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Measuring results for tomorrow instead of yesterday

The Australian Institute of Health & Safety believes that all businesses deserve access to an online benchmarking product which is open-source and which can sharpen their focus on good health and safety, writes Patrick Murphy

When we think something is important we talk about it, try to do more of it, and importantly we measure it so that we can generate better numbers that tell us we are improving.

Inbuilt into measuring processes and planning cycles is a feedback loop where what we measure helps design what we do next. In other words, we don’t only measure what we do – we end up doing what we measure. We have to be a little careful about this, because instinctively we know that if we only serve the statistics, the tail may wag the dog. This might not be such a bad thing if we were certain that we’re measuring the right things, but there’s always the risk that we might miss important issues that the statistics aren’t picking up.

What’s this got to do with health and safety? A lot. Companies throughout Australia and their health and safety people are focused day-to-day on their statistics as the key determinants of their jobs, and exactly what they are measuring has a direct effect on the health and safety practices they are undertaking.

Unfortunately, the evidence of recent years tells us we’re not necessarily measuring the right things.

As outlined in the pages of this edition, our profession and Australian industry is now exploring the limitations of health and safety lag indicators (measuring outputs/what happened) and the opportunities presented by lead indicators (measuring inputs/things we do now to prevent injury/illness in the future). This isn’t a new concept, but unfortunately it’s taken far too long to take hold so we must re-double our efforts.

With an increasing focus on lead indicators, we have a real opportunity to develop the kind of measurements that focus businesses on their actions and behaviours now, on things that will build safe and healthy workplaces for the future.

The Institute believes that all Australian businesses – small, medium and large – deserve access to an online benchmarking product which is open-source and which can sharpen their focus on good health and safety, helping them learn to measure lead indicators, and giving them a chance to see how they’re doing compared to other businesses like theirs. Such a system also has the capability to deliver excellent consolidated benchmarking data to government policymakers to assist them in seeing where the gaps in health and safety really are. Such a system need not be expensive, and would deliver incredible value to Australian business.

This is an issue that both of our social partners in health and safety – both unions and employer groups – should be able to get behind and in which our national policymakers Safe Work Australia have a key role to play, as the stewards of the national health and safety strategy 2012–2022 which talks about leadership and culture within Australian business. Many businesses want to do better but aren’t sure how. Such a tool would give them the guidance they need to build a safer and healthier business culture.

“Inbuilt into measuring processes and planning cycles is a feedback loop where what we measure helps design what we do next. In other words, we don’t only measure what we do – we end up doing what we measure”
What gets measured gets managed

Measuring and reporting health and safety outcomes is coming under increasing scrutiny, and organisations need to examine their current approach and think carefully about what other indicators they might adopt to improve OHS reporting and outcomes, writes Craig Donaldson

Craig Donaldson, editor, OHS Professional

Last year OHS Professional ran a feature article on which listed companies have the highest and lowest injury rates. This article was based on citi’s Safety Spotlight: ASX100 Companies & More: Injury & Fatalities Data FY05 to FY17 (where available). The article was interpreted, which analysed the safety performance of 128 top ASX-listed companies. This article generated a good amount of debate, with a number of members writing to the Institute about the article asking why we publish this material, suggesting that the OHS profession needs to move past the use of LTIFR and other lag indicators.

AIHS CEO Dave Clarke subsequently wrote a post on LinkedIn to continue the conversation, and this also generated a good amount of debate. In the research report, citi also expressed a certain frustration with lag indicators in that they are largely applicable in the context of safety laws and that these indicators are all they’ve got to work with (as do other investors/analysts – which is important for boards and executive teams) in most cases. This frustration was recently echoed by the Australian Council of Superannuation Investors (ACSI), which represents 38 Australian and international asset owners and institutional investors. It recently put out a research report which found that there were some glaring gaps in safety reporting by ASX200 listed companies. Its CEO expressed concern about a lack of transparency around reporting workplace deaths and other incidents and said this may hinder the identification of systemic risks – which are not only important for the companies managing them, but for those looking for business intelligence in making informed investment decisions.

The cover story for this edition looks at the issue of OHS measurement and reporting in detail, and we speak with a number of experts about the common challenges facing organisations, the role of leading and lagging indicators and the latest trends in the area. One of the more promising developments is the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) 403, which is the only comprehensive global framework for reporting on OHS. GRI 403 details a number of specific OHS indicators, including eight leading indicators and two lagging indicators, and the good news for local companies is that the standard adopts a similar approach to that taken by Australia’s harmonised WHS laws in talking about a PCBU and a worker that is not defined by outdated employer-employee relationships. For the full article turn to page 18.

Another topical issue of late is industrial manslaughter, and a number of jurisdictions have introduced laws (while others are set to do the same) with significant fines, penalties and even jail time for offenders. The Marie Boland review of the model WHS laws also said there was a need for officers and PCBUs to be held accountable for gross negligence causing death. A key test in determining whether there has been a breach of industrial manslaughter laws will involve an assessment of whether there is a failure to create a “culture of compliance” in respect to safety. Importantly, this is a new legal test that is different to the tests for “reasonably practicable” and “due diligence”, which are the tests that most organisations’ safety management system would currently address. Interestingly, the recent Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry also examined the role of culture and, in particular, the links between organisational culture and misconduct in financial services entities. The findings and recommendations from the Royal Commission’s final report are also largely applicable in the context of safety culture. In particular, authors Katherine Morris and Melissa Carnell say the recommendation for organisations to regularly assess their safety culture behaviours is a useful recommendation in light of the new focus on culture by regulators in the context of industrial manslaughter laws. See the article on page 16.

“ITs CEO expressed concern about a lack of transparency around reporting workplace deaths and other incidents and said this may hinder the identification of systemic risks – which are not only important for the companies managing them, but for investors looking for business intelligence in making informed investment decisions”

On the topic of cultures of safety, one organisation that has been recognised for this is NOJA Power – a Queensland-based company which researches, develops, manufactures and supplies low-, medium- and high-voltage switchgear for companies around the world. Its award-winning approach to health, safety and wellbeing is led from the top and it takes a holistic approach to both the prevention of fatalities and incidents, as well as the proactive promotion of a healthy and safe approach to work. “Safety is at the forefront of the company’s thinking in everything we do, and it is part of the company’s core culture,” explains NOJA Power group MD, Neil O’Sullivan, who says this approach “automatically has our staff thinking safety. This not only includes the high-level safety focus we have in all of our operations, but also in the research and development associated with products we produce.” As a result, there has been a 68 per cent reduction in injuries, 73 per cent reduction in lost-time injuries, and 50 per cent reduction in sick leave over the past six-oct years. Importantly, 97.2 per cent of its employees are satisfied with the safe and healthy working environment of the company. Turn to page 30 for the full article.
Class action being prepared in response to silicosis cases

Law firm Slater and Gordon is preparing a national class action against the manufacturers of popular kitchen stone benchtops after the products led to thousands of stonemasons contracting silicosis. Slater and Gordon said it had experienced a surge in the number of workers approaching the firm after being involved in the manufacture of artificial stone benchtops, and who have been affected by silicosis – an incurable lung disease caused by inhaling hazardous silica dust found in stone benchtop materials. Even seemingly quite brief exposures to silica can involve significant levels of exposure to silica dust, and the firm said stonemasons cutting and installing the engineered stone products without proper equipment will inhale the dangerous dust particles. Silica has been proven to cause lung cancer, scleroderma and other autoimmune diseases, however, the benchtops do not present a hazardous risk to the general public once they have been installed. Slater and Gordon practice group leader Margaret Kent said major stone benchtop suppliers such as Caesarstone, Quantum Quartz and Smartstone did not adequately communicate the severe safety risks in relation to their products, nor did they adequately convey the necessary safety precautions around its handling.

WHO classifies burnout an “occupational phenomenon”

The World Health Organization (WHO) has classified burnout as “an occupational phenomenon” in its 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), a handbook which provides medical providers with guidelines for making a diagnosis. According to the WHO, burnout is not a medical condition or illness, but it is a “factor influencing health status or contact with health services” – which means that people might reach out to doctors or other health professionals because of issues relating to it. Burnout is defined by WHO as “a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed” and is characterised by three dimensions: feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativity or cynicism related to one’s job; and reduced professional efficacy. While these symptoms may also be visible in non-work-related situations (like feeling overwhelmed with housework and family obligations, for example), WHO said that this diagnosis should only be used in an occupational context. Health professionals should also first rule out mood and anxiety disorders before making this diagnosis, according to WHO, which is about to embark on the development of evidence-based guidelines on mental wellbeing in the workplace.

Embedding human-centred design into your organisation

Most organisations take a random approach when it comes to commitment around projects intended to improve work design, according to Sara Pazell, managing director of consulting firm Viva Health at Work. While such activities are often strongly anchored in physical ergonomics, they are rarely generated by a focus on the aspects of cognitive or organisational ergonomics – although these areas may overlap, said Pazell. Examples of this overlap include a participatory ergonomics project for manual task risk management, review of new capital equipment for procurement, or environmental work design for a fit-out. On rare occasion, Pazell said the work design may focus on something related to cognitive ergonomics and systems changes like training and competency methods in the business. “These projects tend to always have some measure of success in areas of improved health opportunities, productivity and efficiency, or risk reduction, so this is good news,” said Pazell, who spoke on the topic in a recent AIHS webinar. “However, my research, informed by case study, program review, and questionnaire and interview with experienced practitioners and managers, indicated that if projects were part of an ongoing program within a resilient or enterprising organisation, the extent of project success was six times greater, on average.”

Queensland starts first dust-related disease register

The Queensland Government recently changed the Public Health Act 2005 and Public Health Regulation 2018 so that pneumoconiosis, silicosis and other occupational dust diseases will be recorded on the Queensland Health Notifiable Dust Lung Disease Register. “We are now able to monitor dust lung disease like silicosis and pneumoconiosis and identify any emerging workplace health issues,” said Queensland Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy Dr Anthony Lynham, who explained that the register will capture incidences of other dust lung diseases from working environments where workers are exposed to inorganic dust. Minister for Industrial Relations Grace Grace said the government has worked with industry, unions and the medical profession, and has made extensive reforms to help prevent and identify new dust lung disease, including coal worker pneumoconiosis (CWP), and to care for affected workers and their families. This includes the 2017 changes to the Workers’ Compensation and Rehabilitation Act that gave effect to the recommendations of the CWP Parliamentary Select Committee. Minister Grace said the Queensland Health Notifiable Dust Lung Disease Register provides a further layer of protection for workers and will provide government with important data on work-related occupational lung disease.
Serious injuries double in offshore petroleum industry

There were eight serious injuries reported in 2018 in Australia’s offshore petroleum industry – an increase from four in 2017, according to National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA). Serious injuries reported in 2018 included broken bones and torn or ruptured tendons, and these types of injuries have serious impact on the people involved and should be very concerning to facility operators, said Stuart Smith, CEO of NOPSEMA in its National Offshore Performance Report. He said that operators must investigate the causes of all injuries and implement all necessary improvements to prevent their reoccurrence. “While NOPSEMA expects the day-to-day safety of the workforce to be at the forefront of all operations, a crucial aspect of offshore operations is recognising the importance of preventing the potential catastrophic consequences of a major accident event. Preventing major accident events (MAE) is essential to protecting the safety of people at facilities and the environment,” he said. The key focus when reviewing the causes of an event should be determining whether it was a precursor to a major accident event, and Smith said experience has shown that incidents resulting in personal or environmental impact often do not present risk of a major accident event.

