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Harmonisation's failure leaves duty holders confused and distracted: How harmonisation’s failure has led to confusion and distraction for duty holders and safety practitioners

Is the JSA/SWMS process really working? Why there is a potentially better compliance approach to Job Safety Analyses and Safe Work Method Statements

Skilling safety up: There are a number of steps OHS professionals can take to improve the safety qualifications, skills and capability of employees

Improving emergency management preparedness: IFAP’s upcoming Emergency Management – Resilience Conference will examine themes around preparedness, response and recovery

Queensland Rail: firmly on track with safety: Queensland Rail’s top-down approach to OHS has built a strong culture of safety at all levels of the business
OHS professionals sometimes lament the lack of executive support for their initiatives. Without a strong CEO in their corner, these initiatives are often doomed to failure, and OHS can suffer as a result in any business.

The cover story for this edition explores how Brisbane Airport Corporation’s CEO/MD, Julieanne Alroe, and WHS/employee relations manager, Kersty Christensen, work together to drive positive OHS outcomes. To help manage and mitigate OHS risks in the airport, Alroe says the corporation employs a number of strategies and initiatives to drive positive OHS outcomes – the first of which is strong leadership. She says this is “absolutely fundamental” to creating a strong safety culture, not only in the executive team but in the airport generally. For the full story please see page 10.

Similarly, Queensland Rail faces a wide range of OHS risks, and a collaborative and focused approach is required to meet these risks. Executive support and leadership are critical elements in this process, according to Queensland Rail’s general manager safety, assurance and environment, Greg Fill, who explains that the business recently developed a reinvigorated five-year enterprise-wide safety strategy which is owned by the board, all executives as well as key areas of the organisation. A key focus of this strategy is improving safety culture, which will be the result of the “next generation” of leadership development. For more information please see page 18.

The event preview for this edition focuses on IFAP’s 2016 Crisis & Emergency Management – Resilience Conference. To be held on 21 November 2016 in Perth, this conference will feature a range of great speakers, including Mohammad Fuad Sharuji, vice president, operations control centre & crisis director for MH370 & MH17. Identification and training of crisis leaders is vital in every organisation to ensure that the organisation is ready to respond when the need comes, according to Fuad, who explains that a strong emphasis is placed on its crisis leadership training. For more information see page 32.

Lastly, the opinion piece for this edition explores how the failure of complete harmonisation of Australia’s OHS laws has led to confusion and distraction for duty holders and safety practitioners. In this piece, Corrs Chambers Westgarth’s Siobhan Flores-Walsh says the WHS regulatory regime requires change at the statutory, regulatory and judicial levels. Furthermore, duty holders are being distracted by the need to understand different approaches to the use of coercive information gathering powers, workplace mental health issues, how the regulators exercise their (very important) discretion to prosecute and their attitudes to enforceable undertakings. For the full story turn to page 8.

“The corporation employs a number of strategies and initiatives to drive positive OHS outcomes – the first of which is strong leadership”
Lack of remorse a factor in $800,000 fine over worker’s death

A Melbourne recycling company that went out of business soon after one of its employees was crushed to death under a homemade lifting device has been convicted and fined $800,000 in the County Court. Australian Box Recycling was found guilty by a jury of one breach of the 2004 OHS Act in that it failed to provide and maintain safe plant. After it was charged, it advised WorkSafe that it was not going to take part in court proceedings and intended to cease trading. It then tried to deregister which, under the Corporations Act 2001, is not permitted while legal proceedings are in process. WorkSafe successfully applied to the Supreme Court to have the company re-registered so the case could continue. The trial was allowed to proceed because the court said it was satisfied the company was aware of the proceedings and had made a deliberate decision not to participate.

Warning over increase in farm injuries and deaths

In the first half of 2016, 30 people have died as a result of on-farm incidents and a further 44 have been involved in non-fatal incidents that were serious enough to make the media, according to the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety. “These figures are slightly higher that the same time last year when we had recorded 24 deaths in the period,” said Tony Lower, director of the Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety. An analysis of media reports in the first six months of 2016 found that quad bikes, tractors and other mobile equipment have been the leading causes of fatal injuries on farms. Quad bikes have also dominated the non-fatal injuries reported, making up almost 50 per cent of these cases, many of which Lower said have lifelong consequences.

Most construction workers suffering hearing loss

Construction workers regularly experience noise levels up to six times the legal exposure limit and up to 75 per cent are developing tinnitus or permanent hearing loss as a result of their job, according to a leading Australian audiologist, Dr Ross Dineen. Noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) and tinnitus remain a serious issue in construction, said Dineen, who has extensively studied hearing loss and tinnitus in the construction industry. “Dosimeters measured the real-time exposure to noise and worker behaviour was monitored,” he said. “Their total dose [of sound] over the working day averaged over six times the legal exposure limit. Over 75 per cent of construction workers were experiencing hearing and communication problems,” he said.

SWA issues high-risk work licensing reminder

Safe Work Australia recently issued a reminder to individuals who need to update or renew their high risk work licence to contact their local work health and safety regulator for advice. Under the model WHS Regulations, high-risk work activities require a high-risk work licence. Some of these activities include the erection of scaffolding, the operation of certain types of cranes, forklifts, reach stackers and boom-type elevating work platforms, and performing dogging and rigging work. While Safe Work Australia developed the model Work Health and Safety Regulations, work health and safety regulators look after the issuing and renewal of their own state and territory high-risk work licences.

Who’s hiring OHS professionals and why?

The slump in the resources sector has had a number of impacts on the OHS profession and demand for certain skills and experience, according to a global recruitment firm. “We have seen demand for senior and mid-management HSEQ professionals with experience in all four areas of health, safety, environment and quality,” said Lisa Morris, senior regional director of Hays Human Resources. “In terms of industries, a range of industries are still active including logistics, entertainment, financial services and healthcare,” said Morris, who pointed out that recruitment in these industries, in both the public and private sectors, is going well.

Geelong builder fined $12,500 for bullying teen apprentice

A builder in Victoria who repeatedly bullied his teenage apprentice over a two-year period was recently convicted and fined $12,500 in the Geelong Magistrates’ Court. Wayne Dennert, of Bell Post Hill, pleaded guilty to one rolled-up charge under the 2004 OHS Act of failing to provide a safe system of work and the necessary information, instruction, training and supervision to employees in relation to workplace bullying. He was also ordered to pay costs of $757.71. The court heard that Dennert ran a small carpentry business called Quality Carpentry and Building Maintenance, which employed two apprentice carpenters and two subcontractors. The victim began working for Dennert in 2013 as a 16 year old. Until he left in April 2015, he suffered incidents of verbal, physical and psychological bullying and harassment.
Getting from A to B in OHS

In the last edition, CEO David Clarke reflected on “the journey that all professions take”. In this article, SIA Chairman Patrick Murphy takes a look at the journey that the SIA is taking and the changes it is making.

In this edition of OHS Professional magazine we explore the theme of leadership and the role senior leaders play in advancing the safety journey. In doing so we are learning from the experiences of the transport sector, in the form of companies such as Queensland Rail. Transport is an industry sector which is crucial to the safety of not just its employees but also the public, who place their trust in the industry to get them safely to their destinations each and every day.

This caused me to pause and reflect on how, through our day-to-day activities, we are transporting and moving the OHS agenda in our own organisations. The health and safety profession is seen as the key carrier of the OHS message, and it’s important to take stock from time to time and consider just how well we are progressing towards our goals. Are we really getting there? Are we on time? Have we lost our way? Is the OHS message getting across?

It is a privilege to serve as the Chair of the Board of Directors for the Safety Institute of Australia, and we ask ourselves the same question – what are we doing to keep the profession moving forward getting the OHS message across, and how are we progressing?

To do this effectively, first we need to know where we are going, and in May of this year the Board endorsed the 2016-2021 Strategic Plan which sets down a clear vision for the future, outlining where we need to be in 2021. The plan is aligned to other key works such as the Safe Work Australia strategy, and it involved extensive consultation with sector stakeholders in a process which told us there are many people and groups who share our goals and want to be on the journey with us.

It’s not a simple journey. Thousands are significantly injured and become ill from work every year and too many people lose their lives, simply during the course of their daily work. We don’t accept that this status quo is OK. Things are not as they should be. On top of that, conditions are changing. The environment is becoming more complex for our profession.

We have to accept that the same old theories, laws, expectations, mindsets and behaviours are most likely not going to be those that help us achieve the next step change in OHS outcomes. This does not mean ignoring what is already known. We should build on the good work and knowledge of those who have come before us to advance the OHS discourse. We must also build on this with new ideas to tackle new challenges.

“‘We must tackle the challenge that the public perception of OHS across Australia is poor’

In the face of these challenges, we must become far better at embracing diversity, in all of its forms. Diversity is not just about gender, race or age – it is also about thinking and ideas, and we have a richness of these within our profession that we must all embrace, rather than sliding into factions of thinking.

