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Taking the lead with subsea safety:
The MD of Technip Oceania, Sam Allen, on the organisation’s award-winning approach to delivering industry-leading OHS outcomes

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Leading safety from the top

Good leadership and positive OHS outcomes go hand in hand. Without tangible and committed support from the executive level, any OHS initiative will fail to realise its full potential in minimising harm and fatalities in the workplace. This issue of OHS Professional magazine explores the role of leadership and its impact in a number of ways.

The cover story, for example, looks at how Asciano has taken an integrated and holistic approach – led from the top – to improving its safety track record. In FY 2011, Asciano’s Lost Time Injury Frequency Rate (LTIFR) was 15.2 and its Recordable Injury Frequency Rate (RIFR) was 36.7. Since then, it has experienced a 67 per cent reduction in its LTIFR, and today this figure stands at 5 while its RIFR has more than halved to 14.4. For the full story and interview with Asciano’s general manager HSE, Richard Coleman, turn to page 20.

Also in this issue, we talk with company director and winner of the Eric Wigglesworth OHS Education (Research) Award, Dr Kirstin Ferguson, about the role of OHS professionals in leadership and how they can work with the executive and board members to improve safety outcomes. She explains that leading OHS professionals around the world understand that while there are numerous health- and safety-related administrative tasks that need to be undertaken every day, the real value they can add lies elsewhere. See page 28 for this feature.

We also speak with managing director of Technip Oceania in Australia and New Zealand, Sam Allen, for our leadership feature. The company services onshore, offshore and subsea oil and gas businesses in the Australian region, and Allen acknowledges that while the industry still struggles to remain fatality free, much has been done to reduce risks over the past five or so years. In this feature (see page 12), Allen details Technip’s award-winning approach to delivering industry-leading OHS outcomes.

Leadership was also an important topic and focus at this year’s SIA National Safety Convention 2015 (review begins page 32). One of the speakers was CEO of safety consulting firm SAFemap, Corrie Pitzer, who said the safety profession needs to move away from “Newtonian thinking” in that safety is not a management science, and a new focus will be one of managing, leading and dealing with complexity in the organisation. “We’ll have to broaden the concepts of risk and understanding of risk, right down at the shop floor level, so that we, for instance, don’t measure safety any more in the traditional terms of lag indicators,” he said. “Even leading indicators are all invalid measurements of safety. So we’ll have to understand how to deal with, manage, lead and measure complexity in organisations.”

“We’ll have to broaden the concepts of risk and understanding of risk, right down at the shop floor level, so that we, for instance, don’t measure safety any more in the traditional terms of lag indicators”
Work-related traumatic injury fatalities on the decline

One hundred and eighty-eight workers died from workplace injuries in 2014, according to Safe Work Australia’s Work-related Traumatic Injury Fatalities Australia 2014 report – the lowest number of fatalities in the 12 years of the report series.

The worker fatality rate in 2014 was 1.61 worker fatalities per 100,000 workers – for male workers the fatality rate was 2.81 and for female workers the rate was 0.23.

The fatality rate has decreased by 46 per cent from 2.96 fatalities per 100,000 workers in 2007, and in the 12 years from 2003 to 2014, 3000 workers have lost their lives in work-related accidents.

Over this time, one-third of workers who were killed while working died in vehicle collisions on public roads, one-third in vehicle collisions at workplaces (not on public roads) and the remaining one-third of fatalities did not involve a vehicle.

Offshore oil and gas industry needs harmonisation: ACTU

The ACTU recently called for urgent reforms to Australia’s offshore oil and gas industry to improve safety through legislative measures.

The government, Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and relevant authorities were urged by the ACTU to ensure offshore industries are governed by specific provisions of the Model Work Health and Safety Act and harmonised OHS laws.

The current Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006 (OPPGGS Act) fails to align with the principal features of all other modern Australian health and safety regimes covering high-risk industries, according to the ACTU.

In a new report, Offshore OHS – Protecting Our Oil & Gas Workers, the ACTU outlines nine recommendations for OHS law reform.

Ageing workforce brings new WHS challenges

Employers have a shared responsibility to ensure the health and safety of all workers, including those aged 65-plus, according to SafeWork SA.

Older people now comprise an increasing share of the workforce, and it’s a trend the regulator says will continue as a range of economic, social and policy changes encourage delayed retirement.

More than one-third of people aged 65-plus are currently working, up from around 25 per cent 10 years ago.

According to the federal government’s 2015 Intergenerational Report, this age group now makes up almost double the proportion of the total workforce compared with the 1980s.

What OHS skills do employers want in candidates?

In the OHS employment market, there is a move away from risk mitigation and a site-based focus towards skills in conducting strategic reviews of policies and procedures, according to Hays Human Resources.

“WHS and OHS is a growing industry,” said Lisa Morris, senior regional director of Hays Human Resources.

“There is more knowledge about what safety professionals offer a business and far more demand for their skills.”

While demand is high, Morris observed that employers are selective, and she said employers need and want candidates with strong safety knowledge and will wait for the right person who fits their personal needs. “An everyday safety generalist is no longer enough,” she said.

ACT: “fit notes” introduced for GPs and injured workers

The government recently announced a new “fit note” to help get sick and injured employees back to work, for use by all GPs in the ACT and surrounding region before a potential national expansion.

The certificate of capacity is designed to help more than 400 GPs in the region focus on their patients’ capacity for work, rather than their incapacity.

The initiative is part of Comcare’s Health Benefits of Work Programme, which advocates that a timely, supported return to work for people with injury and illness reduces disability.
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Being part of the global context in workplace health and safety

Safety Institute of Australia chief executive David Clarke discusses the SIA’s leadership role on the international stage and the launch of the new Global Framework for Practice for the OHS professional

When you’re part of the SIA you’re connected to a local, state and national network of health and safety people. Anyone can be a member – all you have to do is care about the issues and join. Our state and territory branches create opportunities for getting connected and professional development through all sorts of events. You might participate in our LinkedIn network, be part of the Twitter conversations, go to our industry events, read our E-news and this magazine, be part of our leadership by participating in branches and creating events, or even providing your ideas and input to others through delivering events and professional advice. You might also attend our national conference where the wider OHS/WHS community comes together to discuss and debate both the gnarly old issues and the new out-of-the-box ideas.

While this is happening, we work at a number of other levels to “advance the profession”, as our mission outlines. This means doing our bit to move forward the way the profession operates (capability) and is perceived (reputation). We talk to regulators, politicians, industry groups and employers, and work to build a stronger reputation for the sector. We’ve built the Body of Knowledge to provide a stronger conceptual framework to the knowledge base. We accredit higher education to seek greater consistency and quality in curriculum in the higher education sector. We certify the profession to build both its reputation and its capability.

With this work, it’s easy to see a local context (the individual connections), a state/territory context (OHS law, and statewide activities and events) and a national context (advancing the profession, connecting the national OHS/WHS community).

There is also an international context. In a world where companies, communication, finance, regulation and so much more are on a global scale, global thinking is required. To address this challenge in the OHS field, the International Network of Safety and Health Practitioner Organisations (INSHPO) was formed in 2001, bringing together a number of workplace health and safety organisations representing their professions in different countries, to talk about common interests and build greater connectivity and cohesion to OHS connections internationally.

The opportunities and challenges are clear. Globalisation involves freeing up the movement of capital and people across the boundaries of sovereign states. The movement of capital has created vast growth in companies operating across sovereign boundaries, and OHS professionals with global responsibilities. They deal with different OHS law, terminology and standards of practice, and they are seeking greater consistency. The movement of people has created a global employment marketplace for individuals, and increasing demand for better co-ordination of national bodies representing their professions and certifying their people for international recognition.

We know that Australia has some of the highest OHS standards in the world. We adopt the view that to meet our charter and advance the profession in a globalised world, we support and engage with INSHPO, taking up a responsibility to assist other counties and to learn from

“People often ask about the use of terminology at the SIA and why we make certain choices, and it’s important to understand that sometimes the international context matters”
them. As a result, in recent years the SIA has been playing an increasingly strong role in the network, with our immediate past chairman of the College of Fellows, Phil Lovelock, a recent chairman of INSHPO. As an example of the two-way knowledge-sharing process, in the past two to three years the Australian OHS Body of Knowledge has been drawn on extensively by INSHPO members in the development of their own capability frameworks. On the other hand, in the long development process for certification in Australia, using our INSHPO relationships, we drew on knowledge and experience of countries such as the USA and Canada, with decades of experience in delivering similar programs.