Local councils phasing out glyphosate over health concerns and legal risks

Local councils around Australia are banning the use of glyphosate, phasing it out or conducting reviews of its use because of health and safety concerns about workers who have suffered extensive exposure to the herbicide which has been linked to non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. Councils which have banned glyphosate range from Cook Shire Council in far north Queensland, through to Fairfield City Council and Georges River Council in NSW, down to Moyne Shire and Warrnambool City Council in Victoria. The Victorian Government has also begun a six-week review into glyphosate use, and many other councils including Sydney’s Willoughby, Ku-ring-gai, Sutherland Shire and Waverley Councils are also conducting their own reviews. The bans and reviews come after chemical giant Monsanto was ordered to pay more than $300 million to a dying man in California who used Roundup, which contains glyphosate, during his job as a school groundsman. The first legal action has also been launched in Australia, with 54-year-old Melbourne gardener Michael Ogilivio looking to take Monsanto to the Supreme Court over claims it ignored the alleged carcinogenic impacts of Roundup. Sydney firm LHD lawyers is also considering a class action against Bayer (which owns Monsanto) and personal injury firm Maurice Blackburn is evaluating individual cases after it has fielded hundreds of inquiries mostly over exposure to glyphosate in the workplace.

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SEPTEMBER 2019 | OHS PROFESSIONAL
Reflections on an academic life well lived

University of Queensland Emeritus Professor Mike Capra was recently presented with the Harold Greenwood Thomas Award for his outstanding contribution to the aims of the Institute. OHS Professional speaks with Professor Capra about developments in OHS, his achievements, and what OHS practitioners can do to improve professional standards.

There have been a number of key developments in the science of safety in recent times, according to Emeritus Professor Mike Capra. He explains that most of his career in OHS has been more focused on health than safety – though both are linked, “so my comments are largely in relation to health but of course are applicable to safety,” he says.

One of the major advances in both health and safety in relation to the workplace has been the professionalisation of the field, in Australia and in much of the developed world, he explains. This professionalisation has been driven on several fronts, including the development of undergraduate and postgraduate OHS programs in Australian universities, and most significantly, by the development of the OHS Body of Knowledge (BOK) within Australia. “Health and safety professionals are now involved in the creation of knowledge and evidence as well as practice that leads to providing healthier and safer workplaces and working conditions,” he says.

In terms of specific developments, Capra says the realisation that workplace exposures to substances can have long-term effects that develop, in some cases, many years after the exposure, is a real advance. “A classic example is the asbestos-related diseases that cause high annual death rates from previous workplace exposures compared to the death rates attributable to traumatic workplace incidents. Both death rates are quite unacceptable, but our increasing understanding of cause and effect will see substantial reductions in both,” he says.

An epidemiological study published in the journal BMJ in 2012 estimated that some 8000 cancer deaths in 2005 were work-related, and as more reliable evidence becomes available in relation to both the short-term and long-term effects of workplace exposures to substances and forms of energy, he says more effective preventative measures are being developed.

Common OHS knowledge-practice gaps

Universities are required to generate new knowledge, and as a result can be “ahead” of practice at times, says Capra. “Some say it’s up to 15 years to translate knowledge to practice,” he says.

“I don’t see the role of universities is to cover every aspect of particular industries within their teaching programs, but rather to provide graduates with the capabilities and problem-solving skills to address specific issues seen or unseen on the basis of their university education. Universities should be providing their students with frameworks within a multidisciplinary approach to OHS upon which decisions can be made to protect the health and safety of workers in a variety of situations.”

“Casualisation of work and underemployment will produce both social issues and most likely a range of mental health issues for increasing sectors of the Australian workforce”

In the past, Capra notes that criticisms have been levelled at university-based OHS education in that it does not provide sufficient industry engagement during the passage of students through OHS programs. “There is some validity to this argument, however, many OHS programs now include industry-based projects, and many of the postgraduate entry programs require industry experience either before or during the program,” he says.

Research-based learnings and observations

Capra has supervised 17 PhDs over the course of his professional career, and he says these PhD programs (which he often supervised with other colleagues) have spanned a range of areas including basic science, toxicology, environmental and occupational health and policy development. “All have produced notable and interesting findings, however, I have chosen just a few studies to highlight some of the key approaches and results,” he says.

For example, a study into the planning of outdoor music festivals including the Glastonbury festival highlighted that capacity-building for volunteer staff was an important aspect of providing safety for both staff and patrons. Another study of the exposure of farmers to organophosphate insecticides indicated that urinary metabolites of the insecticides could be used as a more accurate indicator of exposure than the current use of a blood-based test. The study also noted that the urinary metabolites test was much more acceptable to farmers than the blood-based test.

In another study of carpal tunnel syndrome in meat workers, he says this indicated a high prevalence of the syndrome that was also related to the particular tasks engaged in by the workers. An additional two doctoral theses completed by staff members at the Hanoi School of Public Health in Vietnam researched aspects of the exposure of workers and community members to cigarette smoke, and means of reducing such exposure included...
development of institutional policy on workplace exposure and the ability of children to influence a reduction in in-home smoking by their fathers. Another study assessed mercury exposure between groups of workers in Korea and Queensland and examined the differences between prescriptive and performance-based legislation, Capra recalls.

The OHS Body of Knowledge
The OHS BOK website (www.ohsbok.org.au) explains that the BOK is the collective knowledge that should be shared by generalist OHS professionals to provide a sound basis for understanding the causation and control of work-related fatality, injury, disease and ill-health (FIDI). This knowledge can be described in terms of its key concepts and language, its core theories and related empirical evidence, and the application of these to facilitate a safe and healthy workplace. The OHS BOK has been developed for the Australian OHS context but has international application.

“My belief is that it goes much further than this. It has had a profound influence on the practice and professionalisation of OHS within Australia and internationally,” says Capra, who explains that in the Australian context, it has established a sound theoretical basis for the profession. The structure of the OHS BOK was established by a group of very committed individuals with strong links to OHS, and he says he was fortunate to be one of these individuals.

Once the structure had been established, individual chapters were written by experts in each of the fields and then peer reviewed. In addition to providing very strong and detailed guidelines for OHS practitioners and professionals, he says the BOK has provided a foundation for the accreditation of university-based OHS entry programs at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Shortly after the release of the BOK, the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board (AOHSEAB) was established. “After operating for several years, I believe that now every university-based OHS program in Australia has received accreditation. This accreditation has ensured an articulated standard while allowing individual emphases within each of the OHS programs. It has ensured that the continuation of the OHS profession now has a stable and unifying base,” says Capra, who adds that many of the programs have now passed through a second phase of accreditation which will be reviewed on a regular basis.

Evolving the OHS Body of Knowledge
Capra affirms that the OHS BOK was never intended to be static. Each of the chapters are subjected to regular review, and a management group for the ongoing BOK has been developed, and he says this group will continue to upgrade, modify and develop the BOK into the future, as the basis for both OHS practice and OHS education. “I believe there will be many challenges in the ongoing development of the Body of Knowledge as new challenges arise within Australian workplaces. With changing patterns of work in Australia, I think new areas of workplace stress such as casualisation of work and underemployment will produce both social issues and most likely a range of mental health issues for increasing sectors of the Australian workforce. Such changes and their management will need to be incorporated in the OHS Body of Knowledge,” he says.

Other challenges in the Australian context will include new methods of surveillance, for example, the use of drones in remote areas in certain industries such as mining and possibly also the genetic profiling of workers in terms of susceptibility to various agents within workplaces. Both these issues carry very demanding ethical reviews, which Capra says will be a challenge for the BOK. “I also believe that, as a developed country, we are likely to increase the export of our more environmentally and occupationally challenging industries to emerging economies; as such, I think this issue will need careful consideration and advice within the Body of Knowledge,” he says.

Notable achievements and milestones
On reflecting on his professional career history and achievements and milestones he is most proud of, Capra says that having had the opportunity to have worked with so many dedicated and enthusiastic people in developing their research – and achieving the award of their doctorates – has been one of his most pleasant achievements. “I have also had the privilege of being able to work with many people in less-developed countries to improve both environmental and occupational health in their countries,” he says.

The Harold Greenwood Thomas Award
Harold Greenwood Thomas is an important founder of the Australian Institute of Health & Safety and has had a major influence on professional occupational health and safety in Australia. The rarely awarded honour and medal is for an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the aims of the Institute and OHS.

University of Queensland Emeritus Professor Mike Capra has contributed to the science of safety through developing the OHS Body of Knowledge as an open resource and the basis of tertiary program accreditation and professional OHS Certification within Australia. He chaired the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board from 2011-2018. He was also the architect of The University of Queensland’s OHS undergraduate and masters programs and the graduate diploma at QUT, and supervised 17 successful PhDs. Internationally, he has led key OHS projects and research in developing countries like Vietnam, Mozambique, Fiji, Malaysia and Samoa. His own research includes such diverse areas as organophosphate pesticide exposure, smoking, manual handling and outdoor music festivals.
How young safety professionals can get ahead

Young Safety Professionals is a network of young and new safety professionals, supporting and helping young and new safety professionals to be successful in their chosen profession, writes Brad Crockett

There are a number of important considerations for younger health and safety practitioners when it comes to professional development and progressing their careers. There is no doubt that entry into the profession is fundamentally changing, and whereas once a worker may have entered almost exclusively from a trade or similar skilled worker route, we find now that people are entering not only as a skilled worker, but also as a university undergraduate with, in some cases, an academic foundation that may not actually be in OHS or WHS but in behavioural science, business, HR or engineering.

Emma Cunningham, our YSP co-convener for NSW, sees this change however as overwhelmingly positive. She sees it as bringing about change to the practice of WHS through diversity of thought and moving away from an approach based only in work experience skills, with younger practitioners driving and leading change through challenging strongly held beliefs and practices that are not backed by evidence-based research. The counter is – and this is where I believe the value of professional development for young and new health and safety professionals lies – that the ability to engage with leaders and workers, have meaningful conversations and influence their decisions, needs to come from an approach not only based in a sound understanding of risk management, but also in a detailed understanding of the work actually being undertaken. The route followed to enter the profession will determine what form the professional development should take; nevertheless, this development is incredibly important and will be a key influencer of the career trajectory for the young or new safety professional.

The changing practice of WHS
Twenty-five years ago, the safety practitioner was most likely called a safety officer and was tasked with ensuring worker compliance with written procedures with the potential for some form of sanction to be applied when non-compliance was identified. Now, your typical WHS adviser is likely to be involved in a much broader range of activities including but not limited to ensuring the safety of work, safety work, worker hygiene, worker training, health and wellbeing, first aid, modern slavery, culture and many, many others. The implications for the profession in general are clear and perhaps more pronounced for the young or new safety professional as they respond to the challenges of the profession as practised, as opposed to the profession they may have imagined. The skillset demanded and the experience profile expected will continue to broaden; the importance of an approach to professional practice rooted in adaptability, flexibility and importantly, lifelong learning will be key for professional success.

Challenges facing younger professionals
Ms Cunningham says that in her experience, common challenges faced by younger professionals are most often related to a conflict between the workplace environment and their own personal values. The issue here for her, based on her conversations with other YSPs and their workplace experiences, is the disconnect between the rhetoric used by organisations to proclaim the priority and importance of safety, and the reality of site or project pressure to meet production or work deadlines can be very difficult to reconcile, particularly at a time when they are still establishing themselves within the profession. Challenging the status quo or raising ethical concerns can be seen by others as indicating the YSP is unreliable, difficult or lacking experience, which may lead to negative career outcomes. Ms Cunningham’s perspective is simple – all workers deserve ethical leadership, and we can’t claim to be looking out for the health and safety of workers while putting people in the position where they have to choose whether they want to get ahead in their career or maintain their integrity.

The YSP network not only provides an opportunity for this conundrum to be socialised, but it also provides a forum in which professional development opportunities can be discussed with like-minded people, different influencing strategies developed and, importantly, peer support of and affirmation for their continued ethical approach to the practice of WHS, provided.

