

3M Transcript for the following interview: Episode 54 OHS Body of Knowledge

Mark Reggers (R) Pam Pryor (P)

(R) Welcome to the 3M Science of Safety podcast everyone. I'm Mark Reggers, an Occupational Hygienist who likes to ask the questions why, how and please explain. Today, we're talking all about the OHS Body of Knowledge with Pam Pryor. Welcome, Pam.

(P) Thank you, Mark.

(R) Before we get into the real good stuff, the meaty questions and answers, can you please introduce yourself? Who are you, where are you from, and maybe a little bit of your background if that's okay?

(P) Thanks Mark. Just going back, a little way I guess, is important as to where I came from and why I'm passionate about health and safety. I started life as a school science teacher and that gave me an interesting education. I then moved on and took on qualifications in occupational health and safety, worked in the electricity industry, utility industries and the health industry. But I became really interested in professional education and professional affairs, and as a consultant, that took me into the then National Commission where I consulted on OHS skills development and also, I taught at VIOSH at the then University of Ballarat. And I was also involved in VET education there and wrote training products in relation to VET training. So, I've had a bit of a broad exposure to health and safety as a practitioner, as a professional, and also an OHS education. But I think professional affairs and promoting the profession has really been my passion, and that's taken me to this current role in the Body of Knowledge.

(R) So, we are talking about the OHS Body of Knowledge. So, from an historical point of view, how did that come about before we get into what is the OHS Body of Knowledge? Why did it come into existence in the first place?

(P) It's a little bit of a story.

(R) I like stories. Continue.

(P) And it's a story that I think is really important to the profession and to the development of the OHS profession. It started in Victoria in 2007. WorkSafe Victoria identified as part of their strategy they wanted to be more involved with OHS professionals as part of ensuring good workplace health and safety and good advice to the workplace. But they were a little bit concerned at the time that the quality of advice being given in the workplaces wasn't what they thought it should be and that's a really big comment about the profession. But what they then did, and they took a really strategic approach and it was innovative at the time, they supported and sponsored an alliance between universities teaching health and safety and the professional bodies involved in health and safety. That alliance became HaSPA, the Health and Safety Professionals Alliance. And what that did was it first off produced a code of ethics and a set of minimum service standards for those providing advice. That set of minimum service standards recommended that those providing advice in the workplace should be certified. And everybody agreed with that and it was a really momentous recommendation that it came from a regulator. But the big 'but' was, we said for the generalists, we can't have certification yet because we don't have accredited courses and we don't have accredited courses because we can't agree on what should be in the course. So, WorkSafe at the time, to their absolute credit said, "Okay, what do you need to deliver that?" So, the Body of Knowledge project came into being, funded by WorkSafe Victoria, and that had three deliverables. It was to define what the Body of Knowledge was that OHS professionals should have, to set up an accreditation

process for university courses based on that body of knowledge, and to set up certification for individual professionals, thus the Body of Knowledge project was born and the Body of Knowledge was finally published for the first time in 2012.

(R) It's pretty important when you're talking about health and safety that people know what they're talking about on there's so many implications if you don't know what you're talking about and providing advice or doing those things. So, obviously there's been a big gap analysis I guess to simplify what happens and then this OHS Body of Knowledge was created. So, what is it? What structure does it take for these safety professionals and education institutions?

(P) So, it's interesting that you say the Body of Knowledge was created. It sounds like it dropped down from on high. But before I answer what it is, I think I need to talk a little bit more about the tortuous process by which it came about. So, the process by which it came about was we created a technical panel and that technical panel had people on it from Victorian universities teaching health and safety and the Safety Institute of Australia. And I chaired that technical panel. So, there was a number of workshops that we had initially. We consulted with educators. We consulted with professionals and we looked around internationally and at other professions as to what were examples of bodies of knowledge. And there was no example around that we felt that informed us and our discussions around what is a body of knowledge. And remember, we're talking 2010. So, eventually, after a very tortuous process, we came up with a conceptual framework and so, it wasn't a didactic, "This is a handbook. This is what everybody should do, should know." It was about the concepts, the ideas that OHS professionals should be able to engage with. So, it was about the discussion and the engagement and it was quite hard for a lot of people to get their head around what's a conceptual framework. They wanted the how to, the facts, the details.