We must also become more agile and adaptive. Societal expectations, government policies and regulations, boards’ and executives’ interest in OHS, the nature of work and workforce cohorts are all changing. The ever-increasing impact of technological advancement is causing a greater sense of urgency, and we know that change is now the constant.

We must tackle the challenge that the public perception of OHS across Australia is poor. The profession is not well understood, and it is likely we have helped shape these perceptions. We must move beyond being compliance focused and policing, to become enablers. Compliance plays its part, but we must use our expertise to move beyond outlining why things can’t be done to finding ways to make things happen safely. The systems we work to support our image as enablers rather than enablers. The paperwork remains too cumbersome, our procedures are too complex, the roles we are placed in and parameters we work under drive us away from enabling.

The SIA has an ambitious program to establish a stronger, better-positioned OHS profession. Accrediting university OHS courses, maintaining the OHS Body of Knowledge, and developing a modern, dynamic, continuing professional development (CPD) program that builds capability and assists employers in developing their people are just the start.

We are now better connected internationally. As the world shrinks thanks to technological change, dilution of cultures and the convergence of regulatory philosophies is occurring and we are playing our part too on the international stage, being represented on the board of the International Network of Safety and Health Practitioner Organisations. Our OHS skills should be transferable across industries and across geographical borders.

Our certification program is critical to building the profession’s credibility throughout industry. With this program, we join so many other professions on a pathway that has significantly enhanced their standing, as well as their status in the wider community. And so we should. After all, a profession which practises giving advice about life and death in a work context should be certified.

As David Clarke outlined in the last edition of OHS Professional, the OHS fraternity is on a journey that all professions take, and the SIA is one of the drivers that keeps us moving forward. If you work at any level within the field of health and safety, then I invite you to jump on the bus and be a part of that journey with us.

Patrick Murphy, Chairman of the Safety Institute of Australia
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Harmonisation’s failure leaves duty holders confused and distracted

The failure of complete harmonisation of Australia’s OHS laws has led to confusion and distraction for duty holders and safety practitioners and the WHS regulatory regime is in significant reform, according to Corrs Chambers Westgarth’s Siobhan Flores-Walsh.

The WHS regulatory regime requires change at the statutory, regulatory and judicial levels – and the latter two are critical. Despite claims about the “harmonisation” of approach at these two levels, duty holders and practitioners are acutely aware of the different “jurisdictional personalities” they must manage and how this distracts from substantive safety outcomes.

Duty holders are being distracted by the need to understand different approaches to the use of coercive information gathering powers, workplace mental health issues, how the regulators’ exercise their (very important) discretion to prosecute and their attitudes to enforceable undertakings.

Fundamentally flawed?
The regulatory and judicial dysfunction that burdens the WHS regime is structurally unavoidable. When Bill Gates identified the ‘new world of work’ in 2005 he cited ‘team collaboration’ as a critical component to success – and yet our governments cannot cooperate sufficiently to create a single WHS jurisdiction and have burdened us with eight regulatory and judicial systems – that is; one system for every 1.5 million workers.

One system would better communicate the model laws and be more capable of making them work to their fullest extent in the new world of work. For example, there is screaming need for WHS laws to be better harnessed to deal with workplace mental health issues, rather than plough money into the anti-bullying jurisdiction of the Fair Work Commission which only gets involved after the harm has been done and has been acknowledged by many as not producing much ‘bang for buck’.

The broader letter and spirit of the Model WHS Act has not yet been realised, and regulatory and judicial issues unfortunately burden its realisation. While some amendments are required, the model WHS laws are not a bad response to the new world of work, as they are capable of dealing with increased outsourcing, new mechanisms to engage workers, workplace mental health, safety gaps in supply chains and they can protect people other than workers.

Some amendments will make the model WHS laws more effective, including tidying up the definition of ‘officer’ so that duty holders are not distracted by its ambiguity and then fail to implement compliance strategies. New Zealand has a better approach with regards to the definition of officer, and this could be adopted here.

Other potential amendments to consider include refining provisions for coercive information gathering powers, and requiring inspectors to be licensed to use those powers (after being properly trained) to create consistency in use and stop their inadvertent misuse. And of course, with workplace mental health being the ‘growth WHS issue’ we need a hierarchy of control that speaks to mental health – currently, the only controls identified to deal with WHS risks are controls that deal with physical risk.

Opportunities and challenges
Over the coming few years, there will be new opportunities and challenges – and business is being exhorted by government to rise to the challenge. However, governments must also rise to the challenge and put in place responsive regulatory and judicial systems.

Workplace mental health (in its very broad sense) must be seen as a key WHS issue and the WHS Act must be amended to better deal with it, inspectors must be better trained – and perhaps sourced differently – to deal with that issue and in relation to their use of coercive information gathering powers.

Safety culture must be better understood and expressly tied to the officer’s duty under the WHS Act, and the parallels with the recent culture in banking debate are striking. Confusion around the definition of officer means that the officer’s...
duty has not attracted the compliance focus that duty holders should give it.

Although many officers have taken the duty seriously, there are many that do not understand it, and after initial interest, many have returned to ‘business as usual’. Companies and WHS leaders need – and should demand – a supportive regulatory and judicial system that does not bleed funds from substantive safety improvements.

While safety compliance is most often seen as a cost, in truth it can be the best investment in the creation of the work environments that are required for the new world of work. Currently, we are all distracted from this fact as well as the fact that updated model WHS laws can positively contribute to productivity – because we are burdened and blinded by outdated ‘implementation’ mechanisms in the form of eight WHS regulators that are insufficiently sophisticated and insufficiently funded, and a corresponding judicial system.

“Safety culture must be better understood and expressly tied to the officer’s duty under the WHS Act”

Siobhan Flores-Walsh is a partner with Corrs Chambers Westgarth, and she spoke on OHS law reform at the inaugural SIA South Australian Safety Symposium, which was recently held at the Stamford Plaza, Adelaide.
Leading safety at Brisbane Airport Corporation

Brisbane Airport Corporation takes a holistic and focused approach to improving OHS. Craig Donaldson speaks with its CEO/MD together with its WHS/employee relations manager about this process and how they work together to drive positive OHS outcomes.

Brisbane Airport is the third-largest airport in Australia by passenger numbers, with more than 22.4 million passengers travelling through the airport last financial year. Brisbane Airport Corporation, which operates Brisbane Airport, posted revenues of $611 million last financial year while its profit before tax was $228.4 million. Around 420 businesses are located at the airport, and collectively, these businesses employ around 21,000 people.

3 major OHS risks & challenges

There are a number of unique OHS risks associated with Brisbane Airport, according to the corporation’s CEO and managing director, Julieanne Alroe, who explains that public safety is the most significant risk and challenge. “We have 22 million passengers, 22,000 staff, and Lord only knows how many visitors and vehicles we have here in any given year,” she says. “Lots of them have got luggage, they’re in an unfamiliar environment, and it’s an anxious time for people when they are travelling. Public safety is forever front of mind for us.”
The second major OHS risk revolves around construction, and over the past couple of years the corporation has spent about $200 million in construction, with much of this occurring in and around operational areas. An added complication is that very little construction work is greenfield, says Alroe, who adds that the third OHS challenge is around contractor management. “This covers things like cleaners, security guards, people who look after curbside, as well as all our electricians and plumbers and other contractors who are here every day,” she says.

Brisbane Airport Corporation’s WHS and employee relations manager, Kersty Christensen, adds that this is made more challenging, as contractor management is one step removed again as a result of the many tenants of Brisbane Airport and their contractors. “So how do we provide a safe environment for contractors who are coming in, where we may not even have a contractual relationship with them? Subcontractor safety is something we have to consider, from the big tier-one companies all the way down to small local tradespeople. It’s a big piece of work we’re doing and one of the key areas we’re focusing on,” she says.

3 OHS strategies & initiatives

To help manage and mitigate OHS risks in the airport, Alroe says the corporation employs a number of strategies and initiatives to drive positive OHS outcomes – the first of which is strong leadership. “I think it’s absolutely fundamental to create that safety culture, not only in the executive team but in the airport generally – and that starts with me and the board,” she says.

“So we are interested in and focused on safety – maybe obsessively so, and that translates down into our senior management team here. But it’s also really important that our key partners here at the airport – our airlines, big construction firms and other companies – all have that safety focus. I just can’t overstate the need for that strong leadership. Everything else doesn’t work as well if you don’t have that.”

Each of the business’ senior leaders is personally responsible for one of 10 specific OHS areas and they serve as the safety champions in these areas. As part of this, they have a program of works or visits or activities around each area. Over and above this, safety managers are expected to do at least one safety activity a month (such as a safety walk or inspection or attending a WHS committee meeting). Each involvement is recorded, and Alroe says that if a leader does not achieve their expected safety activity, this reflects in their performance at the end of the year. “On the positive side, what we are seeing is people actually exceeding what their expectations are and doing more than what was agreed to,” says Alroe.