INSHPO’s work is coming to fruition. Launched in Perth just last week after two years of development by an international team including SIA representatives, is The OHS Professional Capability Framework – A Global Framework for Practice. The new global framework is a watershed piece because it is genuinely international, relevant across national boundaries, uses language carefully negotiated to be commonly understood, and is part of the ongoing process of defining a framework for OHS practice which is understood across the world. The framework contributes to much greater consistency in defining roles and responsibilities as well as the knowledge and the skills required for OHS professionals, regardless of where they are within a global economy.

It was developed with strong input from SIA representatives, including our representation on the small working party which created the work.

The global framework is just the start of a wider body of work. The next critical piece is defining the role, knowledge and skills of the OHS practitioner at a global level, and this is already well underway with the conduct of a full-day INSHPO workshop in Perth on 13 November, which had strong SIA input.

What inspires me about the work of INSHPO is the willingness of its participants to set aside their norms and their standard frames of reference, tearing down cultural and language barriers to produce pieces of work like this global framework. The difficulty of achieving this should not be underestimated, because as we know we all have our individual, local, regional and national passions about OHS language and concepts. People often ask about the use of terminology at the SIA and why we make certain choices, and it’s important to understand that sometimes the international context matters.

One example is our continuing use of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) as well as Workplace Health and Safety (WHS). Despite recent local Australian legislation using WHS, the term OHS remains the broadly accepted terminology at the international level – so we strike a balance and use both as carefully as we can. More recently, use of the term “practitioner” in our certification program has drawn some criticism, however, it fits with the international context and its widespread use at that level. The current global framework addresses roles directly, and a common language must be found. If you are going to work at the international level, developing common language can be a challenge, and you have to be flexible.

I am proud of the work the SIA has done on behalf of the membership to contribute to this initial piece of the global framework for OHS practice, and we will continue our work to complete this project, as well as continuing to support INSHPO and build greater connectivity in OHS on the international stage.

“We talk to regulators, politicians, industry groups and employers, and work to build a stronger reputation for the sector”

David Clarke
You can find out more about INSHPO at http://www.inshpo.org/
Technip Oceania services onshore, offshore and subsea oil and gas businesses in the Australian region. With more than 400 people working from its Perth office, it has delivered an extensive portfolio of projects for a wide spectrum of clients including Woodside, Chevron, Shell, INPEX, BHP Billiton, Apache and Santos. It operates three business lines: subsea (which covers every stage of the value chain, from field layout, pipeline and umbilical design and fabrication through to installation and condition monitoring during production); offshore (which covers engineering, procurement, construction and installation of fixed and floating platforms for the energy industry); and onshore (comprising a range of facilities for the onshore oil and gas chain, petrochemicals and other industries).

Common OHS risks
Managing director of Technip in Australia and New Zealand, Sam Allen, says the business faces a range of OHS risks, which reside mostly within its construction site activities. Sites range from onshore Australia and New Zealand to offshore floating facilities and construction ships. “One particular issue is where we are operating on a construction ship where motions are ever present and create particular conditions with respect to crane operations, material handling, access and egress, stored energy, and heavy equipment operation. We also have regular interface with shipyards and fabrication yards in south-east Asia, which exposes our people to hazards outside of our direct control. Having said this, one of the more insidious hazards is stairwell traversing in and around the office,” he says.

“Unfortunately our industry still struggles to remain fatality free, although much has been done to reduce the risk over the past five or so years. We cannot afford to sit on our laurels, as success and failure are only separated by a series of poor decisions made by both corporations and individuals.”

Improving OHS outcomes
Technip Oceania won the safety leadership award at the Subsea Energy Australia Business Awards for its “Pulse” initiative – a leadership-led, workforce-delivered program that delivers industry best practice safety outcomes. The program has involved systematic implementation of early management commitments from the very top of the company, impacting its culture, and including subcontractors and clients.

The program is Technip’s foundation program, which underpins a corporate undertaking that HSE is a core value and absolute commitment, according to Allen. “It
How leaders and OHS can collaborate

There are a number of steps that organisational leaders and OHS professionals can take to improve OHS, according to Sam Allen, managing director of Technip in Australia and New Zealand. “Keep abreast of the situation, engage passionate OHS leaders, lead by example, and ensure that priorities are clear, consistent and respected by project and departmental management,” he says.

“Ensure that work site supervisors are walking the talk, as they are the critical link to physical outcomes. Link OHS outcomes to quality, as that is indeed the case 90 per cent of the time when things go wrong and there is an OHS impact. Change what you do, but remain focused on the key elements that drive success.”

...may be described as our journey towards better HSE performance by engaging ourselves, our customers and our supply chain by focusing on values; leadership; communication; behaviour; and commitment,” he says.

“History has shown us that particular hazards present as more likely to cause serious injury or death. These key risk conditions have been distilled into 12 safety actions that are focused upon at each of our work sites in order to achieve consistency in prioritisation and nurture a culture of looking for and managing [eliminating or mitigating] the high-consequence hazards,” says Allen, who adds that an associated “just culture” accountability framework provides balance on consequences of non-compliance with the 12 safety action performance standards.

In addition, observe, recognise, communicate and agree (ORCA) are the four steps associated with Technip’s observational behaviour approach, Allen explains. “By engaging in and accepting constructive discussion about hazards associated with one’s work activities, we have created a culture where looking after your colleagues and doing the right thing when nobody is watching is normal. The strongest version of an ORCA is defined as a ‘stop the task intervention’, when it is perceived that the risks are too high to continue with the planned operation,” he says.

Leadership and results

As managing director, Allen says his role is to defend and expect investment in prevention (not cost of recovery) and remain visible, set performance expectations for leaders and managers, engage in all of the initiatives and walk the talk.

A key outcome of Technip’s holistic approach to OHS is an engaged workforce, from the office to the back deck of construction ships, according to Allen. “Subcontractors enjoy working for Technip as we are inherently safe. Employees actually believe that safety is our core value. Clients accept Technip standards as meeting or exceeding their own standards and expectations. There is always room for improvement so that we place ourselves in the best position to avoid injuring someone to the extent that they cannot go home intact and return to work tomorrow,” he says.

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There are a number of trends and issues WorkSafe Victoria is seeing among organisations when it comes to complex issues such as musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), mental health and safety culture.

Overall, we’re starting to see improvements in manual handling across the board, and an increase in the number of mental health claims in some industries. In terms of workplace injuries, the top three mechanisms of injury in 2014-15 that WorkSafe Victoria saw were body stressing, falls, slips and trips, and being hit by a moving object. This resulted in the following top three injury groups for standardised claims in 2014-15: musculoskeletal systems; joint, ligament, muscle or tendon; and wounds, lacerations or amputations.

**Mental health**
There is growing acknowledgement of the impact of mental health in Victorian workplaces. Increasing numbers of organisations are supporting their employees’ mental health – from providing proactive programs to support a thriving workforce through to early intervention services and support for workers experiencing mental illness.

WorkSafe first saw this greater appetite for proactive support in the mental health area when workplace health promotion grants were available through the WorkHealth program (2008-2013). During the life of that program we saw increasing numbers of employers using the funds to offer mental health and wellbeing services to their staff, and asking WorkSafe for recommendations on programs and service providers.

Issues such as occupational violence and workplace bullying are becoming more prominent through coverage in the media, leading to a growing number of employers reaching out to WorkSafe for resources and support to tackle these issues.

**Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs)**
The health and safety measures put in place to prevent MSDs vary across businesses. Some organisations have comprehensive systems and processes in place, while others do not. In a number of workplaces we see an over-reliance on administration controls, such as a dependence on supervision and training rather than higher order controls to eliminate or reduce the risk. Other times we see a mismatch between a specific task and the equipment provided, leading to awkward postures or repetitive movements which increase the risk of injury over time.

