Getting safety on board

LAW
Home Insulation Program Royal Commission lessons

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On board with safety

Boards can play a significant role in governing and guiding safety within organisations, and OHS professionals can take a proactive approach to helping to add shareholder value in a number of ways.

The cover story for this issue (page 19) looks at the role of boards in safety, the current status of safety governance in Australia and what boards look to in OHS professionals. However, given the importance of the board and the significant liability each board member has in terms of workplace safety, the role of the board has largely been ignored in workplace safety, leadership and corporate governance research.

As Kirstin Ferguson, a professional non-executive director on ASX, government, private and not-for-profit boards, explains in this article, safety professionals have a valuable opportunity to help educate board members through ensuring their reporting integrates statistical performance with matters relating to safety culture and safety leadership, as well as more broadly the strategy of the organisation to move safety beyond lag reporting. Ferguson has recently completed a PhD, which is currently under examination, in the area of safety governance and safety leadership for board members and senior executives, and this article makes for interesting reading for directors, OHS professionals and executives alike.

Also in this issue we look at how two organisations have improved safety outcomes through effective safety management systems (page 24). Taking a holistic and systemic approach to safety management is critical to good safety outcomes, and leading global agribusiness Olam International and VEC Civil Engineering explain how they have improved OHS through the introduction and use of safety management systems. Safety management systems are an important piece of the overall OHS puzzle in organisations. However, as Gus Saunders, manager of environmental health and safety for Olam Australia and Asia, notes in this article, it is important to ensure a consistent and sound approach to safety management across all businesses and subsidiaries in the process.

The Home Insulation Program Royal Commission wrapped up recently, and there were a number of important lessons that came out of it for OHS professionals. On page 12, Norton Rose Fulbright Australia’s Aaron Anderson, who acted for two families who lost a family member while performing insulation work as part of the program, discusses some of the key points that came out of the Royal Commission and explains what they mean for safety professionals.

Lastly, mental health and FIFO workers has been getting some media attention of late, often for the wrong reasons. Mental health problems and suicide rates are higher among FIFO workers, however, companies can take proactive steps to help improve mental health and reduce the risk of suicide among FIFO workforces. On page 14 we look at issue and explore what OHS professionals can do to improve mental health among FIFO workers.

“On board with safety”

Craig Donaldson, editor, OHS Professional
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From planning into action

Chairman Patrick Murphy and CEO David Clarke report on the SIA’s emerging plans for the year ahead

As members know, our recent Annual General Meeting saw the election of three new Directors to the SIA board. We welcome David Segrott, Andrew Maunder and Lindsay Kranz, who join Patrick Murphy, Amanda Benson, Sue Botrell, Bryce McLaren, Cameron Montgomery, Nathan Winter, and Phil Lovelock. Together they will provide leadership in governance for the SIA, and give new chief executive David Clarke clear direction by setting strategic priorities.

At the SIA’s annual Visions conference the new board and chief executive came together in Queensland to talk strategy. Chairman Patrick Murphy reflected on the experience:

“The weekend was an opportunity to ensure the new board was oriented to the SIA’s strategic plan. We refreshed and clarified our focus, explored new ideas, and built the framework for our work in the coming year.”

Patrick also talked about the need to influence SIA culture. “We’re not only concerned with what we do, but equally, how we do it. We have spoken about the need for change in a number of areas, including implementing those changes in a way which reflects strong values. As we all – the board, the staff and our office holders, and even our members – go about our work for the institute, we will adopt collaborative approaches wherever possible, act with openness and integrity, and we will have a strong focus on action,” he said.

“Another critical test of the relevance of the strategic plan is to keep members informed, ensuring they influence the planning process. To that end, the board and David will be consulting with our...
College of Fellows, our branches and wider membership, conducting events throughout the year ahead.”

Patrick also emphasised that planning is not a static process. “We do not just wait and talk. The world does not stop for us while we plan. In a dynamic and responsive organisation, planning and implementation are ongoing and intertwined, responding to a constantly changing environment. Accordingly we have given David some clear priorities to get on with immediately.”

Chief executive David Clarke talked about the projects underway in more detail. “I’ve had a lot of feedback from members since starting in my role. Now, as a result of the work just done by the board, I have a set of key focus areas and we are already getting to work,” he said.

“In the coming 12 months, our job is twofold. Firstly, we have to get the business basics right. This includes getting all of our internal systems and processes improved, including financial and general administrative systems, and most importantly, our member communications. This is critical foundation work which will allow us to lift our standards, and do everything else well. It will take some time, but the work is already underway” he said.

“While we are sorting out our internal systems and processes, we’ll be getting on with key projects.

“The Certification program for OHS practitioners and professionals is being rolled out in 2015. An important work in progress, certification will have a very significant impact on our credibility as a profession, and builds on the already great work being done through the creation of the OHS body of knowledge and Accreditation of Higher Education.

“We intend to become more relevant as an industry body, and to do this we need to have clear opinions on the things that matter, so we have commenced work on a national policy agenda which addresses current issues in health and safety and which listens and responds to the issues and language of governments, industry and unions.

“We will be developing a national research agenda, to provide direction and focus for investment in research, targeted where it is most needed.

“We will be engaging with a wider group of stakeholders. This means building better links with many agencies and organisations and looking for partnerships that help us carry our messages to government, unions and industry. We know that workplace health and safety also has a lot to do with the many thousands of people who don’t identify as OHS practitioners and professionals, and that this group is equally important to our vision for reducing work injury, illness and death. It is critical to our goals that we reach out to this wider group,” he said.

“We are also currently exploring how we can influence the quality of training across all areas of health and safety – an activity you will hear more about in the months ahead.”

David underlined the importance of doing a better job for the membership of the SIA. “We intend to take large strides in the delivery of services to members. We will use the leverage of our membership numbers to help our members cut the cost of doing business and we will revamp our member communications including our website.”

Both Patrick and David are excited by the opportunities ahead for the SIA, and the new direction the organisation is taking. Patrick expressed great confidence in the changes already underway: “These things will not all happen tomorrow, but they will happen. We have an ambitious agenda, but without ambition, little is achieved. Our success depends on everyone lending their support and expertise to our work, as we build a stronger and influential peak body and a more credible safety profession. In the coming editions, you will hear about progress and action.”

“We have an ambitious agenda, but without ambition, little is achieved. Our success depends on everyone lending their support and expertise to our work, as we build a stronger and influential peak body and a more credible safety profession”
Dear Editor

Your article “Skilling safety up” (OHS Professional Sept 2014 issue, page 24) is an important and relevant article which hopefully gets the reading it deserves. Knowledge empowers people to become better employees.

A couple of observations coming out of my many years (now retired) as a head of safety: the comments on time available for training are unfortunately very true. I do not believe anyone these days likes to be away from the job for more than a couple of hours. Training, as much as possible, should be short and not intrusive. Many employees cannot reasonably take more than two hours or even a day at a time for training. The running of duplicate or more sessions gives managers more flexibility to make their staff available to attend. The customer comes first. Starting sessions punctually sets a good tone.

When organising internal safety training programs, one needs to be aware that there are likely many other training programs in an organisation, whose organisers see their training to be just as important as your training. Lack of proper coordination can lead to resistance and frustration with local managers, who also have eyes on their own work targets.

The comment “How does a safety professional convince a board or their accountant to apply precious funds to sometimes substantial safety interventions” has not been elaborated. The key financial decision makers should be involved at an early stage of budgetary planning. Funds for safety usually have to compete with other interests, just as training time mentioned above does. Larger than usual financial requests only appearing at budget time are often not well received.

Here are a few ideas for consideration:

1) Is there a senior member from “finance” on the main safety committee?

2) Does the head of safety have a good working relationship with the chief financial manager or whoever makes the major financial decisions? Flagging budget requirements early can be quite useful by putting the decision makers in the know early.

3) Does the head of safety have a couple of briefings with the CEO each year? CEOs have massive paperwork to deal with, and it is not reasonable to expect them to be able to fully comprehend complex funding application for safety. In addition, written funding applications would require an executive summary and a more inclusive summary.

4) Part of safety professional’s skilling up could well include negotiation skills, budgeting skills and budget request presentation skills.

In conclusion, the global accounting firm Deloitte has recently put the total cost of compliance for Australia’s economy at $250 billion a year (with nearly two thirds of that being self-imposed and the remainder from government regulations). I think that our members need to be aware of this in their respective organisations, because it could become the next “flavour of the month” to rein in costs. The need for safety professionals to be able to justify their budgets, with increased competition for other funds is already there – now perhaps with a significant risk of more “directors” perceiving or questioning whether these expenses are fully warranted?

Jonathan Amies CFSIA

“The key financial decision makers should be involved at an early stage of budgetary planning”
Principal contractors challenged by SWMS compliance

In some cases, principal contractors taking on too much responsibility when it comes to Safe Work Method Statements (SWMS) in the construction industry, according to Gloria Kyriacou Morosinotto, director of Contract Safety Solutions. “There is an urgent requirement to re-educate some principal contractors on their duties and ensure that they understand the legal implications associated with taking on too much responsibility with regard to SWMS,” she said. Speaking at the 12th Annual SIA OHS Construction Forum, which was held in Melbourne on 27 October, she said principal contractors should ensure that they are satisfied that the contractors have systems in place and the required qualifications and experience.

