel and fatigue is something we are passionate about,” he says.

To help address high-risk work activities, the firm has critical control management measures in place, in which the leadership team has seven identified activities that are material if loss of control occurs. Critical controls have assigned risk owners responsible for effective control of the identified risk, and identified risks are measured monthly for compliance/non-compliance, with actions undertaken to address and eliminate non-compliance.

Other steps implemented to address these risks include the development and rollout of “crib cards” for supervisors to assist with on-the-job critical control management, as well as a range of safety campaigns. This includes the “eye on the ball” campaign (currently being rolled out), which focuses on directing thoughts and actions to keeping safety in mind as a first consideration.

“Over the past few years we’ve benchmarked the 2003 incident and shifted our focus to ensure we’re responding to and learning from it, and sharing that, so we don’t suffer a repeat event somewhere else,” says Crowe.

An example of this can be found in managing fatigue, which Crowe says is largely a logistics issue and comes down to how well individuals are managed in the business for the most part. “It’s about asking the right questions and making sure that someone who is at risk has an alternate driver or even a replacement for their shift,” he says. “It comes down to managing logistics and the travel plans required to get to wherever we need to travel, ensuring that the distances between places aren’t excessive, and allowing for appropriate time to sleep. It’s about providing transport when you need to, getting people to work together and carpool when necessary, or making sure they are well rested before driving to work.”

Learning safety from others

G&S has followed the lead of many of its clients, and Crowe says one of the benefits in being a contractor is the exposure to the systems employed by other organisations. “You get to see the best of everything, and pick that up yourself. Our approach is more like a combination of what we’ve seen as best practice with some of our major clients when it comes to best practice of managing fatal or critical risks.”

G&S put a strong emphasis on lead indicators to gain insight across the business. Crowe says this is
then a matter of having conversations in the field to provide human validation that the data coming out of the field is correct. “Data for me only ever gives an indication. All you’re doing is looking at trends and being able to explain those trends,” says Crowe.

“We rely heavily on the safety interaction process ourselves. Rather than simply ticking boxes, we prefer to have a conversation around actions, concerns and areas of improvement. This data tells whether our hazard reporting systems, our critical control systems, or our communications around habits and risks are actually effective in the field,” says Crowe, who explains that without this validation of system-generated analytics, there is a risk of being out of touch with what’s happening.

There are behaviours which underpin the safe management of critical risks inside the workplace, such as whether or not a worker drives fatigued or not. There are also behaviours that underpin whether workers will look after their own mental health or intervene if they think someone else has a problem. “The primary thing we need to work on in each case is having a means to manage the risk, but the biggest challenge is embedding a real culture of caring throughout the organisation. This will ultimately ensure processes are followed and projects are delivered safely,” he says.

Suicides prompt a rethink
A third fatal risk facing G&S is suicide, Crowe says. “Statistically, the biggest risk to people at work is not falling asleep while they’re driving. It’s not actually a high-risk task gone wrong. It’s actually mental health – and that’s not some epiphany from G&S; it’s there in the statistics.”

Crowe recalls a period in the business where it was up to around 1200 staff, with a major focus on physical safety at work. “We went for six months without a reportable injury, and we were ‘high-fiving’ ourselves about this and celebrating – as you should. But in that same period, one of our down day crew workers, who typically worked two or three days a week, committed suicide when he was on leave at home. Another worker who was on and off work for 10 years in the construction space, who had not long left us but who we all knew fairly well, also committed suicide around that same time.”

“So, these unfortunate events woke us up to the fact that we were only focused on the physical safety of everybody. We hadn’t cut a finger in six months, but we’d lost two colleagues. We came to the realisation that if you’re out of touch with the real threats or fears that people face in life, you’re not dealing with mental illness. What we’ve come to believe is, by embracing and helping people with awareness and how to manage mental illness, you actually help others as well. It’s a genuinely engaging process which drives a real culture of care. It means caring about the overall wellbeing of colleagues, how they’re feeling, how they’re travelling at home, whether they have any other problems that are impacting their life – which
“We came to the realisation that if you’re out of touch with the real threats or fears that people face in life, you’re not dealing with mental illness”

then helps us, and them, to focus on associated risks such as fatigue levels when they’re driving. The number one risk of losing someone is through mental health, then through fatigue while driving, and then through the actual physical risks at work – which is still the focus for many organisations.”

Lee Sheather, executive manager HR for G&S, echoes Crowe’s sentiments and agrees that a person’s mental health has an impact on their ability to think and act safely on the worksite. “There is a link between the two,” says Sheather. “The leading cause of death among men between the ages of 15 and 44 – which is a large portion of our workforce – is suicide. If we are looking at the statistics, six men kill themselves every day in Australia. That’s quite a startling statistic, and it’s certainly something that we care about in the construction industry, where such a high portion of our employees are males in that age category.”

Mental health strategies and initiatives

According to statistics, some 65 per cent of people don’t seek help when they have a mental health illness. “So that’s where we started: how do we actually do our bit to make sure it’s not a taboo topic,” says Crowe, who explains that the firm’s mental health and wellbeing strategy (called #HandsUp) covers:

• promoting positive mental health, psychological safety and wellbeing
• delivering initiatives that promote suicide prevention/intervention
• supporting people who experience mental health issues
• delivering a holistic approach to mental health, including physical health and wellbeing.