**Safety culture**
Both employers and regulators are looking to measures of workplace health and safety that are not confined to lag indicators (such as lost time injuries or claims numbers). Lead indicators, such as senior management’s participation in health and safety programs, are used to identify areas for improvement in health and safety in order to prevent injuries before they occur.

There is a substantial body of research that has found a relationship between a more negative safety climate (where employees perceive that safety is deprioritised in organisational policies and practices) and safety outcomes, such as unsafe acts and work-related injuries. For example, work overload and organisational restructuring are both likely to be associated with a lower safety climate.

**Organisational preparedness**
Organisations vary in how prepared or equipped they are to tackle these complex issues in a meaningful way. We see some workplaces that have comprehensive programs in place to reduce MSDs or improve mental health or advance safety culture – we can learn from these workplaces and feature them as case studies for other employers to learn from.

Conversely, there are many employers who want to tackle these issues but are unsure or unaware of what to do, how, or where to start. They may try something locally, or through a service provider they have a relationship with, or may request advice or assistance from WorkSafe on what to do. From our experience, the workplaces who seek support are genuinely interested in tackling these issues.

For example, we’re currently working with employers who import goods into Australia to reduce the risk of MSDs from manual handling. We encourage employers to work with the supply side of their business to influence the way shipping containers are packed or...
loaded before they leave the country of manufacture. This then reduces the manual handling load required to unpack the goods in Australia, and allows for the use of equipment such as slip sheets, which we know not only decrease the time required to complete the task but also reduce the risk of injury.

Employers also seek help in dealing with mental health issues presenting in the workplace, and look to WorkSafe for support and advice. In these cases we’ll often refer the employer onto services such as the Healthy Together Victoria Achievement Program, Heads Up and the People at Work assessment tool, or the soon-to-be launched Mental Wellbeing Collaboration’s resource centre. In general, larger employers have more resources to tackle these issues, and we see a difference in the amount of support services available to employers in metro regions compared to regional workplaces.

The WorkHealth Improvement Network’s pilot program
WorkHealth has been about WorkSafe trying something different, pursuing innovation to develop the next step of health and safety improvements for Victoria. WorkHealth (2008-2013) had significant program reach to nearly 800,000 workers in 38,000 workplaces across the state, and sparked the conversation about health at work and what business and workers can do to support and promote good health.

Our key learnings from the program:
• confirmed the workplace as a setting for workplace health promotion
• identified key attributes of businesses who most effectively adopted WorkHealth – a culture of care for their staff, strong leadership and workplace champions
• there’s no silver bullet – a mix of interventions that are informed by the needs of the workplace, targeted to both the worker and organisational level work best
• interrelationships exist between workplace health promotion and OHS – workplace health promotion works best when it’s built on a sound OHS foundation
• working with and through others provided a new model for WorkSafe (which remains central to our current approach).

This led WorkSafe to look locally at how lead employers were incorporating health promotion into core business. We found that while it was happening, it may not have been intentional or a strategic objective and that workplaces lacked data and measurement in this area. Workplaces reported that the incorporation of health promotion into core business was generally an evolution of good OHS to take a more holistic view of workforce health and safety issues.

At the same time, international views on OHS highlighted the need to incorporate “prevention” and “promotion” into the “protective” health model of OHS. Our thinking was also influenced by the USA’s National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Total Worker Health initiative (www.cdc.gov/niosh/twh/).

Key elements of the pilot program
The WorkHealth Improvement Network (WIN) is an integrated program that brings together workplace safety, worker health and wellbeing and human resources in order to make headway on complex issues facing Victorian workplaces, such as mental health and MSDs.

Evidence tells us that an integrated approach can be an effective and efficient approach to lowering the risk of injury, as well as improving worker health and wellbeing – a happy and healthy worker is a more productive worker.

The WIN uses a collaborative approach to empower organisations to identify and solve their workplace problems. It provides organisations with a suite of tools they need to find the right solutions for their workplace and provides the opportunity for organisations to network and learn from each other. We work through our network partners the Victorian Employers’ Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI) and the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) – organisations that are embedded within industry – to lead our networks of participating employers.

Outcomes and the future of the program
What we’d like to see is that workplaces, employers and employees see the value in the networks and continue to participate past the end of the pilot to drive further health and safety improvements without WorkSafe’s support.

We’d like to see that the interaction between health promotion and OHS has a positive effect on the complex workplace health and safety issues we’re targeting. We’d also like to develop practical tools, resources, case studies and examples from our participating work sites, which other employers could use to tackle these complex issues in a meaningful way. If successful, the approach may be expanded to other industries and workplaces that are likely to benefit from integration.
Reflections on a life committed to safety

Cipriano (Cip) Corva was recently inducted into the Safety Institute of Australia with life membership. Here, he shares his greatest professional achievements, challenges and goals in his extensive career.

How did you get into OSH, and what has motivated you to contribute to the OSH profession?
I joined the Safety Engineering Society of Australia (SESA) in 1964 when I worked in the safety department at General Motors Holden in Fishermans Bend, Melbourne, as assistant to Harold Greenwood Thomas, company safety engineer and my mentor for many years. I learnt a lot from Harold in those early formative years in safety engineering. I helped him to develop a simple formula for “accident prevention” (an old term now!) so that the safety department could train operators about using “safe procedures and methods”. The methods later became job safety instructions (JSIs), which are specific to each job or task performed. I was involved with the development of many JSIs for jobs in all the 16 manufacturing plants, and services including production, production engineering, design, supply/purchasing, sales, HR and maintenance.

During my learning years, I also had the opportunity to study engineering trade, design, metallurgy, industrial hydraulics and pneumatics, industrial engineering, supervision, management, hazard management, occupational safety and health, ergonomics, risk management, human resources and industrial relations. From these early beginnings in safety and occupational health, I developed my passion for learning through education and training, which have been, and will continue to be, my personal drivers and contributions to the OSH profession.

What do you consider your greatest professional achievements?
This is an interesting and challenging question, because how does one determine in 51 years of practise the “greatest” achievement(s)? Most people tend to measure success (or failure) using lagging indicators (i.e. Lost Time Injury Rates); these are negative measures after the personal damage occurrence. Some safety people still call these accidents; there is no such thing as an “accident” (we will leave this issue for another day).

I prefer to use “leading indicators” – positive measures about the things we need to do to improve safety and prevent or reduce the risk of early death and permanent total or partial disability, which carry a very high cost to the employees and their families (including pain and suffering) as well as to employers and society. This little story from my early time in the motor vehicle manufacturing industry provides an example of achievement using both lagging and leading measures.

In the early years (’50s and ’60s) when we had few or no guards and other safety devices on machines in production, we used to “chop off fingers by the bucketful” each year – as one USA company director once said when he visited GMH. St Vincent’s Hospital was a good training area for microsurgeons repairing crushed/amputated fingers, hands and, on rare occasions, a foot.

So to communicate the “language of safety” to operators on the factory floor where these serious injuries occurred, we developed a simple program called “keep your fingers and hands out of danger”, using the rabbit trap to demonstrate the concept of hazard + person = accident/injury. Together with the trap, we developed a “contract of understanding” – a simple multilingual instruction handbook for supervisors and their leading hands to train operators, as most were multilingual and could interpret English with their particular language. This was not always easy, as many operators spoke mainly in dialect, not the pure language of their country of origin. The instruction handbook (CoU) was in eight main languages; we had around 27 different nationalities at peak production in 1965, mostly of European origin. The training booklet was designed with eight columns (one...
“We used to ‘chop off fingers by the bucketful’ each year – as one USA company director once said when he visited GMH”
per language) and one to two pages to cover the machine operation and other tasks like setting up, cleaning, servicing, etc. Pictures were also added to show operating and stop controls, guards, interlocks and other features important to safety.

Also, coupled with the trap and CoU program, I developed another learning tool called “my eleventh finger saves my other ten” – a probe stick made of one centimetre square, 350 millimetre long balsa wood. This idea came from making model aeroplanes from balsa as a boy. The message (MEFSMOT) was stencilled on the balsa wood for instructional demonstration – this was the “eleventh” finger. Now here is the simple solution to prevent damage to fingers: following training, the balsa stick would be used by the operators in the event of jam-ups, misalignments, toggle interlock adjustments, etc, all common problems on production machines which were, prior to inventing the balsa stick, corrected by operators reaching into “live hazard” areas with their hands and fingers, resulting in serious injuries. The balsa wood was used instead of the fingers, saving lots of potential amputations. This behaviour/training program lasted about two years, during which time we also developed other solutions (including engineering improvements) to maintain interest and momentum in the safety program.