Draft WHS law tabled in WA

Western Australia’s draft Work Health and Safety Bill 2014 (the “Green Bill”) has been tabled in the WA parliament, with a call for public comment on the bill and the state’s future workplace safety and health system. “The Green Bill has been drafted to include the core provisions of the Model WHS Bill, but has been refined to reduce red tape and ensure it is in the best interests of WA businesses and the WA community,” said WorkSafe WA Commissioner Lex McCulloch. “While the state government has long supported in principle the process of harmonising workplace safety legislation across Australia, it does not support uniformity for its own sake without giving thought to what is best for WA workplaces.”

Risk of presenteeism underestimated

Most businesses carefully track and monitor employee sick leave and understand the impact it has on their bottom line, yet few understand or even acknowledge the risks that presenteeism in the workplace poses, according to a workplace psychology specialist. If a business continually has an issue with presenteeism it could suggest that the workplace is psychologically unhealthy, according to CommuniCorp Group’s principal consultant psychologist, Laura Kirby, who said this often manifests itself by employees feeling they are unable to take time off sick. “Presenteeism is a workplace issue that has been receiving increasing attention as having a significant and costly impact on businesses, although this is just one key indicator that an organisation may not be psychologically healthy,” she said.

The future of WHS in NSW

Harmonised work health and safety (WHS) laws in NSW have elevated the importance of workplace safety, provided greater focus on prevention and provided consistency with other legislative obligations on officers, according to WorkCover’s acting general manager of work health and safety, Peter Dunphy. He said preliminary feedback from stakeholders, as part of the COAG examination of the model WHS laws, indicates a number of positive impacts identified regarding the duty of officers in NSW. Speaking at the Safety in Action 2014: Sydney Safety Conference, held from 2-3 September 2014, Dunphy said individuals responded that the duty on officers has improved productivity, created a stronger WHS culture and more willingness to invest in WHS improvements.

CSR experience in demand

OHS professionals with experience and expertise in the areas of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability are in demand, according to a global recruitment firm. Such OHS professionals are in high demand both in the consulting space as well as the broader corporate world, said regional director at Hays, Carolyn Dickason, who noted that this is also having a knock on effect on wages. “Demand for OHS professionals with CSR experience is outstripping supply in the market,” she said. Safety professionals with industrial hygiene experience are also in demand as are those with climate change experience and professionals with “the ability to look at the broader climate change pie”, said Dickason.

Lowest compensated fatality rate in a decade

Work-related compensated injury fatalities are at their lowest level since 2002, according to data released in Safe Work Australia’s latest Comparative Performance Monitoring report. The report provides trend analysis on the work health and safety and workers’ compensation schemes operating in Australia and New Zealand. In releasing the report, Michelle Baxter, acting CEO, Safe Work Australia, recognised the progress Australia has made but noted there was still room for improvement. “Over a decade ago Australia set a national target of reducing the incidence rate of compensated injury and musculoskeletal disorder fatalities by 20 per cent by 2012,” said Baxter. “This report shows that as a nation we not only achieved, but surpassed this target, with a 41 per cent reduction in fatalities.”
there are links between workplace health and safety measures and better business performance, including increased productivity, lower costs, greater innovation and higher profitability, according to a recent research report from the University of Melbourne’s Centre for Workplace Leadership.

It found that measures that support safety and reduce the likelihood of poor health in workers protects businesses against long term risks and costs. This is a crucial area for businesses to address, as the cost is high for poor safety records, according to the author of the report, the Centre for Workplace Leadership’s professor Peter Gahan.

“Productivity declines when poor safety means that employees are injured in and out of the office,” he said. “Finding and training suitable replacements is far more expensive than reducing risks in the workplace in the first place. There is a strong case to be made that Australian businesses need to invest more to protect employees from accident, and to protect themselves from the costs associated with workplace injury.”

**By the numbers**

In Australia almost 130,000 serious workers’ compensation claims were made from 2011-12. This represents more than 12 claims per 1,000 employees. Employees who claim for a serious injury are away from work for an average of 12 weeks. During this same period 228 workers died due to a workplace injury or accident. As well as the tragic implications for colleagues, family and the community, workplace accidents that result in death are estimated to cost between $11 and $19 million.

“This report lifts the debate from the traditional but understandable focus on the costs of workplace incidents to also recognise the benefits to business productivity of good work health and safety,” said Michelle Baxter, acting CEO of Safe Work Australia, which commissioned the report.

WHS is often an overlooked and undervalued ‘tick box’ workplace practice, according to Gahan, who said the direct and indirect costs associated with workplace injury and illness are well reported ($60 billion annually – or 4.8 per cent of Australia’s annual GDP (2008-2009)). “However, when looked from a costs-benefits perspective, there is a key advantage for leaders and managers across Australia to take WHS seriously,” he said.

**The role of managers**

The report, *Workplace Health and Safety, Business Productivity and Sustainability*, found that one of the most significant factors shaping employee perceptions of risk is the behaviour of management, and Gahan said managers and leaders do in fact play a critical role in signalling the business expectations around safe and healthy work behaviours to their employees. “Showing leadership in the area of workplace health and safety by establishing good preventative practices and facilitating a positive culture will provide long-term value,” according to Gahan, who said there are a number of things businesses can do to protect against injury:

1. **Make sure your WHS approach is appropriate.** Refining and reviewing current practices to reflect your business goals, strategy, business and employee needs can save you time and money in the long run.

   “Bear in mind that what is suitable for one organisation may not be right for another and what was suitable for your organisation ten years ago may not be applicable today. A small office-based business with 15 employees will have very different regulations to a manufacturing business that employs 500 people,” he said.

   “So start with the basics. Align your
WHS strategy to your business strategy and objectives, and ensure this is reflected throughout divisional strategies so each person has buy-in for their area and can see how they fit with the overall organisational objectives.”

Evidence indicates that those leaders who link strategy, performance reviews and behaviours with WHS procedures can greatly influence employee engagement and reduce employee turnover.

“Ask this person to take charge of your WHS and write this responsibility into their performance review. You have also just created your own cheer squad for WHS which can continue to grow as your employees begin to see value in WHS.”

1. Ensure someone is responsible for WHS performance and hold them accountable through their performance review. “When you set an optimistic tone and attitude around the implementation of WHS practices, you will see the rewards and if you don’t have a specific role allocated to WHS in your organisation, select someone who can and will reflect the benefits of these practices,” Gahan said.

“Ensure everyone in your organisation is aware of the rules and understands why these rules are in place. A key role for leaders is to reduce risk in the workplace by ensuring that everyone in an organisation accepts and understands why WHS rules exist.”

2. Ensure everyone in your organisation is aware of the rules and understands why these rules are in place. “All employees have a personal responsibility to keep the workplace safe. Leaders need to demonstrate the importance of WHS through actions and attitudes that reflect the significance of these rules. Workplace illness, injury and death result in significant economic and social costs which are borne by the community at large, workplaces and individuals, and a leader’s role is to ensure that these processes are acknowledged, understood and enacted by each individual within an organisation,” said Gahan.

“If you need one compelling reason to invest in better WHS – let it be the association between properly implemented WHS practices and better workplace performance. The evidence highlights the role of managers as key influencers of how WHS practices should be implemented and integrated into the day to day activities of a workplace. Attention to WHS systems should be integrated into every part of your business where it is seen as a normal part of putting in place efficient and product management and workplace practices that support sustained business performance.”

“Showing leadership in the area of workplace health and safety by establishing good preventative practices and facilitating a positive culture will provide long-term value”
OHS lessons from the Home Insulation Program Royal Commission

There were a number of important lessons for OHS professionals that came out of the Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Program, writes Aaron Anderson.

The Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Program was established on 12 December 2013 with terms of reference that required the Commissioner to deliver his report to the Governor-General by 30 June 2014. The short timeframe meant that many challenging issues arose for all parties. From my perspective, there were many sleepless nights working with my clients and counsel as large volumes of documents would often be made available only hours before witnesses were to give evidence.

The inclusion of the former Prime Minister and three former Ministers on the witness list promoted a great deal of interest including, as expected, from the large media contingent that were stationed immediately outside the Commission hearing room to watch and report on the evidence from the live stream.

One of the more complex issues that arose was the issue of public interest immunity which, relevant to this inquiry, related to the protection from disclosure of information concerning cabinet decisions. The terms of reference for the Royal Commission required the Commission to inquire into the basis for decisions made by the Commonwealth in relation to the establishment and implementation of the program. The extent to which it was necessary to understand the confidential deliberations of cabinet during the conception and roll out of the program was raised very early on during the proceeding. The issue was dealt with by arrangements whereby certain information in documents would be redacted. This position prevailed until the former Prime Minister appeared to give evidence who did not want cabinet matters redacted from his statement but, rather, wanted to tell his whole story.

After legal argument on the issue, the Commissioner rejected the notion that public interest immunity applied to Mr Rudd's statement and made the entire statement available.

