



Safe Work and Return to Work Awards

Shane Webcke, Queensland Safety Ambassador

Safe Work and Return to Work Awards example entry Category two – Best individual contribution to work health and safety

1. Describe the nominee's work health and safety contributions.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

I am employed as the Downer Utilities Safety Innovation Lead to proactively and collaboratively shift the business approach to safety from purely traditional methods to one that includes progressive safety theories, ideas, and applied practices (e.g. Safety II and Human and Organisational Performance). Since joining Downer, I have been an instrumental part in guiding the safety direction and strategy of the organisation. I am leading the way in operationalising progressive safety theories in Australia, turning theoretical understanding into applied operational initiatives.

My role does not have a typical 9-5 structure. Over the course of three years (since August 2018), I was tasked to develop, test, and implement a human-centered framework to improve organisational and safety performance. I utilised existing thought leaders' theories, as well as my own education in organisational psychology, to create the Human and Operational Performance Framework (HOP) (not to be confused with Todd Conklin's Human and Organisational Performance Framework). The HOP framework was developed via micro-experiments to see what would work as well as being guided by operational and critical risk needs.

Following are my successful initiatives to date.

Enabled People: Understanding and supporting our people will always result in better Human & Operational Performance, leading to operational and safety success.

- Learning Teams workshops to improve work and explore incidents without blame.
- Enabling Human Performance workshop to introduce frontline employees to new safety principles and ideas.
- Coaching and mentoring operational leaders to achieve their safety strategy.

Enabling Systems: Systems either support our Human & Operational Performance or create performance drag. Where people are frustrated or see something as a hassle, we can expect to find systems that either don't add value or are not being implemented in the way envisioned.

- Work insight activities to understand the gap between work as done and work as imagined.
- Decluttering activities involving large scale research experiments (Safety Innovation Lab-Griffith University) and small-scale improvements using work insights.
- HOP Pulse regularly captures people's thoughts and experiences on the front line with locally owned data and a live, interactive dashboard.
- Micro-experiments: Support and guide systematic experiments to trial new ideas and ways of working both internally and externally to Downer.
- Process Mapping Plus: While process mapping is not a new tool, by using HOP principles (collaboration, curiosity, and human-centred design), the process map becomes a living document that achieves long term alignment and understanding of expectations between multiple stakeholders.

Enabling Leadership

Thought leadership: Thought Leadership is the key to unlocking our future potential. By systematically providing the space for, and integrating Thought Leadership activities, we can become more creative and more innovative. The activities I have performed to enable thought leadership are:

- Triangulation for critical risk exploration.
- Thought leadership sessions to introduce ideas and innovations from key safety reformists like Professor Erik Hollnagel, Professor Sidney Dekker, Professor Drew Rae, Dr Tristan Casey, and Dr Todd Conklin.
- Strategy: Working with leaders to create and support a safety strategy that aligns with the Zero Harm Mandate, Utilities strategy, and Line of Business strategy.

HEALTH AND SAFETY CONTRIBUTIONS

I make contributions to safety internally to Downer and the industry as a whole. I have included my measurable impacts to Downer Utilities later in this submission. I am an active participant in the safety field as I believe that if it is going to help protect our most valuable resource, our people, then ideas, insights, and learnings should be shared freely. Effective safety initiatives shouldn't be hidden by IP. To this end, I was one of the original members who started the Emerging Leaders program for safety in Queensland. Since starting the QLD Chapter, I have been involved in organising events for young safety professionals to provide education, professional development, and networking opportunities. The activities have included networking events, a national YSP conference to showcase emerging ideas, technical and practical skill workshops, and support to universities.

I am recognised as a thought leader in the safety industry and I actively share and support not only my company and our clients but anyone who requests assistance in the progressive safety space (e.g. Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment Safety, Antarctic, and Parks Branch).

I have included my achievements and my contributions to the safety industry below.

PUBLICATIONS

- Book Chapter - "Innovation and Emerging Paradigms: shifting the needle on safety: progressing from dogma to science"
- Practical Guide to Safety Leadership an Evidence-Based Approach
- Safety on Tap Podcast 2018 and 2019
- SouthPac Webinar 2020
- Published in SafeGuard Magazine 2019
- Published in Safety at Work 2019

AWARDS

- AIHS Young Safety Leader - Finalist 2020
- AIHS Enterprise Safety Program Initiative – Finalist 2020
- OzWater Beyond the clutter – second best paper 2020
- Water Association Water Industry Safety Excellence Award – Finalist 2020
- APS Teaming Award – Finalist 2018
- APS Workplace Health, Safety and Wellbeing – Finalist 2017

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS (since 2018)