What effect did this program have in reducing serious finger/hand injuries? In a 12-month period, disabling injuries to fingers and hands (equivalent to permanent total/partial disability today) were reduced from 48 disabling injuries or 3.20 DIFR to three injuries or 0.20 DIFR – a 95 per cent reduction. Minor injuries (less than 10 days lost) went from 447 or 29.8 MIFR down to 86 or 5.73 MIFR – an 81 per cent reduction – based on 15,000,000 average hours worked per year. Some other important achievements over the years of my career include:

- conducted around 600 OSH reviews under the WorkCover/WorkSafe Small Business three-hour safety program, involving risk assessments, action plans/recommendations for improvements; follow-up to ensure completion; and providing continuing services
- developed and conducted OSH induction one-day courses for around 2500 construction and building contractors (CCF); and the Master Plumbers & Mechanical Services Association as part of the Foundations of Safety “RED CARD” program
- developed/conducted OSH courses (Certificate) for VECCI; ACM (AiG); VRTA; PIAA; MATFA; MTIA; AMES; YES; and SKILLS PLUS; over 2000 participants were put through these courses
- developed/conducted many OSH five-day basic introduction courses (WorkSafe approved) for safety representatives, supervisors and managers, for a variety of companies, industries and RTOs
- developed/conducted core training courses in OSH (Commonwealth Act) for senior officers, managers and supervisors (equivalent) in the Australian Defence Forces covering over 4000 military and civilian personnel in Queensland and NSW
- as project consultant to Yarra Trams, developed and implemented (including training) integrated management systems covering OSH (AS 4801), risk management (AS 4360), quality (ISO 9000), environment (ISO 14000) and NSCA 5 Star; achieved (third party) certification for all these standards as a requirement of the tram business franchise; provided ongoing consultancies, training, incidence investigations and assistance
- developed and delivered a (WorkCover-funded) project for the meat industry in Victoria to improve OSH, rehabilitation and claims management in some 40 companies; the improvements in safety, injury prevention and rehabilitation/RTW (over a two-year period) enabled the industry to position itself out of the worst 20 industries as measured by the WorkSafe statistical ladder.

What would you say have been your greatest professional challenges?
There have been many challenges along my journey in work safety and injury prevention; in particular, those that involve understanding and applying industrial relations practices and negotiation skills; and also my OSH, technical and management experience, when dealing with unions, employers, and government safety
authorities in developing practical and effective solutions to safety problems.

For example, in the mid-1980s while working for the Grain Elevators Board of Victoria, responsible for the receival, storage, hygiene and transport of grains, I was given the project of developing a safety program and system for pest control and fumigation of grain using phosphine (a gas forming powder) instead of the traditional organophosphate pesticide, dichlorvos – a liquid which is sprayed onto the grain along conveyor paths. Of interest in this project was the fact that, in a good harvest, Victorian farmers produce over 4 million tonnes of grains (mainly wheat for export).

One of the important things we needed to do during the early stage of development was to meet and discuss with the growers, harvest operators, authorities, unions and employees various aspects of grain operations, procedures and instructions for the safe, efficient and quality control of the new fumigation program using phosphine, in preference to dichlorvos. We did this using a small, experienced team made up of myself (as team leader), operations manager, regional and shipping terminals manager, and our entomologist (a certified/registered insect identification and pest control specialist). Prior to this, I planned a pest control operators’ course in conjunction with TAFE, assisted by the entomologist and operations manager, with guidance from the health department in Victoria and an expert pest control adviser from a local company. Following the successful completion of the course, the GEB grain operators who volunteered for the multiskilling were certified, licensed and registered as pest control operators by the Health Department – Victoria. The licence was restricted only to the fumigation of grain in Victoria.

The following year we had a bumper harvest with over 4 million tonnes of wheat grown in Victoria. This necessitated the use of many above-ground bunkers (the size of an Olympic swimming pool with earth walls on all sides) to store temporarily the surplus wheat. The size of these bunkers averaged 15,000 tonnes, and they needed to be covered with plastic tarps the slopes giving a grain repose angle of 24 degrees. This slope was designed to assist with the safe placement, and later removal, of the sorbent strip of phosphine powder satchels by the licensed fumigators. Fencing and warning signs were also installed around the bunkers. All of these tasks were done in line with developed procedure, work instructions and training of all operators and fumigators. These benefits were reported for the following year of harvest:

• cost savings to the farmers of around $10 million from use of phosphine in preference to dichlorvos (which involved liquid spray on all paths and storage equipment; exposure causing risk to health, and lots of waste)
• improved efficiency of transport, storage and ship loading, saving millions of dollars
• improved quality and hygiene of grain used domestically and exported – no residue of pesticide (world food quality requirement)
• improved safety operations and fumigation procedures
• bonuses to grain operators and pest control operators (ongoing benefit) in their pay
• no serious injuries or illnesses and savings in workers’ compensation costs
• a 30 per cent reduction in waste of grain and fumigants.

What do you believe OSH professionals can do to take the profession to the next level?

I have a vision that most of us who are practising in OSH are clear-thinking professionals using the thinking brain rather than the emotional/ judgemental brain. We provide our services and products with the aim of helping our customers improve OSH so as to prevent/reduce personal damage and the horrendous costs associated with Class 1 injuries – fatalities; permanent total or partial disabilities; and critical incidents and near-hits with potential for Class 1 damage. This is the area of “harm” that we must focus on and not get involved with “displacement” activities like zero harm, minor injuries, near-misses, BBS (blame the worker), common sense (there is none?); and other inefficient and ineffective fads.

However, I believe that the safety profession could benefit more if we operated like the medical (and other) professions by developing a body of knowledge that can be used to educate and train general safety practitioners as well as safety specialists in many related fields, like ergonomics; psychology; engineering (design and risk control); OSH law; occupational health; communication and training techniques; auditing; management systems; and, importantly, the fundamental principles and concepts (core subjects) for the prevention and control of risk of “contact” with/bysdamaging energy. This is how people are damaged at work, by the way work is done (or not done) and being exposed to different types of damaging energy including physical, chemical, gravitational, electrical, human, etc.

A good start for the future would be to align the current development of ISO 45001:2016 (working draft) as the occupational safety and health management system standard based on the above veridical concept of how people are damaged at work, and indeed in other activities – at home, school, on the road, in recreation and sport.

There are also other areas to consider and develop in order to improve safety standards. For example:
Setting the priorities

1. Safety costs: This needs to be considered in terms that will clearly set priorities and aim to prevent or minimise the quantum of damage to people and property. Estimates for Australia are that Class 1 damage accounted for 96.5 per cent (fatal 6.5 per cent and non-fatal 90 per cent) and Class 2, 3.5 per cent of the $140 billion quantity of damage in 2005-06 (when total exports were valued at $192 billion). Class 3 damage (temporary disability/RTW) did not rate.

The view can be put forward that work safety is fundamentally a Class 1 problem, and that the majority of the cost of damage is to the damaged people and their families. Class 1 damage must be where most of our resources and priorities are focused for prevention of early death, injury, disease and illness.

2. Language of safety: In consideration of the characteristics of workers in Australia, and in particular the issues dealing with understanding language and the poor levels of literacy (around 46 per cent are not literate in prose and numeracy), the SIA should strongly recommend to government and learning institutions that the following key words be included and clearly defined in sections of the Work Health and Safety Act (and to flow on to safety and health regulations, codes and standards) in order to clarify and instil in people's minds the “meaning and intention” of the legislation and standards of performance.

Safety is uninjured; not exposed to danger; affording security/protection; freedom from risk of injury or disease.

Health is soundness of body and mind; general good condition of body (fit for life, work, play).

Welfare is wellbeing; contentment; happiness (happy workers, not stressed).

Hazard is something causing danger, harm, injury, damage (to people/things); a potential damaging energy.