The value of YSP
Simply put, YSP is a network of young and new safety professionals, supporting and helping young and new safety professionals to be successful in their chosen profession. The importance of this cannot be underrated. Ms Cunningham reflects that if you were to ask a young safety practitioner who they feel has been their biggest supporter or whom they look to for guidance, it’s likely to be a peer, someone from the YSP network. Very few young safety practitioners cite someone older as being a supporter or someone they look to for guidance. So until we as a profession can address this type of feedback from our newer entrants, the role and potential for YSP is clear.

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Many companies are at risk when it comes to first aid preparedness, according to managing director of Australian First Aid, John Haines, who explains that first aid training is a valuable opportunity that many companies are missing out on. Many employers have an OHS policy and safety risk management processes in place with at least a minimum level of first aid training, but he says there are many more businesses who regard themselves as low risk that don’t – particularly small- to medium-sized businesses.

“It’s kind of like being uninsured or underinsured,” he says. “It doesn’t matter while there is no incident, but the lack of it causes enormous grief when an incident does occur. First aid training should be an essential part of any business risk management strategy, but it is often not seen as urgent or an immediate priority to address. Many businesses never get around to closing the gaps that they know are there.”

Furthermore, Haines says there are emerging workplace health risks that tend to be more difficult to identify using the traditional compliance approach to OHS. “First aid training can be a powerful emergency response tool for these emerging issues,” he says.

**Common first aid gaps**

One of the most common challenges for employers when it comes to first aid is keeping abreast of emerging health risks, the hidden costs to business of such risks, and how to be effectively prepared for issues outside of the traditional physical and environment safety concerns, Haines adds.

Many employers regard first aid training as a compliance issue and a cost to be avoided, rather than equipping a critical mass within their team to be ready to respond to an unexpected health emergency.”

**Common health issues such as diabetes, stroke, heart attack and workplace stress are now being added to the long list of workplace safety risks that need to be identified and prepared for.**

**Addressing first aid challenges**

Safe Work Australia provides a Model Code of Practice for first aid in the workplace, which requires employers to customise a response that is relevant to the risks in their own workplace (www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/model-code-practice-first-aid-workplace).

In any workplace incident, Haines explains that there must be a first responder. “If we wait for the ambulance to arrive, it could be too late for someone suffering something like sudden cardiac arrest,” he says.

“Or it could mean that an injury, or indeed a stress-related health issue that flares up onsite and doesn’t get the earliest possible response on the scene, results in a delayed return to work – or significantly reduced productivity for that person for a long time.” There could also be other unforeseen consequences relating to the emotional impact on the rest of the team, and the ripple effect throughout the individual’s life, he adds.

“Best practice first aid in the workplace is about preparing a team of first responders, who can act quickly, and with the right response,” says Haines, who explains that training and equipment are the two key elements to enable best practice. However, due to a lack of understanding of all the risks, he says employers could be exposed in those areas where there are gaps.

**First aid risks and benefits**

“The statistics speak for themselves, yet many of the costs to business remain hidden,” says Haines. The consequences of first aid unpreparedness are not only compliance related, but also business-performance related, says Haines, who cites a number of related statistics:

- Since 2010, the rate of absenteeism across the country has risen by 7 per cent, while as much as 5 per cent of the Australian workforce calls in sick on any given day.
An unexpected employee absence costs a business around $578 per employee per absent day, with the annual cost of absenteeism to the Australian economy an estimated $44 billion dollars per year (AIG Absenteeism & Presenteeism Survey Report 2015).

Australian workers are losing more than three days each year because of workplace stress.

Depression causes one in five people to work at 40 per cent capacity.

Obesity results in an average work impairment of around 14 per cent.

At least 90 per cent of everyone who suffers a Sudden Cardiac Arrest outside of hospital dies – and we lose more than 20,000 Australians this way every year.

According to research, managers and professionals had the highest unit cost for work-related injuries or illnesses of $155,200 and $143,400, respectively, in 2012-13.

Organisations that prioritise workplace health programs have also reported positive business outcomes, including increased employee retention and productivity, and other benefits such as improved employee engagement and reduced workers’ compensation costs, and reduced absenteeism and sick leave, says Haines (citing The Heart Foundation, Cancer Council NSW and PANORG University of Sydney study, 2016).

**Steps for OHS professionals**

OHS professionals can take steps to improve business outcomes, as well as compliance and safety risk issues.

1. **Awareness**

   Awareness is power when it comes to taking proactive steps to minimise the risks. OHS professionals can expand their own awareness of the hidden risks and costs to business of unidentified stress and health-related issues among the workforce. Workplace health awareness programs are an emerging area of expertise that help equip employees to more effectively self-manage.

   Australian First Aid is a Gold Member of the Australian Institute of Health & Safety. Its founder and managing director, John Haines, is a former MICA flight paramedic, deputy chairperson of the Australian Resuscitation Council (NSW Branch), and president of the Australian Emergency Care Providers (AECP). He launched Australian First Aid in 1988 as the first privately owned RTO, providing first aid training to business and the community. APL Healthcare was later launched in 2014 to provide products and services to the health and medical professional sector. Note: Australian First Aid and APL Healthcare will rebrand as LivCor from 1 October 2019.

2. **Identification**

   OHS professionals are now able to assist their employers to improve business outcomes, as well as compliance and traditional safety risk identification, by expanding the scope to include risks to productivity and absenteeism. These include stress and some of the other most common health-related issues such as diabetes, stroke and heart attack, as examples.

3. **Education**

   - First aid training empowers your people to become effective and confident first responders in the case of not only an injury, but also a stress-related or other health issue being experienced by a customer or a fellow team member.
   - Early treatment increases recovery time and increases the chances of a speedy return to work.
   - It is also worth considering health awareness training for staff members to help them self-manage these risks and improve their own productivity.
Work health and safety policy for psychosocial hazards and risks

While policy development and psychosocial risks regulation present a complex and wicked problem, improvements to WHS policy and practice could benefit both the Australian and international workforce, writes Dr Rachael Potter

Work-related psychological health and the regulation of psychosocial hazards and risks represents a pervasive challenge in the modern world of work. In fact, research by Beyond Blue has found that only 52 per cent of Australians consider their workplace as being mentally healthy. As well, Safe Work Australia states that psychological injury compensation claims are now estimated to cost $543 million per year.

Work health and safety (WHS) policies represent the national or jurisdictional standard for work-related psychological health. However, there has been barely any Australian research evaluating the effectiveness of WHS policy for the regulation of psychosocial issues.

In response to this gap, I spent my PhD investigating national and jurisdictional Australian WHS policy relevant to psychosocial hazards and risks and work-related psychological health. My research concentrated on evaluating the policy context in terms of the availability of policy instruments, the policy content itself, and also how the policy is used for regulation. Together with colleagues, I published four academic studies reflecting a thorough examination of the topic. Studies involved an:

- evaluation of the 2012 WHS policy harmonisation, using national longitudinal data
- analytical review and gap analysis of the policy context and content relevant to psychosocial hazards and psychological health.
- international review of organisational psychosocial risk management tools
- interview-based investigation with key WHS informants involved in policy development, program implementation, industry advice or education and psychosocial risk inspection.

The findings from my research enhance knowledge surrounding the Australian WHS regulatory policy framework for psychosocial issues. My findings include conceptual implications, policy recommendations and practical innovations that could improve national health.

Wicked problems
My research validates that both WHS policy development and psychosocial risk regulation should be conceptualised as wicked problems. Wicked problems are complex, lack clear solutions and attract divergent viewpoints from different stakeholders. Wicked problems require a high level of consideration, needing the involvement of various parties to garner a broader perspective and generate potential resolutions or strategies.

While there is no quick fix for wicked problems, there are several basic strategies that should be encouraged. It is critical that – from a policy perspective – discussion of psychosocial risk regulation should engage as many stakeholders as possible, such as inspectors, unions and persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU).

From this, a collective learning culture should be formed based on collaborative discussions of strategies. Attention should be paid to any specific or prominent clashes in perspectives that exist between stakeholder groups. These clashes should be re-framed as positive catalysts for conversation and action within WHS.

The power of perceptions and blind spots
Stakeholder perceptions are paramount in policy development and regulation. Attitudes and perceptions of psychosocial risk regulation, and the role of policy, are moulded through individuals’ roles or positions. For instance, those employed within a managerial position often perceive education programs to be most effective in creating change and are therefore less interested in changes to the policy. Conversely, those individuals who rely on the policy, such as inspectors, perceive value in increasing the specificity of content for psychosocial issues. My research showed that WHS personnel sometimes have blind spots towards others’ roles, lacking awareness of the obstacles or even knowledge that these persons have. Poor insight into others’ positions is likely to hinder collaborative efforts in improving national psychological health.

Practical action can be taken to tackle blind spots. National forums (online or in person) could be held for all persons involved in WHS, so that each interest group becomes active in conversation around these different experiences. Through embracing and discussing diverse perceptions, knowledge can be harnessed and shared among groups. In fact, certain groups may have a valuable perspective, expertise or recommendations regarding psychosocial risk regulation or policy development that are unknown to others – or even to other jurisdictions. It is only through asking questions and engaging in broader discussions that people discover new information. Encouraging collaborative discourse will challenge blind spots and lead to greater progress.

Therefore, those in WHS positions should be encouraged to be introspective and aware of other groups’ or individuals’ perspectives and role constraints. Most positive action occurs when there is a united effort or strong shared vision. Also, policy-making processes must be transparent and enable equal say by all relevant parties. Therefore, I recommend a stronger inclusion of WHS inspectors’ perceptions in future policy-making processes.

A more consistent policy context
Despite some positive progress, my research found great inconsistencies exist between each jurisdiction’s availability of policy instruments. Certain jurisdictions are much
more advanced in this area than others. However, work-related psychological health is a national concern and all Australian workers – regardless of their region – should be protected from psychological harm to the same degree. Ideally, it would be beneficial for all Australian jurisdictions to have a robust and harmonised policy context for psychosocial issues, including the presence of Codes of Practice, guidance material and tools.

All Australian jurisdictions should be encouraged to develop, adopt or update pre-existing older policy instruments. Policy instruments should be relevant and reflect new and emerging psychosocial hazards or psychosocial issues, such as the use of technology at work. To further overcome the inconsistent policy context, jurisdictions more advanced in this area could disseminate their guidance material and/or other practical resources to other jurisdictions.

I found that there needs to be greater development and sharing of practical psychosocial risk management tools to improve the Australian policy context. While international tools are helpful, it would be better if practical tools were tailored to the Australian cultural and policy environment. Tools should also be evidence-based and scientifically evaluated to best assist organisations in complying with their legal duties. To ensure clarity, policy-makers and regulators must be active in providing consistent material across Australia, so that there is a reliable source of context-specific information.

**Updating policy content**

The visibility of psychosocial terminology needs to be increased in Australian WHS policy. While the current Australian WHS laws do cover psychosocial hazards and risks through the obligation to protect psychological health, poor inclusion of relevant terms in legislative policy instruments hinders policy implementation. The lack of visibility and clarity of terminology makes it more difficult for WHS regulators to apply the legislation and for PCBUs to interpret the legislation regarding psychosocial hazards and risks. Poor legislative emphasis on psychosocial issues negatively impacts the process of inspecting and reduces action undertaken by organisations. Without progressing policy content on psychosocial issues, Australian policy instruments will lag behind rapid developments in the world of work that continue to be characterised by psychosocial hazards and risks.