One of the first initiatives to address mental health in the business was a video produced for the #HandsUp campaign. This was designed to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and featured a number of employees telling their stories about mental health issues and the importance of speaking up and asking for help. The video was produced in conjunction with the local football team, which had also lost two of their team through suicide. “It’s easy to find people who had been suffering through mental illness, and largely alone or largely isolated. Those people were happy to speak up and talk about it – and yet no one knew,” says Crowe.

The first video was produced and distributed through the business a couple of years ago. A second video was added to support the message, and a number of other initiatives across the business, to help employees deal with issues. “We’ve embarked on a couple of initiatives over the past 12 months that have moved us past the ‘Are you OK?’ question, and encourages open, honest conversations. We help people to develop life skills and ensure we have the right support in place should we have to intervene when somebody needs help. This all stems from the same culture of care that promotes courage, to speak up if you care about yourself and others, and to say something to somebody if you think they are doing something unsafe in the workplace. It’s no different,” says Crowe.

Over the years the business has introduced a number of initiatives to help support a culture of care in practice, including:

• three annual eight-week health and wellbeing projects, which recognise that a good mental health supports good mental health (healthy eating, mindfulness, goal setting, sleep hygiene, boxing sessions, table tennis)
• “Safetalk” training, which focuses on recognising signs of mental health issues, and how to talk to someone if they may be thinking about suicide
• selection and training of mental health first aiders, who are the “first responders” in the business
• sponsoring viewing of the movie Suicide: The ripple effect to help spread a message of understanding and hope
• an updated fitness-for-work policy, which includes treating psychological injury the same as physical injuries (with fitness-for-work assessments via Gryphon Psychology) and return-to-work plans
• dedicated “safety interactions”, which have been extended to include how the person is feeling, in which personal stressors are discussed
• joining the “inspire your tribe” initiative via Mackay Health to promote healthy living, and encouraging joining the 10,000 step challenge tracking steps program for weight loss and health
• supporting community events such as the Mackay Marina Run and Run4MiLife
• an employee assistance program through Gryphon Psychology for all workers.

Sheather explains that there is a strong link between mental and physical wellbeing, and the firm’s health and wellbeing strategy has been developed by a team of people across the business, led by its HR and HSEQ executive managers. Some of the above initiatives (such as the eight-week health challenges) are designed to help employees help themselves when it comes to preventing mental illnesses in the first place. Other initiatives in the above are designed to help support a genuine culture of care within the business and reduce the stigma associated with talking about mental health. An important part of this has been addressing misconceptions within the business about what it means to look after mental health. “We still have challenges with reducing that stigma, and the judgment that comes with mental health issues and thoughts of ‘I shouldn’t have to talk about this’. We have people in the business who can identify the indicators and spot
an employee who might be in need of help and then encourage them to talk to their mates and look after themselves. So, we’ve moved to a very proactive approach, and this has had degrees of success across the business,” says Sheather, who adds that G&S has also updated its fitness-for-work procedure to focus fairly on both psychological and physical injuries.

The next steps in the journey for G&S include:

• rolling out a mental health survey, specifically around mental health, via Gryphon Psychology to inform further initiatives in the firm’s strategy and to guide current and future targets
• rolling out Safetalk training to the firm’s blue-collar workforce, following completion of training for the office team in January 2019
• completing the selection process for mental health first aiders and organising training of the same to be available on every major worksite
• including Safetalk training for all supervisors covering inductions
• establishing a peer support network
• developing a new #HandsUp video, with a focus on three words for employees in need: “I need help”
• introducing #HandsUp ambassadors across the business.

To help support the above, G&S updated three of its five core values to the following:

• “Safety and wellbeing is our first consideration”
• “We listen and we communicate”
• “We don’t walk past – because we care”.

For a meeting of more than three people, a “safety and wellbeing share” is the standard opening procedure. Safety interactions have also been adapted to include wellbeing as an integral element of discussions with employees and contractors. For supervisor inductions, the first full day includes a session on strategic intent (which covers the core values above), followed by a near-full day on safety. This second day includes a 30-minute segment about #HandsUp, what it is about, reducing stigma and removing judgment (so that people can talk about it), and why, as well as what, their role as a supervisor is.

Results and outcomes

G&S has reaped a number of positive outcomes as a result of its proactive and holistic approach to improving safety and wellbeing in the business. “The most encouraging change we have seen from our programs is the 350 per cent increase in the utilisation of our EAP. This reflects what we know from broader community data that mental wellbeing is the most common risk to people, and this statistic tells us we are headed in the right direction,” says Crowe. Its WA team recently achieved a two-year (730 days) recordable injury free rate.

Furthermore, safety interactions are a lead indicator and used as a mechanism to ask ‘R U OK?’ and provide Safetalk training, with a goal of having more than 80 per cent of staff trained in the first year. Crowe explains that in late December 2018, an employee (a workforce planner who had recently completed Safetalk training) identified a team member who was having suicidal thoughts over the phone. Due to the training, the workforce planner notified authorities, who arrived at the residence, while still talking over the phone. As a result, the person was able to get the help they needed. “The workforce planner spoke to him late January – he’s doing very well and is in a much different frame of mind. He has accessed help and support from family and friends, made some changes and he’s ready to increase the number of days he is working,” says Crowe. “Our workforce planner is about to receive the R&I East Safety Champion of the Month Award – a thank you letter, certificate and safety champion shirt.”

