

Pioneering Ideas for A NEW GENERATION OF SAFETY

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SAFETY PROFESSIONALS STRIVE to mitigate occupational hazards and enhance worker health. Philosophies considering safety leadership, organizational culture, safety climate, behavior-based safety and system safety aim to pinpoint the best approach for employee safety. However, early career safety professionals are new to practices that create sustainable programs. Students receive a range of safety education and training to prepare for the workforce. Yet, the philosophies set forth are discussed too broadly in undergraduate curricula. Consequentially, this may lead to the inability to apply such safety concepts upon entry into the field.

Safe workplaces have been developed over time from considerations other than enforcing workplace standards. Seasoned managers have learned the skills necessary to justify the safety profession and add organizational value. However, many organizations face an approaching challenge as current managers enter retirement age. This may force many organizations to replace the safety role with an early career professional. The purpose of this article is to discuss strategies to prepare for a future leadership gap. Senior leaders

and organizations must recognize the gaps, identify key skills, select emerging talent and implement a structured system to prepare for opening management roles (McCall, 2010). Likewise, early career professionals must develop the technical and leadership skills to sustain the profession. A change in executive leadership requires strategic preparation. With an aging workforce, senior leaders must pave the way for emerging professionals to carry the torch of the safety profession.

The Learning Curve

Graduating safety professionals enter the workforce ready to con-

quer dangerous environments. Safety students are educated on principles to anticipate, recognize, evaluate and control hazards. The next generation comes out of college offering unique skills and aptitude but lacks depth in practical knowledge. Yet, new hires often begin work with little orientation, onboarding, training, introduction or guidance (Shufutinsky & Cox, 2019). This may lead to new safety professionals failing to apply their education and inadequately controlling a workplace. If safety specialists do not apply their training and education, companies may not see a need for the position (Morris & Cannady, 2019). It is important to understand the fundamentals of safety, but basic resolutions will not advance the profession. New safety professionals must be forced to think critically and build upon their experiences. The answer to creating sustainable safety cannot retreat to insignificant change. The cost of development comes back to opportunity costs associated with the learning curve, and the return on that investment is higher quality leadership in organizations (McCall, 2010).

Roles of the Organization

Companies have been slow to embrace the idea that on-the-job experience should be the foundation for development. Management often focuses on immediate results rather than long-term leadership development (McCall, 2010). As a result, the assumption remains that unstructured learning experiences will result in leadership development (Johnson et al., 2018). Organizations implicitly believe that professionals learn on the job without adequate preparation, support or resources (Johnson et al., 2018; McCall, 2010). In this case, familiarity does not result in future successes or growth. Since context often determines success or failure, companies must focus on organizational design and managerial processes (Beer et al., 2016). Companies must design a structured system for supportive learning and professional development. Although scientists argue that it lacks empirical evidence (Clardy, 2018; Johnson et al., 2018; Petriglieri, 2014), the 70-20-10 model has served as a base-

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- An emerging challenge is approaching as many OSH leaders enter retirement age. Senior safety professionals must create a pipeline of emerging professionals to prepare for a leadership gap.
- Organizations must develop an organized framework to transfer knowledge from seasoned leaders to early career professionals.
- Early career professionals must develop their technical and leadership skills to sustain the safety profession.

line for many companies. This framework states that development emerges from 70% challenging work assignments, 20% colleagues and peers, and 10% formal training or education (Effron, 2018; McCall, 2010; Rabin, 2014). The key consideration is implementing a structured system open to feedback, reflection and continuous improvement (Johnson et al., 2018). It is well recognized that organizational systems influence individuals' mindsets and behaviors (Beer et al., 2016). Organizations can design unique work environments and commit to developing the next line of leadership. By creating a growth culture, organizations can become more attractive and fuel sustainable results (Schwartz, 2018). Although an unstructured 70-20-10 framework may fail to deliver anticipated results, there is potential for an organized system to be successful (Johnson et al., 2018).