The most effective way to improve policy content is to include psychosocial hazards in the WHS Regulations. At present, this layer of the WHS regulatory policy framework is silent on any language relevant to psychosocial issues or psychological health. There is a disproportionate focus on physical hazards that indirectly sends a message to inspectors and PCBUs that psychosocial hazards and risks are of lesser regulatory importance. As well, a person referring to the WHS Regulations would need to know that the preceding WHS Act defines health as including psychological health and that principles in the WHS Regulations apply equally to psychosocial hazards and risk factors. Increasing the visibility of terms in this policy instrument would better inform inspectors, PCBUs and workers that the current legislative risk management provisions and models need to be applied to psychosocial hazards and risks.

**Improving policy translation and regulation**

There are practical issues that must be addressed to ensure effective translation of the policy principles. If not addressed, these practical factors could hinder any positive effects of increased policy visibility.

The first issue includes the low levels of resources provided to WHS regulators. In particular, the limited numbers of specialised psychosocial risk inspectors is a concern. Greater numbers of inspectors (including generalist inspectors) need to be trained to develop the skills, attitudes and confidence required for regulating psychosocial risks. Specialised psychosocial risk inspectors are limited to specific jurisdictions in Eastern Australia; and in some regions, I found that numbers of psychosocial risk inspectors had been reduced over time. In comparison, other jurisdictions involved in this research had no specialised teams and reflected much lesser activity on work-related psychological health. Even in those jurisdictions with the specialised psychosocial risk inspectors, without greater investments in inspector staffing numbers, the regulation of psychosocial risks could be further compromised. While not all policy issues can be amended at once, increasing regulator capacity could be a first point of constructive change.

Another issue is the lack of certainty and consistency regarding the application of general duty provisions in the WHS Act in practice. Jurisdictions and/or persons have varying knowledge as to how to more effectively apply the general duties. Cultivating a shared skill base and a shared perception will ensure better application of the general duties. There needs to be greater national dialogue around these issues, and an increased focus on inspector training and education.

“**My research validates that both WHS policy development and psychosocial risk regulation should be conceptualised as wicked problems**”

A more consistent understanding of the WHS general duty provisions will help WHS regulators communicate a clearer message to workplaces about their legal obligations. For instance, under the provision “due diligence”, all PCBUs should be well-informed about psychosocial issues and their implications and then act to prevent harm. Also, it is essential that PCBUs put risk controls in place for psychosocial hazards. Based on evidence of work-related injury and illness, it is apparent that these legal obligations need to be translated more clearly into organisational practice. Furthermore, the legal requirement to manage psychosocial risks should not be confused with health promotion. Australian workplaces must be aware of their legal obligations and exercise due diligence, meaning that they are informed and knowledgeable about psychosocial risk management. There must be a clear message from WHS regulators and the broader government and community about the need to design work in a safe and healthy way. It is important that the focus should not turn to secondary (e.g. mindfulness or resilience training) or tertiary intervention (e.g. counselling once harm has ensued) approaches to replace legal responsibilities of good and safe work design and risk management.

In sum, while policy development and psychosocial risks regulation present a complex and wicked problem, characterised by divergent perspectives, there are tangible steps that can be taken to make improvements. ■

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Industrial manslaughter: do you have a culture of compliance?

In order to be prepared for regulatory investigations for industrial manslaughter offences, organisations should have a plan in place for how they will satisfy the new legal test of a culture of compliance, write Katherine Morris and Melissa Carnell

The recent trend towards introducing industrial manslaughter laws in jurisdictions in Australia significantly increases and changes the nature of the legal risk, and the satisfaction of legal duties, arising from a fatal workplace incident.

It has recently been articulated that determining a breach of the industrial manslaughter laws will involve an assessment of whether there is a failure by an organisation or individual to create a “culture of compliance” in respect to safety. This negligence test is a new legal test that is different to the tests for “reasonably practicable” and “due diligence”, which are the tests that most organisations’ safety management system would currently address.

Status of industrial manslaughter laws
Currently, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) have implemented industrial manslaughter laws. In the ACT, the offence forms part of the ACT’s general criminal law legislation and applies to negligent conduct causing death. It carries a maximum penalty of 20 years’ imprisonment and/or $320,000 for senior officers and $10 million for employers. In Queensland, a new offence has been inserted into the Queensland WHS Act which provides for an offence of gross negligence causing death, and attracts maximum penalties of 20 years’ imprisonment for senior officers and $10 million for body corporates.

The Victorian government has also promised to introduce an industrial manslaughter offence with employers potentially facing up to $16 million fines and individuals up to 20 years’ jail. Consultation in relation to the proposed offence is currently underway, with a new implementation taskforce created to consult on the laws. The Northern Territory has also recently announced plans to introduce industrial manslaughter laws within a year (with a life imprisonment maximum penalty for officers) after the offence was recommended by an independent review of work health and safety in the Northern Territory.

At a national level there has also been two national reviews that have recommended the introduction of an industrial manslaughter offence across Australia, being the Senate Inquiry into Industrial Deaths (conducted in 2018) and the Marie Boland review of the model WHS laws (completed in early 2019). The offence recommended by the Marie Boland review will address gross negligence causing death and apply to officers and Persons Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBUs).

Industrial manslaughter laws
The industrial manslaughter offence usually applies where there has been negligent, or grossly negligent, conduct causing death. By drafting the offence as an outcome-based offence (i.e. it is triggered by a specific event, a workplace death), legislators seem to have moved away from the existing approach for safety law offences, which are mostly limited to providing for risk-based offences in relation to conduct that exposes a person to a risk of death or serious injury or illness, rather than for a specific outcome (a workplace death).

In terms of understanding the nature of the offence, there has been somewhat limited guidance by legislators and regulators regarding interpretation of the concepts of “negligence” and “gross negligence”, in that legislators and regulators have not articulated what the relevant standard of care is for an organisation or officer to meet, or provided guidance on what conduct will amount to “negligence” or “gross negligence”. This is in contrast to the concepts of “reasonably practicable” and “due diligence”, which are the relevant legal concepts for determining a breach of the general safety law obligations by organisations and officers. The legislation contains specific and detailed guidance for what these concepts mean, and there is also guidance provided in relation to these concepts in secondary materials published by regulators. This makes it easier for organisations to know exactly what it is they have to do to comply with their general safety duties.

We can anticipate that, in determining a breach of industrial manslaughter laws, safety culture will be a factor that is assessed as part of that process, given that evidence of an individual’s fault will not be necessary to make out the offence – rather, corporate criminal liability will arise “where an organisation’s culture, or unwritten rules, policies, work practices or conduct implicitly authorise non-compliance or fail to create a culture of compliance, and a death results from this negligent conduct.”

This appears to be a new legal test that is different to the tests for “reasonably practicable” and “due diligence”, which are the tests that most organisations’ safety management system would currently address.

Regulators and a “culture of compliance”
Under industrial manslaughter laws, we can expect to see regulatory investigations in relation to possible offences of industrial manslaughter targeting issues of culture and whether or not there has been a failure to achieve a “culture of compliance”.

Regulators have not yet given guidance on what will constitute a failure to create “a culture of compliance”, and although we may see more guidance on this topic in the future, it is also a concept that, from a legal point of view, is somewhat uncertain and difficult to define.

Because of this, the key way we expect that regulators will assess this issue is by directly questioning witnesses about the safety culture of their workplace.
Approaches to culture outside of safety law

Safety law is not the only area where culture has been garnering attention recently. The recent Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry (Banking Royal Commission) also examined the role of culture and, in particular, the links between organisational culture and misconduct in financial services entities. Kenneth Hayne’s Final Report, released in February 2019 (Final Report), has an entire section dedicated to culture and includes recommendations in respect to culture for financial services entities, and the supervision of culture within those entities by the financial services regulator, APRA.

In the discussion of culture in the Final Report, there is reference to the fact that the term “culture” can provoke “a torrent of clichés” and “serious debate about definition”. The Final Report also acknowledges that, because culture is about behaviours, culture cannot be prescribed or legislated but rather needs to arise from, and be embedded within, an organisation. Importantly, the Final Report states that it is “evident that culture can drive or discourage misconduct”.

The Final Report went on to say that, while culture cannot be prescribed or legislated, it can be assessed, and must be assessed by financial services entities. The Final Report recommended that all financial services entities should, as often as reasonably possible, take proper steps to assess their culture, identify any problems with that culture, deal with those problems and determine whether the changes it has made have been effective.

From the perspective of regulation and supervision of culture, the Final Report recommended that APRA should build a supervisory program focused on building culture that will mitigate the risk of misconduct.

While the findings and recommendations of the Final Report apply in respect to the overall culture of entities in the financial sector, the findings and recommendations are also largely applicable in the context of safety culture. In particular, the recommendation for organisations to regularly assess their safety culture behaviours is a useful recommendation in light of the new focus on culture by regulators in the context of industrial manslaughter laws.

What do organisations need to do to demonstrate a “culture of compliance”?

It is prudent for an organisation to directly address (in written form) how it will demonstrate that it has a “culture of compliance” in relation to its safety-related legal duties. The plan should address the types of behaviours/actions that demonstrate a culture of compliance that the organisation will implement. This is an extension of the approach of directly addressing the requirements of due diligence and reasonable practicability through written frameworks for compliance.

Organisations should also ensure that evidence is retained of the behaviours and actions that have been identified in the plan/framework and which can be used to demonstrate a “culture of compliance”.

Organisations should also regularly assess their culture (similar to what is recommended by the Banking Royal Commission, only in respect to safety) by performing an assessment against the behaviours and actions documented in the plan, and the evidence that the organisation has collected in respect to those actions and behaviours.

The following table sets out some examples of the kinds of behaviours and actions that demonstrate a culture of compliance in respect to safety issues for various topics, and which could be incorporated into the organisation’s safety culture compliance plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Examples of behaviours/actions that demonstrate a culture of compliance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oversight by the board</td>
<td>The board receives adequate information regarding safety risks, including early indicators of emerging safety risks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior leadership oversight</td>
<td>The company establishes an effective safety risk committee at the senior executive level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk management and compliance</td>
<td>Business units within the organisation have senior safety risk officers who are independent and can effectively challenge the business’ approach to safety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue identification and escalation</td>
<td>There are appropriate processes for monitoring safety issues raised by internal audit and other sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>The company has safety accountability principles to achieve best practice in relation to accountability for safety issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety objectives and prioritisation</td>
<td>The company takes a proactive approach to decisions regarding allocation of resources to safety risk management, compliance and resilience, rather than in response to safety issues or incidents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remuneration</td>
<td>Safety incidents and adverse outcomes in safety risk management are considered as part of assessing remuneration outcomes for executives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and leadership</td>
<td>Senior leaders reinforce key safety behaviours and are capable of cascading the desired tone at the top in a personal and authentic manner.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Katherine Morris is a partner and Melissa Carnell is a senior associate with Norton Rose Fulbright Australia.
Effective reporting of work health and safety is essential for organisations to understand their WHS performance. WHS reporting needs to provide relevant, robust and timely information to inform decisions that influence ongoing business performance. In particular, this reporting can be useful for the leaders of an organisation who have a duty to exercise due diligence to ensure the business is meeting its WHS duties.

Reporting can include the use of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), including both lead and lag indicators (lead indicators are indicators that demonstrate the implementation of control measures while lag indicators reflect outcomes). Safe Work Australia published a 2017 report *Measuring and reporting on work health and safety*, which explores processes for gathering and communicating the WHS performance information that guides the WHS decisions of an organisation’s officers. Authored by Sharron O’Neill, associate professor in the Canberra School of Business at the University of NSW, the report said there are few KPIs that can apply across all organisations. This is because the WHS needs and challenges are different across organisations and industries, and organisations should instead select the combination of lead and lag indicators that best inform them of their WHS performance. Lead and lag indicators are therefore generally tailored to an organisation’s context and decision needs.