“Our rigorous selection process aims to identify candidates who would fit the safety culture in which people firmly believe: ‘I’ve got to look after myself’”

G&S is in the process of conducting a survey in conjunction with its EAP provider, which includes a list of around 10 questions (Kessler 10) that are all mental health indicators. “We are planning on using that as a basis for some kind of measure of success, and the results of that survey will help us review our strategy,” says Sheather, who explains that the survey will be conducted on an annual basis to examine whether there has been a shift in key indicators around safety and wellbeing.

Another measure the firm is looking at is the percentage of people who have completed the Safetalk training, and Sheather says the business has a target of 80 per cent or greater. “With mental health first aiders out in the business, 100 per cent coverage is our aim. We only just started on that journey, and already 14 people have expressed interest in becoming a mental health first aider (four days of training, including two days with Safetalk – Assist and another two days with Mental Health First Aid Queensland). The selection process has already begun. We’re about to roll out some behavioural interviews based on criteria that we worked on with our EAP provider to identify the people that we think are the right people to take on those roles,” she says.

Otherwise, qualitative feedback from both within and outside the business is very positive, and Sheather says that many new candidates looking to join G&S Engineering are impressed by the firm’s reputation of safety and caring. “As a result, it is a business they are actively seeking to join. Our rigorous selection process aims to identify candidates who would fit the safety culture in which people firmly believe: ‘I’ve got to look after myself, I’ve got to look after my mates, and we’re all in this together’. We have focused a lot on this over the past 18 months and this has connected us with people who share our values, and who share the concern about safety and about our fellow workers.”
Improving safety performance through incident investigations

There are a number of steps organisations can take to strengthen safety performance and reassure workers of the necessity and importance of timely and accurate reporting of incidents, writes Bruce Johnson.

Over the years there has been significant improvement in reporting workplace incidents across organisations from small business through to large multinational organisations ranging across the various industry sectors, from construction, resources, energy, manufacturing, business, rail, logistics, agriculture and services.

These improvements directly align to management understanding and addressing the importance of being well informed and proactive to manage what is occurring across their operations and workplaces. This has been extensively demonstrated through organisations reviewing and implementing improved incident management processes, ensuring consistency across all operations, educating personnel in timely and accurate incident reporting and investigations, moving from just paper-based reporting to comprehensive electronic databases, and incorporating the use of mobile devices to register incident information.

Areas that have been a catalyst towards this improvement include organisations' awareness and requirement to:
• understand their defined and assigned accountability and responsibility for statutory obligations within the relevant legislation/s
• reduce the cost of injury to the employer, both indirect and direct, such as workers’ compensation
• reduce production downtime and become more efficient, leading to increased profit
• provide a healthy and safe working environment.

In addressing the above, upper management have understood the necessity for a robust incident reporting culture, followed by quality investigations to determine systemic deficiencies and implement appropriate corrective actions to learn from what has occurred (the incident) to prevent recurrence of a similar incident. It is commonplace now for organisations to promote and deliver healthy and safe work groups, and safe and efficient workplaces.

Although significant improvements in incident reporting have been made, there still exists varying levels of acceptance across industry as to what is the standard required. To understand, qualify and quantify an organisation’s level and improvement in their reporting culture requires a transparent approach with openness across the organisational hierarchy from operators to upper management, and the accuracy of performance markers.

During my role as investigator/trainer with Safety Wise Solutions, conducting incident investigations, training incident investigation methodology (Incident Cause Analysis Method, ICAM) and working closely in the operational and safety departments of organisations across the various industry sectors has given insight into various incident management regimes and subsequently incident reporting levels. Experience has shown that when asking an individual their opinion or perception of the organisation’s reporting culture with respect to incidents, the comments can significantly vary from those of the operator, maintainer, supervisor, manager, board, and so on. These varied responses can be contributed to the varying levels of reporting within the organisation where “pockets of excellence” exist with some departments and/or sites producing a high standard of reporting, while other areas in that same organisation may be below that standard.

The organisation may have the systems and processes in place to support good reporting. Management may assume that if systems are in place, reporting must be to a good standard. However, the system alone does not mandate good reporting is occurring across the business. The organisation’s safety performance...
markers do not always accurately reflect the various reporting standards across the organisation due to poor behavioural discipline in adhering to process and how the performance is measured. While low reporting in one area may indicate good safety performance from the current statistics, this may be misleading in that this “good” performance is only sustained in the short term. Incidents are still going unreported, leaving latent systemic deficiencies remaining unaddressed with the organisation vulnerable long term, leading to deteriorating safety performance and catastrophic consequences.

Generally, there is improvement in incident reporting across industry, with some of industry achieving a high standard; however, there still exists further opportunities to enhance the reporting culture specific to incidents.