Key safety implications

One of the most startling admissions made during the Royal Commission proceeding was that issues of installer safety was not a risk to the Commonwealth, but was perceived to be a risk to the people doing the work and the companies they were working for had to control the risk. This approach resulted in installer safety been omitted from the Commonwealth's risk register for the program, and this omission was not brought to the attention of the Minister responsible for the program delivery. This was despite the repeated warnings given to the Commonwealth about the risk of death or injury to installers.

While the companies who were performing the work had statutory responsibilities under state and territory work health and safety laws, and a number of them were prosecuted under those laws, the Commission found that the Commonwealth could not abrogate its responsibility for identified risk and the omission of installer safety from the risk register was one of the critical factors in the less than adequate attention given to the consideration of safety in the design and rollout of the program. The Commission also found that there were failings at senior management level that contributed to the failure of the project. Those failings included not providing candid advice to Ministers on key risk aspects of the program.

These findings are an important reminder that responsibility for safety in multiparty arrangements does not fall on one party alone. Organisations must take steps to protect the safety of people performing work to the extent they can influence or control safety outcomes. While it seems from the evidence given during the Royal Commission that the politicians involved were largely kept...
in the dark in relation to critical safety information, Boards should ensure that there are appropriate governance structures in place to ensure timely and accurate reporting of safety critical information to them and take steps to verify that they are being properly informed of that information. By doing this, Boards will be in a position to make informed decisions that ensure safety is not compromised by the organisation in the pursuit of commercial objectives.

OHS lessons
It became apparent very early on during the Royal Commission proceedings that there was a very real conflict that existed between meeting the policy objectives of the program. On the one hand the program was intended to inject $2.7 billion dollars into the Australian economy in a very short period of time and this required a rapid roll out of the work. On the other hand, it was estimated that insulation would be installed in around 2.2 million homes and in order to achieve this, in light of the knowledge that there would be a large injection of unskilled workers in to the industry and potentially unscrupulous businesses, careful planning and appropriate controls were necessary.

The Commission found that the Commonwealth sacrificed planning for speed as there was a perceived immutable start date for the program of 1 July 2009. This meant that safety critical controls that were discussed during the early program development were compromised. These controls included doing away with mandatory installer training and allowing low barriers to entry for participants in the program which meant that organisations with no previous insulation installation experience could register to be an installer.

In business, there will often be tensions between the need to meet commercial objectives and achieving a desirable approach to safety. It may not always be within the power or authority of safety professionals to ensure the right decisions are made. However, one of the lessons from the tragic outcomes of the program with the loss of four lives is the importance of ensuring change management incorporates an appropriate reassessment of risk. Where there are ongoing concerns about safety, those concerns should be escalated to senior management and, in some cases, the Board. As the Commissioner put to one of the witnesses during the proceeding, one of the problems was the lack of frank and fearless advice about the true risks of the program to Ministers.

Aaron Anderson is an occupational, health, safety and security partner at Norton Rose Fulbright Australia. He acted for two families who lost a family member while performing insulation work as part of the program.
How to improve mental health among FIFO workers

Mental health problems and suicide rates are higher among FIFO workers, however, companies can take proactive steps to help improve mental health and reduce the risk of suicide among FIFO workforces, writes Craig Donaldson

There is an underlying stigma about mental health problems which makes it harder for organisations to deal with them effectively – particularly among fly in fly out (FIFO) workers in the resources sector, according to Edith Cowan University’s Philippa Vojnovic.

This stigma acts as both a barrier on an individual worker level as well as on a company level, which prolongs a negative cycle of related costs. Furthermore, there have been a number of FIFO related mental health and suicide cases in the media headlines over the past few months, Vojnovic observed.

There have been nine reported suicides of FIFO workers in the Pilbara area in the last year, one linked to the goldfields and a few in Queensland, while she also said a political inquiry by the Western Australian Legislative Assembly Health and Education Standing Committee into FIFO mental health problems and suicide is also underway.

Speaking at a recent SIA breakfast event in WA on managing mental health and suicide risk in FIFO workers in the resources industry, Vojnovic said suicide is more common among men, and for work-related suicides (where the coroner identifies work as a significant cause in the death), men are seven times more likely to die in this way than women.

“Work-related suicide is affected by many factors, including stressful work and living conditions, and individual vulnerabilities,” she said.

Impacts of suicide among FIFO workers

“A self-inflicted death of FIFO workers certainly impacts the employer and has implications for compensation claims, holds consequences for work, health and safety and liability issues, as well as raises various management challenges,” said Vojnovic. The effects of suicide are really felt throughout the entire company. It decreases the performance and productivity of co-workers, including their absenteeism, and increases their intention to quit; they may also feel angry and betrayed by the deceased. Managers may feel guilty for not detecting that the worker was suicidal or fear that they played a role in adding to that employees job stress.”

A company’s reputation can take years to repair from a worker suicide, and Vojnovic said a good example of this is France Telecom which received a lot of negative publicity after the suicide of 25 of their employees within two years. “The exposure of the suicides led to an investigation, firing the CEO and union action. As you can see, there are convincing economic and human reasons for promoting mental health at work and for reducing worker suicide,” she said.

A recent report found that the financial cost to Australian businesses of poor mental health is around $10.9 billion each year, while Vojnovic said businesses which implement strategies to improve and protect workers mental health could gain $2.30 for each $1 invested. Workers with mild depression take double the amount of sick days as other workers. In fact depression alone costs around $8 billion due to sickness absence and presenteeism (where workers are present but not productive), as well as $693 million lost because of bullying and job strain, she added.

One report said that if 25 per cent of the least mentally healthy Australian workers could be raised to the level of the 25 per cent most mentally healthy, then $17 billion in employer costs can be saved, Vojnovic said. “If we talk about costs we also need to recognise the more hidden personal costs of mental health problems, such as poor relationships with co-workers, low self-esteem and loss of ambition. We must think about mental health at work in a similar way that we think of physical health and safety. If a colleague had high blood pressure or diabetes, getting them to a doctor for diagnosis and treatment would be promoted and it wouldn’t affect their relationships with co-workers,” she said.

“But now imagine that the guy you work with has bi-polar disorder and is taking prescribed medication. Do you feel the same way about him that you would if he had high blood pressure?”

However, a more positive cycle in addressing poor mental health in the workplace might involve earlier treatment for workers with mental health problems, and less costs wasted on low productivity and absenteeism, said Vojnovic. “We spend around a third of our life at work which means that it’s a great place to receive mental health promotion, and this is an opportunity that companies can seize,” she said.

Vojnovic noted that suicide is a highly complex issue, and it involves multiple causes and vulnerabilities. “FIFO work does not cause mental health problems or suicide, but it exposes workers to mental health risks including isolation and loneliness, relationship breakdown, job stress, and long work hours. Mental
health problems can be heightened by work injury, performance pressure, and fear of job loss, substance misuse, and arguments with co-workers, all of which may then increase the risk of suicidal thoughts in someone who is vulnerable,” she said.

Solutions for FIFO workers
People experiencing suicidal thoughts need support from a range of people, including professionals (doctor, psychological counselling) and informal (family, friends, co-workers), Vojnovic added.

However, one of the biggest challenges in supporting FIFO workers is that there are significant obstacles to them receiving that support, she said. The majority of resources companies provide support programs and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), yet Vojnovic said these are underused – and this largely comes back to stigma around mental health and getting help, because workers worry that visiting the EAP may affect their jobs. “For example, Rhys Connor, a 25 year old FIFO worker, died by suicide in his work accomodation in the Pilbara in July 2013. Although he had accessed formal company support, his employer was unaware of any risks. His family reports that Rhys hadn’t told his supervisor of his experiences because he feared what could happen if this information was entered in the industry wide electronic resource management system,” said Vojnovic, whose PhD supervisor, Dr Susanne Bahn, is also an expert in the field.

“You have a clear and direct duty to provide support and assistance in this area with evidence that you are complying,” said Bahn. “This includes reviewing incident reports, workers compensation claims, patterns of absenteeism, sick leave, staff turnover, and staff complaints. One-on-one discussions, focus groups and observations are suggested as proactive actions that help you to meet your requirements to consult with your workers. The key message here is you have a duty and you need to provide evidence that you are complying.”

Vojnovic said that while companies may feel powerless to act about these “personal” issues, worker mental health and suicide is certainly an organisational issue. First, she said companies need to be clear about their responsibility to protect worker mental health.

“Some resources companies in Australia have implemented good initiatives to promote mental health and these should be further encouraged. Contract workers often have access to less support, so it’s important that they be included too,” she said.

The majority of FIFO workers are men, and Vojnovic said men prefer to access support in different ways to women. “For example, a man is often more likely to talk to his wife or mates than to formal support services. So what we have is a very male dominated workplace culture which can be negative (ignoring feelings, coping through self-medicating with alcohol and drugs) or positive (mateship, mentoring). Companies can capitalise on this through setting up informal men’s support groups and peer support programs. It’s also a good idea to regulate rostering and educate workers on the FIFO lifestyle and mental health during the on-boarding and exit stages,” she said.