Another focus for Alroe and the business has been on trying to make it easy for staff to stay safe. “This comes down to getting the basics right, from giving them good, clear guidance and simple, effective tools to help them out with the likes of risk assessments or safe working procedures, for example. We operate in a big regulatory environment, with compliance around
“I think it’s absolutely fundamental to create that safety culture, not only in the executive team but in the airport generally – and that starts with me and the board”

WHS, aeronautical safety and security,” says Alroe, who explains that the corporation employs an AS 4801-accredited OHS management system (accredited with SAI Global since October 2010) to help ensure processes and tools are developed, implemented and maintained to deliver on the broader safety vision, while ensuring harmonious compliance across different areas.

“Through the system we want to make sure that safety is not an added burden to people but something that makes their job easy and with the right outcome. It’s not about dumbing it down but making it simple to use so that we help people embrace safety in a way that makes their life and their job a bit easier,” she says.

Christensen emphasises the importance of collaboration in the WHS process and says this is something she and Alroe have been working on closely with all leaders and staff, contractors, tenants and other key input stakeholders. “This is something everyone needs to work on together, and if we make it easy for people to do the right thing, everybody is going to get a good outcome,” says Christensen, who adds that an important part of this process is getting all contractors up to an appropriate level of safety – particularly when it comes to smaller contractors. While larger contractors tend to have their own safety management systems and processes, she says smaller local contractors often need help in meeting standards and understanding the application of these onsite.

Similarly, it is also important to acknowledge and reward good behaviour in the workplace, and Alroe says random and other acts of safety need to be recognised. An important part of this is “airport safety week”, which incorporates a number of OHS initiatives as well as the presentation of a Chairman’s award for safety (for staff) and a CEO’s safety award (for contractors). Throughout this week and the rest of the year, senior managers and the board also lead by example through a series of safety
activities including safety walks, participation in WHS monthly meetings and toolbox talks with staff. “Each year there is a growing number of nominations, particularly for the contractor award, and growing enthusiasm on the part of staff to win the awards. A lot of it’s just about good, routine work and not the big spectacular wins. We find those three things are very important, and they’re the ones where we’ve seen some of the best outcomes.”

Driving outcomes through collaboration

Alroe and Christensen work closely together to help improve OHS standards and practice across the business, and they meet formally twice a year to review safety performance and other trends. They also meet formally at least once a month, and informally as and when required, to review and discuss any OHS issues or concerns.

“Kersty knows she can walk in here any time. She’s got direct access to me on any matters to do with safety,” says Alroe. “It’s part of that regular engagement for Kersty to have that ad hoc access to me. Even more important is that Kersty gets loads of support. She knows I’ve got her back, and she’s got my back. Without this support and engagement in any business, OHS becomes effectively useless.”

Christensen agrees that Alroe’s support plays a significant role in good OHS across the business and says it is important to be free to talk with her about any concerns at any time. “It doesn’t matter whether it’s a question of increased focus from the whole company, a specific OHS issue with an individual or team, or whether an injection of funds is required – the support is there for that to happen,” she says.

Alroe says she has often read reports of major safety accidents where management thought they had a safe system and their companies had quite favourable lag indicators, however, she says these can sometimes hide some bigger issues which
are less apparent or frequently occurring. “Yes it’s important to look at the statistics every year and see that they’re very good, but ask Kersty if there is anything that’s worrying her that is not coming up through the indicators. Both of us have got to be open to the fact that you don’t always get told what you need to hear. You need to have the courage to make sure you are really hearing what’s going on,” she says.

Leading OHS in practice
As the CEO and managing director of the business, Alroe is clear about her expectations of Christensen in making OHS a real business objective and priority. “I need independence and courage from Kersty. She needs to be honest and frank with me. Honesty, at the end of the day, is fundamental to this. That’s what I expect from Kersty probably most of all,” she says.

“In terms of my senior management team, I need them to engage as actively as I do with that leadership role – and not just token leadership; it’s got to be honest-to-goodness example. What is seen and understood and demonstrated to be important to our staff is the example they follow. After a while you don’t even have to push it, because if you ask the right questions the right behaviours are demonstrated,” says Alroe.

A good example of this can be found in the corporation’s “fairly good” incident reporting, though she says the close-out rates were “not always as good as we would have liked. There weren’t big hairy problems, but more routine things. As our senior management got more engaged in this process, we now find our close-out rate is very close to 100 per cent each month now, whereas that’s always something we were struggling with before. So when senior management ask questions and get involved, we do see things improve. Where I’ve seen the most impact come through is where we have that leadership,” she says.

Incident reporting is also at the highest rate ever, and Alroe says it’s important that staff feel very confident that they can report things, with the expectation that problems will be addressed. “Probably most satisfying of all is we’re getting more and more reports of near misses or safety observations. People are observing what they think is an unacceptable safety risk, and this is

“...
The large majority of Brisbane Airport Corporation’s shares are owned by Australian investment and superannuation funds, including Colonial First State Global Asset Management, Commonwealth Bank Group Super, Motor Trades Association of Australia and Sunsuper. Brisbane Airport Corporation’s CEO and managing director, Julieanne Alroe, says she receives strong interest in OHS from the funds, and in investor meetings. “They are very keen to see strengthening of WHS right across their investment portfolios, and I work with other agencies that are in the network of these funds. So they are particularly active investors,” she says.

There is also greater emphasis on due diligence of board members, as several of the corporation’s board members are investor representatives. “Most of our board members have that wonderful characteristic that you often see with board members, which is the inquiring mind. They do ask questions. They do come out, they do walk around, they do want to see and hear things that are actually happening. I think that’s made it much easier for me to push leadership of safety down through the company, because senior management see that board members value this,” says Alroe.

Alroe and her management team have been encouraged by the board and investors to provide KPIs with greater emphasis on lead indicators. “So better training, better contractor management, better engagement – these all allow you to properly anticipate and try to avoid problems rather than just understand what’s going on,” says Alroe.

Starting to change our whole response to issues. It’s much more pleasant dealing with solving a problem rather than dealing with someone who’s been injured,” she says.

When the business’ leadership program was being built a couple of years ago, Christensen recalls that “our metrics were telling us a story that we didn’t like”, in that the close-out rate was sitting at about 50 to 55 per cent. “This was the kick start we needed to focus on. It was a conversation that was never going to be easy in front of the entire senior management team in saying ‘OK, guys, you need to lift your game’. But, in actually talking to them and finding out what’s important to them, we could tailor the leadership program around areas where people either have specific expertise or specific interests. Then the big part was getting them out and about, talking to staff and asking the right questions. That in itself has been the biggest thing in changing the culture and the approach to safety over the last few years here,” says Christensen.
Is the JSA/SWMS process really working?

Job Safety Analyses and Safe Work Method Statements are often seen as unnecessary and burdensome. However, there is a potentially better approach which provides a record to demonstrate compliance to WHS legislation, writes Ollie Ojczyk

Job Safety Analyses (JSA) and Safe Work Method Statements (SWMS) were introduced for high-risk works with the aim of having the workers concerned evaluate the work process they are to perform to identify all the risks associated with the works and ensure the appropriate risk control measures are being implemented.

As a safety professional I see this as a positive safety principle, although the feedback from the workers is that the paperwork is a pain. It is seen as unnecessary, as they have been trained in their trades and are confident in performing their tasks as they have done so many times before. This results in JSA/SWMS being produced with their generic controls for every stage of their work process, because that’s what we do for that task.

On several occasions I have reviewed JSA/SWMS and noted that the controls for particular tasks have actually increased the risk of the hazard due to the particular site conditions. When asked why the particular control measure was implemented, the standard answer is: “That’s what we always do”.

When the particular site hazard was pointed out to the worker, the comment would be, “Oh, I never thought about that”. The worker would then review the work process for that site and come up with an acceptable control measure.

The current JSA/SWMS process does not promote the thinking process about what the risk is and how to control it, or get the worker to stand back and ask “What if” – i.e. look at the site around the work area, identify issues that could present a hazard and identify what could be put in place to prevent the risk of injury should it happen. A simple example of this can be seen in the following work process.

A hydraulic engineer was engaged to service the hydraulic system pumps at a facility that had seven pump stations located in different areas throughout the facility.

The engineer had serviced six pumps without an issue. He arrived at the location of the seventh pump, saw the pump and went straight in to perform the service. On completion he stood up to leave and cracked his head open, ending up in hospital for two weeks. Who knows what other issues he will be faced with for the rest of his life?

On investigation, it was puzzling how this could have happened. It was quite obvious the potential was always there, because just above the pump facility was an RSJ construction (this is what the engineer hit when standing up).

Of course he was following his natural instinct, that is, see the pump, get straight into it and complete the works. Had he used the “What if” principle he would have seen the RSJ and noted the potential risk and taken the appropriate precautions – wear a hard hat/access the area differently – i.e. he would have been aware of the specific site issues.

The current JSA/SWMS lend themselves to this type of oversight, as they ask three questions: What is the task being undertaken? What hazard does this task present? What control measure is to be implemented?