- Young Safety Professionals conference 2018
- Safety Professionals Leadership 2019
- Melbourne Metro 2019
- Safety-II in practice 2020
- Oz Water 2020
- OHS Leaders' Summit 2020
- AIHS National Conference 2020
- Visions Conference 2020
- OzWater Conference 2021
- Chair of AIHS Conference 2021
- OHS Leaders' Summit 2021

BARRIERS

Firstly, my role was a new addition to Downer Utilities and did not exist in any capacity in the wider business (or the industry). This was a challenge because I needed to define my role scope and impact, educate people about what support I could provide, and develop the HOP tools from scratch. I overcame this by engaging with all levels of the business from the senior leadership team to the frontline workers, to understand and learn my new context.

Secondly, I had to develop case studies and proof of the effectiveness of the HOP framework. This meant I had to gain the trust and support of my general managers so that they would be willing to try something new in the safety space without documented proof. Fortunately, I identified and engaged with the early adopters of the framework and now have strong results and case studies for the different initiatives.

Thirdly, I am the only person in this role in the company with upwards of 3000 people. This is a challenge because I need to cover the different areas of the business and implement meaningful changes to have a sustained impact (as opposed to a scattergun approach). I developed the programs and tools of the HOP framework and what we use in my business is not an off-the-shelf solution. Now that the HOP framework has been proven to work, I am overcoming this resource challenge by training local teams to ensure there is the local capability to continue with the initiatives. This is important as I cannot be the sole person skilled in HOP, and long-term sustainable impact means that each area of the business needs to own its HOP journey.

COMMUNICATE AND CONSULTATION

I employed multiple engagement and communication strategies to bring the people of Downer Utilities along on the HOP Journey.

- **Discovery Tour:** When I first started at Downer, I conducted a discovery tour across diverse sites and packages of works. This allowed me to be quickly orientated to the unique Downer context and to meet my new colleagues. The discovery tour allowed me to identify areas of opportunity and the current strengths of the business.
- **Thought Leadership Sessions:** Over the course of 18 months, we held monthly safety thought leadership days to introduce the senior leadership team to proactive and new safety theories. This exposed the business leaders to new ideas and shifted the needle on proactive approaches to safety, rather than focus on reactive/ traditional practices.
- **HOP Workshops:** I designed and facilitated a series of HOP workshops to introduce operational employees to the HOP principles and strategy. This allowed me to engage with a wide range of employees and answer, address or change any details based on feedback.
- **HOP Implementation:** Whenever a business engages in a full HOP Implementation, we follow a specific strategy to guide the business along the journey. The strategy has been designed based on Kotter's 8 (change management), Andrea Bakera's HOP change, and the communication model.

2. How did the nominee's contributions improve work health and safety?

GAINING SUPPORT

To gain the support of Downer Utilities for the HOP Framework and to change the way work is completed, I approached the change in three ways.

Firstly, it was truly a collaborative method to building the framework. While I get to claim the improvements seen in the business and be known in the industry for our approaches, it would not be possible without the input, feedback, and constructive criticism of the business. Without the active participation of the business, I would not have been able to amass the case studies to show the success of the framework. Also, by building it with the people in the business, the program was made to fit the business, allowing for its success.

Secondly, engaging with industry thought leaders (e.g. Art of Work, Forge Works, McLeod Lawyers) allowed for a sense of security and sureness in the business. While Downer has been leading the way in proactive safety initiatives, we are not the only ones (e.g. Laing

O'Rourke, Mitchell Services, Urban Utilities). By showing that they were not alone on the safety and HOP journey, the senior leadership team felt that the risk of trying something new was reduced.

Thirdly, I am a scientist-practitioner. I believe in evidence-based practice and proving as much as practical if something is effective or not. This meant that while we had false starts in the beginning, each failure allowed us to learn, improve and grow the HOP model. By engaging with the subject matter experts within the business (operational and functional), I was able to leverage the insights, knowledge, and expertise of our people to impact the whole of work. This enabled the improvement of the work itself and not treat safety like a bolt-on process.

It has been an ongoing process and journey, but the leaps and bounds made within the business are clear to see. Where we started in 2018 pales in comparison to where we are today.

Safety Improvements (Culture and Injury rates)

I am the Project Lead for five major initiatives within Downer Utilities.

Learning Teams

Learning Teams are collaborative explorations of events and conditions involved in an adverse outcome and identification of opportunities for workplace improvements to better support future performance with frontline operators.