Common gaps and challenges
What is observed in many organisations is certain types of incidents are reported to a high standard while other incidents remain unreported. The incidents that are generally reported to a high standard are typical of incidents having a tangible outcome, such as property damage, injury, loss of production; that is, putting it simply, what is noticeable. On the other hand, an incident such as a near miss or near hit is more likely to go unreported due to the nature of the incident being without injury or damage, but having the potential to do so.

There are several reasons, or gaps in systems and processes, why incidents – including near misses – go unreported, diminishing the organisation’s reporting culture. These reasons include:
- no appreciation of the learnings and benefits from reporting and follow up
- near miss incidents are not clearly defined and understood in the organisation
- fear of blame or embarrassment having negative repercussions that someone had worked unsafely
- the organisation has minimal structure or an unclear reporting process
- perceived time constraints caused by the organisation’s focus on production

The above-mentioned gaps relate to the underreporting of incidents. Management must be aware of these issues and what is relevant to, and/or adversely impacting on, their operations. Some gaps are easily dealt with, such as developing a system and process, defining terms, roles and responsibilities, and education and awareness sessions. However, other gaps can be more challenging to address. These challenges include:
- building trust across the workplace by removing blame and implementing a “fair and just culture” model where accountability (both individual and organisational) is identified and managed accordingly
- ensuring the reporting process, including electronic database, is user friendly
- delivering and maintaining a robust feedback communication mechanism to all personnel
- ensuring good operational discipline to process across all levels of the organisation’s structure.

The above challenges, especially those which are behavioural based, must be supported by management commitment to process, responsibility, accountability, and provision of credible data. Credible data following reporting the incident is achieved using a systems-level investigation methodology, such as ICAM. A systems-level investigation identifies the contributing factors to the incident, thus defining human error, organisation deficiencies and inadequate safe systems of work. From a solid reporting structure, management can implement initiatives, such as an investigation to determine what happened, why it happened, what they are going to do about it, and what is learnt to share. Therefore, a good reporting culture leads to a good, informed and learning culture, giving management a solid platform for continuous improvement directly attributed to commitment and responsibility across all roles and sectors of the business.

Incident investigation trends
Currently, organisations are in various phases of their reporting culture, ranging from (i) management accepting there is serious room for improvement, to (ii)
“While low reporting in one area may indicate good safety performance from the current statistics, this may be misleading in that this ‘good’ performance is only sustained in the short term”

those organisations requiring minor enhancements and sustaining the existing high level of reporting.

For the organisations with significant room for improvement, the trend is to re-evaluate their current systems, processes and practices in respect to incident management and prioritise consistency across all operations and worksites. The emphasis is on incident category, classification and defining a near miss as well as clearly defining and aligning reporting responsibilities to specific roles.

Simultaneously, the database is customised to align to the procedures and ensure consistency across all sectors with the application being user friendly. Some organisations believe that once the reporting mechanism – such as the database – is implemented, this instantly improves reporting. Unfortunately, this is not the case as credible data must be obtained and entered so meaningful information is provided.

No matter where the organisation sits within the spectrum of their reporting culture, organisations have seen the need to not only be satisfied with the incident being reported, but ensure the situation and consequences are managed and applied to show continual improvement. This must be communicated to all personnel to demonstrate the commitment to a safer workplace. Where employees see beneficial change, they value the need to report.

The years ahead are seeing organisations committed to quality investigations into the incidents because reporting is not enough on its own; it is how management react and implement change to prevent recurrence. The better quality the investigation the better the outcomes, which directly influence improved or sustained reporting.

What is becoming more and more evident over time is the shift in ownership of the incident where responsibility and accountability is moving towards operational personnel rather than sitting with the safety department. In addition, the organisation should set the appropriate scorecard to measure change and success.

Improving investigation outcomes

To improve incident reporting, an organisation should:
- identify the current level of reporting in the workplace and what is the minimal standard accepted and then what is to be tolerated
- consult with all levels in the organisation, from the operators to management, and determine where the gaps exist – this includes both process and behaviours
- review existing procedures, systems and databases for effectiveness and user friendliness
- assign responsibilities and accountabilities to set the business expectations
- implement a robust process of investigation to determine learning and corrective actions
- develop and/or enhance communication and feedback mechanisms to all personnel
- introduce and apply a transparent “fair and just culture” model so identified levels of accountability through performance management are accurately and consistently dealt with by managers – this elevates the level of trust across the work teams and management, reinforcing positive behaviours
- ensure outcomes are visible in the work area
- make time available to relevant personnel for accurate reporting and investigations
- undertake ongoing education and awareness sessions
- monitor and review effectiveness of both process and behaviours. Unless incidents including near misses are reported, organisations are unable to address potential systemic problems that could lead to a serious injury or incident. Missed opportunities to learn also result in lost productivity and inefficiencies, as well as increased costs to business.

The reporting of incidents with a proactive approach by management to implement corrective actions focusing on continual improvement can be used effectively as a “leading indicator” as opposed to the traditional “lagging indicator” of incidents.

Advice for OHS professionals

When management take the opportunity and be proactive to improve reporting and/or maintain a high standard, OHS professionals must grasp the moment and take a leadership role (initially) to drive change. Assuming this leadership role, OHS professionals must consider any implications that may evolve through the journey of change. The end play must be identified. What is this space going to look like?