Some companies do conduct employee psychological screening which can help to identify suitability for FIFO work, but Vojnovic said it may be beneficial if mental health is then monitored, as part of an annual review for example.

“This can be viewed as part of building a mental health aware workplace, which can also reduce the stigma around mental health problems,” she said. “Another strategy is to encourage workers to use anonymous online tool kits (such as from R U Ok?) which can help to check their mental health and work out if they may need some additional or professional support. Finally, we need to aim to have zero suicide deaths just as we aim for zero accidental deaths, because suicide is preventable.”

Vojnovic is currently conducting research into ways to encourage workers with mental health problems and suicidal thoughts to access support. For more information call +61 410 152 992 or email p.vojnovic@ecu.edu.au.

“Managers may feel guilt for not detecting that the worker was suicidal or fear that they played a role in adding to that employees job stress”
Safety habits: how do Australians rate?

Organisations can help keep workers safe by understanding and leveraging the unique cultural habits and drivers of what it means to be Australian, writes Emma Brookes

Australians are a different breed as a nation. Call it the Aussie battler attitude or stoic if you like. We have a sense that everyone should be given a fair go. But how does our unique national culture play out in the ways we think about safety at work in comparison to employees from around the world? A recent research project carried out at Fonterra highlights the differences between the attitudes of Australian based workers in comparison to their overseas peers. The research combined a model of national culture with a safety cultural survey of the Fonterra workers and the results were quite startling.

Australians and safety

The first finding was that Australian workers rank higher than all countries except for New Zealand in relation to the way we accept unequally distributed power (known as power distance). Essentially, Australians don’t always value instruction from an authority figure when compared with other people from around the world. But what does this look like in terms of our behaviour? For instance, Aussie workers are less likely to obediently follow procedures just because management has instructed us to do so, instead they need to cognitively understand the reason or purpose of those procedures and actively decide that it should be obeyed.

The research also showed that when it comes to safety requirements at work it’s important for Australians to be emotionally engaged. In other words the health and safety message needs to affect the hearts and minds of employees to have the desired impact. Consultation was also a significant requirement to engage Australian workers with health and safety. Aussie workers expect to be consulted in relation to health and safety changes in the workplace or else they’re less likely to buy in to what those changes are. The Kiwis, however, expected a much higher level of consultation then Australians, preferably on a one to one basis.

It was really positive to see from the research that Aussies are willing to report near accidents or unsafe situations. This allows us to build a strong culture of health and safety reporting in Australia. This was unlike Fonterra employees in China and Chile where cultural considerations means that there are greater challenges to build a reporting culture. Employees in both of these countries were less inclined to health and safety issues while at work as they could feel responsible or feel that they would lose respect for doing something wrong.

An area where Australia shared similar cultural traits with other western countries such as New Zealand and the US was our value for ourselves and our immediate family (known as Individualism). In terms of safety, this means that what is important to us as Australians are the loved ones that we go home too, and the activities we do outside of work. In Australia we can customise our safety messaging so that we know what our personal benefit in being safe is. Within some other countries such as Sri Lanka or Vietnam, they had a different value to Kiwi’s which was about the importance extended family, religion and the wider community (known as Collectivism). For these workers Fonterra customises safety messaging to focus on looking out for each other as a collective team and as a community.

How to change habits

All of these factors work together and we can create a stronger safety culture by focusing on the habits of individuals as a lever for behaviour change. All of our habits are made up of three key components:

- Routine
- Cue
- Reward
The drive towards globalisation of business is creating a pressing requirement to comprehend the influence of national culture in relation to workplace safety culture. The aim of this study was to enable a better understanding of how national culture influences the views and attitudes of workers towards workplace safety across multiple countries at Fonterra Co-operative Group. Creating an emotional engagement to start the cue of working safely. We also have to continually reinforce the personal benefit to our workers which could be getting out on the pitch with the rugby team on the weekend or playing with the kids at home after work. We need to work on establishing a habit loop that looks like this one:

\[ \text{Cue} \rightarrow \text{Routine} \rightarrow \text{Reward} \]

\[ \text{Work Place} \rightarrow \text{Injury} \rightarrow \text{Limit or under report injuries, Self manage minor injuries} \rightarrow \text{Meet set performance Target} \rightarrow \text{Emotional Engagement} \rightarrow \text{Personal Benefit} \]

It is important to keep in mind that Australia is becoming more diverse and we can have populations of workers that might not reflect the prevailing Aussie culture. The key here is to understand the micro culture of your workforce, and use this as a lever to drive safety programmes. We might be a different bunch down here in Australia, but we can all be safer workers by understanding what our uniqueness is, and using it to our advantage to keep our people safe.

About the study

The aim of this study was to enable a better understanding of how national culture influences the views and attitudes of workers towards workplace safety across multiple countries at Fonterra Co-operative Group. Creating a habit loop that shows this could look like this one:

1. Do a sense check across your own workers – does the prevailing national culture in Australia match with the attitudes and views of the workers you support? If not you may consider carrying out your own cultural survey to identify what are the levers that will drive the right habits for your workforce.

2. With your leadership team, carry out a brainstorm of the habits in relation to safety that you would like to change with new positive habits. Create a plan about what the cue, routine and reward would be for this new habit and how you might go about implementing the habit. Consider what positive aspects of your culture could be used to create the cue and reward.

3. Build some new branding or safety message positioning based on the positive aspects that you know about the culture of your workforce. Does your current safety messaging fit tightly with what is important to your workers as a group? Is there a true sense of emotional engagement and personal benefit with the messaging?

4. Do some navel gazing around how well you are consulting with workers on change and any failures to follow procedures. Does this mean that your workforce is delinquent or not engaged? Or are they just demonstrating their ‘professional’ or ‘promotion’ of the mind’ (national culture).

5. If working for a multinational company which is not domiciled in Australia – consider if systems, branding, and messaging is appropriate for the national culture of Australia. Conversely for multinationals based in Australia, consider if the systems, branding, and messaging being provided for safety in locations outside Australia is appropriate for that national culture. You can review and compare countries using Hofstede’s model here: http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html

Emma Brookes is the global framework implementation manager for Fonterra Cooperative Group.
Getting safety on board

Boards can play a significant role in governing and guiding safety within organisations. Craig Donaldson examines this issue and explores new research into how boards can actively drive great OHS outcomes.
Given the importance of the board and the significant liability each board member has in terms of workplace safety, the role of the board has largely been ignored in workplace safety, leadership and corporate governance research.

Kirstin Ferguson, a professional non-executive director on ASX, government, private and not-for-profit boards, has recently completed a PhD, which is currently under examination, in the area of safety governance and safety leadership for board members and senior executives. She was able to identify four key safety leadership criteria relevant for board members and senior executives: vision, personal commitment, decision-making and transparency. “Each of these criteria is important individually, but when used together, particularly by the board as a collective in combination with the CEO and senior leadership team, safety leadership is enhanced,” she says.

“In addition, safety governance is also vitally important as it provides the structure through which the vision and commitment to safety is set; the means of attaining safety objectives are agreed; the framework for monitoring performance is established; and compliance with legislation is ensured. The relationship between the board and senior executive in terms of safety leadership and safety governance is vitally important.”

In conducting the research, Ferguson was interested in understanding how boards approached safety beyond mere compliance with relevant legislation given, on its own, such compliance does not ensure a safe workplace.
“Not all board members have operational experience, particularly within the industry of the board on which they sit, and therefore do not have direct experience of the impact of safety leadership on safety performance”

I was also interested in understanding the changing trends in safety disclosures in annual reports and CSR reports, and to see whether what was being disclosed reflected what was happening within the organisation,” she says. In terms of safety disclosures, she researched 10 years’ worth of annual reports and CSR reports for ASX200 companies to examine the changing trends in safety-related disclosures. What Ferguson found is that each of the four safety leadership criteria, vision, personal commitment, decision-making and transparency, could be identified in safety disclosures and each have increased over the past ten years.

The highest number of safety-related disclosures is in the area of decision-making with 89 per cent of companies in 2011 (compared to 58 per cent in 2001) disclosing the role of the board, senior executives and employees in making decisions around safety, or disclosing the existence of safety documents and systems. The research also found that the industry sector to make the most safety-related disclosures is the materials sector (24 per cent) followed by the energy sector (23 per cent).

The industry sectors to make the least disclosures were consumer discretionary (5 per cent) and health care (7 per cent) and financial services (7 per cent). “As a result of the research, I have been able to develop best practice guidelines for company disclosures on safety based on the four safety leadership criteria,” Ferguson says.

**Implications for OHS professionals**
The implication of these findings for safety professionals is the importance of engaging board members in safety beyond pure statistical analysis of lag indicators, Ferguson explains. “Not all board members have operational experience, particularly within the industry of the board on which they sit, and therefore do not have direct experience of the impact of safety leadership on safety performance,” she says.

“The industry sectors to make the least disclosures were consumer discretionary (5 per cent) and health care (7 per cent) and financial services (7 per cent). “As a result of the research, I have been able to develop best practice guidelines for company disclosures on safety based on the four safety leadership criteria,”

Ferguson says.