Gaining Practical Experience

Leadership is learned primarily through challenging experiences. Organizations can design job assignments to be more developmental and diverse (McCall, 2010). New professionals must broaden their knowledge within their industry. A structure designed to involve new employees in the processes sets a foundation for practical learning in the field. Field supervisors readily accept the idea of learning in the trenches, and their wisdom may offer additional opportunities to learn in the organization (McCall, 2010). Safety professionals must engage with supervisors and line workers to mitigate hazards (Morris & Cannady, 2019; Provan et al., 2017). New professionals can shadow frontline workers to gain hands-on experience and apply their safety education. This type of learning interprets the environment, applies education in a practical experience and effectively creates organizational value (Hagel & Brown, 2020). In return, new employees confront overlooked and unexpected situations in the field that are not covered in the textbooks or training materials (Hagel & Brown, 2020).

Another way to add value and gain practical experience is through virtual reality training. Younger generations have shown to be the most technology literate (Cekada, 2012). Experienced professionals must incorporate the next generation's knowledge of technology. Virtual reality training provides an opportunity to gain firsthand on-the-job experience. It bridges the gap between classroom safety training and on-the-job experience by representing live scenarios (Norris et al., 2019). New employees can lead such training and communicate with frontline workers to understand real-world hazards faced in the field.

Creating Diversity & Opportunity

Management often fails to spend time strategizing developmental assignments for high potential employees (Beer et al., 2016). Talent development must be a fundamental component in business strategy and success. McCall (1998; 2010) evaluated business strategies to enhance leadership development. One company started by identifying strategic initiatives and the leadership challenges associated with each project. The executives then allocated the projects to a pool of high-potential talent. Another company desired a cross-business and cross-functional perspective from its leadership team. Senior leaders started by brainstorming a list of skills that a manager must master. This list was used to identify



learning opportunities from assignments and became the business rationale for making cross-boundary moves to develop talent (McCall, 2010). Both strategies provide a structure and offer unique opportunities for career development. The structure allows the early career professional to lead projects while the managers help in the background to deliver measurable results (Sutton, 2019).

Many organizations progress employees through horizontal or lateral career moves. Horizontal career moves focus on increasing knowledge, skills and competencies (Petrie, 2014). Although horizontal experiences remain necessary, organizations may benefit from incorporating vertical assignments. The vertical assignment enables complex thinking and develops next-level competencies (Petrie, 2014). Consider ways the military demonstrates the ability to integrate horizontal and vertical experiences. Research has explored military strategies for developing safety leadership (Winn, 2014). Throughout military training, soldiers are forced to facilitate training sessions, lead physical fitness and guide unit missions. Also, soldiers are expected to learn the jobs of their superiors and train subordinates to fill their own roles (Kirchner & Akdere, 2017). Organizations can use similar practices for emerging safety professionals. The strategy may consider assigning supervisory responsibilities, leading start-ups or turnarounds, and undertaking priority initiatives (Clardy, 2018). Organizations integrating vertical and horizontal exposures may further enhance leadership development (Kirchner & Akdere, 2017; Petrie, 2014).

Safety managers must create opportunities for new professionals to get involved at every level. Additional growth can be nurtured by allowing emerging professionals to lead monthly safety meetings or culture initiatives, present in upper management meetings, attend pre-evolution or project management meetings, participate in collaboration projects, lead incident investigations, or assist with program design. The exposure and networks developed may be crucial for future knowledge creation and career success (Dunn, 2019). Early career professionals need to learn the craft of science, develop competence, establish performance records and become members of their profession (Dunn, 2019). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the organization's leaders to strategically plan to involve early career professionals. In return, this creates exposure to each level of the organization. A key aspect is to provide constructive feedback to allow the individual to learn. Feedback creates learning opportunities and is critical for a thriving culture (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012). It allows individuals to understand what to start, stop and continue doing (Sutton, 2019). Moreover, managerial leadership must assess how

well their programs provide frequent feedback and whether feedback effectively targets improved work quality (Dow, 2014). The structured exposures and feedback prepare early career professionals for future opportunities.

Many companies encourage soft promotions or stretch assignments. Global and national companies can offer diverse job opportunities within their organizations. Companies with global segments can develop rotational programs among several sites. Similarly, companies can offer rotational programs within various disciplines. In one study, a company rotated new employees between three departments (Zaharee et al., 2018). The results found a range of benefits for employees including a deeper understanding of the company's product technologies, end-to-end knowledge of the product development process, and an orientation to the company's project-oriented culture (Zaharee et al., 2018). The first few years of an individual's career offer some of the greatest growth opportunities. Like established professionals, early career professionals likely benefit from accessing diverse knowledge to increase the chances of innovation (Dunn, 2019). Organizations can structure growth opportunities to establish the rise of internal leaders. Further, this structure can keep emerging professionals from seeking new job thrills from another company.