Beneficial Impacts

- Engineering control case study: An engineering control was developed and is changing how we isolate our buried valves.
- This solution is a first-in-industry solution on how to physically isolate buried valves. This has reduced isolation incidents significantly and we now have a 90% success rate.
- Critical Risk case study (Plant and People interaction): 50% reduction in reversing on sight and 5% increase in efficiency.
- Quality Case Study: A reduction of 800 defects in a business area to 99 defects after one month.
- When compared to an ICAM (5 incidents compared), Learning teams produce 50% more insights into the business.
- Client feedback "this is a fantastic approach to incident investigation and more delivery partners should use the process".
- When surveyed "100% of participants stated that the learning team was a worthwhile experience".

HOP Pulse

The Pulse survey was designed to allow local leaders to have direct access to their people and their data.

Beneficial Impacts

There was a sustained participation rate of 80%.

Using a two-sample t-test there was a significant increase in:

- Psychological safety.
- Locus of control.
- Leadership communication.
- Change management.
- Engagement.

After 8 months of the Pulse implementation.

Process Mapping Plus

While process mapping is not a new tool, by using HOP principles (collaboration, curiosity, and human-centered design), the process map becomes a living document that achieves long term alignment and understanding of expectations between multiple stakeholders.

Beneficial Impacts

- Efficient Handover of Asset Process that enables acceptance of asset by O&M.
- Prevents the need to leave close out manager on project for an extended time beyond project completion.
- Eliminates rework associated with the handover of Assets.
- Enables UU to be ready for Asset acceptance.
- UU Program Manager “Really appreciate everyone’s effort in producing this excellent piece of work. It is going to make for seamless commissioning, handover, and capitalisation process”.
- Manager Program Assurance and Commission “Thanks a million for your help and efforts Michelle”.

Decluttering

With the support of Griffith University’s Safety Innovation lab and their researchers, we implemented a decluttering trial for a treatment plant upgrade.

Beneficial Impacts

- Removing the clutter enhanced productivity and team communication about safety.
- Community engagement improved.
- \$1.5 MILLION saved annually on total construction costs for highly repetitive linear infrastructure projects.
- \$1 MILLION saved on complex infrastructure projects.
- Reduced risk allocation for projects.
- Reduction in non-conformance reports and rework recorded.
- Was the solution a higher order of control?

All the work that has been completed to date for the HOP Framework can have broader application across the industry. The HOP Framework improves safety by improving work, and in that instance, it is a useful approach to anyone looking to improve operational outcomes while protecting our people.

3. Describe how the nominee’s contribution to health and safety management and performance was above and beyond their immediate area of responsibility.

I work closely with the stakeholders in Downer Utilities to implement proactive safety initiatives while maintaining a safe environment.

I work across all areas of the business to achieve safety improvements. The journey to craft, test, and implement the HOP framework has taken three years. While my role is unique to Downer Utilities (and potentially the industry), and I crafted the framework using existing theories and novel ideas, I rely strongly on my colleagues to make a long, lasting, sustainable impact.

I have included statements from my colleagues below so they can state in their own words the reason for the nomination.

“All areas of my business have already implemented or are in the process of implementing HOP (Human and Operational Performance) principles and tools. Michelle’s contribution to this as the Downer subject matter expert has been invaluable. She has devised tools, templates, and processes to actually operationalise the theory behind HOP. This is the hardest part, translating theory into a practice that delivers tangible benefits to the business. The practice now goes well beyond just the tangible safety benefits we have achieved into all aspects of performance and business operation; it is becoming just how we do business. This would not have been accomplished without Michelle, she was a key pillar, it is as simple as that” – Chris Yeats General Manager, Water Services North.

“Not only does Michelle introduce ground-breaking initiatives, but she also develops, implements, trains, monitors, and reviews the progress of each element. Michelle has successfully navigated both the safety and operational management teams to achieve engagement and involvement in her initiatives. I am extremely honoured to have Michelle as an integral part of my team.” John Walsh General Manager Zero Harm Downer Utilities.

“Michelle has the ability to identify the operational barriers to achieving desired WHS outcomes quickly. Once she knows there is an issue, she sets about investigating, engaging, and addressing the issue. Not only has she worked better to understand the causes of Asset Strikes in our business, but she has also introduced human performance workshops into our operational teams that have identified the critical strategic need for changes. Michelle is a thought leader in the operational application of safety II principles and is one of the leading experts on WHS in Australia.” Nicole Ashcroft – Quality Manager Downer Utilities.

“Michelle’s support in turning our culture from compliance-based to psychological-based safety cannot be underestimated. Without her assistance, we could not have achieved the improvements in our management and field attitudes to safety, the reduction in significant physical and mental health injuries, and the development of an amazing tool to interact with our remote workforce.” Leanne Hartley National Zero Harm Manager Skilltech.