Risk is the chance of bad consequences, loss, injury, death; exposure to chance of injury or loss.

Incident is falling or striking upon; contact with something.

The important link between hazard and risk is “contact” – this is an incident (not accident).

It is a scientific fact that if there is no “contact” (by a person) with or by the “hazard” (energy source of injury), there is no (actual) risk, and logically, no incident (resulting in injury or occupational disease or death).

This is, after all, how we measure safety (or a lack of it) by the incidence of fatalities, injuries and diseases to some base exposure indicator. This also raises the issue of requiring persons to notify and report a near-hit (near contact) rather than near-miss to create a logical perception of hazard + risk + contact = injury or damage incident and costs/losses.

A recent example of this occurred in Australia when two Qantas planes – one flying Perth to Melbourne and another Melbourne to Perth – nearly collided head-on while flying at the same altitude. Quick action by one of the pilots to descend below the other plane's path, within seconds, averted a major air disaster which would have killed all on board. This was a near-hit (or near collision), not a near-miss – a term that has done nothing to improve safety.

The main objects of the Work Health and Safety Act should be to eliminate or reduce the risk of contact with damaging energy (hazards); as this is the logical way by which occupational injury, disease and death can be prevented. By doing this, safety and health will be assured. The rest of the Act and regulations, codes, standards, etc should then prescribe general and specific ways by which risk of contact with damaging energy (hazards) can be prevented or reduced (for example, by eliminating/minimising damaging energy (hazards) at the source or eliminating/reducing the risk of contact by the person).

These basic principles and concepts were emphasised in the judgement by Judge Cummins of the Supreme Court, in the Longford Explosion inquiry (DPP v Esso Australia P/L – VSC 263, 30 July 2001).
This concept should be included in the objects and the section of the Work Health and Safety Act dealing with “the concepts of ensuring the safety and health” and should flow on to regulations, codes and standards.

I have purposely placed safety before health in describing the principles and language of safety. Up until now, in Australia, we have used these words in reverse, which is like “putting the cart before the horse”. Safety (science, engineering, process, etc) is the way health and wellbeing can be achieved at work; not the other way around.

I have done this deliberately to invite debate to challenge “correctness and logic” in the use of safety and health and related words, like the ones listed and defined above, and to encourage research in safety science at all levels in education. It is important, however, that any research into safety and health and the allocation of resources and priorities must have as its focus the prevention of Class 1 damage to people.

One of the main objectives of the SIA should be to become accredited by the Accreditation Board for Standards Development Organisations (ABSDO) to develop a “Safety Australia Standard” to cover all aspects of Australian society: at home, school, work, travel, transport, recreation and sport. The basic framework could then branch out to other Australian standards dealing with “safety” in areas listed above, with the aim of instilling in all Australians a “living safely culture”.

Also, the development of a world-first standard for safety would involve key stakeholders from the above areas through a standards reference group and key stakeholders.

I would like to encourage members of the SIA to contribute to this debate on the science and language of safety and the development of safety standards to improve the profile and professionalism of the SIA, and the services provided by its members.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the following for being part of my journey in safety: the late Harold Greenwood Thomas, my manager, friend and mentor at GMH; Geoff McDonald, safety engineer (Qld), my friend and mentor, for helping me understand “Good Theory”; the late Dr Eric Wigglesworth, my friend, supervisor in my postgraduate studies, and mentor; Sheryl Dell, my friend, for helping me understand persistence; Phillip Kamay, my friend and confidant; my family – Stephen, Andrea and Natalie – for their love and support; and my wife Val (my tower of strength), for her support and encouragement to sometimes go down the road less travelled.
Asciano: leading safety from the front

Asciano has improved its OHS track record significantly, thanks to an integrated and holistic approach to change. Craig Donaldson speaks with its safety leader, Richard Coleman, about this process and how the business has taken a different approach to safety improvement.
“It’s all about how does a leader show up and demonstrate that they are committed to health and safety”
In Citi’s July 2015 report, Safety Spotlight: ASX100 Companies & More: Injury & Fatalities Data FY05 to March FY15 Presented & Interpreted, several listed companies demonstrated significantly reduced injury rates on both the LTIFR and TRIFR metrics from earlier high levels. One of these was freight logistics company Asciano, which specialises in bulk and container shipping and transportation through its port and train operations across Australia. Demerged from Toll Holdings in 2007, it now owns Patrick Corporation and Pacific National as subsidiary companies and employs more than 8000 people.

As a heavy industrial company with moving plants and equipment, the most common OHS risks involve falls from heights, electrocution, road traffic, and personnel interaction with mobile plants, according to Asciano’s general manager HSE, Richard Coleman. “Probably the biggest one is load shifting. In our general stevedoring business, we can be shifting pipes one day, the next day pieces of steel, then driving cars on and off a ship or loading grain, so the risk profiles are very different depending on the loads,” says Coleman. “We also have a business in New Zealand (C3) that marshals logs out of the forest. A forestry company will cut down the logs, but we ship it to the wharf and manage the log transfer from the wharves onto the ship, so we have some pretty high-risk businesses.”

**Safety leadership**

In FY 2011, Asciano’s Lost Time Injury Frequency Rate (LTIFR) was 15.2 and its Recordable Injury Frequency Rate (RIFR) was 36.7. Since then, it has experienced a 67 per cent reduction in its LTIFR, and today this figure stands at 5 while its RIFR has more than halved to 14.4.

Coleman, who has been with Asciano for about three years, credits this significant shift in numbers to several factors. “The biggest change in our business is we genuinely have a CEO who believes that culture change is critical for the organisation to be successful, and one of the key aspects of culture change in this company is around safety performance,” he says, adding that the business’s safety vision is that everyone goes “home safely every day”.

A critical element of this has been safety leadership in the form of its leading “home safely every day” program, which has sought to fundamentally change how Asciano’s leaders think and respond to safety. The two-day on-site training program was somewhat unorthodox but innovative in approach, in that it used a converted shipping container as a classroom, and learning took place in operational areas of the business across Australia. “This converted shipping container is dropped smack bang in the middle of one of our sites, so that they’ve got cranes and trains and forklifts and straddle carriers and everything moving around them while we’re having a very deep discussion about what it means to lead safety effectively across Asciano,” says Coleman.

The program takes about a year to complete, of which nine days are dedicated to the program, and through a four-phased approach it helps build leaders’ skills to communicate and demonstrate their commitment to safety consistently, in everyday interactions and decision making. Evaluation of the program has shown that it has helped to build this capability and has provided leaders with the tools and confidence to not only demonstrate safety excellence themselves, but
also the ability to share their learnings with their teams and create a global and consistent set of safety behaviours company-wide. The top 480-odd senior leaders in the business undertook the program first, and to date, nearly 2000 employees have participated.

“The focus has been on people thinking about their leadership role in a fairly unique and different way. Typically, when you ask leaders about what’s important to you around safety, or what have you got to do to demonstrate you’re a leader, you often get an answer that sounds a little bit like, ‘Whenever I go on the site I have to make sure I wear the right PPE and I ask the right questions, that they’re positively framed and they focus on behaviour’,” says Coleman.

“Now, our view is that that’s necessary, but not sufficient. You actually want leaders who say, ‘Well, when I’m performance reviewing the business, I need to take into account equal weight between profit numbers and safety numbers. When I’m looking at a manager and I am considering whether or not he’s right for promotion, I need to have a look at what his people are saying about him through the employee engagement survey, as much as I

About Asciano

Asciano is an ASX 50 national rail freight and cargo port operator providing logistics services within infrastructure-based supply chains. It owns and operates five businesses: Pacific National (Australia’s largest intermodal rail provider and a major provider of coal and bulk haulage rail services); Patrick (the leading provider of port-related services to importers, exporters and shipping lines); Patrick Autocare (which offers processing, storage and distribution of motor vehicles); C3 (New Zealand’s leading provider of product handling solutions); and Mountain Industries (which transports, stores and manages bulk products such as minerals, grain, fertiliser and carbonaceous products).
need to look at what he’s done around costs or revenue. Or, when I’m making a capital decision about investing in this company and I’m thinking through the implications of that, I need to think about the safety implications as much as I need to think about return on investment or the net present value of those issues.’