(R) The textbook that says A, B, C, D, do it this way.

(P) And the Body of Knowledge is not a textbook. We're very clear on that because a textbook is usually written in perhaps a didactic way. It's a statement of what's the knowledge at the time, often by one person or a small group of people for a textbook. So, we're quite clear the Body of Knowledge is not a textbook. It is meant to evolve as knowledge evolves. It is meant to be based on research, on peer-reviewed literature, on practice but informed by reflective and critical thought. But also, to bring together the knowledge and the practice of what's happening in the profession. It's not about one or a few people's views, as perhaps a textbook is.

(R) So, you said it's not a textbook, but what form does it come in then?

(P) That's a good question because if you asked me that three months ago, I would probably answer it differently. And as I mentioned, the Body of Knowledge is about evolving and it's evolving as knowledge grows. But it's also about evolving as we get our head around what is the Body of Knowledge. So, when it was published in 2012, it was really a series of PDFs on a website and because when we launched it ... you had to launch something physically ... so we did actually print out the chapters and wave around a bound book. And we still get requests from people to say, "Can I buy a printed version?" But I'm resisting that because that makes it again fixed in time, and we've said the Body of Knowledge is evolving. So, if you ask me what does it look like now, then we've recently launched a new website for the Body of Knowledge and on that website, we've expanded the offerings, if you like. So, there is still the core chapters around each core idea and core concepts for the Body of Knowledge, but we're expanding it so that now each chapter, if you like, has a topic page. On that topic page, you can download the core chapter, which was based on the research, the peer review, and that is protected, if you like, because that has to have integrity. But we're also looking at developing what we're calling a sandbox and I guess the explanation is come and

play with me as a kid in a sandbox. So, the sandbox is an interactive element where the chapter's posted but what we're looking for people to do is to engage with that online so that people can write comments etcetera. The other aspect with each topic is that we're looking at posting resources which might be podcasts on particular topics which might be links that are freely available tools that have been developed. The other thing that we're looking at putting on each of the ... or some of the pages is that as we tackle more complex problems in the Body of Knowledge, then the chapters are getting much larger. I guess if we look back to some of the original chapters ... let's take thermal environment from a hygiene point of view ... that can be written in a summary format and deal with the technical aspects for the generalist in a fairly neat, concise format. Then you go to something like organisational culture or you go to ethics in practice or even safe design and it's becoming much more complex. So, the chapters are growing and one of our principles was that each chapter for the Body of Knowledge should be written in a format that is accessible to the professional, so it's not meant to be each chapter a textbook or of size. So, one of the requirements was that it be in a fairly short format ...

(R) Concise

(P) Concise but while still looking at the research being clearly referenced etcetera. But as each chapter gets more complex, as I said it's growing, and so, we don't want that length to become a barrier to people sitting down and reading it. 50 pages on ethics might be a bit challenging for some people. But that is the core ... that is looking at the knowledge. But what we are doing in some of the chapters is then producing a two to three-page summary. My concern with that is that people will read the two to three-page summary and think they've got it. So, that's just another one of the offerings that is around the Body of Knowledge. So, the short answer to your question is what is the Body of Knowledge? It is a website which has a number of resources on it, the main resource being the exploration of each

concept within the framework. Then a part of that is also the tools and the other resources attached to it.

(R) You've mentioned a couple of the chapters; ethics and thermal environment. Can you highlight a couple of other topics, because OHS is very broad?

(P) So, perhaps coming back to the tortuous development is what was the framework? What was the structure, how we would structure this? And were we going to use a risk management structure? Were we going to use a systems structure? We went through all of those discussions and in coming up with the conceptual framework, we identified that there was a plethora of these conceptual ideas that an OHS professional would put together in different ways to answer different questions. And we eventually came up with the narrative and the narrative is that people work. Work impacts health and safety. So, we have three global concepts of work, health and safety. So, the health and safety impacts on humans and humans interact with work, so we need to understand humans from a physical, physiological and psychological perspective. So, humans work in organisations and organisations are impacted by the socio-political environment. Organisations are and have systems and within those systems there's hazards and those hazards have to be under control in order to reduce, minimise, control risk. And to do that, you have to understand causation from a safety point of view and a health point of view. And so, each one of those areas that I've mentioned is a core concept and then under that, there is a number of sub concepts. So, that narrative then leads to the chapter topics. So, each one of the core areas that I've mentioned is a chapter topic or a group of chapters. So, for example, under control, we have a chapter on prevention and intervention and that's basically a summary of the control theories processes. Also, under control we have safe design and then we have some mitigation chapters around emergency management and then also the mitigation through controlling and managing workplace injuries. So, under the concept of control, there's a number of extra chapters as well. So, that's an