A major risk, through the transition, which must be avoided is that incidents remain or fall back to the responsibility of the OHS professional. In order to eliminate this risk, OHS professionals must include and consult operational personnel through this journey. This is a transition phase where the ownership of incidents shifts from the OHS professional to operations.

Roles and responsibilities must be defined and made clear within the incident management process where operational personnel report and manage incidents within their scope of work.

The role of the OHS professional becomes that of:
- Custodian of incident management procedures and process
- Mentor and coach to operational personnel
- Governance of process
- Monitoring and reviewing of process and reports
- Quality assurance.

Where ownership is taken by operational personnel, from the reporting of the incident to implementing corrective actions, together with management commitment and OHS professional support, this strengthens the safety performance for the organisation and reassures workers of the necessity and importance of timely and accurate reporting of incidents.

Bruce Johnson is an investigator/trainer with Safety Wise Solutions. His extensive experience covers engineering, organisational development and business improvement with large multifaceted organisations in both the private and government sector. Safety Wise Solutions is the home of the ICAM methodology and trains individuals to investigate and generate improvements within organisations. It also assists organisations over the world to conduct internal investigations of incidents, accidents and near misses.
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Community Care Options: driving safety in aged care and disability

Effective WHS is supported at every level of aged care and disability provider, Community Care Options. OHS Professional speaks with CEO Deb Ryan about this approach and the strategies employed to drive award-winning WHS outcomes

Community Care Options is a not-for-profit community aged care and disability provider located on the Mid North Coast of NSW. Established in 1996, it is the largest provider of home care packages for the aged as well as the largest provider of disability services on the Coffs Harbour Coast. With more than 160 employees, it provides a diverse range of care and support services to a diverse client base of approximately 2300 people per year, including people with a disability, older people, people with dementia, people exiting hospital and carers. This effectively means that Community Care Options staff work in more than 2300 different workplaces, which presents a unique range of challenges in maintaining safe work practices. As such, the organisation considers the health and safety of workers and customers in the design and implementation of all policies and practices, according to Deb Ryan, CEO of Community Care Options.

3 major WHS risks

“Most of our WHS risks therefore are external risks – that is, we are not in control of all of the environments in which our staff work each day,” she explains. “An additional challenge is clients’ understanding that their home is a workplace once our staff are present. Not all clients can afford to maintain their home effectively, and we work with clients who live in a vast range of situations – including mobile homes, squalor, and complex family situations and dynamics.”

Ryan observed that WHS can be confronting to people when talking about the health and safety of staff in their home. “As an organisation, we have to weigh up our duty of care for someone vulnerable with the health and safety of our staff. Mitigating issues in people’s homes can be difficult. We don’t own the environment. Even in bad environments, staff still want to provide care and support,” says Ryan, who added that organisational WHS data indicates three major risks and challenges – the first of which is client behaviour.

“We have an ever-increasing number of incidents with regard to workplace violence,” says Ryan. “This might be as simple as someone swearing at a staff member to a full physical assault. Many of our clients have challenging behaviours due to dementia, disability, pain, mental health issues. Workplace violence does not always come from clients, it can be neighbours, family members, and so on.”

The second major risk facing Community Care Options is manual handling, as a high number of clients require manual handling – and two-person transfers several times per day in some cases. “Moving people is complex. We have a no-lift policy, which again clients do not always accept or understand. When they fall, staff want to help them up. We have an increasing number of clients who are morbidly obese [bariatric],” says Ryan, who added that this is made more challenging by limited hours and funding, necessitating that staff

“Mitigating issues in people’s homes can be difficult. We don’t own the environment”
are at risk of rushing to fit all requirements into allocated service times.

The third major risk relates to motor vehicles, as direct care staff utilise their own vehicles for work purposes. “We provide a lot of transport to older people and people with disabilities in the community across three local government areas that all involve driving on the Pacific Highway every day. While to-date all [incidents] have been minor, they do occur frequently,” Ryan says.

WHS risk management strategies

There are a number of strategies and initiatives Community Care Options employs to help reduce the above risks, while supporting positive OHS outcomes across the organisation. This begins with new recruiters and effective staff induction in relation to WHS, according to Ryan. “This is about understanding what the risks in the sector are and why we have the policies and procedures in place that we have – to protect staff. Our inductions also cover issues such as dealing with challenging interactions and workplace violence,” says Ryan, who personally inducts all new staff into WHS, so they know it is of primary importance and led from the top.

Culture also plays an important part in reducing WHS risks, and Ryan says Community Care Options’ culture is very focused on risk management. “Everyone understands that WHS is everyone’s responsibility,” says Ryan. “We have a culture which encourages staff to report incidents and hazards, and expects that they do. It is an expectation that there are frequent opportunities for staff to raise WHS issues or concerns. As a strategy, we encourage staff to tell us, as we can’t manage what we don’t know.”