“Now, what was really good about our program is that firstly the CEO and all his direct reports went through it. They also hosted every session we had, and we had very senior executives in the room expressing their expectations of the company around safety and leadership for our people. That’s important, because historically, all we said to our operational line managers was that we wanted them to be a role model around safety. Now, if you ask 10 people what that means, they’ll all come up with a different read on that. So we wanted to be really clear about our expectations across the whole company, and get senior leaders of the company to lead this. We do not talk at all about issues to do with how to write a safe work method statement or a job safety analysis or any of that stuff. It’s all about how does a leader show up and demonstrate that they are committed to health and safety. That’s been probably our biggest intervention and, to my mind, the most successful one.”

**Critical safety essentials and systems**

A key component of Asciano’s safety management system is its “critical safety essentials”, which are a set of non-negotiable, robust controls for its most significant fatal risks. Wherever possible, Asciano sets “above the line” controls, utilising
engineering controls or better to mitigate safety risks; however, Coleman explains that the company has a strong focus on high-consequence and low-probability risks.

“They’re not necessarily the things that appear in your injury statistics, but they are things that are going to lead to people being killed. Like many businesses our size, we’ve identified a series of what we call critical safety essentials. They are those controls that must be in place for hazards that are likely to kill people. We’ve spent a lot of time making sure that we consulted across our company in terms of what those issues should be, and we also did a lot of work in developing the controls so that they would be ultimately accepted. Now, we’re running the implementation of that across each of our operating divisions,” he says.

Supporting this is Asciano’s integrated HSE framework, which brings its various management systems together to create one co-ordinated approach. This framework was established to provide a consistent approach to HSE management across the company and support the integration of HSE management processes and responsibilities with other business responsibilities.

Another recent initiative for Asciano was the launch of its safety, health and environment database (The SHED) – an online, company-wide system for recording and managing safety data. Initially focusing on managing incidents, near-misses, hazards and safety engagements, the functions of The SHED will expand to include risk assessments and audits. Action management and the presentation of live data in dashboards and
Cover story reports are key features of the system, which has brought together many separate systems into a single platform which enables Asciano to better understand safety trends and drive actions that make its sites safer.

The company also sets improvement objectives that hold people to account for their safety performance, and all operational leaders have a short-term incentive that’s built around safety, with a mix of lead and lag indicators. “Historically, this was all around recordable injury rates, but now we’re on a balance of recordable injury rates and implementation of our critical safety essentials,” says Coleman.

Empowering line managers
The role of the safety function recently changed within Asciano, and Coleman says OHS professionals are now recognised and act as health and safety business partners. “The point of this is that historically, they have sat in rooms, written procedures and reviewed safe work method statements and so on. Our future view is that they partner. They coach. They facilitate. They support the line to be able to do the things that they need to do. We’ll create a centralised shared services function that does all the document development, all the investigations, liaison with regulators and other admin that needs to be done, so we can free up our health and safety people to act as coach and mentor for the frontline,” he says.

Giving line managers permission to act in the interests of Asciano’s safety vision has also been a significant priority, according to Coleman. “Historically, in transport and logistics businesses, it’s all about driving margin, taking out costs, making it more profitable. We don’t want you to do that in absence of managing the safety risks as well. If you find risks, we encourage you to raise them and we will find capital to fix them. We call it our ‘permission granted’,” he says.

“Also, wherever we’ve got any particular training and development initiative around leadership – such as our emerging leader, front-line leader or executive leadership program – they all reinforce those measures. Safety is the first item in there.” An innovative component of such programs is a fictional 11-minute film about a significant incident, which follows an investigation from...
the moment the call is made about an event, backwards in time to about 18 months before, tracing the decisions and behaviours that leaders exhibited and potentially cascaded down and led to the event. The difference with this film is that it is an interactive “choose your own adventure” style format, so that it is viewed via a digital touch screen and participants are able to make decisions around behaviours.

“So at each of these points in the film, if somebody had done something slightly different, they get to see where that would take people. The film shows a whole range of behaviours that lead to a bad outcome, but the point of the ‘choose your own adventure’ format is that people can understand that there are things that they can all do to get us to the right outcome,” says Coleman, who explains that these journeys are explored over the next two days of the program as source points for further discussion.

**Safety and the executive**

Coleman reports directly to Asciano MD and CEO, John Mullen, and says this is important for a number of reasons. “I get access to the CEO and all his other direct reports as a peer, which means that in many of the key decisions this company makes I’m involved in those. I carry the flag, if you like, not just for safety but health issues and environment as well,” says Coleman.

“I see my personal role as a similar role to a company executive. I have to think about the economics of what I’m proposing as much as I do the ethics and the safety driver. I need to find those things in conflict. I’m able to articulate the desire or the thinking processes that need to occur around major decisions that impact safety without concerning myself that they destroy value because they don’t. They generally add value to the process. Often, what health and safety professionals are challenged by is that we have to justify. We’re constantly required to show the business case. In this business, I haven’t had to do that. I’ve had to show alignment to a culture change strategy.”

“So if the other executives say, ‘If we do what you want us to do, Richard, how does that line up with the changes more broadly that we’re trying to drive in the business?’, that’s much simpler and easier to articulate, but a much more effective way of thinking about health and safety than, ‘Well, if you want me to spend $3 million training all our leaders, show me how that returns an ROI’. Now I can essentially make it up for you, and I can because it’s all subjective.

“The other hand, if you say to me you want your leaders to be much more engaged with the frontline, connect to people on an emotional level, be inspirational, talk to them about the future, and talk to them about why we’re changing, I can show executives exactly why and how this drives that outcome.”

**Investors, safety and safety KPIs**

There is a growing interest in companies’ OHS performance among shareholders, investors and analysts, according to Asciano’s Coleman. “Fifteen years ago, I didn’t have a single discussion with our investor relations people about anything. I don’t think I ever got the chairman asking me to get questions and answers ready for him ahead of an investor briefing. That’s changed,” he says.

“Yesterday, I drafted a heap of potential answers for our chairman should he get asked questions at the annual general meeting. I think that’s the way they’re looking at safety. It’s a positive in terms of driving behaviour in the company,” he says.

Having the board lined up behind the CEO in terms of wanting to drive change is also a critical drive of this, according to Coleman. “We do have quarterly sustainability committee meetings that are held onsite that look at what the hazards are in this business and how they are being managed. They engage with people on our sites when they have those meetings; they don’t just sit in the office and have the meeting. So there are a few things that support this process and making change relatively easy.”

**The evolution of indicators**

Asciano does report its safety statistics as a matter of course, and Coleman acknowledges that there is much talk in the OHS profession about getting away from lag indicators. “The best way for me to do that is not to reflect on those numbers other than to say to you, ‘they’re all heading in the right direction’. The key measures for me are much more qualitative. That is, we have recently dismissed some managers for poor safety behaviour and their inability to manage risk, for example.

“And we have moved on contracting companies which could not demonstrate a willingness to live up to our values. We conducted surveys pre and post the leading “home safely every day” initiative among participants and their direct reports, and when we did the post surveys 18 months after people had gone through the program, we got almost perfect alignment across seven of the key content areas of that program. We’ve made some measurable cultural shifts in our business, and I think these are much more important than lag indicators because they’re a better predictor of things that can go seriously wrong,” says Coleman.

“Too be frank, I don’t obsess over minor injuries in our business. I don’t buy into the idea that by controlling the minor injury numbers I’m somehow preventing fatality risk. It’s simply not true. As far as I’m concerned, my role in this organisation is to stop people getting killed and/or maimed. If I can get the culture lined up behind that, and if I can get the right controls in place behind that, I’ll succeed.”

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How to engage boards in safety

Safety is an important component in board governance, and OHS professionals play a critical role in this process. Craig Donaldson speaks with Dr Kirstin Ferguson, company director and winner of the Eric Wigglesworth OHS Education (Research) Award, about this and how OHS professionals can get ahead in business.

How can OHS professionals best develop credibility and build profile within their organisations?

OHS professionals are the thought leaders and internal experts for health and safety within their organisations. Frequently, however, OHS professionals find themselves primarily focused on, for example, collating and analysing incident data, overseeing safety investigations, ensuring timely close out of corrective actions or conducting safety observations. For those OHS professionals, the administration of health and safety can often make it challenging to find the time and space needed to add value to the senior executive team and board at a more strategic level.