Generally, a tradesperson will always be performing the task that they are qualified in, so it is therefore understandable that they would apply the specific controls they were taught and have experienced for the task without giving it much thought. We must understand that the human is a very habitual animal, and that’s why when asked, “Why are you doing it that way?”, we hear, “That’s what we always do for this task”.

My recommendation is to provide a process which promotes the worker to give the task at hand the appropriate risk assessment by going through a site-specific “What if” process.

The JSA/SWMS should include the risk assessment process for each step. This would have the worker identify the risk level of the identified hazard before and after the considered control has been nominated, which must always be site specific.

An extended JSA/SWMS principle has been introduced to several organisations with positive results, which I believe should become the standard, as it requires the worker to think about the task at hand and evaluate all the proposed controls.

Process overview

The preparation of an SWMS involves the identification of potential hazards, assessing their risk and recording how to eliminate, or minimise, the risk to the worker by implementing safety controls. Where the potential hazards are identified as extreme, high or medium risks, the SWMS will be completed using the following process.

A generic SWMS (not specific to any site) may be developed for tender submissions. The generic SWMS broadly defines job steps using general hazards identified. This SWMS will demonstrate the organisation’s understanding of the risks involved and that appropriate, typical controls will be implemented to ensure that the risks are as low as reasonably practicable.

Prior to commencement of the works on site, the generic SWMS will be reviewed. Where steps or site conditions change from those planned in the generic SWMS, they shall be updated to reflect the way the job will actually be done on the specific site and how safety will be controlled.

An alternative is the SWMS form (available at www.sia.org.au/downloads/News-Updates/JSA_Risk_Template.pdf), which provides a record to demonstrate compliance to WHS legislation. The person responsible for implementing a particular action to eliminate or minimise the risk of potential hazards on site is nominated on the SWMS. This will ensure responsibility for risk control is allocated and can be followed up.
Evaluation of the SWMS

The SWMS will be evaluated on how well the extreme, high or medium hazards (risks) have been identified for the work activity to be undertaken, and whether the suggested controls, wherever possible, eliminate the potential hazard or minimise the risk of injury.

When selecting controls, consider the “as low as reasonably practical” (ALARP) principle, which should be as high as practical in the hierarchy of controls, as shown below.

1. Eliminate: remove the hazard completely (e.g. remove risk of electrocution by using compressed-air driven tools).
2. Substitute: use something less hazardous (e.g. water-based chemical rather than solvent-based one).
3. Isolation: use barriers or isolate the hazard (e.g. guards on machines, enclosures for noisy machinery).
4. Engineering controls: design and install equipment to counteract the hazard (e.g. install an exhaust ventilation system to extract dangerous fumes).
5. Administrative controls: change work practices (e.g. reduce the time people are exposed to the hazard).
6. Personal protective equipment (PPE): wear PPE while near the hazard (e.g. ear plugs or earmuffs, safety boots).

Process

The process for developing SWMS with this alternative form is as follows:

Step 1: Complete the “Job Location” and “Job Details” section of the form.

Step 2: Review the requirements of the task to be undertaken and the specific site where works will be conducted, and identify any specific “Permits and/or Licences” required for the job/site. Enter any requirements on page two of the SWMS form.

Step 3: Identify any potential environmental hazards that may be produced or may affect the job/site, and record findings on page two of the SWMS form.

Step 4: Using the table on page three of the form, enter all the steps that will be undertaken to perform and complete the task – “Process Steps”. For each step to be undertaken:
- Identify any hazards associated with each step and record on the SWMS – “Potential Hazard”.
- Using the risk management tool on page one of the SWMS, determine the risk score (E, H, M, L) for each potential hazard and record – “Initial Risk”.
- Determine what controls will be used to reduce (ALARP) the risk associated with each identified hazard and record – “Risk Control Measure”.
- Having determined the controls, ensure that the risk of the hazard has been reduced to the (ALARP) principle by again using the risk management tool on page one. This assessment will include your selected control – “Residual Risk”.
- Assign the responsibility to the appropriate person, to ensure that the selected controls will be used during the operation – “Person Responsible”.

Step 5: Having evaluated the site and the appropriate controls to be used during the operation of the work, identify the appropriate PPE to be used and enter this on page two of the SWMS.

Step 6: Sign and date the SWMS on page one under “Prepared By”.

Step 7: Prior to starting any works, ensure that all employees that will be involved in the works to be undertaken have read and understood the process steps and controls to be used for the job and signed off on page one of the SWMS – “Work Team Members” (all workers involved).

3 essential SWMS criteria to satisfy

Work should not proceed until the following criteria have been achieved:

1. The SWMS is completed and signed by an appropriately qualified person/s who is competent in the work activity to be undertaken.
2. The SWMS is reviewed and signed by the appropriate principal contractor/project representative of the project.
3. All employees involved in the works have reviewed and signed the SWMS, indicating that they understand and are willing to implement the controls required to carry out the work safely.
“Trackside protection is extremely important for managing the safety of each and every one of our staff”
Queensland Rail: firmly on track with safety

Queensland Rail’s top-down approach to OHS has met with very positive results. Craig Donaldson speaks with its OHS leader about this approach and how it goes about driving good OHS outcomes.

Queensland Rail is an integrated customer and rail infrastructure business servicing the passenger, tourism, resources and freight customer markets throughout Queensland. With more than $6 billion in fixed and other assets, almost 6000 staff and approximately 6500 kilometres of track, Queensland Rail is an organisation that faces a wide range of different risks which fall under the safety umbrella, according to its general manager safety, assurance and environment, Greg Fill.

Major OHS risks

There are four major OHS risks Queensland Rail faces, according to Fill, who explains that the first and most significant one is safeguarding its workforce. “This is simply about preventing unsafe work practices, managing the work environment and ensuring there are sound processes in place. We’re a 6000-strong workforce dispersed right across the state, working in vastly different environments, temperatures and areas of the business. So in there we have a wide range of exposures, such as use of motor vehicles, working with electricity, including 25 kVA overheads, use of various types of plant, managing our contractors and a contingent workforce,” he says.

It is important to keep staff safe in a range of environments, both static and more active ones, Fill explains. “We have lots of workers on track and trains running around, so trackside protection is extremely important for managing the safety of each and every one of our staff.”
LEADERSHIP

says Fill, who explains that asset management plays an important role in ensuring appropriate management of Queensland Rail’s infrastructure to assist in preventing major avoidable events. With around 1000 drivers and guards in southeast Queensland alone, managing risks associated with derailments, train-to-train collisions, and collisions of trains with cars at level crossings going through red lights, for example, are an important focus. “This is a big risk for us, because it also puts our drivers in danger and they could be seriously injured or worse if those happen. We must have excellent and robust risk controls in place,” says Fill.

There is a heavy compliance requirement of Queensland Rail from a general OHS perspective as well as in the rail safety and electrical safety fields, and he says it is important to arm the business with the tools to manage legal and regulatory compliance and requirements. Given Queensland Rail has been around for 150-odd years, Fill says it has developed a range of highly embedded operational processes to assist with compliance, and which are often adopted industry-wide.

The last most significant OHS risk facing Queensland Rail, according to Fill, is in keeping up the safety momentum. “We believe our culture’s reached a level of maturity where our systems are in place and our people understand safety, but we must ensure that performance remains strong. There are always areas where we need to improve, so it’s important to take the time to refocus efforts on safety,” he says.

Driving effective OHS outcomes
There are three main ways in which OHS is driven and supported across Queensland Rail, and Fill says the first and most important part of this is the strategic direction for safety within the organisation. “This is not just about my safety team leading the charge and saying we’re going to set the rules and have everybody else follow them. It has to be quite a holistic approach, and that needs to be led from the top down,” he says.

One of the ways this is achieved is through Queensland Rail’s executive safety committee, which has a dedicated meeting in which the senior executive team meets with Fill for two hours every month. “At this meeting I have all the executives at my disposal, and they’re completely involved and immersed in the safety performance of the organisation. We talk about any incidents that occur, from where someone’s cut their finger, through to something more significant. We look at the trends and issues, validate where our initiatives are working well, and also focus on where we could improve further,” says Fill, who explains that this is strategically very important as it provides the executive team with information that they may need to go to the board about, or which indicates they need to go back to their own team members and refocus on particular issues.

Supporting this, Queensland Rail recently developed a reinvigorated five-year enterprise-wide safety strategy which is owned by the board, all executives as well as key areas of the organisation. Strategy performance will be reviewed at regular intervals, and a key focus of the strategy is that improving safety culture will be the result of the “next generation” of leadership development. “If we can empower and coach and put greater accountability on all levels of leadership, we’ll get better safety outcomes from that,” says Fill.

A second key element of the safety strategy has been to arm employees with the right information to do their job safely, particularly through a meaningful safety environment management system. “This needs to have key standards, procedures and tools that acutely support and guide all of our staff through their day-to-day activities,” says Fill. “This doesn’t mean having a million and one procedures or work instructions; they also need to be very user friendly. So it’s important that you have a system that’s constantly rebalanced to make sure it fits the requirements of a constantly changing organisation that has different emerging risks and issues.”