Mentorship & Development

Organizations must establish an integrated design to connect current leaders and emerging talent. This can be accomplished through formal or informal mentorship programs, although informal programs suggest better results (Allen et al., 2006). Seasoned professionals participating in mentor programs can create a lineage of safety leaders. Companies developing a mentor-mentee relationship can create a way to orient new professionals (Murray, 1991; Ragins et al., 2000). One strategy has shown positive results by pairing new employees with others who have been in the organization for 2 to 5 years (Omilion-Hodges & Sugg, 2019). Further, mentor-mentee relationships can expand to other departments. Some research has shown positive results in cross-sectional networking (Penney, 2011; Ragins et al., 2000). Mentees connected to a mentor in another discipline can provide diverse learning. Other research reports greater career mentoring from relationships in the same department (Allen et al., 2006). Nonetheless, positive outcomes may depend on the quality of the mentor-mentee relationship (Ragins et al., 2000). A key aspect of program design is to allow individuals to provide input in the matching process (Allen et al., 2006). This feature allows for a relationship to develop naturally rather than a forced matching. It is well known that social networks significantly contribute to an individual's creative performance and career success (Dunn, 2019). These networks can influence career progression, enhance learning through training, offer extended networks and transmit professional status to new professionals (Dunn, 2019). A mentor program provides a foundation for professional development, learning from like-minded professionals and a network to build relationships with new contacts.

Supportive Work Environments

Employees have such potential but they need work environments that draw out and cultivate creativity (Hagel

& Brown, 2020). While companies understand this on a conceptual level, many new graduates take jobs as the only safety professional on site with minimal support. Company rationale for this may include market recession, internal budgets, size or job justification. This requires a great deal of demand to establish credibility, relationships and outcomes. Upon entry, early career professionals assume job demands including risks and hazards, physical demands and complexity (Nahrgang et al., 2011). These demands exhaust an employee's mental and physical resources, leading to an increase in burnout, and hinder engagement in safety activities (Nahrgang et al., 2011). Without proper organizational design, companies often see an increase in errors and safety concerns related to staffing challenges (Genly, 2016).

It remains a zero-sum game for safety professionals to establish value on an individual level. Organizations can develop job resources to lighten the load on a small safety team. Job resources including knowledge, autonomy and supportive environments have shown a positive relationship for motivating employees toward high engagement for better safety outcomes (Demerouti et al., 2001; Nahrgang et al., 2011). Additionally, Nahrgang et al. (2011) found that establishing supportive environments benefits organizations across all industries and improves safety. Supportive work environments begin with creating a psychologically safe climate to express ideas and offer ways to add value. Psychological safety provides support, promotes open communication, improves engagement, increases performance, cultivates problem-solving and creates opportunities for advancement (Allen & Rogelberg, 2013; Allen et al., 2018; Delizonna, 2017). Organizations can support by training supervisors to be better leaders, emphasize the importance of teamwork and social support, and establish safety values (Nahrgang et al., 2011). This creates a climate that involves frontline leaders in safety. Furthermore, seasoned veterans and supervisors will calibrate early career professionals' thinking to establish safety as a whole. Senior leaders can help early career professionals to think beyond the textbooks and realize that many solutions require divergent thinking (Hernandez et al., 2018). Organizations strategizing diverse growth experiences, offering senior mentorship and incorporating supportive environments will tap into the potential of the next generation.

Role of the Emerging Professional

There is no substitute for educating future leaders on how to take responsibility for their development (McCall, 2010). Despite the focus on organizational strategy, emerging safety professionals must develop an intrinsic motivation to prepare for opening management roles. Conventional wisdom suggests that successful leadership comes from experience; therefore, the more experience one has the better equipped one is to fill leadership roles (Bottomley & Burgess, 2018). Many current leaders are facing retirement, which will create a leadership vacuum in organizations (Bottomley & Burgess, 2018). As an early career professional, it is critical to develop the skills necessary to sustain the future of the safety profession. These skills include technical understanding, effective communication and emotional intelligence. The safety profession

may soon experience a shakeout; some will face survival, others who develop their skills and mindsets will thrive (Hansen, 1997). Emerging professionals must overcome conventional wisdom and exceed leadership expectations.