WHS is an agenda item for each and every company meeting, from directors down. Directors meet monthly to review strategy, operational

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**Key operational components that support a safe culture**

- Policies and procedures, including the development of a Safe Care Manual in 2011 with WHS information in one place, including policies for all risks identified for the sector, reviewed and updated annually
- Development of safe work procedures
- Risk assessment and risk management
- WHS training and education, including staff induction
- Communication and consultation: provision of information to (as well as feedback from) employees, clients, contractors and sub-contractors
- Emergency procedures and drills
- Provision of WHS equipment, services and facilities, including PPE kits
- Regular workplace inspections and evaluations
- Reporting, recording and analysis of incidents, accidents, injuries and illness
- Health and safety representatives across all workgroups
- WHS committee with bi-monthly meetings
- An injury management and return-to-work program
- An employee assistance program

“There is a very clear expectation that no staff member stays in any environment where they feel unsafe”
issues, complaints, WHS reports, and endorse policies and procedures. At the management level, meetings are held weekly to review business goals, strategies, processes, incident/hazard forms and complaints. At the staff level, meetings are held twice per year to review strategic imperatives, changes, policies and procedures, and seek input from staff. Work groups also meet monthly, and all staff can provide input to agendas.

Other measures to manage and reduce both internal and external WHS risks include:

• Everyone being clear on their role and how WHS is an integral part of this. “There is a very clear expectation that no staff member stays in any environment where they feel unsafe. This is backed by effective and timely debriefing of staff, while all managers are trained in return-to-work procedures,” says Ryan.

• New staff are mentored by an existing employee to ensure understanding of WHS responsibilities, with additional mentoring specific to complex clients who have higher needs, such as manual handling.

• Support planners, who are responsible for risk-assessing every client home prior to services being provided and developing a risk management plan for risks identified, and ensuring direct care staff are provided with this information both in the home and through roster risk alerts. These plans are updated, and support planners take action in response to any new information received through reporting.

• Co-ordinators, who are responsible for communicating important WHS risk information to support workers through all communication means.

• Support workers, who are the eyes and ears for the organisation, and report any new hazards, incidents or injuries that occur. The management team then reviews all hazard/incident reports at weekly meetings.

• A WHS committee, which meets on a bi-monthly basis and has representatives from all Community Care Options workgroups to review incident/hazard data, and identify trends and training needs.

Driving WHS outcomes
One of the more unique yet effective initiatives adopted by Community Care Options to drive WHS outcomes includes the introduction of “yellow cards”. This was a suggestion by the organisation’s WHS representatives to ensure that all staff understand clearly their responsibilities and the importance of reporting WHS issues. These are issued for breaches of WHS responsibilities, such as failing to report an incident or wearing unsafe footwear. “Three yellow cards can result in dismissal,” says Ryan.

“However, the program is not intended to be punitive – more educational. If a staff member gets one card the management team will sit down and review what is required until the staff member is fully understanding of the requirements. No one has ever been terminated due to three yellow cards,” she says.

Another initiative within the business includes the purchase of Elk lifters to assist with lifting clients after a fall. Ryan explains that many clients do not want to call an ambulance after they have had a fall. “Our staff are not allowed to lift the person. Ambulance officers also have a no-lift policy and do not want to come just for that purpose,” according to Ryan, who says the Elk lifters are portable, inflatable and able to assist a person from the floor, then to a sit-to-
stand position, and all staff have been trained in their use.

Community Care Options also has a comprehensive risk assessment tool to risk assess all client homes and other environments where service may be provided. If risks are identified, a risk management plan is developed, and these are reviewed six-monthly or more frequently where any new risks are identified and reported.

Integrated WHS planning is an effective business practice within the organisation, according to Ryan, who says it works hard to plan for and accept change, to be innovative and proactive in seeking solutions. “Modification to future systems is necessary because of effective planning, effective data analysis, review and measurement,” she says, while other measures taken within the organisation to improve WHS outcomes include:

• All direct care staff are issued with personal protective equipment including power surge protectors, gloves, masks, first aid kits and torches.
• All staff are provided with a manual which includes all WHS policies and procedures as well as safe work procedures.

Results and outcomes
As a result of the above, Ryan says that staff at all levels have a clear understanding of roles and WHS responsibilities, and are more connected and committed.

Workers’ compensation claims are also reviewed annually with Community Care Options’ insurer, and these have reduced claim costs from over $30,000 (2015) to $1500 last year (2018). Community Care Options has no current/active workers’ compensation claims.

Furthermore, total workers’ compensation claims (frequency), time lost (severity) and claim costs have all reduced since 2015. “This has been achieved through proactive education of staff about risks, mentoring and peer support, early engagement of a rehabilitation provider for injured workers and our employee assistance program,” says Ryan.

She added that independent quality audits conducted in 2017 also identified that Community Care Options has robust and integrated risk management systems that demonstrate best practice within the aged care/disability sector. Other outcomes include:

• staff-suggested internal penalty for not meeting WHS responsibilities: only two yellow cards issued in the last year
• analysis of WHS data has allowed targeted training to address WHS trends, including manual handling, and managing violence
• winning the 2018 NSW Safe Work Award for Excellence in workplace health and safety culture for big business.

“We have an ever-increasing number of incidents with regard to workplace violence”
Back to the future of OHS

The SIA 2019 National Health and Safety Conference will bring together stakeholders from across the health and safety profession to discuss challenges facing WHS professionals and practitioners, as well as the latest ideas, innovation and research.