The system must also be tailored to suit different areas of the business and support different adoption levels by staff, Fill explains. “It’s difficult to just have a one size fits all these days, when you have a business that has so many different aspects to it. You also need to make your people aware of their own requirements and their own accountabilities, and this is important as a reinforcement tool, especially to our leaders at all levels,” he says.

The final element of the strategy is to continue learning as an organisation, according to Fill. “Understanding we can improve, and never becoming complacent is important,” he says. For example, there is a particular emphasis on understanding safety directions in the business, and Fill explains that leaders talk to staff or
groups of staff about a safety issue two or four times a month. Employees are also encouraged to verbalise safety directions and advice, as this helps them remember and understand what’s involved. “This is similar to when we’re in high school, and often we’re told when you write something down when you hear it, it helps to imprint it on your memory more. Or if you’re at home and you’re reading something, read it out loud because it helps you imprint it. It’s the same thing. So we get staff to verbalise what OHS equipment they should have in place, and what the local procedures and risk controls are, and we find culturally it imprints on them more and they remember those things a lot more,” he says.

As part of this, Fill underscores the importance of a robust safety communications framework and says this plays an important role in awareness around safety incidents or emerging issues. “We use a very targeted method of communication, which ensures that employees are informed quickly of more important safety methods, and this is tailored to suit,” he says. “Not all 6000 staff get the same message at the same time – if it’s something to do with track work, then our track workers are availed of that message. If it’s something to do with electrical safety, this is targeted at employees who are involved in electrical safety. So it’s very important that staff are brought along on the journey and kept up to date with safety messaging and information.”

Queensland Rail also incorporates a master assurance schedule for safety, which is a risk-based audit regime designed to constantly test the effectiveness of controls. “So rather than looking at compliance, this asks questions like: ‘Are staff taking up these procedures, these risk controls? Are they using them? If not, why? Do they know what they’re doing? Are they coached enough around it? Is the document still in date? Is this still best practice? Is it still relative to the process that’s involved?’ It’s part accountability, but also about accessibility and engagement. So from

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**Improving OHS results**

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Another key safety metric for Queensland Rail is the signals passed at danger rates, where drivers accidentally go past a red signal. In the past 12 months these rates are at all-time lows after falling almost 11 per cent. There has also been an increase in safety reporting of hazards and near misses by 10 per cent over the past year, while the business has also experienced a reduction in the number of level crossing near misses by 6.3 per cent in the same timeframe.

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an assurance perspective, if you’re constantly looking at the effectiveness of the controls rather than the compliance it gets them, you find that you’re tweaking the processes and systems in place to make sure they’re the best fit for your foundation,” he says.

Executive leadership team collaboration
Queensland Rail’s executive safety committee reports quarterly to the board’s people and safety committee, and the board also looks at and reviews safety performance, the performance of new and existing initiatives and controls, as well as any challenging issues or blocks that the board or the executive may need to influence in order to realise a particular safety outcome. “The executives in Queensland Rail are highly engaged in asking the question to themselves, ‘What more can each of us, or as a collective executive do to help influence and improve safety?’” says Fill.

Locally, executives often accompany Fill and walk around and talk with staff about safety issues. They also go on regional tours looking at infrastructure and operations, with a high focus on talking to staff at all levels and leaders about what their biggest local safety risks are, and if there is anything the executive can do to help improve these. “There’s constant feedback, and a good part of that is we’re constantly getting that executive support,” says Fill. “Executives aren’t frightened off by questions around bad statistics. They’d rather know about it upfront and engage in a conversation about it and say, ‘Alright, what do we all need to do to fix this?’”

Building a culture of safety
There are 700-odd leaders among Queensland Rail’s entire workforce, and the expectation is that each one will be the safety leader for their immediate teams. Every two to three years a benchmark safety culture survey is conducted within the organisation, and the last one (conducted in late 2015) found that over 80 per cent of frontline employee respondents indicated that their leader has a plan in place to improve safety and has worked towards making their workplace safer.

In trying to improve the culture, Fill says it’s important to have a workforce that has its “antenna up” for improving safety. “It’s important they don’t have a firewall there to say, ‘Well, don’t talk to me about it. That must be my manager’s role, or the local workplace OHS rep’s role.’ The constant message and empowerment that we’re trying to give staff is that each and every one of them is responsible for safety, so it’s important that we also test the water with them around how they’re travelling from a cultural perspective, and put more energy and resources into areas where we’re being challenged and could be improving,” he says.
Making safety a critical part of the culture is crucial if any organisation is to make serious OHS progress, according to Queensland Rail’s general manager safety, assurance and environment, Greg Fill. “We signpost safety as Queensland Rail’s number one priority. No member of the organisation can be unaware of that commitment, and that’s important,” he says.

It is also important to know and thoroughly understand the organisation’s risk profile, including the aptitude of the executive team and stakeholders for risk tolerance. “It’s absolutely critical that both you and they understand this. You need to involve employees in the safety decision-making process, and you need to show your employees that you’re interested by talking about safety regularly and asking what they think is required to improve safety in the workplace. Our employees often come up with some of the best and most innovative ideas that we hadn’t thought of before,” he says.

Queensland Rail delivers bi-monthly safety leadership training for all line managers in the form of a one-and-a-half day safety leadership course. This training helps provide leaders with the knowledge and skills to lead and manage safety in their project teams. Experts are also brought in to help deliver specific training on a range of areas, including how to undertake investigations or how to have courageous conversations with staff. “When leaders see an unsafe act or some hazard where they think staff should be taking more care, it’s important for leaders to be empowered and understand how they can say, ‘Look, let’s stop what you’re doing. Let’s sit aside and see where we can improve our safety performance here, because I can see something that might not work out too well.’ That is certainly different to a blame-related culture, in which a leader might say, ‘You’re doing the wrong thing. Stop or I’m going to sack you.’ That’s certainly not what we’re about at Queensland Rail.”

Advice for OHS professionals

Making safety a critical part of the culture is crucial if any organisation is to make serious OHS progress, according to Queensland Rail’s general manager safety, assurance and environment, Greg Fill. “We signpost safety as Queensland Rail’s number one priority. No member of the organisation can be unaware of that commitment, and that’s important,” he says.

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It is also important to have a safety management system which gives employees safe systems that work and the correct tools to do their work. These systems must also be tested and verified to ensure they are working and not unnecessarily onerous to use. “This is why an assurance program is important, in order to test for effectiveness of controls,” says Fill.

“You also need to build in safety around performance requirements for all levels of management and provide guides to all employees regarding their responsibilities, that relate to safety through process and documentation – and that needs to be communicated in a thoughtful and meaningful way.”
As organisations seek to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their learning and development initiatives, there is a significant shift occurring in the nature of OHS training, according to a number of experts. Training is used by organisations to provide knowledge to its workforce about hazards and controls, according to managing director of SafeStart, Cristian Sylvestre, who explains that the belief behind this is that if people know about a hazard and what to do to avoid contact with it, they will be able to prevent incidents. Although knowledge is important (you can’t prevent what you don’t know about), he says it is not enough to prevent all incidents.

“So even when the safety training is as effective as it can be, people still get hurt. Our research shows that momentary inattention is involved in 95 per cent of incidents,” says Sylvestre. “This has been confirmed by the latest research from neuroscience that shows that 95 per cent of our actions are subconscious, or able to be done without much conscious thinking. This is not to define people as lazy or lacking in care, but rather make people understand that we do not look at or think about what we are doing ‘in the moment’ as much as we think we do. This is a trait that is part of our cognitive limitations as human beings. The good news is that it can be addressed, resulting in significant improvement.”

People are more likely to suffer from inattention when there is rushing, frustration, fatigue or complacency in play, Sylvestre adds. “The training that SafeStart does is to teach people about inattention [unintentional and habitual behaviour] and what can be done about it. This is very different from OHS training, which is driven by compliance requirements a lot of the time, but complements it rather well.”

Brendan Torazzi, CEO of AlertForce, also points out that organisations are generally reactive when it comes to training and other safety factors. “In other words, an incident occurs, regulators intervene and training happens. Sometimes, training happens as a result of an impending audit or large business opportunity,” he says.

“For AlertForce our clients frequently train if the outcomes are licensed – for example, traffic control training or asbestos removal. The most effective training comes when organisations are proactive and can make business or safety improvements at the same time as upskilling their workforce. For qualifications and career upskilling, most industries push the cost of this back onto staff. Successful individuals understand the value of investing in their education, whether it be vocational and/or tertiary – my opinion for WHS is that vocational is the mandatory part,” he says.

Pitfalls and challenges

The biggest challenge in OHS training is in getting people to be open to the idea that there is a different way of looking at safety, and that if we continue to do what we have always done we will continue to get the same results, according to Sylvestre.