“Very effective safety professionals understand the issues confronting the organisation across all areas and seek to ensure that the work they are doing in safety fully integrates with these other imperatives. For example, if there is a significant financial crisis facing the organisation, Ferguson says safety professionals should ideally brief the board on safety performance in light of those issues. “How will this distraction impact on time managers spend in the field? How will increased demands by the board on financial reporting impact the ability for those executives to focus on safety? What can the organisation do to arm themselves against any reduction in focus on safety while other issues are dealt with? These are just examples and every organisation will have unique situations for safety professionals to be abreast of rather than seeing safety as a standalone issue,” she says.

**The role of boards on safety**
Harold Downes, a partner with Herbert Smith Freehills, believes there is an increasing focus by boards on health and safety issues generally. “My concern is that board members have varying levels of sophistication and impact when making that focus. I often think that what board members do when they conduct their visible demonstrations of their ‘focus’ by visiting sites, amounts to little more than what I would call ‘safety tourism,’” he says.

“There is a serious deficiency amongst many board members’ appreciation of what they can influence and how they should do so. It is improving, but there is a long way to go. The manner in which they can satisfy themselves that they have ‘verified’ the provision and use
of resources intended to achieve acceptable levels of risk, is complex. I would like to see board members briefed on the high risks tasks before they go to a site, and for them to call for an explanation about how those risks are being mitigated. That, in my view, would achieve a greater result than them walking a site checking to see if PPE is being worn. In high pressure white collar environments, it may be that senior executives walk the floor late at night to see who is still at work, and why.”

Martin Kriewaldt, chairman at Hyne, Australia’s largest and most successful privately owned timber company, believes there are too many companies with poor OHS records, and in such instances, the board has to become involved. Many boards don’t get involved in culture either, according to Kriewaldt, who says culture plays a critical role in safety. “If you’ve got a bad culture, then you’ve got to start telling the chief executive to either fix the culture or start looking for another job,” he says.

“It’s exactly the same with OHS. If you’ve got a chief executive and managers who really are focused on it, then it’s not something that boards need to be focused on because it’s being done by the people who can seriously make the difference. You can have the most enthusiastic board on OHS but get nowhere if the chief executive and the C suite aren’t going to play ball.”

The safety-shareholder value link
At the highest level, better safety outcomes and performance do correlate with improved shareholder value, according to Kathryn Dent, director of People + Culture Strategies and non-executive director of the Cerebral Palsy Alliance. “A company found guilty of a WHS breach will face a significant penalty which will vary according to seriousness of risk,” she says.

“The penalty a company must pay will reduce the profit available for distribution so there’s a direct impact, but what is indirect and not easily quantifiable will be the adverse impact a breach (and even simply a poor history of safety through incidents and claims) has on the company’s brand and reputation and relationships with stakeholders – all of which in turn may affect shareholder value.”

For example, she says employees working in an organisation which has unsafe systems, plant and equipment may have higher incidences of lost time off work or higher turnover, both of which would likely impact on productivity and morale. Breaches may also lead to losses of commercial contracts and tenders, reducing the company’s work levels and profitability, which in turn may lead to higher turnover. “The incident itself may not only result in a penalty under WHS laws, but it may also result in other types of claims, for example, property damage, economic losses, workers’ compensation claims and so on,” she says.

Kriewaldt believes there is a firm link between a safe workplace and better productivity, however, he says not all board directors see or understand this link. As a result, some companies suffer from “some appalling safety records” and governments are updating laws and regulations to enforce what boards and executive management teams should be looking after.

Improved safety governance arrangements needed
A 2012 survey by Herbert Smith Freehills examined the safety governance arrangements of 118 organisations and measured these organisation’s arrangements against that required to meet ‘good practice’. Key findings of the survey were:

• 2 out of 5 of organisations have a board where not all directors have a strong understanding of their legal duties.
• Only 55 per cent of new directors receive a briefing on their WHS safety responsibilities.
• Only 54 per cent of boards have separate (external) WHS auditing or assurance processes.
• Half of boards rely more on injury and incident data than on general deliberations on WHS matters.
• Only 29 per cent of boards receive regular information on the safety culture of their organisation.
“I have absolutely no doubt that a safe place is a more productive place and it’s better for shareholders,” he says. “I don’t think there are too many shareholders who would happy to get a dividend on the basis that someone has to go home maimed or dead. From my perspective, focusing on employee welfare is a big part of just being in business and doing the right thing for shareholders.”

**Safety’s business value**

OHS is typically seen as a cost centre in most organisations. However, from a board perspective, there are a number of steps OHS professionals can take to link operational safety priorities to a Board level perspective, and potentially add shareholder value in the process.

Dent recalls the advice of a chairperson who told her: “don’t look at things as a cost to the organisation but the value to it”. She says most boards would be committed to WHS and Advisors safety practitioners to keep them updated, make necessary recommendations, be aware of the organisation’s risk appetite and if necessary work to change it. “WHS professionals need to communicate in practical and real terms that you can’t put a value on a workplace free of risk and which complies with health and safety laws,” she says.

“WHS professionals need to paint the picture of the cost of failing to comply because this is where the value is. Once an organisation has been prosecuted it will understand the value of compliance – you can’t put a price on someone’s life and the impact the loss of it will have on their family, friends and colleagues. As a director having a criminal record or being imprisoned is a huge risk to take for a fraction of the cost of ensuring your obligations are met. Even defending a small WHS breach carries with it a cost which attention to WHS compliance justifies.”

Dent says some more practical steps could also include the presence of a board member on an enterprise risk management committee, and the employment of not only a WHS professional who may alert and investigate WHS matters, but internal auditors that review fiscal and procedural processes for authenticity.

Downes says he is seeing clients secure work through tendering, particularly in the traditional hard hat industries of construction and mining, through the harmonised safety legislation has. Safety professionals can assist boards to move through these stages by working with the CEO on effective safety presentations to the board and in identifying ways to engage board members in safety beyond only reporting on statistical indicators and the outcomes of investigations and audits, as examples.

“I also believe that many directors, particularly those who come from white collar backgrounds (the accountants and lawyers amongst us) do not generally have the same level of appreciation for high risk activities as engineers for example. It does require significant training for people whose careers have not included activity based hazard identification to become comfortable with those concepts, and what it might take to mitigate the risks which flow.”

Kriewaldt believes that it is important for OHS professionals to be focused on forward looking indicators. “If you’ve got a bad record on the lag indicators, obviously you’ve got to work to do there,” says Kriewaldt, who says process safety is also important and that OHS professionals should be looking at consequences rather than the outcome. “Dropping a wrench from a height that hits nobody to me is far more important than somebody twisting his ankle when stepping on a rock. A lot of people wouldn’t see it that way. I want to see that they’ve got their brains engaged and that they’re not out to just get me the numbers, but they’re out to get me safety,” he says.

“There are too many who see the number as the end game, whereas safety is in fact the end game. The number is simply a method of measuring past performance, but if they simply focus on past performance, they’re going to miss the big picture.”

**A pathway to safety governance**

To help identify where a board may currently sit in terms of their approach to safety Ferguson has established a five-stage safety governance pathway through her research. Safety professionals can assist boards to move through these stages by working with the CEO on effective safety presentations to the board and in identifying ways to engage board members in safety beyond only reporting on statistical indicators and the outcomes of investigations and audits, as examples.

“The least effective boards in terms of workplace safety appear to have a transactional approach where they take a minimal approach and see safety as a management responsibility, with the board generally only engaged after an incident has occurred. These organisations do not tend to make any disclosures about safety performance in their annual reports,” she says.

The harmonised safety legislation has seen many of these boards recently become compliance focused where the board is aware of their responsibilities in a legalistic sense and ensure basic safety reporting is in place (generally focused on lag indicators only). “A brief reference to safety may be made in an annual report such as the existence of a safety policy. Overall, compliance with legislation is the main driver rather than seeking to go beyond such requirements to understand the importance of safety leadership by the executive team and the resulting impact on safety culture," says Ferguson.

It appears that once a compliance framework for safety has been achieved, boards often then...
become more focused on the issue beyond the legislation, frequently driven by an executive team or CEO with strong safety leadership skills. Safety may be included in the board charter at this point, a vision for safety and safety targets may be set, and lead indicators introduced. Often safety systems and processes are now disclosed in annual reports.

From this stage, Ferguson says boards might become more proactive in safety and are comfortable with their role in safety leadership. “Boards may seek even greater safety performance from their executive team and establish a sub-committee of the board to ensure safety receives the focus it requires. Often in this stage the Chairman makes a personal commitment to safety in their annual report and public disclosures may also include both lag and lead indicators,” she says.

The most effective boards with respect to safety ensure that it is completely integrated with the operations of the organisation. “The link between high safety performance and business excellence (or safe production) is known and accepted by the board and senior executive team. Clear statements about the role of the board are disclosed in annual reports and safety-related disclosures are honest and transparent sharing both the good news and the bad,” says Ferguson.

Notable gaps and challenges

There are a number of common challenges facing boards from a safety governance perspective, according to Harold Downes, a partner with Herbert Smith Freehills.