What are the best WHS indicators?
O’Neill explains that health and safety are broad, complex social constructs, so you can’t measure them directly (at least not in any scientific sense). “So, we are left with trying to identify other things to measure that might offer some useful insights into aspects of
“The big challenge for OHS at present is that many of the OHS metrics are very detached from the rest of the business”
Helen De Cieri, a professor in the department of management at Monash Business School, together with associate professors Cathy Sheehan and Ross Donohue, have been conducting research into WHS performance across a range of organisations in sectors including mining, transport, arts and recreation, healthcare and manufacturing. “Across these very different organisational settings, we established the importance of leading indicators of health and safety,” says De Cieri, who explains that these include making sure that:

- there are regular safety checks and audits
- everyone respects and values OHS improvement
- health and safety are at least as important as the production of the core product or the service provided by the organisation
- workers and supervisors have the information that they need to work safely
- employees are always involved in health and safety decisions that impact on them
- those in charge of OHS have the necessary authority to make changes as they see fit
- anyone who acts safely is given encouragement and receives positive recognition
- everyone has the resources and proper equipment that they need to complete their work safely.

These eight factors were derived from two separate studies of more than 1400 Australian workplaces and over 3500 Australian workers. The results highlighted that in workplaces with greater commitment to health,
wellbeing and safety, individuals experienced fewer injuries and illnesses at work, which in turn was associated with fewer claims or incidents causing time lost from work. “Worldwide, there is strong interest among government and industry stakeholders in the use of leading indicators as a measure of workplace health and safety performance,” says De Cieri. “We want to shift the focus of workplaces from counting the cost of injuries and illness to better work practices that prevent incidents, with more attention to OHS leadership, equipment and resources, and access to health and safety training.”

**Lead and lag indicators**

Lagging indicators are failure-focused and measure OHS incidents that have already happened, while leading indicators allow workplaces to proactively identify early warning signals of potential failure and prevent incidents occurring in the first place. As a consequence, De Cieri says leading indicators are proactive in nature as they are actionable, achievable, and represent the positive steps that an organisation can take to prevent OHS incidents from occurring. Leading indicators are important as they enable organisations to identify and correct hazards in order to prevent or mitigate workplace incidents, she adds.

“Although there are very obvious benefits in shifting to a leading indicator approach, the shift does reflect a major change in the way that health and safety are viewed within the organisation. As with any major change, the effective transition begins with the leadership group as they are the primary drivers of safety culture and climate within their organisations. Where the top management team accepts the need to prioritise health and safety, resources can be committed to give authority and weight to health and safety,” says De Cieri.

“Effective transitioning is more than just allocating resources; it also requires genuine behavioural change and authentic leadership by senior management. Where employees do not see a match between management rhetoric and management behaviour, they will lose faith in the authenticity of any leading indicator activities.”

O’Neill observes one of the biggest challenges for organisations is to better understand how to match the questions they have and information they need to the indicators they monitor. “We need to be careful that we’re not just measuring something because someone else measures it,” she says. “The things we measure should add value to decision making. Improving performance measurement is about recognising what information is going to be useful to whom and getting better alignment between the measures we use and the decisions we want to make.

“I’ve seen companies say things like, ‘we’re getting rid of lag indicators and we’re just going to use lead indicators’. That is unfortunate, because it shows they either don’t understand what those terms mean, or they don’t appreciate the range of users who need various types of health and safety information. For example, it suggests they don’t appreciate the role of injury data. If you’re actually going to stop monitoring the harm, the damage to workers, that’s a problem – this is information that should be useful to an organisation and useful to its stakeholders.” Injury data is not a safety measure,

**Investors call for better workplace safety reporting**

The Australian Council of Superannuation Investors (ACSI) represents 38 Australian and international asset owners and institutional investors, which own on average 10 per cent of every ASX200 company and manage more than $2.2 trillion in assets. It recently released a research report which found that there are some glaring gaps when it comes to safety reporting by Australian listed companies – and action is required to improve the level of safety data collection and reporting.

“Safety data is material to our members. We are concerned that the lack of transparency about workplace deaths may mask the extent of this tragedy and slow the identification of systemic risks,” says ACSI CEO Louise Davidson, who adds that information about ESG practices is a critical piece of business intelligence and investors need to understand how companies are tackling ESG issues to make their investment decisions.”

Its ESG reporting by the ASX200 research report found that 22 people died in workplace fatalities in 2018, however, ACSI said there is no requirement to report this information to the market. Instead, it is collected by state-based agencies and may vary by sector, making it difficult to locate. More specifically, the research found that of 22 reported workplace fatalities, 16 were contractors, suggesting there is a disconnect between the safety practices of companies and the standards they require of contractors.

A further 67 of the ASX200-listed companies disclosed no safety information, including eight companies that pay executive bonuses based on safety outcomes, and ACSI said “this lack of information is out of step with investor expectations”. The research found safety reporting is commonplace, but disclosure is limited: more than half the ASX200 report some form of safety metric but few give any insight into the severity of injuries (except fatalities). More mature reporters typically disclose forward-looking metrics alongside lagging safety metrics, and only nine companies reported their near misses. Fewer than half the ASX200 reported their Lost Time Injury Frequency Rate (LTIFR); just one-third reported their Total Recordable Injury Frequency Rate (TRIFR) and even fewer companies in both indicators included information on contractor safety.

Executive remuneration outcomes at 85 companies include a safety component, although eight of these companies did not report any safety metrics, and ACSI said this makes it difficult for investors to assess how this was applied to pay outcomes. “Safety incidents come at significant personal and financial cost,” the research report said. Apart from the effects on the people involved, companies face compensation claims, loss of productivity and operational performance issues – both directly, in a financial sense, and indirectly in terms of community and other stakeholder impacts including reputation. Workplace health and safety is a focus area for ACSI and our members, many of whose own members work on the front line of high-risk industries. Safety reporting is not just important for investors, who see and feel the financial impacts of delays to projects and lost productivity. It is also a crucial piece of business intelligence that signals that management has robust and timely information to appropriately manage and mitigate its risks in these areas.”
however, she says it is a useful indicator of the impact of safety systems on people. And while this data isn’t usually helpful for informing operational safety decisions, it is useful to help inform a range of other decisions around governance and investment, she adds.

Neil Budworth, former president of the UK’s Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) and health, safety and risk manager at Loughborough University, says the most common challenges around leading and lagging indicators are perception, obsession, consistency and data collection. “There is a perception that safety is about accidents, and in some cases, suspicion that looking at anything else is merely trying to divert attention from the real issue of people being hurt. Fundamentally, there are some who are not able to draw the link between solid enabling activities and the subsequent reduction in incident rates, trusting only the output measure of incidents.”

“Where employees do not see a match between management rhetoric and management behaviour, they will lose faith in the authenticity of any leading indicator activities”

For some companies, Budworth says there has been such a drive on incident rate, especially Lost Time Injury Frequency Rate (LTIFR), that it has become a cultural obsession. “The drive to react to every lost time incident and eliminate every cause is ingrained and can be harmful, as it can serve to distort priorities and mean that really significant risks are underfunded due to resources being expended on knee-jerk responses. Also, in some organisations managers are experienced in gaming the LTIFR figures, by challenging definitions, and ‘managing the absence’, and so can be reluctant to move away from well-known, ‘controllable’ measures,” he says.

When organisations do seek to implement new arrangements, mechanisms and definitions need to be developed, agreed on and implemented. “Without these there is no consistency and no ability to benchmark. The measures also need time to mature – all of this means that in many cases it is just easier for the busy safety professional to just roll with the status quo,” he says.

There also needs to be mechanisms for data collection and reporting, and while these are generally well established for incident data, Budworth says potentially completely new infrastructure is needed for leading indicators.

What measures do investors and stakeholders want?
Investors and stakeholders are usually concerned about bottom line outcomes, according to De Cieri, who explains that when it comes to reporting, financial outcomes are usually prioritised. However, research evidence indicates that unsafe work practices do impact bottom line outcomes, resulting in lower productivity, reduced competitiveness and lower shareholder value. “A major challenge for health and safety leaders is to frame an initiative, such as the promotion of leading indicator activity, as a priority that will add to the bottom line,” she says.

One way to do this is to report the impact of leading indicator initiatives on lagging indicator data. For example, an organisation can report changes over a 12-month period with respect to performance on leading indicator activity, and connect that change with changes in lagging data such as reported/unreported incidents, near misses and the WorkCover compensation claims data. “The impact could be reinforced with estimates of the associated dollars saved as a result of the incidents averted,” she says.

O’Neill is seeing increased interest from superannuation fund managers in OHS when they talk about how they decide on the companies they invest in (see sidebar on the recent Australian Council of Superannuation Investors report). Fund managers, and investors more broadly, are looking for companies that manage risk effectively, according to O’Neill, who says it’s well known that those companies that manage health and safety well, generally understand risk and know how to manage it well. Conversely, companies that just don’t get risk management are not going to manage health and safety well either.

“This is reflected in reporting on OHS in annual reports, too,” she says. “It’s moving well away from the corporate fluff approach to CSR, what I call safewash; investors want companies to talk about health and safety in a mature way; to provide information that is useful to stakeholders and can help them make decisions about identifying and investing in those companies that understand risk management.” This is reflected clearly in the new Global Reporting Initiative’s global standard for OHS reporting (GRI 403).

“Controversially, personally, I don’t think most investors really care about health and safety reporting,” says Budworth. “The only time it really becomes an issue is if the investors believe that the lack of focus can impact on the profitability and sustainability of the business. So, process safety failings in petrochemicals industries, fines and reputational damages would be of interest, but the number of slips, trips and falls may not be.” However, what investors and stakeholders do crave is assurance that things are going well (or if not, the issues have been identified and are being resolved) – so leading indicators around assurance and audit as well as outcome measures are important, says Budworth.

Steps for business and OHS leaders
There are a number of steps organisations and their OHS functions can take to adopt better indicators of health & safety, however, this is “the $64,000 question”, says Budworth. The first thing is to determine what they want to achieve in terms of safety management, awareness, accountability, ownership and education. Then determine the critical path to success, and finally Budworth recommends identifying the measures that will best guide them on that route – and crucially will let them know when they start to deviate from that route. “Some may be short term for a few months, some may
be enduring. From this build a basket of indicators that are robust and which the leadership can use to steer the business,” he says.

O’Neill believes it is important to take a more holistic view of the organisation and its hazards and how they are managed. “If we took a more holistic view of how health and safety plays out within an organisation, rather than focusing on a silo of health and safety, then we would have a more useful set of indicators – much more meaningful in terms of being able to offer levers for change and actually drive better decisions within an organisation,” she says. “I think the big challenge for OHS at present is that many of the OHS metrics are very detached from the rest of the business. And unless we get a more holistic integrated approach, it’s going to be very difficult to develop the maturity we need to drive improvement in measuring and reporting systems.” De Cieri also says that authentic leadership behaviour is important in setting expectations about health and safety as a priority. “Leaders need to create positive safety climates within their organisations. They need to prioritise procedures, policies and practices that govern desired safe behaviour, where employees are encouraged to behave proactively in relation to workplace health and safety,” she says. “Where health and safety are not already a business priority, health and safety professionals can use impact data to make their case. A positive safety climate is imperative in order for employees to report potential hazards, near misses and accidents.”

Another initiative that leaders can adopt is the implementation of OHS management systems. An OHS management system is a high-level, systematic and coordinated approach to managing health and safety risks in the workplace involving careful planning, implementation, measurement/evaluation and refinement, she says.

Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) 403

Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) 403 is the only comprehensive global framework for reporting on occupational health and safety, developed through a transparent and multi-stakeholder process, and in the public interest, according to Robyn Leeson, vice-chair of the Global Sustainability Standards Board for the GRI. The content of the Standard was developed by a multi-stakeholder project working group of experts, with equal representation from businesses and worker representatives, and representation from the ILO. The draft Standard also underwent extensive public consultation, and aligns with key international instruments, such as ILO instruments and ISO 45001, and is available for free.