“Given our safety legislation is so compliance driven, that compliance view of the world filters down through organisations. What we advocate is not throwing out policies and procedures – they are fundamental to an organisation’s ability to keep people safe – but also having a component that helps people be safer human beings, not as something we have to manage around but rather something that we can influence and use to improve safety culture,” he says.

When it comes to looking at the person side of an incident, Sylvestre observes that the assumption made is that because the person knew about the
hazard and control, they must have deliberately chosen to violate the rule, procedure or behaviour. However, what organisations do not always appreciate is that the latest neuroscience is discovering that states of mind like rushing, frustration, fatigue or complacency alter the functionality of the brain. “For instance, research at the Harvard School of Medicine showed that high levels of noradrenalin and cortisol released during stressful periods actually ‘shut down’ our rational and executive brain functions, leaving us exposed to more impulsive behaviour,” he says.

“The good news is that there are proven techniques to help people deal better with the four states of mind, but these need to be practised so they can be brought into play when needed. Assuming people’s actions are deliberate is very ‘black and white’ and easy to deal with; either retrain the person, counsel or discipline them. What is far more effective, however, is to help the person understand what was going on with them at the time and use that information to get them to improve a personal safety skill.”

Making sure organisations get the right training is also another pitfall, according to Torazzi, who often sees training purchase decisions made—with the wrong training being purchased (such as an awareness course that needs to be nationally recognised). “When unions or regulators get involved, almost every time they will require a nationa

“Overtraining as well as undertraining can be an issue, and getting the right balance between the two is critical to get a return on investment”

nationally recognised program because it has been benchmarked to the Australian Qualifications Framework. In just about all cases there will be nationally recognised programs available. There are, of course, exceptions to this such as five-day health and safety representative training and some other niche industry such as International Maritime Dangerous Goods training [IMDG training required by AMSA],” says Torazzi.

“Another challenge, of course, is identifying the right people in the organisation to be trained – overtraining as well as undertraining can be an issue, and getting the right balance between the two is critical to get a return on investment.”

Trends and developments in OHS training

Sylvestre is noticing a move towards “top-down” initiatives – usually referred to as safety leadership or safety culture programs, driven from the top. This is undoubtedly important, because people are influenced by what their leaders pay attention to, he explains. “We are seeing leadership teams more engaged in safety and wanting to improve results. What needs to
While Australian organisations are conducting first aid training for their staff year in and year out, research shows that less than one in three Australian employees feel confident to perform first aid in a workplace emergency, according to Nikki Jurcutz, the CEO of Hero HQ, a nationally recognised first aid training organisation. Jurcutz was working as a paramedic when she first noticed the lack of skilled first aiders in the community, and she was continuously being called into workplaces where first aid treatment could have potentially changed the outcome of a patient, and saw firsthand the impact of first aiders who were not confident in their knowledge or skills.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics data reports that the average workplace injury rates are an astonishing 58 per 1000 workers, yet few businesses are first aid ready, she says. "It is integral for organisations to seek out first aid providers that are not only offering your business compliance but are offering training that is of the highest quality. Organisations should take into consideration the calibre of the educators and resources, rather than selecting a provider based purely on price," she says.

There have been a number of recent developments in first aid training, and Jurcutz points to the emergence of innovative technologies such as online learning, with Brayden Manikins and app-based resources impacting the way in which first aid training organisations are delivering their service. “Organisations should look out for providers who are integrating these innovative technologies into their processes and procedures, as this generally means a more streamlined and effective service for their clients,” she says.

“Quality providers are opting to take a more holistic approach to their clients’ training requirements by tailoring content specific to their workplace, taking into account previous first aid incidents when delivering the service and tracking staff’s requirements to ensure compliancy is met. A holistic approach results in staff who are compliant, more engaged and confident to act in first aid emergencies.”

There are a number of steps OHS professionals can take to improve their first aid training and improve ROI and engagement. Jurcutz says it is important to offer staff accredited training and refresher courses, ensure environments have first aid resources available and conduct frequent drills and emergency training. “Externally, OHS professionals should seek out providers that offer a high quality service by means of a holistic approach, a streamlined service and engaging and interactive classrooms,” she says.

Drivers of change
In short, every organisation is looking to get more effective and more efficient, according to Sylvestre, who observes that modern-day safety requirements are considerable. “Very few organisations that we have spoken to consider themselves at the end of their safety journey,” he says.

“What is becoming evidently clear, however, is that having a robust safety management system and a strong commitment to safety by the leadership group is not enough to prevent all incidents. There is still more that needs to be done. The next area of focus is to understand how people’s brains actually function, what cognitive limitations we have and what can be done to compensate for those limitations.”

Most safety professionals understand that people’s unintentional mistakes play a significant role in many incidents. However, Sylvestre says the real question is what to do about it. “One avenue is to compensate for our cognitive limitations by reducing the amount of influence that humans can have on a process — we can continue to automate systems, etcetera. Our solution is to help people deal with their cognitive limitations and engage them to have more control over their own personal safety.”

Depending on the state or territory, Torazzi says there is a range of drivers with regards to OHS training trends and developments. “In NSW it’s just the sheer amount of work, with NBN upgrades and rollouts north of Sydney, highway upgrades or light rail projects. In Queensland the market is going through change because of where the industry cycle is with mining, however, many companies are now outsourcing
work to consultants. Downturns are also a great opportunity to take some time out to upskill again, whether that be through vocational training or tertiary,” he says.

“Since the WHS Act came in there have been many, many compliance training requirements, and of course we are still a long way from harmonisation. Victoria and Western Australia still have OHS Acts, whereas the rest of the country has moved on to WHS. The average person on the street still refers to health and safety as OHS.”

Improving ROI and engagement

In improving return on OHS training investment, Torazzi says the first step is to identify the business’ training needs and what the business outcomes will be. “Research the chosen provider to ensure you are getting quality training – not all organisations are equal. For organisations big enough, make sure you have an organisational training plan in place to ensure that you are not exposed to risk operationally as well as at a compliance level,” he says.

“Overall, explain to your staff why they are getting the chosen training and what the benefits are to them personally as well as the organisation. There are still many government-assisted or -subsidised programs running around the country for organisations as well as for individuals. Make sure you ask your registered training organisation what the current opportunities are.”

Sylvestre says it is particularly important to understand how people function in order to facilitate any performance improvement. The important thing to note here is that brain functionality is not about psychology, it is about biology, he says. “We are what we are because we evolved from our ancestors, and that process fine-tuned the traits that were useful for our survival. We believe that engaging people to take more control of their own personal safety is the next step for safety professionals. It is not as easy as writing a new procedure or designing a new form, but it is more worthwhile because it teaches the skills required to engage personally with people,” says Sylvestre.

“But the platform for engagement also has to be valid – that’s why the focus has to be WIIFM. We advocate skills that help people to stay safer not just in the workplace but also outside of the workplace, where for most of us we are far more likely to get injured. Australian statistics show that we are up to 20 times more likely to become a fatality outside of work. When safety training is conducted, we need to have the skills to engage personally with people about something that is important to them. If we don’t, we are not going to change what they do and safety performance will be what it has always been.”

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Making OHS education stick

The accreditation of OHS courses and raising the expectations of stakeholders that OHS course graduates will be suitably professionally qualified – and that organisations need OHS professionals to do the job properly – is a recent trend of significance in the tertiary education sphere for OHS. Such, organisations need to expect and check that the consultants and employees that they are hiring are appropriately qualified and have both the knowledge and the skills to provide a professional and evidence-based service, according to Dr Rhys Stuckey, a senior lecturer within the College of Science, Health and Engineering at La Trobe University’s School of Psychology and Public Health.

Furthermore, the “internationalisation” of many organisations requires appropriate context-specific adaptation of often generically developed OHSMS. “This in turn often requires sophisticated communication, assessment and analytical skills to provide the services appropriate to the particular industry and occupational context, and to develop and implement a sustainable OHS system,” she says.

As well as ensuring compliance with best practice in course content as required by the accreditation process, Stuckey notes that educators need to provide students with both the opportunity to explore sound theoretical models, and opportunities to develop a range of practical skills which can be applied regardless of the type of industrial context.

Marcus Cattani, senior lecturer in OHS within the School of Medical and Health Sciences at Edith...
Cowan University (ECU), also points to the move towards a global accreditation system, which ECU is part of. “The International Network of Safety and Health Practitioner Organisations [INSHPO] has developed a series of standards for member states to use to improve their safety performance in several areas,” he explains. The Safety Institute of Australia is a member of INSHPO and has contributed to the development of these standards.

A number of Australian universities have developed their courses in response to these standards, and have been accredited to them. “This important initiative aims to ensure the next generation of safety professionals is equipped to continue the safety performance improvement process, using proven techniques,” says Cattani, who adds that ECU has created education/career pathways so it is able to offer the right course for the right person, whatever their level. This also enables the university to provide businesses with skilled workers, whatever their requirements, he says.