“For me, the biggest gap, and one that I have great sympathy with, is how directors verify compliance. For example, we have been through an era of a ‘no blame culture’ to encourage reporting. That has resulted, in many corporations, in the obvious consequence, namely, a non-enforcement culture. That has resulted, in many corporations, in the obvious consequence, namely, a non-enforcement culture. “We are now starting to see courts and other tribunals express the concern that while a corporation may have a whiz bang system, if it is not enforced then it is worthless,” he says.

Another gap which Downes sees is that too many boards have a very homogenous composition. This has implications for how risk is identified and the mitigated: “you may as well have one brain working on it,” he says.

“I believe that the current push for diversity on boards will enhance the way in which these matters are dealt with.

“I would like to see safety not being described as the first item on the agenda, but the most important operational item on the agenda.”
Taking a holistic and systemic approach to safety management is critical to good safety outcomes. Craig Donaldson looks at how Olam International and VEC Civil Engineering have improved OHS through the introduction and use of sound safety management systems.
lam International is a leading global agribusiness which supplies food and industrial raw materials to more than 13,800 customers worldwide. With operations from seed to shelf in 65 countries it employs 23,000 people, maintains a diversified and well balanced portfolio of 20 agricultural commodities and has built a leadership position in agri sectors including cocoa, coffee, cashew, rice and cotton. The business has grown significantly in recent years, through both organic growth as well as acquisitions, which led to the need for an improved and more comprehensive safety management system. For a large and integrated
SAFETY MANAGEMENT

7 key elements
Olam Australia’s safety management system consists of seven key components:

1. Commitment of its leaders and people.
   “Work health and safety is something that our senior managements and workers are committed to, and with this commitment by all employees we can generate a positive and successful WHS culture in Olam Australia,” says Saunders. “Olam Australia has a strong training focus on safety leadership and culture. The success has been shown in site management (managers/supervisors) levels taking more leadership and being accountable in their safety operations.”

2. Genuine two-way communication.
   This allows parties to give and receive feedback on their thoughts and ideas allowing for constructive improvement in any area of the organisation, according to Saunders, who says it is important that both parties feel safe to do this without repercussion as an organisation cannot operate effectively without it. “One of the key points is to improve our safety culture, which has happened, but this needs to improve further and we are working at this. One of the new primary procedures we are implementing is ‘a fair and just culture’ program to help workers feel free to have input into the safety and other processes,” he says.

3. Task analysis.
   This involves looking at the whole process by using a logical and systematic approach to identifying, analysing and evaluating risks (based around the ISO 31,000 standard which does not use the word hazard any more). “Once the risks are evaluated they then need to be treated according to their severity, the risk treatments need to be implemented,” says Saunders.

4. Best work practices. In health and safety, these involve working out the best way to do something safely, and following that process like a formula.
   “At Olam Australia, best work practices must be followed by employees to ensure the safe completion of any task within the workplace. These BWPs are also part of our competency assessment process,” says Saunders, who adds that these practices are also being developed in Olam Australia’s safety/risk management software (Myosh) which combines risk assessment and work practices. “This part of the process has been challenging with getting site management involved as we are all time poor with the workloads, but we are getting on top of the process,” he says.

5. Information, induction and competency.
   “Information plays an integral role in the management of common risks among business units, and allows us to manage these risks more effectively – but is not the only component,” says Saunders, who adds that training and competency are of equal importance to health and safety and help reinforce the importance of a safe workplace.

“In the past they were like safety inspectors, but now they have a different focus, which is to facilitate, advise and assist managers, supervisors and workers in doing their job safely”

Gus Saunders, manager of environmental health and safety for Olam Australia & Asia

business such as Olam Australia, its manager of environmental health and safety, Gus Saunders, says it is important to ensure a consistent and sound approach to safety management across all such businesses and subsidiaries.

“Plus we needed to ensure our system met the new legislation and harmonisation requirements, so it was a good time to review things – however, a lot of our procedures had been updated early,” he says. “I generally take whichever state has the highest legal standard for whatever procedure or process, and then adopt that – which then gives Olam the best compliance level.”

In developing the system, Saunders says a system that was simple to use for employees and which ensured good compliance with safety requirements as well as a safe environment for workers was a must. “When I developed the system requirements, I brought things back to the basic day to day operations of safety; I ended up with the seven elements we have now (see below), instead of the normal 18 to 20 elements you normally find in a management system. Under each element there are a number of primary procedures which set out how things are required to be completed in a safe manner and who is responsible,” he says.

At the same time Olam’s IT department was upgrading its internal Australian intranet, which called for an improvement in programs as they would be running on a different platform. “This allowed us to develop a program which suited our needs, and where possible, reduce the need to paper by having PDF fillable forms which we are moving to.”
6 Safety Performance Index (SPI).
This is designed to be a proactive health and safety indicator that highlights positive activities within the workplace. This element focus on a new preferred concept of incorporate desired safety performance as necessary elements of safety culture and safety behaviour and focus on lead or positive indicators. These positives activities include safety meetings, toolbox talks, safety inspections, safety audits and training.

7 Incident management. Olam Australia recognises incident management principles and practice are of benefit to the organisation and Saunders says it has developed a joint employee management approach to incident management. “We manage incident very closely and ensure there is good follow up,” he says.
Also one of the key features of the safety management system is, where possible, the integration of quality (food safety), environmental, health and safety primary procedures: “in other words the ‘safety’ can be for food safety (including quality), environmental safety and work health safety,” says Saunders.

Challenges and lessons learned
One of the key things identified early in the process of developing the system was that there are many different terms and abbreviations used, says Saunders: “Safe Work Procedures (SWP), Safe Work Method Statements (SWMS), GMPs, SOPs, on and on,” he says. “To overcome this challenge, I decided to have one term for all the procedures that were required for Olam Australia operations which is primary procedure. There may be some site procedures which are specific to a particular site.

“The role of our safety advisors has changed along with the new safety management system. In the past they were like safety inspectors, but now they have a different focus, which is to facilitate, advise and assist managers, supervisors and workers in doing their job safely. They will help with organising training, source information for teams to do their jobs and will also ensure sites are meeting Olam compliance as well as external legal compliance requirements. At the end of the day everyone is accountable,” he says.
Another challenge relates to contractor management and seasonal workers – something which many other companies are facing – and Saunders said one of big focuses moving forward is contractor management and how to best manage this, whether it be internal or external.
“IT don’t think I would have done anything different; the process has taken longer than I would have liked, and to have it implemented sooner would have been good – but a steady implementation has worked well,” he says.

Leadership support
“The development of the new system has been reported to Olam Australia executive leadership team each month, as part of the monthly QEHS report which I present first up at each meeting. I am very lucky I have a very proactive leadership team which gives plenty of support, and this also reflected in the global business,” says Saunders, who adds that the business’ head of country (Bob Dall’Alba) and general manager for HR/safety (Bruce Highfield) are very proactive in their support for safety.
A part of the monthly QEHS report focuses on the safety performance index of each business unit, and each general manager has a chance to ask questions about any poor performance or positive performance: “There is no hiding from SPI results,” says Saunders, who adds that a senior managers are also required to conduct site inspections to ensure their accountability and involvement.
When the system was rolled out early last year, booklets and posters were designed, produced and distributed to help communicate the system. A key part of this was the development of a safety logo, which is based around the honeycomb structure. “This ties nicely to our safety philosophy,” says Saunders. “Their high strength-to-weight ratio minimises the amount of material (information) required to reach maximum safety with little paperwork. The idea was to design a system that was simple, light weight in structure, but very strong in application, compliance and easy to use.”

Results and improvement
With the implementation of new system over the past 6 to 12 months, there has been an increase
VeC Civil Engineering

VeC Civil Engineering specialises in bridges and structures, civil infrastructure, rail, steel fabrication and water infrastructure. It operates as a single-source contractor, has offices in Tasmania, Queensland and Victoria and clients include the Department of Infrastructure Energy and Resources (DIER), Tasmanian Irrigation, TasRail, VicRoads, Queensland Main Roads, Queensland Rail and local government councils around Tasmania and other Australian states.

The past five years has seen the company grow in size, having expanded from 60 employees and at times peaking at 200 plus employees. This rapid growth placed strain on its HSEQ systems and processes, according to the HSEQ manager for VeC Civil Engineering, Paul Menheere. Although it was accredited in safety, environmental and quality systems and practices since 1994, he adds that records and reporting functions were varied and at times inconsistent. “VeC quickly realised that in order to stay a leader in our industry we had to change our way of thinking and find an innovative solution in order to better manage our HSEQ system,” he says.

“This began the task of integrating our separate safety, environmental and quality management systems into one comprehensive system, and then once established, searching for a flexible HSEQ software management system. The company needed a system which would handle our continued growth and was suited to flexible contracting industry requirements yet would meet the requirements of our own HSEQ standards, third party accreditations (AS/NZS 4801, AS/NZS ISO 14001, AS/NZS ISO 9001, OFSC and rail accreditation) and current and future legislative requirements.”