I have been fortunate to work with some of the leading OHS professionals in the world. The common trait all of them have had was the ability to recognise the strategic importance of health and safety to business excellence, and understanding that while there are numerous health- and safety-related administrative tasks that need to be undertaken every day, the real value they can add lies elsewhere.

In my opinion, the most effective OHS professionals I have worked with bring to their interactions with senior executive teams and boards an understanding of the context in which the organisation is operating. That means that they understand the impact of volatile commodity prices on their business. They understand the level of distraction (and therefore potential impact on safety outcomes) that a potential divestment (or acquisition) will have on employees. These OHS professionals are aware of digital disruptions impacting their industry and the ways such a disruption can be leveraged by the organisation to have a beneficial impact on health and safety.

In my experience, those OHS professionals who can add value to an organisation through understanding both the strategic context in which their function operates, as well as the broader environment in which their business is functioning, are better equipped to develop credibility.

One way for OHS professionals to understand how they can best add value is to put themselves in the shoes of their CEO or the board and ask themselves what information they would want to hear from the internal expert in this field during each interaction. It is also important for OHS professionals to learn and understand as much about the business and the industry in which they operate as possible. Credibility will follow from being able to participate and add value in business discussions with other leaders beyond focusing solely on the health and safety function.

What is the best way for OHS leaders to engage their boards in safety?

In a board meeting, all issues compete for the board’s attention. While I would expect that most boards understand and acknowledge the importance of health and safety on their board agenda, I also understand that at any given meeting there can be a multitude of incredibly important issues to be discussed and decisions to be made.

The best presentations I have seen from OHS professionals to boards or senior executive teams make health and safety relevant and interesting. There was one board I sat on as a director where there had been a particular hazard that had been raised in a board paper to discuss. We had a discussion about the hazards based on the description in the monthly board report. As we were relying on words to explain a very technical task, it was difficult for board members to really appreciate the risk while sitting in a boardroom in the city.

The following month, the OHS professional presented to the board during their monthly report the same task but explained using a video as it was being undertaken by an employee. It is fair to say that a much more robust discussion was able to follow, with the board having a much better understanding of the mitigation strategies being introduced.

OHS professionals should work closely with their CEO and board on getting reporting right. It is essential that health and safety reporting focus on the right metrics and commentary, since the discussion that follows will reflect the report. For example, if your reporting focuses primarily on lag indicators then the conversation will most likely focus on minor personal injuries including slips, trips and falls, rather than the significant near miss that also happened during the month but which either wasn’t included in the report or was not even captured.

Often, I hear OHS professionals incredibly frustrated by the low-level discussions during board meetings where disproportionate time is spent on minor incidents. In almost all cases, the reason for that usually comes back to the reporting template being used.

How can OHS professionals be considered for board roles themselves?

Board directors require a range of skills, so the first thing I remind anyone who
is looking for a board role is that it is not enough to, for example, bring only health and safety skills and experience to the role. While an understanding of health and safety is increasingly important for all directors, it is not on its own likely to be sufficient for you to obtain a role on a corporate board.

As examples, corporate and commercial experience, financial literacy, the ability to contribute to strategy development and understanding how to identify and manage risk are all additional skills every director, or aspiring director, needs to be able to demonstrate.

There are various ways you can develop your skills in these areas, including successful periods in line management roles with P&L responsibility as well as undertaking the AICD Company Directors Course. It is also important to determine whether a board role is something you want to do while also in full-time employment. If so, many organisations have restrictions on the kinds of boards full-time employees can join, which may need to be explored.

Anyone looking to join a board might like to ask themselves the following questions:

1. **What kind of board would you like to join?**
   There are many different kinds of boards, such as publicly listed companies, private companies, non-profit organisations, advisory boards or government boards. While there are similarities across all of them in terms of directors’ duties, there are also a lot of practical differences that are important to understand.

2. **Have you got the time to commit to a board role?**
   This will be particularly important if you are in full-time employment. Taking
on a board role requires a considerable investment of time and focus, so be sure this is something that you fully investigate before accepting a role.

3. What value can you add to a board?
This is often one of the harder questions to answer, particularly if you are currently in full-time employment. It is essential to think about the skills you can add as a board director and not as an executive. Many of your current hands-on skills will not be required as a board director where the ability to think strategically and take a hands-off approach will be required.

The practical steps to consider are to start expanding your networks, let people in your network know you are keen to be considered for board roles, explain the value you will add as a board director and put together a CV that focuses on the skills you will bring to the board, rather than a CV you would use to apply for an executive role.

How will safety reporting and KPIs change in the future?
In terms of internal reporting to the board, I am seeing a much greater focus on the quality and meaningfulness of reporting across many boards, regardless of industry. As the safety governance approach of an organisation matures, so too does the expectations and knowledge of those receiving the reports. As board directors become more familiar, knowledgeable and experienced in reading and analysing health and safety reports, I would expect that we will continue to see a reporting quality increase. There is a tremendous opportunity for OHS professionals to be working on enhancing safety reporting for their boards to assist in this process.

In terms of external public reporting of safety outcomes, I believe there will be an increasing demand for transparency around KPIs linked to safety, especially for public companies. Many institutional investors are already focusing on health and safety disclosures of publicly listed companies, and I expect that trend to continue.

During my PhD research I analysed 10 years of safety reporting in the annual reports of ASX200 companies. I found that the disclosure of safety statistical information, for example, increased from 29 per cent of all companies in 2001 to 67 per cent of all companies by 2011. Upon closer analysis, however, the quality of such disclosures can vary immensely and is very rarely comparable between or within industries. Just as board safety governance processes and reporting is maturing, I suspect the level of public disclosures will continue to mature as well. I would certainly hope that in the near to medium term we will start to see some agreed standards of reporting which will allow for some level of benchmarking that isn’t so reliant on lag indicators such as LTIs or TRIFR.

What are the best development options for OHS leaders looking to get ahead in business?
First and foremost, I am a great believer in saying yes to opportunities as they present themselves. If, as an OHS professional, you are offered the opportunity to work outside of your function for a period of time, or you can take on additional line management responsibilities, these are great opportunities to consider. The broader the corporate and commercial skills and expertise you can develop throughout your career, the more likely it will be that you are offered further opportunities which will allow you to expand your career path and options.

I am also a great believer in seeking out ways to continue further education. While not everyone will want to pursue formal tertiary education, the more senior you seek to become in your career, the higher the expectation is that this is a path you have followed. MBA programs can be a great way to expand your corporate and commercial knowledge base but are certainly not the only option. Completing the AICD Company Directors Course can also provide an excellent overview of how an organisation governs itself at the most senior levels and will start to provide you with knowledge and experiences beyond your OHS function.

Other opportunities – such as speaking at conferences or events, networking with industry colleagues outside of your organisation or developing an online professional profile so you can engage with health and safety colleagues around the world – will all help to raise your profile so that further professional development opportunities may be offered. It is very easy to get caught up in the day-to-day pressures and activities of the business you are in. My advice would be to expand beyond those walls whenever you can to engage and interact with others. Doing so will ultimately develop your credibility and further your professional development opportunities.
The reporting being used will most likely reflect the level of safety governance maturity of an organisation. It is important for OHS professionals to identify the level of safety governance maturity in their organisations at any point in time to effectively influence change at the board level and with the senior executive team. There are various stages of safety governance maturity, and the following questions may assist in identifying where your organisation sits:

1. Does your board and senior executive team generally see health and safety as the responsibility of the OHS team? Do they tend to become engaged in health and safety only after an incident has occurred? Do you have a culture of “production over safety”? If so, it is likely your organisation is at the transactional stage.
2. Is compliance with workplace health and safety legislation the main driver of reporting to the senior executive team or board? Is the senior executive team or your board primarily focused on ensuring the minimum legislation standards are met? If so, it is likely your organisation is at the compliance stage.
3. Have you noticed the senior executive team and board asking more detailed questions lately, often wanting to drill down into the causes of incidents with much greater understanding? Does your senior executive team and board consider site visits an important part of their safety leadership role? If so, it is likely your organisation is at the focused stage.
4. Do you feel that most of your senior executive team and board “get” safety? That is, they get that a strong safety culture is much more than simply compliance but require safety leadership both inside and outside the boardroom? If so, it is likely your organisation is at the proactive stage.
5. Does your senior executive team and board seek to understand the safety impacts of every decision being made across the organisation? Does the concept of “safe production” set the tone for all health and safety discussions? If so, it is likely your organisation is at the integrated stage.

