

Skilling safety up through training and education

OHS education and training plays a critical role in compliance and improving safety outcomes, and there are a number of steps OHS professionals can take to improve the safety qualifications, skills and capability of employees, writes Craig Donaldson

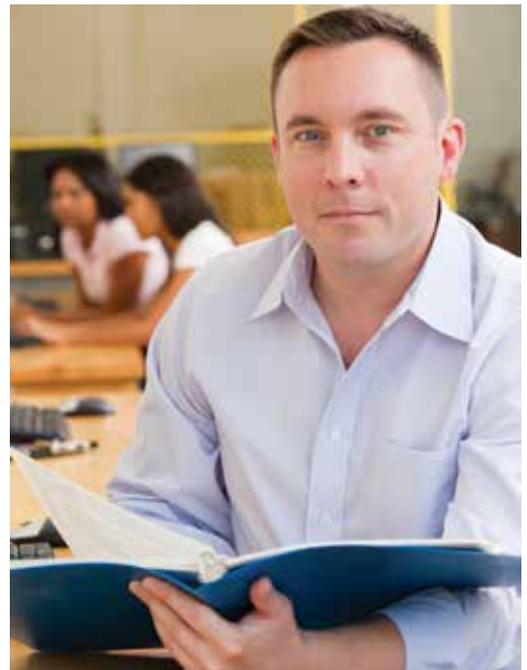
As organisations seek to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their learning and development initiatives, there is a significant shift occurring in the nature of OHS training, according to a number of experts. Training is used by organisations to provide knowledge to its workforce about hazards and controls, according to managing director of SafeStart, Cristian Sylvestre, who explains that the belief behind this is that if people know about a hazard and what to do to avoid contact with it, they will be able to prevent incidents. Although knowledge is important (you can't prevent what you don't know about), he says it is not enough to prevent all incidents.

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

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

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

“For AlertForce our clients frequently train if the outcomes are licensed – for example, traffic control training or asbestos removal. The most effective training comes when organisations are proactive and can make business or safety improvements at the same time as upskilling their



workforce. For qualifications and career upskilling, most industries push the cost of this back onto staff. Successful individuals understand the value of investing in their education, whether it be vocational and/or tertiary – my opinion for WHS is that vocational is the mandatory part,” he says.

Pitfalls and challenges

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

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

When it comes to looking at the person side of an incident, Sylvestre observes that the assumption made is that because the person knew about the

“Momentary inattention is involved in 95 per cent of incidents”

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

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

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

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

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

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

Trends and developments in OHS training

Sylvestre is noticing a move towards “top-down” initiatives – usually referred to as safety leadership or safety culture programs, driven from the top. This is undoubtedly important, because people are influenced by what their leaders pay attention to, he explains. “We are seeing leadership teams more engaged in safety and wanting to improve results. What needs to

READY TO TAKE THAT NEXT STEP IN YOUR CAREER?

Monash University’s Graduate Diploma and Master of Occupational and Environmental Health are internationally recognised qualifications with a reputation for excellence in teaching and outstanding graduates. Both courses are accredited by the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board.

Preparing students with the knowledge and skills necessary to assess, control and reduce workplace hazards and risks, these dynamic courses offer great teaching flexibility including online classes.

ENROL TODAY AND PROPEL YOUR CAREER

Phone: +61 03 9903 0563

Email: pgradenq@monash.edu

coeh.monash.org

“The most effective training comes when organisations are proactive and can make business or safety improvements at the same time as upskilling their workforce”

happen is for that passion to be instilled across all levels, not just in the leadership group,” says Sylvestre.

“We are also noticing an increase in online learning systems, which are particularly favoured in industries where time is in short supply. Online learning gives participants access to large amounts of knowledge at their own pace and certainly has its benefits. What we know, however, is that safety is not just about the knowledge people accumulate, but more importantly, it is about what they do. What still needs to be determined is how effective online learning is at embedding knowledge and translating it into action.”

Torazzi observes that most organisations will require a minimum of a Diploma of WHS for health and safety professional roles. “We see many individuals standing out by rounding out their education with a Diploma of Quality Auditing. There is also a huge opportunity available for those who gain these formal qualifications along with other ticket training. For example, in NSW at the moment there are so many infrastructure programs going, traffic control work is going through the roof – there simply are not enough workers. These workers of course need to be managed, so individuals need to look at niches within health and safety to get work,” he says.