After exhaustive reviews; policy, procedure and form consolidations, investigations, consultations and trials, the company developed a comprehensive and fully integrated HSEQ management system (IMS), then took the next step of converting that system into an electronic HSEQ software management system, which was branded as ‘VeCSafe’.

Leading and driving change
To help support the development and implementation of the above, a systems management team was formed at the start of the journey, and in consultation with external parties such as auditors and OHS consultants, the team reviewed and planned to make the necessary changes for the fully integrated approach.

Throughout the development stages, Menheere says relevant senior management and supervisory level staff were consulted and encouraged to provide input into the development and improvement of the system. This was completed through management meetings, group workshops and team bonding sessions.

“We now continue to encourage consultation at all levels of the company (senior management, project management, safety committee and
whole company communications); and respond accordingly to requests, suggestions or improvements. The monitoring of the electronic IMS is ongoing, and feedback from users is regularly welcomed to ensure continual improvement,” says Menheere.

**Keys to practical success**
On identifying the initial suitability of the electronic IMS, the product was presented and introduced to senior management teams, project management teams and supervisory teams for review, consultation and evaluation. The teams were given a comprehensive outline of the product including access to a demonstration model for testing, and Menheere says teams had the ability to use the product, ask questions, and request certain and custom built operations.

“The extensive product review and consultation process ensured all parties where satisfied with the proposed product, and the general consensus was gained that the product met the current and future needs of VEC, according to Menheere, who says that the consultation process continued once consensus was established.

The initial testing committee reconvened after the purchase of the product, to ensure the product met all the specifications required of our HSEQ IMS, and while the electronic IMS was being developed, the committee continued to test, modify and build on the electronic system until it was ready for wider use. At this point, the system was rebranded as ‘VECSafe’. The name ‘VECSafe’ aligned the electronic system with the company, and assisted in creating employee ownership by making the brand a part of employees’ workplace communication.

**Challenges and lessons learned**
The new and electronic IMS processes were initially received with some reluctance in the workplace, Menheere recalls. In the first instance, he says the initial development of the IMS had a reluctant uptake, which was likely due to employee apprehension of the significant change in the system and how HSEQ processes were completed and handled. “This non-acceptance took time to overcome, and integration occurred through the assistance of our consultation and training processes and plan,” he says.

“The reluctance encountered to implement and use the new electronic IMS approach, VECSafe, appeared to stem from the change of approach on how we did things due to the new electronic technology, rather than being a paper based system. We understood that all new concepts and processes have a learning period; so through consultation, general education, training and encouragement, understanding of VECSafe increased and users realised how easy the system was to use, and how helpful it is in our day to day workings.”

**VECSafe was customised to incorporate company terminology in terms of processes and actions, which was consistent with the approach to the previous paper based IMS, and Menheere says this assisted in its acceptance given that system fundamental processes and the names of methods had not changed.**

“We designed VECSafe with features to encourage others to use the system, and customised each person’s access and usage to suit their requirements, so that they were not overwhelmed with information which may have discouraged them from using the electronic system,” he says.

“VECSafe is now widely accepted and fully integrated throughout the company, not only into our vernacular, but as part of our daily tasks and operations. This is assisted by users having 24 hours access to the system. Information is input and available in real time, and therefore can be accessed by anyone at any time or place where there might be internet access.”

**Results and improvement**
Since the introduction of the integrated approach of IMS, there has been significant demonstrated improvements in health and safety in the workplace, and Menheere says the most noticeable improvements have been seen since the introduction of VECSafe which include:

- Increased knowledge share in the workplace: the transfer of knowledge from employees’ minds into a system where it is shared, stored, referred and used by all employees at different times, improving efficiency and understanding of HSEQ processes and practices.
- Improved reporting: the reporting of hazards, opportunities for improvement and events (including near misses, accidents, incidents, injuries, property damage, complaints or community impact issues or quality and environmental impact issues) have improved and become more regular.
- Improved compliance and management of activities: VECSafe has been developed to be a one stop HSEQ information and recording tool for busy employees. The ability to reach out to one system to find relevant information or to report, a hazard, an opportunity for improvement or an event has increased HSEQ performance compliance and has also reduced shortcuts being taken on project activities to avoid paperwork.
- Comprehensive document control, management system: VECSafe is a single document control HSEQ management system. The electronic system allows all users the easy retrieval, and most up to date versions of any policy, procedure, form, document, MSDS, position description or employee training record. All documents are current and are available for use and access 24 hours a day, where there is internet access available, this means users are not relying on any one individual to provide them with the right documentation.
Sure & steady safety

Slips, trips and falls are a common OHS hazard in many organisation. The City of Kingston’s Margie Hanragan explores how the council reduced its LTI rate through a proactive approach to reducing related injuries in the workplace.

The City of Kingston is a local government area in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Through its Aged and Disability Services (A&DS), the council provides support to frail aged and younger disabled community and their carers. Services include assessment, social support programs, community transport, domestic assistance, personal care, respite care, delivered meals, home maintenance, and information and referral. Some 250 staff including 190 direct care workers (DCWs) and 20 home maintenance officers provide these services to over 5,800 clients in their own homes and community settings.

OHS and slips, trips and falls

Kingston City Council takes a multifaceted approach to OHS across all levels of the organisation, through statutory OHS committees, area based working groups, application of an OHS policy and procedures, sound risk assessment practice, and a corporate management system (SafetyMax) to report, track and manage incidents, hazards and near misses.

From 2010 to 2011, 17 reports were made by DCWs concerning slips and trips, with most occurring in wet areas. The analysis also rated the hazard as a main contributor to lost time injuries for the DCWs. The A&DS health & safety working group comprises staff across the department, including five DCWs, was charged with reviewing the incidents and identifying potential solutions. After examining several options the group decided to trial Tiger Grips, a rubber based shoe overlay. The trial showed that Tiger Grips are readily available, affordable and above all are effective in reducing slips and trips.

A working solution

The success of finding a solution to the challenge of slips and trips of DCWs was based on the working group’s stepped process of identifying the frequency and nature of the occurrences, identifying potential solutions with input from those who do the work, trialling products in the workplace, and analysing results.

In addition to the selection of the preferred Tiger grip solution, a campaign to raise awareness of potential trip and slip hazards that exist in the workplace was undertaken through a number of channels including:

- The provision of a comprehensive induction for all new staff
- Issuing each DCW with a handbook that communicates council’s expectations
- Safe working guidelines that outline the do’s and don’ts for staff and clients are provided
- Safe work procedures are provided that detail how to undertake each task safely
- Meetings and supervision sessions with DCWs to convey OHS information are held regularly
- Updates on policies and procedures etc. are provided promptly
- Articles on safety are included in the periodic staff newsletters
- Manual handling training and regular refresher training to staff is provided.

Staff engagement is demonstrated by providing staff with the opportunity to be involved with the A&DS health & safety working group, and their participation in peer learning circles where staff share their experience through the development of safe work practices. Direct care staff are also recruited to the membership of the quality review committee which reviews policies and procedures.

Awareness of safety issues in the workplace has also occurred through a process of ensuring that DCWs review their workplaces. DCWs are asked to complete a written safety check of each home environment. The checks consider the appropriateness and potential risks of areas such as floor surfaces, bathrooms, vacuums, equipment, beds etc. Any safety issues identified are then followed up by appropriate staff.
Challenges and lessons learned
Following a long trial, feedback and evaluation the Tiger Grips were made a mandatory personal protection equipment item for all DCWs. There has been a high degree of trust in the product and positive feedback regarding comfort. Overall, staff appreciated the efforts of management to ensure their safety in the work place.

The challenge for the effective use of the Tiger Grips relates to compliance by all staff therefore monitoring compliance is required. Initially, staff were instructed that Tiger Grips must be worn all at times. This approach was met with some resistance due to issues with shoes and socks becoming wet whilst DCWs were showering clients, thus resulting in DCWs spreading water throughout clients’ homes as well as spending all day with wet feet. As a result, the requirement was modified so that staff must wear the Tiger Grips when they are working on or around wet and slippery surfaces.

It was also identified that Tiger Grips have a shelf life and the tread will wear after continual use, therefore organisations should budget for a reissue every couple of years.

Results and outcomes
The solution to the problem was easy to implement and relatively cost effective due to the reduction in loss time injuries. In the first year following the introduction of Tiger Grips there was a 21 per cent reduction in loss time injuries within A&DS. In the following year there was a further reduction of 42 per cent and in the third year a further reduction. Of note was the absence of incidents of falls and trips in wet areas that had previously been serious in terms of the severity of the injuries and recovery time.

Advice for OHS professionals
A system of reporting, tracking and reviewing incidents, hazards and near misses in the workplace is paramount. For this to be effective, staff must be educated to report incidents, hazards and near misses and they must be provided with the necessary tool to do so, for example, an observation sheet to be provided to the supervisor for follow up.

Where appropriate, information about injuries, incidents, recovery requirements and success stories should be shared so staff appreciate the importance of compliance.

Staff knowledge can be tested to ensure the OHS message has been understood. This can take the form of quizzes, reviews, meetings and group or individual discussions.