The SIA National Health and Safety Conference will be held from 22-23 May 2019 at the International Convention Centre (ICC) Sydney. As part of the #SAFETYSCAPE Convention, the conference will bring together stakeholders across the health and safety profession to discuss some of the challenges currently faced by WHS professionals and practitioners and explore the impacts these have on the OHS profession, as well as new ideas, innovation, research and leadership.

With a conference theme of “Back to the Future”, one of the speakers at this year’s conference will be senior manager HSE consulting for EY, Nicole Meacock, who will be discussing digital transformation. Speaking ahead of the conference, she explained that most organisations are finding it challenging to effectively use digital technologies to improve OHS outcomes, and many examples of digital technology initiatives are not owned, driven and achieved by OHS functions. “The OHS digital initiatives we do see are typically implemented to address a specific problem,” she said. “Generally, we don’t see organisations adopt a strategic approach to digital OHS.”

Meacock also observed that OHS functions often operate with limited technological capability. “There is often an over-reliance on digital technologies being ‘silver bullets’. This reliance usually ends in disappointment, as no digital technology can address the complex, human challenges that OHS professionals encounter.”

Meacock explained that digital technology can be a key lever that influences an organisation’s OHS maturity. “When we assess digital maturity, we rarely find digital OHS maturity beyond ‘basic’ or ‘developing’. Conversations with clients, and more broadly across industry, indicate there is strong interest in this topic, but most are uncertain as to how to use digital technologies to meaningfully improve their OHS performance,” she said.

Meacock said that capability gaps in digital technology are continuing to widen, and while some organisations in the bottom quartile are struggling with understanding fundamental concepts like big data analytics and innovation, others are encountering more advanced problems like integration and implementing machine learning. “Often, OHS functions equate big data to large spreadsheets, and analytics as simple graphs and calculations,” she said. “More digitally capable professionals understand that big datasets are those that are large in volume, high velocity – for example, real time – and highly variable, for example, not simply counting inspections.”

In terms of digital WHS initiatives, she said those that are successful require three elements: subject matter expertise; technology that works; and human-centred design. “We’ve found that without addressing these three areas collectively, it is difficult to achieve successful digital initiatives. In our experience it is the final element that organisations find the most challenging. This means things like building trust with workgroups and employing design-thinking principles.”

Furthermore, Meacock said many digital initiatives do not stick, and sometimes they wither when the initiator leaves the business, or the workforce doesn’t adopt the technology. “We also see many instances of poorly integrated digital elements,” she said.

From an executive perspective, these failures may materialise as “flash in the pan” projects which do not yield any meaningful return on investment. At a managerial level, this might manifest as “app fatigue”, where every individual problem is met with a separate isolated application.

“The result is disconnected systems that can create worse overall results,” said Meacock. “At the worker level this may mean inadequate user-centred design, poor change management, or inadequate training, resulting in user frustration and confusion.”

Digital technology is significantly impacting the role of the modern OHS professional, and Meacock said that the role of OHS is evolving to require the following capabilities:

1. Clearly understand the objectives of OHS digital initiatives/strategies, and ensuring these align with the broader business objectives. This might require strong advocacy for users (including effective consultation) and human-centred design skills.
2. Ensure effective change management processes are in place to support these initiatives, again to ensure objectives are met.
3. Understand their own and the organisation’s capability gaps, enabling OHS digital projects to include the right capability mix.
of OHS and digital expertise.
4. Build a high-level understanding of the various technologies, in order to ask the right questions and connect the right stakeholders to effect change.
5. Build trust through clear communications, because we know that trust and the flow of information are critical to building organisational OHS capability.
6. Finally, OHS professionals need to understand what a well-designed initiative looks like, so that success or failure can be captured and built upon. They need to think about: “What is our hypothesis? What assumptions have we made? And how will we know if we are on the right track?”

“Our role is to understand what the subject matter experts are saying, to liaise with workgroups to optimise human-centred design, and to understand the technologies well enough to articulate to business leaders,” said Meacock.

“By taking actions that grow their capabilities across these key areas, they are future-proofing themselves in a changing world of work. By growing their competency, they can not only survive these periods of rapid change, but lead their organisations in leveraging digital technology to improve OHS performance,” she said.

Reducing safety clutter
Also speaking at the 2019 National Health and Safety Conference will be Mohammed Ibrahim Shire, research fellow at the Griffith University Safety Science Innovation Lab. He observed that the amount organisations are spending on compliance has been consistently going up for two decades, however, the amount of extra safety they are getting in return “has not been going up at all”.

Every time an accident or “incident” occurs, there is an investigation and recommendations are made to add in more procedures or checklists, said Shire. “This creates safety clutter, and one of the most common clutters that most organisations engage in is what they call vertical duplication clutter, and it happens where multiple systems have to be adhered to and they all cover the same procedures,” he said.

Shire also said safety clutter damages employee ownership of safety and is terrible for adaptability, erodes trust, and creates an unnecessary trade-off between safety and productivity. “When ‘safety’ rules impose a significant and unnecessary burden on the performance of everyday activities, both work and safety suffer. Every organisation has

“No digital technology can address the complex, human challenges that OHS professionals encounter”
“Often, OHS functions equate big data to large spreadsheets, and analytics as simple graphs and calculations”

safety activities that are at times performed with no expectation that they provide any real safety benefit,” he said.