Drivers of change

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

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

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

Depending on the state or territory, Torazzi says there is a range of drivers with regards to OHS training trends and developments. “In NSW it’s just the sheer amount of work, with NBN upgrades and rollouts north of Sydney, highway upgrades or light rail projects. In Queensland the market is going through change because of where the industry cycle is with mining, however, many companies are now outsourcing

A primer on first aid training

While Australian organisations are conducting first aid training for their staff year in and year out, research shows that less than one in three Australian employees feel confident to perform first aid in a workplace emergency, according to Nikki Jurcutz, the CEO of Hero HQ, a nationally recognised first aid training organisation. Jurcutz was working as a paramedic when she first noticed the lack of skilled first aiders in the community, and she was continuously being called into workplaces where first aid treatment could have potentially changed the outcome of a patient, and saw firsthand the impact of first aiders who were not confident in their knowledge or skills.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics data reports that the average workplace injury rates are an astonishing 58 per 1000 workers, yet few businesses are first aid ready, she says. “It is integral for organisations to

seek out first aid providers that are not only offering your business compliance but are offering training that is of the highest quality. Organisations should take into consideration the calibre of the educators and resources, rather than selecting a provider based purely on price,” she says.

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

“Quality providers are opting to take a

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

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

work to consultants. Downturns are also a great opportunity to take some time out to upskill again, whether that be through vocational training or tertiary,” he says.

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

Improving ROI and engagement

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

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

sure you ask your registered training organisation what the current opportunities are.”

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

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

Fully accredited and completely online

ECU’s Master of Occupational Health and Safety, and Graduate Diploma of Occupational Health and Safety have been accredited by the Australian OHS Education Accreditation Board (AOHSEAB). These courses are designed for OHS professionals who wish to expand upon their existing knowledge and enhance their career opportunities.

Throughout these courses, students design and implement an OHS management system; investigate, analyse and synthesise OHS legislation; critically review the risk management processes; use creativity and initiative in the analysis of workplace needs, and much more.

Courses are available to study online both part-time and full-time, offering you flexible study options. What’s more, ECU offers a Graduate Certificate in Occupational Health and Safety, and a Master of Occupational Hygiene and Toxicology which is accredited by the Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists (AIOH) and the British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS).

Apply for Occupational Health and Safety
ecugetready.com.au

ECU. That’s how university should be.



303ML ECU12349 | CRICOS IPC 00279B

How To Break Through The Safety Plateau

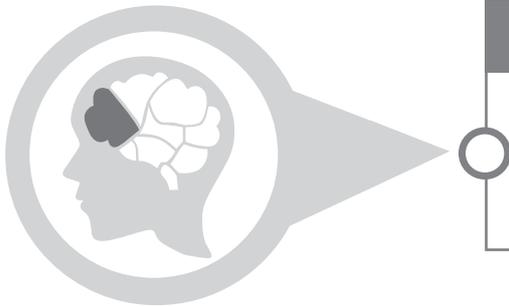
Most organisations have realised that people's actions have a lot to do with incidents. Traditionally, workplaces have attempted to manage people's actions by focusing on:



First Generation Safety

Safe Workplace

Eliminating hazards and providing workers with knowledge by using risk management and consultation.



Second Generation Safety

Top Down Safety

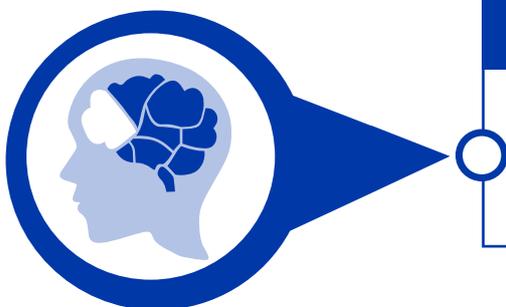
Influencing people's ability to make safer "conscious decisions" through leadership, observation and instruction.

While these methods have been effective in reducing workplace incidents the question that remains is: Why are people still getting hurt?

Neuroscientific research tells us that 95% of what we do is subconscious.

Our subconscious is the hard drive of our mind where most of our behaviours reside. By repeating tasks on a regular basis we become comfortable with them resulting in "autopilot" or habit driven behaviour.

The problem is that while in "autopilot" we are often not paying attention to the things that can hurt us, and that is typically when we get hurt.



Third Generation Safety

Safer Habits - The Missing Piece

Using neuroscience and behavioural research to engage the subconscious mind for safer habits.

Find out more by contacting us today or registering for a



FREE WEBINAR

Call 02 8844 8100 or email info@safestart.com.au.