Insight aims to provide useful information, links and tips in the areas of Risk Management, Work Health and Safety, Business Continuity Management, and other areas relating to management systems and corporate governance.

"SS"ing your SMS

Management Systems, at their best should be simple, structured, user-friendly enablers of efficient operational practice. However, all too often they become as unmanageable as long hair in August westerly winds.

Over time, management systems tend to morph into unwieldy beasts, becoming overly complex, tedious to apply and even more burdensome to manage… and then the task of overhauling them seems to drift into the too-hard basket.

If a root-cause analysis were undertaken to figure how the management system got to that state, there would likely be some interesting revelations, such as:

- a lack of consistent management oversight
- a failure to consult or listen to the end-user
- a perceived need to over-specify or duplicate details
- a blind-faith belief that the legislation, ISO standard or industry requirement says we need separate procedures for this, that and the other.

Overhauling these fattened, cluttered, complex management systems is an effort.

If the Japanese workplace organisational method of 5S can be used to improve our workplace and minimise the hazards and risks, what if the same approach were applied to management systems fattened by lengthy documents, to minimise their risk of failure?

The traditional 5S program is based on principles seiri, seiton, seiso, seiketsu and shitsuke.

To take a little liberty with the traditional Japanese principles by applying them to management systems rather than workplaces, there is a certain logic in 5S that could be applied to making management systems more *zen*.

The most obvious applications are:

- Seiri, which translates to 'sort', by which perhaps the biggest gain would be to sort out which management system documents are necessary and which can be earmarked for removal because they add little value as a result of being a duplication, generic, or redundant.

- And this links to Seiton or 'setting in order' where the various tiers of the management system would be organised to make clear links between (for instance) a Corporate Standard and a Workplace Procedure. A failure to attend to these links is often where problems originate, because ill-considered document hierarchies and templates prompt duplication and generalisation.

- Seiso refers to 'shine' and under a typical 5S program relates to cleanliness, and (putting aside any reference to the need to remove layers of dust from a shelved management system…) this can refer in a management system to 'sharpening the look' of documents to be more succinct and focused.

- Then there is Seiketsu, which relates to 'standardising'. With the standards and expectations for the management system established, it needs to be enshrined and protectively guarded to ensure there are no deviations.

- Finally, Shitsuke which translates to 'sustain' – once the all the hard work has been done to establish a management system, it then needs to be robustly maintained.

Or we could adopt an Aussie version of the 5S:

- **Scrap** what doesn't add value.
- **Structure** what does add value.
- **Sharpen** up the valuable detail to suit the end-users.
- **Specify** what is needed in the system.
- **Safeguard** or protect the system from becoming unnecessarily complex.

Please contact QRMC for more information.

Safe Work Method Statements – Tales From the Road

As safety professionals, QRMC consultants have seen a lot of Safe Work Method Statements (SWMS) in their time. It would be fair to say that the *quality* of these tends to fall into a typical bell curve: some are top notch, some are next to useless, and the majority are somewhere in the middle.

But what is meant by *quality*? In a SWMS it means two things:

1) That they fulfil the primary purpose of a SWMS – that is, they provide workers with step-by-step instructions for how the work activity is to proceed, with the hazards identified and the required safety controls stated for each step, all in an easy to understand manner; and

2) That they fully meet the legislative requirements of the jurisdiction in which the work is taking place.

Point 1 is where most organisations tick the box – albeit in as many ways as there are stars in the universe. What differentiates the good from the bad (and the ugly) here is paying attention to:

- keeping it simple,

- ensuring workers have had an input into the work methodology and how to do the activity safely, and

- taking a consistent approach to controlling the risks that everybody understands.

The SWMS needs to be a "live" working document that is able to be referred to during the work activity, rather than a once-off, sign-on sheet before the job commences. It is also the organisation's documented methodology that will be the evidence that an auditor, inspector, or worse, judge, will be seeking to compare the actual, on the day work methodology against. The paper and the work on the day must marry up.

Point 2 is where QRMC sees the most misunderstanding of what is required, and there really needn't be. In Queensland for example, **Section 299** of the *WHS Regulation* (2011) is quite straight forward in stating the legislative requirements for a SWMS for 'high risk construction work' (with 'High risk construction work' defined in Section 291).

Where many organisations' SWMS don't meet these legislative requirements is in regard to:

a) *Not taking into account relevant circumstances at the workplace that may affect the way in which the work for which the SWMS has been prepared, is carried out.*
   This requirement is to ensure the organisation has identified any issues (circumstances) at the location where the work is to take place (and importantly, *around* the work location that have the potential to impact the work – for example, an operating crane or large volumes of traffic next to the work site). These circumstances may not be known until arrival on site. The SWMS must be prepared to take these into account.

b) *Not describing how control measures are to be monitored and reviewed.*
   Most SWMS state the measures that are to be implemented to control the identified risks. However, that last crucial step in the risk management process – monitoring and reviewing the risk – is often neglected. If, for example, one of the implemented controls is the use of temporary steel upright posts to hold the ceiling in place above workers to prevent collapse, then the SWMS must contain details about how and how often the steel posts will be monitored to ensure they remain in place, fit for purpose, and effective. Monitoring and reviewing risk control measures should be an integral part of the risk management process, and the SWMS must reflect this.

For assistance in preparing, reviewing or auditing your SWMS and work activities, or for further information, please touch base with us at QRMC.