GRI 403 details a number of specific OHS indicators, including:

**Leading indicators**
- Disclosure 403-1 Occupational health and safety management system
- Disclosure 403-2 Hazard identification, risk assessment, and incident investigation
- Disclosure 403-3 Occupational health services
- Disclosure 403-4 Worker participation, consultation, and communication on occupational health and safety
- Disclosure 403-5 Worker training on occupational health and safety
- Disclosure 403-6 Promotion of worker health
- Disclosure 403-7 Prevention and mitigation of occupational health and safety impacts directly linked by business relationships
- Disclosure 403-8 Workers covered by an occupational health and safety management system.

**Lagging indicators**
- Disclosure 403-9 Work-related injuries
- Disclosure 403-10 Work-related ill health.

Reporting on occupational health and safety has traditionally been focused on employees and immediate contractors, which Leeson says do not always reflect the full range of workers who may be impacted from an occupational health and safety perspective. “The Standard goes beyond the traditional idea of employees on a payroll, offering a response to modern ways of working – such as the gig economy or the mobile workforce,” she says. “It covers the full spectrum of workers, for whose occupational health and safety an organisation is expected to be responsible. So, in addition to employees, it covers workers whose work and workplace an organisation controls, in line with ISO 45001.”

To provide healthy and safe working conditions, organisations need a robust management approach that drives the prevention of physical and mental harm and the promotion of workers’ health. The standard also goes beyond lost time injuries, and Leeson observes that the frequency and severity of work-related injuries has traditionally been assessed using metrics based on lost time or lost workdays. “The Lost Time Injury Frequency Rate is a classic example of this. One of the problems is lost time incidents don’t catch all injuries that have a significant impact on workers’ health, and the way they are calculated hides disabling, but non-fatel, injuries,” she says. The GRI Standard covers all damaging injuries for workers, even if they don’t result in days away from work, and places a greater emphasis on workers’ recovery from work-related injuries – thus leaving behind those measures that focus solely on lost work time.

Reporting on occupational health and safety has traditionally focused on physical health, says Leeson. Few companies report on stress and anxiety resulting from psychosocial work-related hazards (e.g. verbal abuse, harassment, bullying) and hazards related to work-organisation (e.g. excessive workload demands, long hours). Leeson explains that the Standard covers these hazards specifically.

“We are seeing more investor-focused initiatives – such as the Dow Jones Sustainability Index – include safety performance and safety-related information in their rating and assessments of companies. Increasingly, such initiatives require this information to be available to the public, which increases the level of transparency and disclosure expected by companies,” Leeson adds.
The business benefits of leading indicators

When properly developed, leading indicators are controllable and will therefore be influenced by management action, according to Neil Budworth, former president of the UK’s Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) and health, safety and risk manager at Loughborough University. “While there is no doubt that good systematic health and safety management will reduce the number of incidents, managers often think of accidents as being out of their control (hence the move to the word ‘incident’). And the unfortunate reality is that there is some truth in that belief. For example, incidents could occur today due to a design decision made several years ago,” he says.

Measuring something that managers believe that they can actively influence – such as audit scores, or number of inspections, or inductions, or training volumes – gives them some ownership and develops engagement, Budworth explains. Furthermore, as the number of incidents decline, the statistical reliability of the data diminishes – meaning organisations are chasing random statistical blips and the results of variable levels of awareness. “Shifting focus on to a positive, controllable, large volume data set means that resources can be appropriately targeted,” he says.

OHS management systems also provide a process for organisations to continually improve their OHS performance. “In practice, this would mean referring to research such as ours, which shows that the adoption of leading indicator activity prevents and reduces incidents from occurring in the first place. Within their own organisation, health and safety professionals might also be able to show how changes to leading indicator activity over a 12-month period resulted in shifts in lagging indicator outcomes,” says De Cieri.

Health and safety reporting trends

OHS reporting is already seeing greater emphasis placed on monitoring workplace stress and mental health as workplaces and support services are registering increasingly higher levels of psychosocial illness, according to De Cieri. Another major trend in the workplace is the ongoing development of digital tracking initiatives that will increase the quality and opportunity for performance reporting. This is especially likely in a work environment increasingly characterised by employees who are working as peripheral workers. “The ‘on-demand economy’, for example, covers a wide range of jobs where employees are hired as independent contractors rather than as permanent workers. Digital tracking will make it easier to track their performance via digital monitoring,” she says.

However, the decision to set up this kind of workforce configuration, as a way of benefiting from an arm’s length work relationship with employees, has to be set against possible health and safety implications. “It may be possible to track performance, but it may be harder to motivate healthy and safe behaviour when workers are not embedded in an organisational culture.”

Given the increasing level of artificial intelligence and robotics in the workplace, future risk assessment and reporting will also need to focus on how humans and robots can “collaborate” safely when performing work tasks, adds De Cieri.

Budworth observes that, historically, all incidents used to be considered in the same category. “Although those who were familiar with the theory and practice of safety management recognised the different causality of incidents, to some degree this got dumbed down to a single measure which gave false assurance. Following a number of high-profile accidents, the industry has now remembered that minor incidents, process safety incidents, high potential incidents and health impacts have a different causality and hence need to be reported and analysed differently. I see this trend continuing,” he says.

“I would hope that the focus also starts to shift more towards health, which is notoriously difficult to manage with lagging indicators. We know that far more people are killed and injured through work-related ill-health than through safety, yet our indicators are dominated by safety.”

As occupational disease and mental health become more damaging and more costly, Budworth also says there will be more indicators for the detection and prevention of these issues. Traditionally, sickness absence has been the indicator for health, but as technology has moved on, he says sickness absence has become less binary as there is a grey area around sickness absence and people working from home. As a tool for triggering response and support, sickness absence is losing its effectiveness and so alternative measures will be required, says Budworth. New technology may open up new possibilities with automatic data collection and the ability to identify specific words or pieces of text within large and complex sets of data, he adds.

O’Neill believes that one of the biggest trends in reporting health and safety performance is the GRI 403 Standard, which was released late last year. Companies are transitioning across from the G4 standard to the new GRI 403 between now and 2021. “You’ve got a lot of large global companies that report in accordance with the global reporting initiative; I think we’re going to see a broader diffusion of the recommended metrics,” she says.

To that end, organisations in Australia are likely to find it easier to meet this international standard than organisations from other countries because Australia already has a legal system (in the form of the harmonised WHS Act, except in Victoria and Western Australia) that talks about a PCBU and a worker, that is not defined by outdated employer–employee relationships. “The new standard adopts that same approach in its scope of workers,” she says.

GRI 403 provides a useful framework for understanding and communicating health and safety information for professionals in Australia, because it aligns so well with both the legal obligations on business and current understandings of best practice and other frameworks and standards such as the ISO 45001. “The potential for the GRI 403 to guide discussions around business practice and improved decision making suggest it is going to be something that will help shape the way we monitor and communicate health and safety performance over the next three to five years,” she says.
How Woodside measures and reports on WHS

ASX-listed company Woodside is an integrated upstream supplier of energy which operates 6 per cent of global liquid natural gas supply. With around 3600 employees, it captures and reports against a number of health, safety, environment and quality lagging and leading performance indicators. Its major lagging performance indicators are Total Recordable Injury Rates (TRIR), High Potential Events (HPEs – High Potential Incidents and Hazards) and Tier 1 and 2 Loss of Primary Containment (LoPC) Process Safety Events, according to Debbie Morrow, vice-president HSEQ for Woodside. The significant elements of Woodside’s leading indicators are Fitness for Work (FFW), Process Safety Critical Role Conformance and performance indicators for quality requirements.

“All of our performance indicators are reviewed at least monthly and we include inputs from all our operating assets and offices, as well as contractors where applicable. That generates extensive data which we store and analyse in a digital platform,” says Morrow, who explains that the system delivers fast access to data, allowing the company to proactively assess trends to enable learning and drive continuous improvement.

As far as practicable, Woodside has aligned to International Association of Oil & Gas Producers’ (IOGP) reporting methodologies, which allows the company to compare its performance with industry peers. “Our approach aligns with Woodside’s belief in building and sustaining a safety culture in which our people are empowered to take action to prevent injuries and thoroughly investigate incidents. We also assure our H&S performance data annually and we publish the key results every year in our Sustainability Report,” says Morrow. “We believe a strong, effective, persistent HSEQ underpins good business performance, which is informed through a robust risk management framework. Put simply, our view is: good safety equals good business.”

Woodside’s HSEQ performance forms a core element of its values and helps ensure workers operate as one team, with a clear line-of-sight to maintaining safe, sustainable operations, she adds. “Woodside’s H&S performance is directly linked to our company scorecard and our performance. We make sure that areas requiring focus are regularly communicated throughout the business. We strive to use a lot of interesting and interactive communications tools, to ensure we are very frequently having informed discussions about H&S performance,” she says.
Sharpening the OHS skillset

There are significant trends in the broader world of work impacting tertiary level OHS education, and there are a number of ways universities are assisting graduates to keep up with these changes, writes Craig Donaldson

There has never been a clear consensus on what a safety practitioner or safety professional needs to know, according to Drew Rae, Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science at Griffith University and an advisory panel member for the OHS Body of Knowledge. Historically, he says safety people came from other professions, such as engineering or psychology, and specialised in safety. Each profession brought its own particular slant to how safety should be thought about and practised.

“Today, through a number of different regulatory and economic movements, there are a lot of safety people who have no formal tertiary education in anything but safety. What should we teach them? There are too many relevant things they could learn – biochemistry, human movements, sociology of organisations, human factors, behavioural psychology, nutrition, engineering, management science … we can’t teach everything,” says Rae.

One recent positive trend is the move away from teaching safety as a set of management “recipes”, and towards teaching the principles of safety science as a core part of the curriculum. “Hazard identification” and “safety management systems” are techniques, not knowledge. “Safety science provides the core underlying theory about why accidents happen, and how to prevent them, that should underpin all work as a safety professional,” he says.

Dr Joanna Bohatko-Naismith, Course Coordinator for MWHS, Faculty of Health and Medicine, School of Health Sciences, The University of Newcastle says a key development within businesses and workplaces, and being introduced into OHS education, is the expansion of OHS to be broader than just physical on-the-job health and safety. OHS now includes the emotional, social and mental health and wellbeing of workers, not only in the workplace but also at home. “We need to recognise and accept that the mental and social wellbeing of workers extends beyond the workplace and overflows into workers’ private lives (and vice-versa), often negatively impacting on their family and relationships,” she says.

“As organisational leaders and educators we need to consider total worker health as a key workplace issue to better care for and protect workers and their families at work and at home. OHS staff need to have conversations with workers not just about the workplace, but also learn to open up discussions with staff about the effects of workplace stress, illness and injury on their personal lives and family lives.”

Associate Professor Sue Reed, Director, Occupational and Environmental Health and Safety, School of Medical & Health Sciences, Edith Cowan University, says that workplaces are changing, and the way in which universities develop their programs are also changing so that graduates are more adaptable in different workplaces in the future. “It’s about teaching OHS professionals of the future to be able to apply different concepts in different situations; a one-solution-fits-all approach doesn’t work. That’s not the way things work now, and it definitely won’t be the case in the future,” she says.
Reed also notes that tertiary education is helping graduates and the broader OHS profession with the important process of learning how to validate their knowledge. “We have learned a lot in the workplace, and in tertiary education we’re often learning how to validate the knowledge we have. It’s about how you substantiate your opinion and new ideas. Workplaces are going to change more over the next five to 10 years and we need to prepare graduates for this scenario,” she says.