Gaining Technical Understanding

Emerging professionals must seek opportunities to gain technical knowledge. Early career professionals must gain technical knowledge before moving up the ladder. The foresight of seeking lateral opportunities will create a base for vertical success. Individuals without practical knowledge cannot appropriately and successfully control the workspace. Before moving up the ladder, emerging professionals must understand the processes and predictors that generate successful outcomes.

Safety professionals must know the numbers both within the field of safety and business. Young professionals are taught leading and lagging indicators throughout their education. However, conceptual understanding does not demonstrate practical use within an organization. Safety leaders use metrics to track safety performance, best practices, response time to safety concerns, corrective actions and percent of employee participation (Krause & Bell, 2015). Senior leaders must teach emerging professionals how to interpret the numbers beyond lagging indicators. Seasoned veterans can train emerging professionals to understand trends that shape better safety outcomes (Krause & Bell, 2015). Serious injuries are effectively mitigated in the original design or redesign process (Manuele, 2003). Leading indicator trends can be discussed with supervisors and other personnel to enhance safety. This process provides the foundation for early career professionals to view systems as a whole, identify opportunities for improvement and collaborate to solve problems.

Financial and business principles are rarely used to prepare safety students for the workplace (Hill, 2002). As a result, safety professionals often lack business skills and knowledge (Hill, 2002; Provan et al., 2017; Wagner, 2010). Safety professionals must develop the skills to understand financial strategies, support business processes and employ entrepreneurial tactics (Hansen, 1997). The safety professional must become a servant to business functions and understand that their organizational value (incident reduction, process design, savings) equates to the financial numbers (Hansen, 1997). Managers can facilitate learning by assigning financial responsibilities. These responsibilities may include reviewing current plans, managing a small project budget or forecasting next year's safety finances (Sutton, 2019). The process of submitting and presenting these numbers supports the development of business skills. Early career professionals must shift from old paradigms and learn ways to effectively add value to the business (Hill, 2002).

Emerging professionals have a skill in their back pocket that can improve safety management systems. In a world of technological advances, it is critical to utilize innovative ways to identify, control and track hazards. Emerging professionals must embrace their understanding of technology and offer ways to improve a system. Suggestions can include workplace design, automation, incident investigation technologies, data tracking, statistical analysis, field survey technologies, virtual reality training or wearables in the field. Younger generations possess a technological

understanding, and it is important to embrace applicable ways that technology can improve a safety system.

Developing Effective Communication

According to Solomon (2016), 69% of managers report feeling uncomfortable communicating with employees. Except for the CEO, safety professionals must be able to communicate effectively with a more diverse group than any other role in the organization including senior management, line management, support staff, contractors and regulators (Provan et al., 2017). Thus, early career professionals must develop the skills to effectively communicate and solve problems. To remain effective, safety professionals must work with production and maintenance to creatively mitigate hazards (Morris & Cannady, 2019; Provan et al., 2017). Sustainable safety performance requires employee involvement, and safety professionals cannot single-handedly improve performance. To create employee involvement, OSH professionals must build a network and trust in the workplace (Law, 2020). This requires safety professionals to communicate with frontline workers and collaboratively solve problems. The ability to articulate knowledge concisely is the single most important attribute for emerging safety professionals (Provan et al., 2017). Developing their ability to communicate will provide the greatest opportunity for emerging professionals to leapfrog in their careers (Gallo, 2018).

Cultivating Emotional Intelligence

A safety management system is necessary for injury prevention, but such activity is not sufficient to achieve a total safety culture (Geller, 2000). Many safety programs and strategies focus on extrinsic motivators to influence behavior and abide by policies (Olawoyin, 2018). Another contributing factor suggests that a positive relationship is possible between emotional intelligence and safety management systems (Olawoyin, 2018). The construct of emotional intelligence represents the ability to influence safety attitudes and behavior (Jeffries, 2011). It has been argued that the most critical skill for safety professionals is their ability to influence others (Provan et al., 2017; Swuste & Arnoldy, 2003). A safety professional's effectiveness and ability to influence others may be as important as formal safety management systems (Provan et al., 2017; Swuste & Arnoldy, 2003).