example of some of the chapters, but also, I've mentioned hazards. Well, I think there's about 11 chapters that deal with specific hazards. So, the idea is that the OHS professional, depending on the problem they're dealing with or the situation or the strategy they're looking to develop, they would draw on different chapters in order to answer that problem. So, if I take the example of the electrical industry and what has happened is that there has been a storm and the emergency crew has been called in on a Sunday to respond to that. So, the supervisor goes out and finds out or realises that one of the people has turned up on the crew but he feels he's under the influence of alcohol. So, that then comes up in discussion the next day about how should that be managed. So, the OHS professional would be then saying, "Well, we've got to review our policy," etcetera, but in doing that, intellectually what he's doing is drawing on elements of the Body of Knowledge. So, he would be saying, "Well, okay this person has turned up under the influence of alcohol. What do I need to know about the human from a psychological point of view that has enabled that to happen? What's the physical impact of the alcohol on his capability?" But then he's going to go to the systems and say, "Well, what's the systems in the organisation that has enabled that to happen?" and it needs to be brought into place to deal with it now it's happened. And what's the hazards that are being created, so I have a visual picture of having all these concepts in his mind that he is then going to draw down on in order to say, "What was not happening in the organisation that we need to address and how are we going to change our strategies?" But to do that, he needs to draw on a whole lot of different areas and they will be different depending on what problem they're dealing with.

(R) I think that was a fantastic example, actually, just to highlight all the different elements that come into play to addressing the situation and as health safety professionals who are listening are probably nodding as they're listening right now as all those different situations that do occur in the workplace, that you are drawing on those areas of knowledge.

(P) Mark, can I just perhaps reinforce that because quite often people say to us, "Well, when I look at the Body of Knowledge, I want to be able to start at one and go through to 10 or 15," and they say to me, "Well, you need to give it to me so that it answers the problem more sequentially." But I think this is a really key thing for generalist occupational health and safety is that it's not a straight line in order to, "This is my problem and this is how I get to the end." So, in using the Body of Knowledge, people have to get their head around what health and safety is about. And it's not a straight line, and so, we need to have that idea of being able to pull from different areas, different disciplines, but also different parts of the Body of Knowledge in different ways. And I think this is a really important development of the profession and development of the concept that it is not a straight line and health and safety's very multidisciplinary. And if I can move on and perhaps just give you another little example of the challenges?

(R) Please.

(P) Because health and safety is multidisciplinary, and it's creating a difficulty in limiting us as developing a profession because professions have to have a body of knowledge and we're still discussing, "What is the health and safety Body of Knowledge?" What do we own as a profession? And we recently did some work with the Institute of Chemical Engineer Safety Centre on developing two chapters on process safety. We had a technical panel that had process safety specialists and generalist health and safety specialists. And I would say the first four meetings were around role clarity. And the process safety specialists really had very little understanding of what generalists did. So, in order to work through that, we had to be able to work out if you've got a situation in a process environment, the process safety people are really important because they have their role and their technical element. But there is some really important things that the generalist brings around the organisational aspects, the systems, etcetera. And what we then did was that by clarifying the role, we were able to add to the Body of Knowledge by saying,

"This is the role of the generalist in a process safety environment." And so, that actually ... the process engineers, at the end of our development of the chapter, had a very different view of working with generalist OHS professionals. And so, that added to the Body of Knowledge by being able to clarify the roles.

(R) So, what involvement does the Australian Institute of Health and Safety have to do with the Body of Knowledge?

(P) So, the Australian Institute of Health and Safety, previously the Safety Institute of Australia and we need to get our head around that change ...

(R) The recent change, yes.