Drivers of change
A key development from the ideas discussed above, involves OHS practitioners and professionals moving beyond OHS historical workplace and roles implementing and auditing safety, and into high level leadership, management, business and accountability roles. Bohatko-Naismith observes that organisations, both large and small, need OHS practitioners to become part of the senior leadership team so that safety and health sits at the top of the core business principles of an organisation. “Universities have introduced business management and leadership courses into their OHS programs in recognition of the needs of OHS professionals to be able to positively impact into the leadership of industry,” she says.

Reed agrees, and notes that OHS professionals also need to be able to communicate on a range of fronts using formats and technologies. “The way we communicate with workers on the shop floor will be different with how you communicate with CEOs,” she says. “We also need to get better at cost-benefit analysis when working in business. We need to understand the cost-benefit analysis of making certain changes, and not just how good things might be from a philosophical perspective of looking after your workforce. But what does this mean financially as well?” As OHS professionals progress through their organisation into higher and more senior levels, Reed says they need to be prepared to answer questions using an understanding of cost-benefit analysis.

Tertiary education also needs to not only keep up with but stay ahead of laws and regulations in order to pre-empt changes that might happen in the future so organisations are prepared for these changes. “As professionals we shouldn’t just be making recommendations to businesses and organisations based on what laws, regulations or codes of practice say; we should be making recommendations based on best practice and trying to be preventative with regards to injuries and adverse impacts on OHS in the workplace,” says Reed, who also serves as deputy chair for the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board.

Rae observes that safety is gradually moving towards an evidence-based profession. “The movement is slow, inconsistent, and painful, but it is happening,” he says. “Every time an organisation or individual steps to ask ‘Hey, why are we doing safety like this? Is it working? Is this the best way to do it?’ they find that those questions can’t be answered by looking up legislation, codes of practice, or standards.”

Smart businesses realise that lightly trained safety advisers can often implement current strategies effectively, but they can’t provide good advice on how to do things better, explains Rae, who says a safety person without a thorough grounding in the historical development of safety is vulnerable to fashionable trends. “They can copy what other people are doing elsewhere, but

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Key OHS trends

A rejuvenated focus on employee “wellbeing” is a key trend in the area of OHS, with organisations increasingly adding this term to the name of their OHS/WHS department, adding the term to their policy documents, and introducing initiatives in this area, according to Kelly Johnstone, senior lecturer, Occupational Health and Safety Science Programs at The University of Queensland. “This is being driven by a broader societal trend toward our individual desires to improve our health and wellbeing. We live such cluttered and busy lives there is a drive for simplicity and balance. It’s being seen as the new ‘luxury’. Organisations are interested in improving worker productivity, engagement and retention, and wellbeing is part of this,” she says.

Johnstone, who also sits on the advisory panel for the OHS Body of Knowledge, adds that there is renewed interest in occupational hygiene and in particular workers’ exposure to dust or more specifically respirable crystalline silica dust (RCS). This is being driven by the tragic diagnosis of hundreds of workers in Queensland and other states with accelerated silicosis as a result of their work with engineered stone benchtops and its high silica content. The media has also been reporting on the re-emergence of issues surrounding worker’s pneumoconiosis and glyphosate cancer cases in the US involving record payouts, says Johnstone.

There is also increased interest in the “Safety Differently”/Safety I and Safety II movement/theory and what it can offer in terms of how we understand “safety”, says Johnstone, who explains that this comes back to the concept of encouraging OHS professionals to keep themselves informed regarding changes in the science of safety and theory developments (the increasing body of OHS evidence). “How may new theory be tested, adapted and applied to the work of an OHS professional? There is no one magic answer to ‘safety’ and we need to continue to learn, adapt and improve. New research and new thought leadership is continually emerging and evolving. Over time there have been key authors and thinkers who have questioned the way we approach safety in organisations,” she says.

“It is important for OHS professionals and the profession more broadly that we keep up to date with new and emerging theories and the peer reviewed literature. Professional development and lifelong learning are vital, along with the capacity for critical thinking and an ability to apply new approaches, new empirical research to our professional practice.”

they don’t understand the fundamentals well enough to choose appropriate strategies and to tailor them to the needs of a particular industry or business. A well-educated professional can translate foundational and theoretical knowledge into practical improvements,” she says.

Maximising investments in education

In the same way that organisations employ highly educated staff in finance, marketing, research and development and other functions, Bohatko-Naismith says there is a need for companies to employ highly educated OHS professionals who can take a leadership and management role across the industry. “Recently I had the pleasure of attending the Hunter Safety Awards in Newcastle. At these awards were stories of companies who gave leadership and authority to OHS staff to implement best practice and innovative approaches in workplace health and safety across the business. What I observed at the awards was a room full of individuals, who with self-determination were able to develop and lead innovative solutions to workplace OHS problems. The outcomes realised by these companies were not only safer workplaces, but more contented workers, with increases in productivity and reduced costs,” she says.

Innovative organisations are starting to recognise the benefit of highly trained/tertiary trained OHS staff in creating a safer workplace. Bohatko-Naismith affirms that any organisation which proactively adopts strategies that nurture the autonomy of their OHS staff will have success with creating a safe and healthy workplace for their employees and families, and reduce the cost of injury and illness in the workplace and at home. “Staff who feel supported across their lives become better staff in the organisation,” she says.

Reed says that it is important for students to choose courses in which the education is based back in the workplace, so that they are using learnings as they go through the course and can integrate these learnings into the workplace – even as they are studying. “The organisation also gets the benefit of that education as they go along and they don’t have to wait until the end, and students learn better if they are integrating their learning into the workplace as they go along,” she says.

Rae points out that organisations need to recognise that training and education are different things. “Training is a rapid response to provide someone with a specific skill that they need for a specific job. Education is a long-term investment in the overall capability of a person. It has to be a partnership – you can require someone to undertake training, but you can only support the education of someone who already wants to educate themselves,” he says.

One fear that organisations have is that if they provide funding to help with education, the newly educated person will find a better job elsewhere. “That’s a rational fear. The whole point of education is to make someone more capable. Before investing in education, organisations need to ask themselves seriously whether they are willing to give their staff the opportunity and responsibility to use what they learn to improve the organisation.”

Advice for OHS

There is no such thing as an uneducated professional, or a professional who is not trying to continuously improve, Rae
states. For safety people, it is time to stop arguing about the relative value of practical experience and education, and to recognise that someone who passes up opportunities to learn is choosing not to be a professional. “That’s not a bad choice, it’s not a wrong choice, but it is a choice,” he says. “We do not trust non-professional medical personnel to issue prescriptions. We do not trust non-professional technical personnel to design bridges. It’s long past time for anyone who wants to tell other people how safety should be done to either shut up, or start living up to professional standards.”

Every tertiary safety course offers a different package of learning, and Rae says no-one should pick a course based on which one will give them the easiest qualification. “That may technically grant the title of safety professional, but it fails at the first step of being a professional. A professional seeks to learn, so the first step for any safety person who wants to improve their education is to find a course that teaches something that they don’t already know,” she says.

Bohatko-Naismith says that OHS professionals need to recognise the expanded role of OHS staff in total worker health into the future, who they may need to work with to have recognition for and develop a total worker health framework and solution for their organisations, and how to work with organisation leaders to have OHS recognised as a core part of a company’s strategic plan.

“The challenges for OHS in industry is to make OHS part of the strategic plan of the business – a core business principle – realising that poorly managed OHS is a significant business risk (both personnel and financial risk), and that OHS should sit at the top of the senior leadership group meeting agenda for every meeting, and not reduce OHS to a minor discussion point on agendas,” she says. “An organisation that can outwardly express to its customers and employees its strategic plan to ensure the total workplace health and safety of its employees and their families will usually reap the rewards of a healthy and happier workforce who can be more productive.”

Raising the bar for tertiary OHS education

Associate Professor Sue Reed, Director, Occupational and Environmental Health and Safety, School of Medical & Health Sciences, Edith Cowan University, and deputy chair for the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board, says that there has been considerable consolidation in OHS education at the tertiary level over the past 5 to 10 years, with less universities offering programs – while those that are offering programs are of a very high standard. “The accreditation process has driven the need to meet the latest changes in educational levels as published by TEQSA (the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency) to meet the Australian qualifications framework,” she says.

Organisations are also looking for people who have completed accredited courses, such as graduate diplomas and Masters degrees. “We’re starting to see more organisations asking for people who are certified or have postgraduate qualifications in OHS – particularly when it comes to more senior roles,” says Reed. “Some people are finding they cannot progress or are unable to move into these roles without those qualifications, so the requirement to have postgraduate qualifications is more important now for job applications.”

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Engineering health, safety and wellbeing at NOJA Power

NOJA Power takes a holistic approach to health, safety and wellbeing, with senior leadership playing a key role in the company’s award-winning health, safety and wellbeing program, writes Craig Donaldson

NOJA Power is a Queensland-based company that researches, develops, manufactures and supplies low-, medium- and high-voltage switchgear for companies around the world, including all-Australian electrical utilities like Energex, Ergon Energy, Endeavour Energy and Ausnet; as well as Scottish Power, Enel, Eskom and Cemig. Founded in 2002, the company specialises in auto-reclosing circuit breakers for industrial, infrastructure and electricity distribution utilities and exports to 88 countries around the world.

The company faces an array of OHS hazards which are unique to the business, according to Rabiul Alam, quality and safety manager for NOJA Power. As a company that manages electrical safety risks, there are a number of mandatory legal requirements. The company has a health and safety management system in place that provides a framework for monitoring and managing operations, and this system is based on ISO 45001:2018 Standard. “We have all procedures, processes and risk assessments as part of our standard operating processes,” says Alam. “We do lots of internal auditing, and external auditors also visit for audits. Every year there is a surveillance audit which is conducted by Sci Qual International.”

The company employs around 250 staff – 200 of which are local while the remainder are based overseas (including a factory in Brazil). Before starting a job with the company, employees must also go through a risk assessment. Some 60 per cent of its workforce are involved in production, while employees come from 32 different countries of origin. “It is a very multicultural workforce,” says Alam. “There are differences in sizes between people, from male to female, and the height of employees varies from 150 centimetres to 198 centimetres. We need to consider this in the ergonomics of our production assembly line so that it can be adjusted to support employees of different heights.” Various engineering controls help support the ergonomically designed workplace to reduce and eliminate musculo-skeletal disorders.

In addition to ergonomic design layouts and detailed risk assessments for the tasks in each workstation, NOJA Power employs a number of LEAN manufacturing processes and tools i.e. 6S (sort, shine, set in order, standardisation, safety and sustain), KANBAN as well as continuous flow processes and value stream mapping in its workplace layout.

NOJA Power also eliminates risks through preventive interventions with manual handling. “Some of our products weigh up to 150 kilograms, so we have to use different mechanisms for these. We use hoists and cranes to move the parts as part of our very customised assembly line to eliminate or reduce the risks related to hazardous manual tasks,” he says.

One of the more hazardous tasks within NOJA Power involves research and development of high-voltage products and testing in high-voltage test cages onsite at its production facility in its Brisbane factory. Its testing facilities include 600 kV and 300 kV impulse laboratories, 200 kV and three 100 kV power frequency laboratories as well as a salt fog laboratory and environmental chamber. “We have many processes and mechanisms in place to reduce risk here, such as interlocking doors on the cages so that people cannot conduct these tests without closing the door first. There are also sensors and lights that indicate whether it is safe to conduct a test. As a result, we have had no incidents related to high-voltage testing since the inception of this business in 2002,” he says.

Improving health and wellbeing

NOJA Power has been running a “Safety is important – health is your life” program since 2012 and it addresses the occupational, social, physical, intellectual and emotional wellbeing of workers. All company directors actively participate by endorsing health, safety and wellbeing policies, allocating resources and staff to carry out activities and being involved in the annual action and evaluation plan.