“Organisations need to have consistent ways of working. Once there is a consistent way of working, we have defined their organisational culture. Developing an organisational culture is a major task in the development of a safe and productive workplace. To ensure that we have a consistent way of doing things, people at different levels of organisations need to be taught a similar framework, based on contemporary thinking in OHS,” he says.

Similarly, Leo Ruschena, senior lecturer in OHS at RMIT University, says that industry wants professionals who are able to overcome current business problems when they come out of universities. “They need to be problem solvers who can integrate solutions with business needs, and preferably to increase productivity at the same time as improving safety. That certainly underlies an understanding of the business,” he says. “They also have to be aware of emerging trends. Yes, we have to deal with the traditional issues, but they also have to understand where the world of work is going to be in 2020 and beyond and where the associated problems are going to be.”

This means university curriculums have to carry things like psychosocial subjects as well as the traditional area that universities and OHS have been dealing with, such as physical, chemical and biomechanical learnings. “As part of the

“Developing an organisational culture is a major task in the development of a safe and productive workplace”

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“They need to be problem solvers who can integrate solutions with business needs, and preferably to increase productivity at the same time as improving safety”

understanding of business, I think what we’re saying to our students is that they have to be change agents. It’s about influencing, it’s about negotiating, it’s about developing strategy – those higher-order skills, or what HR would call the soft skills, are increasingly important as far as the employers are concerned,” he says.

Drivers of change

Another major change can be found in the integration of safety into all levels of business and government, according to Cattani. “There needs to be a strong partnership in organisations, between the OHS professional and the leadership team. It is a similar relationship to the accountant and the leadership team,” he says. “The OHS professional works out solutions to the issues in the organisation – what is or could cause injuries – and then works with the operational teams to develop a process which can be used effectively in the workplace.

“An effective system needs to be developed in association with the people who are going to use it. In general, systems do not work as well as they could if they are prescribed. The OHS person discusses what needs to be done, and engages with the end users about how this new initiative or task can be incorporated into the work processes, to the benefit of the workers. In this way, the OHS and operational teams work together to manage risk – it is a partnership. We need to teach the leadership teams about OHS and vice versa so there is some common knowledge in the professions, which makes forming a team easier and more efficient.”

Stuckey adds that, locally, the requirements from the regulators to ensure the use of appropriately trained OHS professionals, and consistent and reliable service delivery, is another driver of change.

“This has been supported by the relevant OHS professional specialist membership bodies with an increased recognition across all OHS professional groups of the importance of accreditation of courses and an expectation of graduates with consistently high-level skills,” she says.

“The frequent expectation of international organisations is that high quality services will be delivered appropriately within the local context. These regulatory, professional and international expectations require the ability to manage complex systems within an increasingly litigious environment. Therefore, there is an expectation that the OHS professional will be well trained and competent to responsibly manage OHS practice, regardless of the context.”

Ruschena says it is important to try and make OHS courses as realistic as possible. “For example, a lot of our assignments are actually based inside the organisation the student is working in. So they might be working on identifying a procedure that’s actually quite important in your organisation because it relates to a high hazard or something similar. Then it’s taught to a group of workers who actually have to implement the procedures, and students find out if they understand the procedure, what they understand about it, and whether or not they should use it, and so on. They then go and talk to a supervisor who has to supervise the procedure and then ask them similar questions,” he says.

“The point I’m trying to make is that, yes, you can actually develop the soft skills by actually incorporating anything that is a process. The soft skills there are obviously going and seeking information, talking to people, and then analysing and coming up with some conclusions about what happens in the organisation – compared to what the literature would suggest is good practice, for example. The literature would say that you write your procedures at the level of a year seven or year eight school level, so that the bulk of the people who have to use them actually can understand.

“I think that that’s the big problem with a lot of professions, and that’s not just OHS. Keeping your professional development up to speed is really the biggest problem that they all have, because they’re very busy people. Everybody is trying to do more with less. Keeping your head above water is actually a prime survival skill, but that’s not good enough. You not only have got to keep your head above water, but you’ve actually got to swim faster and be able to learn new strokes. That’s the name of the game that we’re in at the moment,” he says.

Improving return on investment

Stuckey underscores the importance of expecting OHS staff to always use evidence to inform workplace practice, thereby reducing costs of interventions that are not supported by evidence. A good example of this is the ongoing use of manual handling interventions reliant on training. “We know that there is a substantial evidence base that has shown that this is not an effective method of reducing musculoskeletal disorders, but many organisations continue to use this approach,” she says.

“Trained professionals in the field, including those at La Trobe, are taught to use evidence to inform practice, and as such make better decisions about investing in interventions or workplace changes that are likely to be effective. Interventions need to be justified and argued in terms of cost effectiveness as a component of risk management and evaluated using appropriate outcome measures, based on sound theoretical and well-researched practice models.”

Managing pitfalls and challenges

“Organisational resistance to change can be an issue, because sometimes we do things as we do because we always have done it that way and new ways of practice can be challenging,” observes
Stuckey, who explains that participative approaches involving meaningful consultation which enable the workforce to be involved in the change are often considered to be risky, when workforce participation has been shown to increase both the efficacy of interventions and their sustainability.

“Many organisations still see OHS as a standalone function with the role of simply ensuring regulatory compliance, rather than an integrated and essential component within all aspects of their business,” she says. Under-resourcing is also a common issue, particularly when OHS is not understood as a professional management component which needs to be integrated into the organisational structure – “one of the reasons why being able to argue cost effectiveness is important”, she says. “A poorly integrated OHSMS is often reliant on the skills of particular individuals and therefore not sustainable when they leave the organisation.”

A common mistake on the part of organisations – and OHS professionals – is that they take a simplistic view of what is a very complex environment in business, according to Ruschena. A related issue is the view in which the manager knows everything, he adds.

“This is about command and control, and all they have to do is to write enough procedures and everything is going to be hunky-dory. That hasn’t worked in the past and will never work in the future. Certainly, the protagonists of safety are quite correct in saying you can’t control everything. You have to actually allow people to be able to make decisions based on what’s happening around them and from moment to moment, and that’s absolutely true,” he says.

“The problem is, to get to that point you actually have to invest a lot of time, effort and energy in training and education of the people so that they have the skills to be able to, one, identify that there is a problem, and two, be able to come up with workable solutions to meet those problems.”

Another common challenge is that OHS professionals sometimes possess insufficient tools for the task they have to do, or they’re not up to date in their knowledge. “They don’t see themselves as change agents but more about getting people to do the right thing. They don’t have sufficient involvement with managers and workforce and other stakeholders. I think that’s where a lot of the problems will then start to occur, because they’re not facilitating. One of the problems with OHS practitioners is they spend a lot of time, effort and energy understanding everything, so they do think that they know it all. They themselves then start to fall into the trap of saying, ‘Well, I’ll tell you what to do and you can do it safely’. Again, that’s really not what it’s about. It’s about helping people understand what’s safe and helping those people to learn and develop the skill and capabilities to work safely,” he says.
Lessons in emergency response and resilience

The Industrial Foundation for Accident Prevention’s (IFAP) upcoming conference is the premier crisis & emergency management event of the year.

In recent times there has been an increase in the number and magnitude of emergencies, natural disasters and interruption to business continuity, terrorism and other unprecedented crisis events in a global environment with a constantly changing threat profile.

Hosted by IFAP and supported by REM, this inaugural Emergency Management – Resilience Conference will be held on 24 November 2016 at Pan Pacific Hotel Perth. The Resilience Conference will focus on the current topics of today and the unprecedented increase in potential risk and exposure to major emergency events with themes around preparedness, response and recovery for organisations in an unstable global environment.

Managing emergencies at Malaysia Airlines

Malaysia Airlines has changed several policies and procedures in its corporate emergency response program since the MH370 and MH17 crises, according to the head of Malaysia Airlines’ post-accident office, Mohammad Fuad Sharuji, who will be speaking at the IFAP Resilience Conference.

“Media always presume that the airline is responsible for everything, including responsibilities of the government and authorities”

These changes include incorporating an “ICE” list (in case of emergency), which is an emergency contact for every passenger who makes their flight booking on a Malaysia Airlines flight. “We have also shared this with other airlines and several airlines have also incorporated this into their flight booking system. This was done because we encountered difficulties in contacting the relatives and friends of some passengers (non-Malaysians),” he says.

More emphasis is now placed on crisis leadership training, especially for emergency operations centre members, the “go team”, crisis directors and their deputies. “This training is enhanced with emphasis for individuals to lead their teams under immense pressure, constraints of time and to make decisions quickly. This training also emphasises the need to remain calm and composed under extreme pressure without breaking down, including managing stress,” says Sharuji.

“Management advisers” have also been incorporated into the airline’s crisis leadership team, including the “go team”. “In our experience, the go team leaders were very absorbed in the tactical handling of the crises at the stations, but were distracted by the political and diplomatic intervention that [they have] to handle as well. This includes handling the media, foreign ministry, authorities, embassies and other external entities. With the appointment of management advisers, the go team leaders could focus better on the crisis handling while the management advisers could focus on the strategic issues including the relations with the authorities and governments,” he says.