Emotional intelligence can be described as the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others (Olawoyin, 2018). Leaders with advanced emotional intelligence may generate cooperation and trust by the ability to develop high-quality interpersonal relationships within their teams (George, 2000). While learning technical skills is required to build a successful system, emerging professionals must cultivate their emotional intelligence to exert influence. A person without emotional intelligence can have the best training in the world, an analytical mind and an endless supply of creativity, but the individual will not make a great leader (Goleman, 2004). In one study, Goleman (2004) analyzed the role that emotional intelligence played at the highest levels of a company. The higher the rank of a star performer, the more emotional intelligence showed to be a contributing factor in the person's effectiveness (Goleman, 2004). The five components of emotional intelligence

at work are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills (Goleman, 2004). Research has shown that a person with greater emotional intelligence is more likely to exercise self-control and influence decisions supportive of a safe environment (Jeffries, 2011).

Effective safety management systems require professionals to create employee involvement to sustain safe working conditions. Through cultivating emotional intelligence, emerging professionals can begin working with others and influencing ways to create a safer organization.

The Shortest Distance Between Two Points

A key factor in developing leaders is organizing a strategy for the future. The strategy starts with executive leaders assessing needs, identifying emerging talent and establishing ways to enable professional development. Organizations must understand that older workers will be a major component of the workplace in the foreseeable future (Bernardo et al., 2020). While it is difficult to determine retirement waves, all baby boomers will be 65 or older by 2030 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). This presents a window in which to establish ways for experienced leaders to transfer skills, knowledge and expertise to emerging professionals. Much discussion has been published on generational differences and ways to retain early career professionals in the workplace (Bottomley & Burgess, 2018; Calk & Patrick, 2017; Hernandez et al., 2018; Hershatler et al., 2010; Hoffman, 2018; Omilion-Hodges & Sugg, 2019; Shufutinsky & Cox, 2019). Yet recent research argues that perceived generational differences may not exist (Rudolph et al., 2020a, b; Vogels, 2019; Zaharee et al., 2018). A study to gather insights about early career professionals suggests that what makes employees stay with a company may not be generational (Zaharee et al., 2018). Professionals of all generations leave employers for similar reasons including inadequate compensation, insufficient or undefined advancement opportunities, and poor management (Zaharee et al., 2018). Conversely, career development and training are among the most important factors in retaining talent (Zaharee et al., 2018). As noted, an organized framework can keep talented employees and prepare for a future leadership gap.

Organizations recognize that it may soon become more challenging to retain developing professionals (Allen et al., 2010). Therefore, organizations need to identify their turnover trends and create a strategy to retain talented employees for opening management positions. Allen et al. (2010) aim to apply evidence-based strategies for employee retention. They emphasize that job design, the work environment and coworker relationships moderately relate to employees staying with a company. These relationships suggest that organizations can align their culture and develop job embeddedness to improve retention rates (Allen et al., 2010). Organizational strategy cannot be universal and must remain specific to industries. Yet, these strategies begin with executive leaders assessing needs, identifying early career professionals, establishing ways to enable professional development and reaping rewards by designing an organization that retains developed talent.

Conclusion

Elevating safety leadership is the single most important action an organization can take to set improvements

in motion (Krause & Bell, 2015). The challenge requires organizations to rapidly prepare for an approaching retirement wave. In preparation, experienced leaders and organizations must become responsible for developing a pipeline of emerging professionals. Organizations can design a structured framework to elevate safety leadership and retain emerging talent. This framework establishes the gaps, strategizes developmental opportunities, and executes a system for the transfer of knowledge. Likewise, early career professionals must develop the technical and leadership skills to assume opening management roles. Without this growth, a generation of underdeveloped professionals may fail to establish a safer workplace. If the actions of the organization and the individual align, a pipeline of safety leaders will emerge from the next generation. By actively investing in the next generation, experienced leaders will pave the way for emerging professionals to carry the torch of the safety profession. **PSJ**

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