(P) The recent change. So, absolutely key involvement and again, perhaps a little bit of a process history background. Then, the Safety Institute of Australia was part of the development of HaSPA, was a representative on HaSPA. They were represented on the technical panel and I, as representing then the SIA, chaired that technical panel for the Body of Knowledge; very much involved in the development. The SIA also managed the consultation process around the Body of Knowledge originally. When the Body of Knowledge was published in 2012, WorkSafe Victoria signed over the copyright of the Body of Knowledge to the Safety Institute of Australia on the condition that the Safety Institute continued to develop it and maintain the currency. And very much now, as the Australian Institute of Health and Safety, they have taken up that challenge to continue the development. They now manage it and support it financially and ensuring that we follow on with that evolution and development. So, very much involved in the beginning and owning it and developing it now. I think the other thing is that Body of Knowledge now permeates everything that the Australian Institute of Health and Safety does. They have a capability framework and that's represented as a pyramid. The Body of Knowledge forms the base of that pyramid. The second

layer of the pyramid is around assuring OHS education and the quality of the education. That happens through the accreditation board and the Body of Knowledge is part of the criteria for accreditation. The third level is around role clarity and so I've just discussed how the Body of Knowledge is really important in role clarity. The fourth level is around certification which ensures the quality of those individuals giving advice and when they get certified. The Body of Knowledge forms part of that criteria of certification. The peak of the pyramid is around ongoing professional development and the Body of Knowledge forms a framework for that. So, the Safety Institute since 2012 and now in 2019, being the Australian Institute of Health and Safety, sees the Body of Knowledge as its greatest asset and sees it as being absolutely vital to the profession. Part of a definition of a profession by Professions Australia is a body of knowledge that comes from high level education, training and research and so the Body of Knowledge to health and safety is absolutely essential to them as a professional and as the professional body. The Australian Institute of Health and Safety sees the OHS Body of Knowledge as their core business.

(R) So, looking forward, where is the Body of Knowledge going in the future? You've said it's not a static thing. Where is it likely to go?

(P) It's absolutely not static and the evolution is important and the profession is evolving very rapidly. And so, the Body of Knowledge has to move with it and that's one of our challenges. So, I've just mentioned that there is a new website. We've also got a new fresh livery for the Body of Knowledge. But our main activity at this stage is around our charter, if you like, which was around maintaining currency in its ongoing development. So, those chapters that were originally published, we have a responsibility to review those. It may sound a long time, but we want to make sure that there is no chapter that's older than five years. Some of the updates of the chapters are routine and can be done fairly easily. In reviewing the other chapters, we've found that we've basically been writing new chapters,

and that's fairly resource intensive. But again, it's developing the discussion. We also identified early on that there is gaps. When we published it in 2012, we felt we had a fairly broad coverage but as the profession's developing very rapidly, we realised even at the time that there were gaps. So, we've got a plan which is posted on the website about the areas that we've identified we really need to do some more work in. So, we've got ongoing development going on. The other aspect is that we've realised that we have this great asset to the profession, but being realistic, we do still have some issues around awareness and around utilisation. So, even in the short term, a communication strategy is something that we really need to put more attention into and push a lot harder. We need to have a greater awareness and greater utilisation amongst the professionals for a start. The OHS educators are pretty good about it at the moment because it's part of accreditation but even amongst the students and the educators. They're a target group that we need to increase our involvement with. We very much need to increase our involvement with the regulators about their awareness and their interaction with the Body of Knowledge and also with organisations generally and how organisations can use the Body of Knowledge to develop their OHS capability, not only of their professionals, but their awareness of others.

(R) Well, hopefully this podcast episode will help move that along a little bit with all those particular target audiences you've just mentioned there. How do people access the Body of Knowledge? It's this great resource. Where do people go and how do they get it?

(P) Its absolutely great value is that it's free. There is no limitations to individuals, individual professionals accessing the Body of Knowledge. It's on the website which I'm sure you will have posted at the end of the podcast.

(R) You can tell us what the website is right now, so everyone can know.

(P) So, www.ohsbok.org.au. Fairly simple; ohsbok.org.au. So, on that website is the chapters that can all be downloaded individually. Then there is the support materials as we mentioned earlier. It's free to individuals to be used for non-commercial purposes, so for development of themselves in the profession, even for organisations that are wanting to improve their health and safety. But if it's to be used for commercial purposes such as training, then we look at licensing those people for the Body of Knowledge.

(R) So, do you need to register? You say it's free. Do you have to put your details down?