Sharuji has learnt a number of valuable emergency response lessons as a result of the MH370 and MH17 crises and has observed that most of the airline’s emergency operations centre staff do not take their roles handling crises seriously during “peace-time”, but during a real crisis, they have to refer to him for clarification and understanding. “I had to guide them on their roles and to focus on strategic issues rather than tactical,” he says.

“My role as crisis director was without any deputy and it was immense pressure on me to handle both crises for long hours continuously for several weeks before I could get some rest,” he recalls. “The physical, emotional and mental challenges were immense because not many leaders in the airlines are emergency response experts, including the senior management team – even though they attended the training, drills and exercises.”

Handling the media was also a challenge, especially when there is no information for the airline to provide, and the airline is not in control of search, rescue, recovery, investigation and identification. “Media always presume that the airline is responsible for everything, including responsibilities of the government and authorities. We are not allowed to talk on behalf of government or to mention anything that may implicate the government. As such, this puts us in a bad light, as if we are hiding information and not revealing the truth. We are faced with speculations from the media, bloggers and public, who created rumours and false news especially on MH370, and to a smaller extent MH17,” he says.

Lessons from the 2016 Waroona fire

Also speaking at the conference will be the former chief officer of the Victorian Country Fire Authority (CFA), Euan Ferguson, who is a forester and fire emergency manager with 39 years’ experience in fire and fuels risk management, community engagement and emergency management leadership.

In February 2016, he was appointed as the Special Inquirer into the January 2016 Waroona bushfire in Western Australia.

Ferguson believes emergency managers face the risk of failure if they fall into the trap of creating centralised bureaucracies that become siloed and vulnerable to disconnects due to technological failure, the tyranny of distance and loss of local capability. “We live in an uncertain world. We [governments, agencies and the community] can be lulled into a false sense of complacency. What worked in yesterday’s emergency may not necessarily work in today’s or tomorrow’s. How often do we hear the government and community leaders who say, ‘We were unprepared. We did not imagine that this could occur? Technology is part of the answer, but there are risks in becoming too reliant on it,” he says.

Increasingly, there needs to be a change in thinking and culture with respect to “out of scale” disasters and crises, Ferguson believes. “This calls for innovation, imagination, empowerment and collaboration between individuals, teams and governments. In adopting changes to our approach to emergency management, it is important not to lose sight of the fundamentals,” he says.

This is especially true for bushfire management, and he affirms that long-standing and tested principles of emergency management must continually be taught and practised. Examples of such principles include community centric; primacy of life; communication; unity of effort; managing the
risk; shared responsibility; interoperability; collaborative planning; foresight; integrated and co-ordinated response; flexibility of approach; and decentralised structures.

The Special Inquiry into the Waroona fire of January 2016 identified organisational and policy failings that, with or without hindsight, could have been recognised and acted upon sooner, Ferguson says. The Inquiry also highlighted the need for such inquiries to look at the “systems” of emergency management.

“It recognises that any emergency occurs within a system, and those managing and responding also work in a system. Before launching to blame individuals, we should look first to the system and how the system can be improved for the future. A systems approach is a resilience approach,” he says.

The Report of the Special Inquiry calls for a new approach for bushfire management in WA and suggests that, over time, the management of real fire policy in WA has eroded, with a loss of skills and expertise in managing volunteers and community bushfire risk management. “The Special Inquiry also warns of the risk of planning for the ‘next fire’ when we really need to be planning for ‘the next firestorm’,” he says. “In particular, the Special Inquiry recognises the need for greater emphasis to be placed on fuel reduction, building resilient structures that are more able to resist fire, and developing options for bushfire last resort in vulnerable communities.”

Frontline lessons in emergency management
Stuart Ellis is CEO of the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC), the national council for fire and emergency services across Australasia, representing 32 member agencies and a workforce spanning 300,000 volunteers and 20,000 career staff. Through a collaborative approach with members, AFAC assists the emergency services sector to identify and achieve strategic and operational priorities.

As an experienced leader in the emergency management industry, Ellis says organisations are often unprepared for major emergencies or incidents and their business continuity plans inevitably don’t always cover the unexpected or what can’t be identified. “There’s an exposure there where individuals are not using their imagination well enough to think what could happen. ‘We had the knowledge, we had the skills, we may have even had the experience – but we didn’t have the imagination to plan for just how bad an emergency could have been’,” he says.

Many agencies have people who are qualified and well trained, however, whether they’re being exercised well enough is another question. “Because agencies may have well-qualified people they might think that’s enough, but if they’re not exercised then they’re not necessarily able to step in when those emergencies happen,” says Ellis.

He also adds there are a number of trends impacting emergency management, and points to changes in technology and information as one of significance. “We are no longer in control of information,” he says. “In the past, we were of the view that we would keep people informed and let people know what’s happened, but I think in this day and age we’re no longer the controller of the information. It’s coming from a whole range of sources. We need to be very transparent about that. We also need to be very open to receiving information from a whole range of sources, not just from traditionally what we might think is operational information or intelligence or whatever, because it’s coming from social media, or it’s coming from news reports, or talkback radio, whatever it might be,” he says.

Maintaining excellent stakeholder engagement is also an important and growing consideration for emergency management professionals, according to Ellis, who says it is important not to manage emergencies in isolation. “Historically, that is what we have tried to do. I don’t think that is acceptable anymore. There is an expectation that there is going to be very quick community engagement, for example. Also, the political interface is less assured these days. People may not have the same confidence in the political system that they once had, and perhaps it’s not necessarily meeting expectations. There may not be the traditional support that this has brought in the past,” he says.

In bridging emergency management gaps within organisations, Ellis says it is important to adopt common approaches, systems and even vocabulary. “I think if we’re talking emergency management, we want to be talking the same language and have the same understandings. I think that is a really easy pitfall in the process,” he explains.

It is also important for individuals’ emergency management skills and training to be current, he adds. Emergency management is a perishable skill, and this comes back to practising or exercising those skills – “because if you don’t, they’ll lose their currency and they may well lose their confidence as well,” says Ellis.

IFAP’s inaugural Emergency Management – Resilience Conference will be held on 24 November 2016 at Pan Pacific Hotel Perth. For more information visit www.ifap.asn.au/resilience.
Have you ever stopped and wondered what has shaped people such that they espouse certain views or exhibit specific skills and traits? In this book, Andrew Hopkins delivers a fascinating insight into the origins of his beliefs, the drivers of his actions and evolution of his story-telling mastery. This book is not an autobiography in the usual sense. Instead, it is an exploration of personal influences ranging from the sociological theories of Marx, Weber and Lenski and momentous world events such as the Vietnam War and the breakup of the USSR, to quite specific personal trigger events such as a fatality at the Kellogg’s factory in Sydney and the Moura Mine disaster. In explaining how one interprets and reacts to such things, it is inevitable that there must be references to family and friends and personal experiences which add to the richness of the story, but the focus remains on the background to Andrew’s work that so many of us are familiar with and, in particular, on the books.

Discussion of the events in Latin America in the 1970s, a chapter devoted to Marxism and indeed a traditional perception of sociologists in general means there are no surprises when Andrew discusses his political affiliations and campaigning. Indeed, Chapter 2 is “A Left-Leaning World”. However, in true Hopkins style there is no drum-beating in this book. Instead, in what at times feels like an interconnected series of essays, he provides a highly logical construction of the arguments that surface in the conclusions of most of his books. Far from party-political, this book unpacks the theories and illustrates how the sociologist’s lens has been used to focus an understanding of the world of work and organisations. A fascinating example of this emerges in Chapter 4 through a discussion of criminology and the conflicting goals of the so-called correctional system and the prisons themselves. Sparked by teenage experiences of a friend, Andrew’s PhD studies explored, among other things, the overall aim to rehabilitate while at the same time measuring prison performance on the basis of maintaining incarceration and order. Understanding conflicting organisational goals clearly provides a basis for exploring organisational accidents, as described with depressing repetition in the later books.

Personal anecdotes drawn from events while travelling and even paragliding not only illustrate personal reflection and application of ideas but they also offer insight into the author and enrich the story; and this is a story in the same way that all of Andrew’s books are stories. Story telling is a craft, and Andrew has worked hard to perfect it from his grounding as a journalist with *The Age* to his efforts to make complex subjects understandable to all.

As I said, this book is not an autobiography; it is not written to tell people about Andrew Hopkins. The book instead is about health and safety, grounded in theory and illustrated by personal beliefs and experiences through which we happen to learn much about the author.

I sometimes feel that I either read for work or read for pleasure. That artificial distinction most certainly does not apply here, and like his other books, it is a real page-turner. Even without any knowledge of the earlier books, it presents a rich resource of safety concepts, history and more, and will have very broad appeal. I shall certainly read it again, and because it tackles so many key issues from LTIFR to safety culture, to the meaning of so far as reasonably practicable and beyond, I am already referring it to students to generate discussion.

Reviewed by Steve Cowley

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