NOJA Power plans out the whole year
of health and wellbeing programs during its monthly health, safety and wellbeing committee meetings, and the theme for the current year is “fitness for life”. The company runs a number of programs as part of this, including inviting professionals in for stretching for office staff and employees on different shifts. There are also programs that have run continuously for the past few years, including Bridge to Brisbane, futsal after work competition, basketball tournaments, dragon boat racing, beach volleyball, park runs, cycling and yoga.

The company also organises a range of other activities including company-sponsored annual doctor visits for all staff, community events, picnics providing fruit daily for staff (two pieces per day per staff member), and health and wellbeing lectures throughout the year. Last year, NOJA Power ran six lectures on mental health and wellbeing as well as a Queensland Government-sponsored “My health for life” program, in which some 80 employees participated. Out of this, 10 staff with the highest potential risk of diabetes, stroke or high blood pressure were selected and put through six different programs over a four-month period to improve their health.

Return-to-work outcomes
NOJA Power also has a comprehensive return-to-work program for employees, according to Alam. The company investigates all incidents and examines their root cause, so if it is related to process the company develops interventions and implements actions immediately to reduce risks of further incidents. When injured staff return to work, the company designs suitable duties for them in co-operation with WorkCover Queensland, while doctors and sometimes occupational therapists also provide support to make sure that they come back to work as quickly as possible.

“Safety is at the forefront of the company’s thinking in everything we do, and it is part of the company’s core culture”

Alam says these different programs and initiatives are collaborative in nature. NOJA Power has included communication and consultation into daily business activity, and the company has ensured employees have an opportunity to provide feedback via surveys, team meetings, toolbox talks and interviews – and this is incorporated into the design of the health and wellbeing program.

NOJA Power also has a health, safety and wellbeing committee in place, which comprises 11 members (including senior leadership team members, group MD, finance director and engineering director) as well as eight from different groups and departments across the business. This committee meets every month to discuss health, safety hazards as well as wellbeing issues. Each representative of the committee goes back to their respective groups in the business, as well as minutes and other notes from meetings. “This is a process of two-way communication, and with three members of our senior leadership team there it makes it easy to pass any resolution. So we don’t need separate meetings to action things; we get approval on the spot,” says Alam.

Working with senior management
In addition to having three senior leadership team members on the health, safety and wellbeing committee, there are also key agenda items in the company’s monthly management meetings in which issues are discussed and resolutions passed to improve health, safety and wellbeing outcomes across NOJA Power. Alam explains that the company takes an integrated approach to management of health, safety and wellbeing, with five directors at the top level working closely with middle management to ensure that communication is clear in terms of objectives and outcomes.

The company also conducts a number of detailed risk assessments from a health and safety perspective, and the outcomes of these (together with other risk assessments of NOJA Power’s production facility) are passed onto top management with recommended actions for improvement. “These involve money and resources, so it is important to get support from top management in
order to improve performance and productivity across the business,” he says.

“Since top management is integral to day-to-day operations, they actively get involved in things, and most of the five directors do some sort of walk-around in factory and facilities every day,” says Alam. “They want to understand issues, and this is part of business strategy – so they get to know about even small issues or hazards on the floor. This way they can help reduce or significantly eliminate risks much quicker. All our directors (which also include the founders of the business) are very involved in health, safety and wellbeing of employees, and this approach helps us significantly.”

Leadership, safety and culture
Cultural is an important focus within the business, and Alam explains that top management’s commitment, leadership and demonstration of health and safety has been key to implementing a positive health and safety culture in the organisation. “Culture is a very important thing to the NOJA Power group MD – he takes safety very personally. In any meeting, management meeting or health and safety meeting, he follows the safety-first approach,” he says. This is reflected in the business’ “Safety Leadership at Work” (SLAW) philosophy, which every employee is encouraged to adopt.

When employees join the business, for example, they go through a separate induction which introduces them to the culture of the business, and the safety message is promoted heavily in this. “I also invite the group MD to a quarterly meeting with new staff, so he can present to new team members and talk about safety and why it is important to the business,” says Alam.

“It is important that everyone gets the message and understands the direction they need to follow. Culture is a very broad thing and it’s not easy to implement, but we have been successful in getting people to take this message seriously and everyone understands our strong safety culture.”

Outcomes and results
NOJA Power has experienced a number of benefits as a result of its holistic approach to health, safety and wellbeing. Since 2012, Alam says there has been an increase in the number of workers improving their nutrition, physical activity, quitting smoking and conducting formal risk assessments before organising a task.

From 2013 through to 2018, there has been a 68 per cent reduction in injuries, 73 per cent reduction in lost-time injuries, 50 per cent reduction in sick leave, 53 per cent decrease in absenteeism and 66 per cent decrease in staff turnover. Last calendar year, there were nine total incidents/near misses, three medical treatment injuries, zero fatalities and permanent disabilities and an LTI rate of 9.8.

The maximum number of days injury free in the workplace stands at 255, while 91.3 per cent of its employees are satisfied working with NOJA Power and a further 97.2 per cent are satisfied with the safe and healthy working environment of the company. Further 70 per cent of employees are involved in some sort of sport or physical activity, while 96 per cent of employees are consuming enough fruit and vegetables compared to 40 per cent in 2012.

The company publishes a range of health, safety and wellbeing KPIs and results annually for all the staff so they can understand how the business is tracking in this regard, and Alam says staff also receive awards for performance in this area. “All of this is linked back to our safety management system with KPIs, so it is all integrated and we monitor and report these to the staff,” he says.

Awards and engagement
NOJA Power also works with the Queensland Office of Industrial Relations on their healthy working initiative, and Alam is a member of the initiative’s focus group to develop best practice in health and wellbeing and share the company’s experiences with the regulator and other organisations. He also speaks at events including the recent musculoskeletal disorders symposium organised by Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, and his topic was “Workplace design: health, safety, wellbeing and ergonomics”.

NOJA Power group MD, Neil O’Sullivan, and Alam are part of the expert reference group, Safety Leadership at Work (SLAW), initiated by the Office of Industrial Relations, Queensland Government. Either O’Sullivan or Alam have participated in their quarterly meetings for the past three years. This group promotes networking and leadership to develop the safety leadership and culture model and provides visual leadership and expertise to build a positive culture for safety in Queensland. “I’ve been participating in both focus groups and contributing to them and sharing our story,” says Alam.

NOJA Power was awarded first place in the categories of “Best Workplace Health and Wellbeing Initiative” and “Best Demonstrated Leadership in Work Health and Safety” in the Queensland 2017 Safe Work and Return to Work Awards. The company also received a gold recognition award from Workplace Health and Safety Queensland for the “Healthier:Happier.Workplaces” initiative, which encourages employers to create a work environment that improves the health and wellbeing of employees, boosting productivity and workplace culture. The program aims to better integrate healthy lifestyles and employee wellbeing into workplace culture, and to acknowledge and recognise the efforts of organisations already making a commitment to better employee health. “We are the only company who received the gold recognition three times in a row since 2015,” says Alam.
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Professor Sidney Dekker is a major international writer and influencer of occupational safety. Some regard him as a guru, while others view him as dangerous. Those who have heard him speak know he provides a dynamic performance that frequently pulls no punches, while those who have read his books and articles may not always agree however cannot help but admire the towering intellect. Having given up flying 737 passenger jets in his spare time, Australia is privileged to have enticed him from Europe to Griffith University in Queensland where he founded the Safety Science Research Lab. In 2017 he made time to produce a documentary entitled “Safety Differently: The Movie”. Having read Dekker’s previous book, I really had to read his 2018 The Safety Anarchist: Relying on Human Expertise and Innovation, Reducing Bureaucracy and Compliance (Routledge) and almost immediately purchased a Kobo e-copy (I am probably too old to find this an enjoyable way to read, but that is another story) of his latest 2019 book Foundations of Safety Science: A Century of Understanding Accidents and Disasters (CRC Press). Neither is for the faint-hearted, but both repay handsomely the effort to read them thoughtfully.

The Safety Anarchist’s key argument about reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and paperwork, as suggested by the sub-title, is one that I have also supported (for example, in OHS Professional 2014) while being nervous about not throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Dekker prosecutes the argument in a thoroughgoing manner that draws upon a rich tradition of history and scholarship from theologians and the Domesday Book of 1086 to sociologists and psychologists of today. His chapter headings are: A case for change; We know what’s best for you; Authoritarian high modernism; The safety bureaucracy; What gets measured, gets manipulated; The infantilization of us; A new religion; A non-deterministic world; Anarchy versus anarchism; and Ways out. Such is Dekker’s scholarship that I felt pleased just to find a reference or two that I think should have made the cut. One is a 2013 monograph by RMIT’s Dr Jan Hayes – Operational Decision-making in High Hazard Organizations: Drawing a Line in the Sand – which demonstrates the importance of domain experts and front-line managers in maintaining operational safety. Others, which I will not inflict on you, were from my own eclectic academic background that includes some theology and anthropology. He cites many silly OHS rules but published before the Bunnings “onions on bread before sausage” saga.

According to Dekker, “The book argues that we need to push back on the triumph of compliance and bureaucracy to recover some of the humanity, dignity, common sense, creativity and innovation of frontline work” and notes that “the anarchists’ view of the world is surprisingly close to that of complexity science”. He encourages, among other things, “decluttering”, conducting small-scale safe-to-fail experiments, promoting safety as a horizontally shared guiding principle, bolstering capabilities for self-organising and mutual co-ordination, and facilitating expert connections. All are worthy of serious consideration, albeit depending somewhat on the work context. I know from my recent Perth employment that innovative Australian organisations like Woodside Energy are seeking to adopt much of this program alongside deep engagement with big data, analytics and robotics. Foundations of Safety Science is more of a textbook and primer written for tertiary students and safety practitioners. Dekker, ever the renaissance man, illustrates key points with his own cartoons. In establishing the foundations, the book covers the intellectual background, history and development of safety science in a detailed and accessible manner, particularly from the 19th century to the present. But more importantly, it helps the reader make sense of this development by clarifying and criticizing difficult concepts that may have been made more difficult by the varying and sometimes obscurecurist terminology used then or since, and indicating their present usage. Of course, what we have is a foundational history from Dekker’s viewpoint. But it is so wonderfully rich and insightful that for me this was no barrier. However, others seeking a quick read will need to look elsewhere.

Dekker defines safety science as the interdisciplinary study of accidents and accident prevention and, in particular, emphasises its roots as disciplines in social science, psychology, population health, physical sciences and engineering. His chronological chapters across more than 430 pages are:

1. The 1900s and Onward: Beginnings
2. The 1920s and Onward: Taylor and Proceduralization
3. The 1920s and Onward: Accident Prone
4. The 1930s and Onward: Heinrich and Behavior-Based Safety
5. The 1940s and Onward: Human Factors and Cognitive Systems Engineering
6. The 1950s, 1960s, and Onward: System Safety
7. The 1970s and Onward: Man-Made Disasters
8. The 1980s and Onward: Normal Accidents and High Reliability Organizations
9. The 1990s and Onward: Swiss Cheese and Safety Management Systems
10. The 2000s and Onward: Safety Culture
11. The 2010s and Onward: Resilience Engineering

All chapters include study questions and up-to-date references with further reading. Many of my safety heroes are cited approvingly by Dekker, including Jens Rasmussen, James Reason and Andrew Hopkins.

For those who wish to understand the breadth needed by safety professionals, the pairing of the Body of Knowledge that is maintained and stewarded by Pam Pryor AO and the Institute, and Dekker’s Foundations of Safety Science, is my new gold standard.

Reviewed by Kym Bills, Chair, College of Fellows and Board Member, Australian Institute of Health & Safety
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