(P) No, Mark. This is the absolute value. It is free, as I mentioned, to individuals, and all you need to do is go to the website, access the chapters or the materials which you want. In looking at the hits we get on the website, it's interesting that about a third of them are from outside Australia.

(R) I was going to ask, is this an Australia-only scheme, or how does this work internationally with other professional bodies trying to do the same thing?

(P) No, as I mentioned, it started Victorian. It very quickly morphed into being national Australian. And we were referring to it as the Australian Body of Knowledge but in 2012, I was invited to go and speak at INSHPO which is the International Network of Safety and Health Professional Organisations. They were facing the challenge of saying, "How do we have international mobility of OHS professionals and international recognition across borders?" And so, I was invited to go and speak about what was happening in Australia and Professor Andrew Hale from the UK was asked to go and speak about what was happening in Europe. Those two presentations and presentations from a couple of the other countries then led to a much more in-depth view about how do we have this international recognition. So, over the next 12 months it was identified that they wanted to have

a global capability framework and so, I was involved in the working party that developed that framework and the Body of Knowledge informed the development of that framework. What we have done since then is to map the Body of Knowledge to the INSHPO framework and to map the framework back to the Body of Knowledge, and that's published on our website and published on INSHPO's website. And on INSHPO's website, they reference the Body of Knowledge developed in Australia as the Body of Knowledge and there is discussions about how that might be more internationalised. That is likely to present a little bit of a challenge just because of the differences in culture etcetera, but for example, our ethics chapter was developed as a joint project with the Canadian Board of Registered Safety Professionals and as I mentioned, the process safety one was developed in association with the Institute of Chemical Engineers, which is a global institution. So, very much it's having some international influence.

(R) In summing up the Body of Knowledge, what would you want to leave with our listeners today?

(P) Two words; engagement and discussion. We've already discussed a few times that the Body of Knowledge is evolving and that a body of knowledge is needed for a profession. Within the OHS profession, we need to have the discussion and I see the Body of Knowledge as being both an output and input to that discussion. As we have the discussions to develop the chapters, we're actually creating knowledge and we're creating new knowledge because by bringing together research, peer-reviewed literature, experience, critical thought and reflection on that, we're actually then synthesising that to create new knowledge for the generalist OHS professional, which in a lot of cases hasn't happened before. So, we're having discussion to generate the Body of Knowledge, but when the Body of Knowledge comes out, then I see it should be initiating and being the core to how we have that ongoing discussion for the next iteration. And I think some of the topics, particularly for example ethics, I see as really being vital to generating that

discussion. If you've got a blank page, you've got nothing to talk about. But if you've got something written down, then people can engage, agree, disagree, extend, interpret. And I think that's the vital role of the Body of Knowledge and I want to see it keep developing and keep changing through engagement and discussion.

(R) There is so much to this Body of Knowledge and hopefully we've given a nice little overview but we are planning future episodes on some of these particular chapters to try and help get that discussion, to continue on with our listeners and the safety and health and hygiene world of things. So, if people do want to get in contact with you, Pam, what would be the best way to do that?

(P) So, my current role is around ... and I'm titled Manager OHS Body of Knowledge Development and I work with the Australian Institute of Health and Safety to do that. There is contact information on the website. I guess an easy thing to remember is the email manager@ohsbok.org.au or through the Australian Institute of Health and Safety. But the website is probably the best contact. And there is a contact page, contact information and an engagement page on the website.

(R) And that website again for everyone is www.ohsbok.org.au. Thank you so much for coming in, Pam. Really appreciate your time.

(P) Thank you, Mark, and we appreciate the opportunity to talk about the Body of Knowledge at any time, and as I said, it's part of the discussion and engagement.

(R) Well, thanks for listening everyone. You can get in contact with the show by sending an email to scienceofsafetysz@mmm.com. If you have any further questions, or topic suggestions or you would like some assistance around the appropriate selection, use around PPE and other topics in your workplace, 3M are certainly here to help. You can also visit our website, 3m.com.au/sospodcast for

further resources on the OHS Body of Knowledge that we've been talking about today, as well as a transcript of the conversation if you prefer to read what we've been speaking about. Be sure to subscribe and share through Apple Podcasts, Spotify or Google Podcasts or wherever you get this podcast from. And as Stephen Covey said, "I'm not a product of my circumstances. I'm a product of my decisions." Thanks for listening and have a safe day.