Levels of safety governance maturity
Bringing thought leadership to the fore

The SIA National Safety Convention 2015 was recently held at the Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre

As the premiere conference for the year, the SIA National Safety Convention 2015 brought thought leadership to the fore and encouraged national and global involvement and networking among industry professionals. The convention aimed to provide new directions to age-old safety challenges, with speakers including Michael Lutomski (former risk manager, International Space Station (NASA retired)), Rosa Carrillo (president, Carrillo & Associates), Jennifer Taylor (CEO, Comcare), Nigel Hadgkiss (director, Fair Work Building & Construction) and Dr Sharron O'Neill (senior research fellow: International Governance and Performance Research Centre, Macquarie University).

What does the future of OHS look like?

Also speaking at the conference was Corrie Pitzer, who said a society which is increasingly sceptical about risk in the workplace is one of the strategic, long-term issues for the OHS profession. Modern societies such as Australia, the United States and Europe are increasingly focused on moving away from risk, however, Pitzer said the modern organisation has to deal with and contain risk more and more – to the point where that containment becomes problematic and an impairment.

The fundamental principle in risk management is that it should be as low as reasonably achievable, but Pitzer said that to get risk close or down to zero is “in essence, impossible”, and this is the underlying conflict of the modern organisation in a modern society.

“If we don’t push innovation, if we don’t push thinking outside the box we will stagnate, and the organisation can’t produce products at lower costs anymore. Costs are increasing as a result of this, and it is starting to affect the very fundamental existence of the organisations in this society. That’s one of the key longer-term issues that I see,” he said.

Pitzer also explained that safety professionals will increasingly guide all internal actions to ensure they do not lead to increased levels and types of exposure, which, as a result, may drive the safety professional further away from operational lines of the organisation. “I’ve seen this trend happening in some organisations in the US, where the safety professional has started to become the compliance manager, and as such, they are essentially not playing a key role any more in making operations safe,” he said.

“They are playing a role in making the organisations more contained and less exposed. That’s a critical consequence of this trend,” said Pitzer, who added that the profession may split into two functions in the future as a result.

The role of the safety professional as compliance manager will continue, and Pitzer said a new expert may rise within the organisation “who thinks differently and counteracts the effects of this compliance-driven impact. This operational expert is focused on organisational change, on the dynamics of the organisation, and will be a change expert, a risk expert and an innovation expert in the organisation. That’s a whole different ball game,” he added.

Pitzer also said the safety profession needs to move away from “Newtonian thinking” in that “safety is not a management science”, and the new focus will be one of managing, leading and dealing with complexity in the organisation.

“We’ll have to broaden the concepts of risk and understanding of risk, right down at the shop floor level, so that we, for instance, don’t measure safety any more in the traditional terms of lag indicators. Even leading indicators are all invalid measurements of safety. So we’ll have to understand how to deal with, manage, lead and measure complexity in organisations,” he said.

Pitzer also criticised the behavioural safety movement and said it is “reducing the human being to a simplistic entity of antecedent behavioural consequence. The behavioural safety movement, I think, needs to be left behind, and the new focus must be on the supervisor, who really is the key player. So the focus needs to be on the supervisor’s skills in coaching, their skills in dealing with risk in a progressive manner, dealing with the systems in the organisation and, most importantly, creating the value environment,” said Pitzer.

Where construction falls down on OHS

Also speaking at the conference was Matthew Hallowell, assistant professor at the University of Colorado, who said that while the construction industry is improving in terms of injury prevention, it is far from being at an acceptable level. A major issue with OHS in the industry is that a large proportion of the current practices are based, at least in part, on ideas that have been established without empirical validation, he said.

“Accident causation, injury prevention and safety strategy are often based on someone’s idea of how the world works. Although these theories often make logical sense, they are rarely tested or supported
Safety Differently.
The SIA National Safety Convention 2015 at the Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre
with empirical evidence. Experiments are even rarer. As such, the construction community decides to form a safety strategy based upon what they believe will improve safety rather than evidence from scientific inquiry. The result may very well be that we are investing in false truths.”

Hallowell explained that as new strategies are developed or new ideas are formed, research and professional communities should be encouraged to collaborate and test the theory using sound science. “Such a partnership would ensure the creation of basic knowledge that has practical application and long-lasting effects,” he said.

Hallowell also said he had seen some new strategies emerge from industry–academia partnering on worker engagement through the use of storytelling and videos. “Although a secondary measure of safety, these strategies have been shown to promote engagement and interest in the workforce,” he said.

“Other organisations are using safety meeting maturity models to measure and hopefully improve the quality of their pre-job meetings by holding the meetings at the job face, involving employees in the discussions, focusing on specific rather than general hazards, and so forth. I think the strength of these new strategies lies in the fact that they focus on the worker and that they are being tested.”

Hallowell said organisations should take steps to implement new strategies that best align with their culture and try not to implement too much at once. “Strategies tend to take root when an organisation implements a few strategies with management support and dedicated resources and has specific, measurable targets for improvement,” he said.

“Also, I would suggest implementing new strategies with an open mind and testing them to see, empirically, if they achieve the desired outcomes. If they do not, I would propose to move to new ideas. Not every new strategy will work and not every strategy will yield long-term benefits.”

**What boards and managers fail to understand about safety**

While the boards of many companies understand the importance of safety, they often do not understand all that the term encompasses, according to Professor David Shallcross, director of the Engineering Learning Unit at Melbourne School of Engineering, Melbourne University.

Speaking at the convention, he said that most, if not all, board members lack experience in dealing with safety issues on a day-to-day basis. “Taken on a tour of their company’s facilities they often will be completely unaware of safety issues, or what constitutes good or bad safety practices,” he said. “Fortunately, a number of companies are now bringing some expertise onto the board by having skilled managers join them.”

Shallcross said that managers at all levels of organisations often have little useful training in managing safety management systems.

“They will certainly understand the obvious things like having up-to-date first aid kits, safety training for new workers, complying with safety regulations or having regular safety meetings, but they will have no knowledge as to whether their company actually has a real and pervasive safety culture,” he said.

“They may well have people who can rapidly respond to provide first aid, but they might have no capability to deal with the mental health issues of their staff.”

Shallcross drew on his own experience as the manager of a business unit that had around 60 staff members and an annual budget in excess of $10 million. “I thought that we had a very good safety culture, but this was proved to be very wrong following a near-miss that nearly left one person blind,” he said.

“We might have been able to show the inspector that we had all the paperwork in place, but we really had a poor safety culture in which people did not speak up when they saw something wrong.”

Turning this around required buy-in from everyone from the unit, and Shallcross said the near-miss helped to show how lucky things had been. “We introduced a series of escalating consequences for breaking safety rules that were applied to everyone. We got involvement from everyone in developing local safety rules,” he said.

“We got senior managers involved in jointly conducting safety audits with staff, and we saw in increase in the number of reported incidents. Managers and leaders often do not understand how little they actually are aware of safety issues. Regrettfully, it can take a near-miss to make them see just how safe their workplace is.”
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Gold Category - Investing in health & safety
Annual investment commitment: $5000
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Silver Category - Get connected
Annual investment commitment: $2500
As a Silver member of the SIA, your company is connected to and engaging with individuals and organisations that are part of the workplace health and safety profession, delivering effective workplace health and safety to Australian workplaces. The funds you invest contribute to our operational activities across a range of critical areas.

Bronze Category - Be part of the network
Annual investment commitment: $1375
As a Bronze member of the SIA, your company is investing in being part of a network of individuals and organisations that are part of a capable and credible profession delivering effective workplace health and safety to Australian workplaces. The funds you invest contribute to our operational activities which are designed to advance the health and safety profession, and contribute to making Australian workplaces safer and healthier places to be.

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