Having an OHS committee and/or working group that is representative of all staffing levels is important for staff engagement. This group must be proactive, accountable and demonstrate leadership to the target staff.

The provision of personal protective equipment such as Tiger Grips can provide ready solutions to identified problem areas. This should be supported through staff training and by the giving of information through a number of channels including newsletters, handbooks and discussion.

All workplace practices should also be covered by policies and procedures that are accessible to all staff and promotion of the contents on a regularly basis is advisable.

Margie Hanragan is senior coordinator operations for aged and disability services at the City of Kingston
EVENTS

Visions of OHS success

A range of industry experts spoke at the 22nd Annual Visions OHS Conference, which attracted many OHS professionals keen to learn about the latest workplace safety trends and issues.

The Safety Institute of Australia (Qld Division) recently convened the 22nd consecutive annual Visions OHS Conference at the Mercure Gold Coast Resort from 17-18 November 2014. Sponsored by Scott Safety, the conference featured a range of speakers including professionals, academics, researchers and other practitioners, who discussed a wide range of key industry topics. Key themes covered at the conference included the divergence between reality and research, the future of OHS and emerging trends, as well as the human element in safety.

WHS legal trends

One of speakers, Fiona Austin, special counsel with Herbert Smith Freehills, spoke about some of the more notable changes to Australian OHS legislation on the horizon. She observed that the Federal Government’s proposed changes to the Comcare regime will change the landscape for workers’ compensation and safety regulation.

“If progressed, these changes will allow corporations operating in more than one jurisdiction to self-insure under the national worker's compensation scheme. Corporations making the move will be regulated under the Commonwealth laws for both workers’ compensation and WHS regulation,” according to Austin, who said this change agenda presents an opportunity for employers to consider afresh their workers’ compensation and WHS arrangements and make a decision about the best regulatory environment in which to operate.

The actual business value of any opportunities from the proposed Comcare changes will depend on assessing the benefits of the jurisdiction changes and any savings in workers’ compensation costs, against the impacts in IR and WHS practices that may flow from the change, she said. “But overall there is an undeniable opportunity to improve national integration of WHS systems and cultures across large businesses. Given the challenges WHS professionals face in light of managing complexity, the opportunities to improve operational excellence by limiting complexity are inspiring,” said Austin.

“In addition, there are many possible advantages of having vertical integration for all aspects of WHS within a single framework. These extend from the potential benefits of enhanced engagement and productivity from integration of employer and insurer, through to potential improvements in rehabilitation effectiveness. However, there are potential downsides such as risk adversity or industrial relations considerations, and these will require careful consideration before taking the leap.”

Austin also noted that mining industry safety and health reform is a potential game changer for the industry, but its future is not clear. Safe Work Australia, in conjunction with the National Mine Safety Framework prepared the Model WHS Mining Regulations in late 2011. South Australia and the Northern Territory incorporated a form of the model mining regulations, but Austin said they remained under review in the three mining states of Western Australia, Queensland and New South Wales, which were working to create an additional set of ‘non-core’ mining requirements. “New South Wales led the way in publishing intended regulations, however their progress is currently at a standstill. The Western Australian reforms are under consideration and Queensland appears more likely to modify the existing industry specific laws rather than incorporate mining into the main WHS regime,” she said.

Mining industry safety professionals will be keeping an eagle eye on the progress of...
industry reforms, noted Austin, who added that a hot topic is the issue of statutory appointments and personal liability, with significant variations likely between jurisdictions. For example, Queensland has a stricter personal liability regime than is proposed in New South Wales, where it appears the individual role of Site Senior Executive (SSE) will not be adopted and other statutory position holders will have narrower personal obligations.

“Contractor management is also likely to be an area of real operational impact,” she said. “The reforms will include detailed contractor management requirements to incorporate contractor management systems into a mine’s single safety and health management system. Under proposed changes, the high degree of demand for oversight by the operator or SSE has the potential to curtail the extent to which mining operators can allocate responsibility for risk.”

On the subject of leave accruals, Austin said the Fair Work Amendment Bill 2014, if passed, will clarify the difficult question of leave accruals during absence on workers’ compensation. “It will clarify that employees cannot take or accrue any leave (paid or unpaid) during a period in which the employee is absent from work because of a personal illness or injury for which employee is receiving workers’ compensation,” she said.

The clarity regarding leave accruals will be welcomed by businesses which have been managing inconsistent accruals provisions in different jurisdictions, Austin affirmed. However, in introducing the change, she said any businesses who have not met the previous accrual requirements may uncover previous instances of non-compliance which may require attention.

And with regards to energy safety management systems, she said there is continued development of legislation requiring operators in the energy sector to have in place, and effectively implement, fully integrated safety and health management systems, that have the force of law. For example, in Queensland petroleum safety, under the Water Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014, she said the concept of a ‘safety management plan’ is proposed to be clarified by renaming as a ‘safety management system’ for operating plant. “The safety management system must be a documented and auditable system in its own right, and it can be an offence not to effectively implement the system. There are similar energy safety management systems requirements either as a legislative or licensing requirement for most energy operations such as electricity, petroleum and gas, throughout Australia, with varying degrees of rigour required in the system development,” she said.

WHS professionals need to be conscious that a safety management system documented under energy safety legislation often has the force of law. “In other words, the safety management system is a law that you write for your own business, and criminal consequences can flow from failure,” according to Austin. So while there is always a central need to focus on systems development from the prevention perspective, she said there is also a risk that at some stage a breach of the system may occur, leading to legal consequences. “There are many good reasons for WHS professionals to revisit documented systems from this perspective, to avoid creating unnecessary legal risk at the same time as working toward aspirational safety goals,” said Austin.

Safety citizenship
 Also speaking at the conference were specialist workplace safety consultancy Sentis’ principal consultant Peter Kennedy and research scientist Tristan Casey,
who observed that most organisations typically struggle to achieve what is generally regarded as the pinnacle of a safety citizenship culture: total employee engagement in safety, the adoption of the organisation's safety goals as their own, and a genuine commitment to continuous safety improvement.

Industries such as nuclear power, oil and gas, and aviation, which have a long history of investment in both the physical and psychological aspects of safety, are usually further along than industries such as construction and mining, where the 'person factor' has yet to be fully understood and integrated within safety management systems.

However, they said most organisations, regardless of industry, achieve some of the ingredients that are necessary for safety citizenship. “Specifically, a culture of mateship or team support characterised by ‘helping’ behaviours within teams usually emerges by virtue of natural safety leadership talent, the formation of social bonds between people, and characteristics of the job such as a requirement to work collaboratively,” they said.

“Broadly, our experience suggests that the journey to safety citizenship among most companies begins at either the public (following the rules only when others are watching) or private (following the rules because of an intrinsic and genuine belief in the value of safety) compliance stages of safety culture maturity. Importantly, we have also observed elements of counter-productivity or dysfunctional safety culture among some companies which are grappling with the fallout from downsizing and other cost-cutting initiatives that have been poorly managed.

“Consequently, we think about the safety citizenship journey as a series of stages or steps of safety culture maturity, so it is critical for companies to firstly measure where they stand so an appropriate stage-matched safety culture change intervention can be developed,” said Kennedy and Casey, who noted that safety citizenship is not something that is easily achieved, and some challenges at each level of a company include:

- Underestimating resources and commitment required to implement company-wide culture change (which may require review of existing systems and infrastructure to remove constraints that discourage employee citizenship behaviour).
- Understanding their current state (current cultural maturity) and the pathway they need to undertake to improve.
- Lack of internal resources with the expertise in psychology and human factors required to develop, implement, and support a safety culture change initiative.
- A focus on implementation without adequate preparation or embedding/support.

From a leader's perspective, challenges include:

- Lack of soft-skills training and development in safety leadership techniques that foster safety citizenship among employees.
- Competing demands and pressures, which leave little time to invest in subordinates such as spending time in-field and developing personal and meaningful relationships with them.
- Poor role-modelling and lack of visible leadership around the types of safety citizenship behaviours that are desired among workers.

From an OHS professional’s perspective, the challenges include:

- Role competencies emphasise technical safety over cognitive- and behavioural-safety, with many soft-skills being learned on-the-job or requiring natural talent.
- Burdensome administration that limits onsite time to observe, inform, and coach employees, particularly leaders, in how to foster safety citizenship.
- Emphasis on lagging safety indicators, with limited measurement of leading indicators such as climate and specific safety culture maturity.
- Complex multi-system work environments that can include numerous contractors and subcontractors, each with their own level of safety culture maturity and roadblocks that prevent progression towards safety citizenship.

“The OHS professional takes on a number of roles along the journey towards safety citizenship,” said Kennedy and Casey. “Initially, it will be an influencer, securing support from management and the need to change. Next, roles including ‘measurement scientist’ and ‘strategic planner’ become important, as firstly the current state needs to be diagnosed and this information used to develop a plan for action that is specific and measurable.”

Once the journey is underway, they said the OHS professional should act as a champion of change, again drawing on influencing skills and also engaging in education, coaching, and mentoring as employees start to implement change.

“Finally, it is important for progress to be measured and progress toward staged goals communicated out to the company in an inspiring and motivating way,” they said.
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