Such activities drain time, resources and attention that could be spent on improving the safety of operational work, said Shire, who added that they also create and perpetuate harmful beliefs about safety. In such cases, he said safety outcomes can be improved by reducing the amount of safety activity.

“All of this comes with a greater trend towards bureaucratisation and risk aversion, as well as centralisation, standardisation and increased surveillance in safety,” said Shire, who explained that safety clutter is prevalent due to two asymmetries.

First, it is easier to add or expand safety work than to remove or reduce safety work. Second, there are many regular or ad hoc events during operation that trigger the addition or expansion of safety work, but relatively few opportunities to remove or reduce safety work.

“Together, these asymmetries create a ‘ratchet effect’, whereby the number and complexity of safety activities in an organisation increase over time. Even deliberate attempts to simplify safety are likely to result in excessive generalisation – more clutter – rather than a genuine reduction in safety activity,” he said.

There are some practical steps that they can take in response to clutter: first, since external stakeholders make demands that may directly result in clutter (through duplication, over-specification and over-generalisation), he said OHS professionals can reduce the impact of these demands on the organisation by actively managing these stakeholders. Second, OHS professionals can promote leadership styles to the senior management that place an emphasis on asking open questions, collecting evidence, and showing interest in operational work, rather than attempting to add value by taking part in low-level safety activities. Third, OHS professionals can take a reflective, evidence-based approach to their own practice.

“A key part of this is recognising that something going wrong is not evidence that something needs to be done – and is certainly not evidence for any specific action. There will often be occasions with social and psychological pressure to take rapid action to improve safety. Actions taken at such times, unless backed up by evidence, are very likely to create safety clutter,” he said.

By taking this approach, Shire said safety professionals will model a mature safety attitude to the rest of their organisation: “they need to be sensitive to operation improvement, not compliance,” he said.

Exploring ethical standards in WHS and risk auditing

Also speaking at the conference will be Risku’s Mark Hamon, an integrated risk specialist with more than 15 years of high-risk industry experience. Hamon observed that while companies and organisations are generally faring well when it comes to ethics and corporate governance, they are struggling with over-regulation and compliance – and with little evidence of success in this area.

Hamon questioned how often ethical issues come up in safety meetings or if ethics are discussed when putting together an internal safety audit program for an organisation, for example. “Do you cover ethical fundamentals in the employee induction process beyond having them read mission, values, culture or vision statements?” he asked.

“Do managers explain the impact ethics can have directly and indirectly on the business? Is there an understanding of how digital technology can impact on ethical safety standards, for example, social media, or privacy issues?”

Hamon observed that one of the challenges facing auditors today is the impact organisational culture can have on their ethical standards. “Are your auditing standards and integrity about creating real value and change, or are they influenced by other factors?” he asked.

“Competitive markets, tender processes, productivity, finances, KPI requirements, job security, peer pressure and legal concerns can all have an impact on ethical standards – ethics and values – when it comes to safety auditing. Companies need to work with HR departments to ensure the people they place in their organisation are going to be the right fit, somebody with a strong personal conviction to do the right thing.”

Hamon recommended considering an employee who has just started a career in auditing, or those with a personality which may be influenced by peer pressure, and he suggested they may feel stresses from management above or their peers to predict certain audit results. “It takes experience, a strong ethical conviction and the ability to be transparent to be a good auditor, even when the results are going to be unpopular or have an impact on the company – do the right thing,” he said. “Did the safety audit results truly reflect what’s happening within the organisation, or do the results reflect something more than a ‘smoke and mirrors’ exercise to make the organisation look good?”

Hamon explained that organisational culture comprises the values, beliefs and behaviour (written rules) of the people in the workplace, which are generally accepted as the norm. However, he said auditors must exercise integrity, transparency and unbiased objectivity in the course of their work: “they must not be swayed by organisational culture where it can impact on professional codes of ethics,” he said.

“Organisations which are poorly led show both a lack of ethics and corporate governance; this is then cascaded down through the workforce [employees],” said Hamon, who added that other challenges include unnecessary regulation, unrealistic resource levels and, “above all, a complete lack of capability and maturity of resource competence”.

Organisations that have been poorly communicated or in many instances have a complete lack of corporate “mission, values, culture or vision” struggle with an ethical approach to not just WHS and risk audits, but any type of appraisal starting with a strategic plan. However, there are a number of things that can be done at an organisational level to adopt a more ethical approach to WHS and risk audits, and Hamon said there are a number of questions to be asked in this process:

• Many organisations already have a workplace safety culture program, but does that program capture and promote a greater awareness of ethical values to the workforce?
• How well do your employees react to safety audits? Are they open and transparent or do they try to hide or downplay true findings?
• What is the experience of the audit team when carrying out their audits? Is there pressure from workplace peers to influence the findings?
• How often are ethical standards in safety communicated across the workforce, whether this be from senior management or in toolbox talks, audits or safety meetings with the workforce?
• Is the actual impact or ramifications of non-ethical practices discussed with the workforce as risk against the business, e.g. reputational risk, job security, corruption, fraud or legal prosecution?
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