

Introduction to Workplace Safety and Health Management, By
Goh Yang Miang (2018) Singapour/London: World Scientific
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Recensions / Book Reviews

Introduction to Workplace Safety and Health Management

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“...Good WSH [Workplace Safety and Health] can lead to organisational excellence”. I could not agree more with this statement found on the back cover of the book. So it is with great interest that I started reading it.

Chapter 1 is entitled Introduction. It presents some basic notions (e.g. accidents, ill health, environmental pollution, etc.), the *Singapore Workplace Safety and Health Act* with its basic principles and a chart of the main duties of the various duty holders, some consideration on the costs of accidents and on WSH management. It also presents some widely known figures like Frank Bird's iceberg of accident costs and his accident pyramid, as well as the *Plan-Do-Check-Act* cycle of Walter Deming's wheel of continual improvement (underlying all WSH management standards). However the notion of System dynamics, also known as Systems thinking, which is supposed to be the backbone of the book as the subtitle of the book (“A Systems Thinking Approach”) implies, is described in a short section. The contribution of Systems thinking to WSH management is unclear, and its role as the guiding thread of the book is not explained, as one would expect in an introduction.

Chapter 2 is about incident causation. Throughout the book, the notion of incident includes those of accident, ill health and environmental pollution. The author presents a certain number of well-known models of incident causation (Heinrich's, Haddon's, Bird's, Reason's). Then he introduces the concept of “causal loop diagrams (CLDs)”, which “can be used to describe

system archetypes”. Although these diagrams are in line with “systems thinking”, unfortunately it is unclear how these CLDs shed new light on our comprehension of how accidents occur. There is no explanation on how to use these diagrams, and the author himself does not use them in the case studies at the end of the book. If this model is to make a contribution to the field of WSH management, further explanations and a more thorough demonstration would be required.

Incident investigation is the subject of Chapter 3. The author explains briefly the importance of incident investigation and analysis in the WSH management process, the steps of an investigation and the types of evidence. The major part of the chapter is devoted to an analysis technique called Event Causation Technique (ECT) apparently developed by the author. This technique is interesting, but it is difficult to see what its original contribution (if any) to the domain is, as there is no comparison with other major wide-spread techniques such as the Fault-tree analysis or the French INRS method. One wonders whether this technique is better than the others at identifying fundamental causes of accidents, which is the most difficult part of an accident investigation.

Even though Chapter 4 is about Risk Management, it begins with a figure based on the ECT technique (and so will Chapters 5 to 8). The first part of the chapter oscillates between genuine risk management and incident causation. By linking the two too closely, one can be led to the false perception that the only input to risk assessment is the risk factors identified during incident investigation. The foundations of risk management, however, are well presented, and so are the steps of the process.

The design stage of any project is the ideal moment to eliminate dangers at source. Hence the importance of Chap-

ter 5. The process and its steps are clearly described, even despite the clear focus on construction projects.

In the field of WSH, when the words Management and Systems are associated, it is generally in the context of national or international standards or guidelines. Chapter 6 uses the latest of these standards, ISO 45001: 2018, to present the main components of a WSH management system, which are fairly similar from one standard to another.

Safety culture is the theme of Chapters 7 and 8: what it is (Ch. 7) and how to improve it. Once again the importance of top management direct involvement is emphasized. The main approach (*riding-elephant-path*) used to describe the process for changing the safety culture is interesting although somewhat folkloric. Overall there are a few interesting ideas on how to improve the safety culture of an organization, and why it is important to do so.

In addition to what has been presented in previous chapters, Chapter 9 presents a whole series of legislation and regulations applicable in Singapore. This chapter is mainly interesting for people who are interested in comparative WSH legislation.

An interesting feature of this book is the two accident case studies in Chapter 10, which serve as illustrations of some of the key notions of the book. In addition to the review questions at the end of each chapter (the back cover mentions online quizzes, but these could not be found), these two features of this book can make it useful for teaching purposes. The scope of the book, however, is somewhat narrow for a number of reasons: 1- the legislation covered is specific to Singapore; 2- the author admits that it is mainly suitable for high-risk workplaces with a certain focus on construction, a domain which the author knows very well. Furthermore, the subtitle “A Systems Thinking Approach” is a little bit misleading: systems thinking as the narrative thread of

the book is far from fully exploited, and only in Chapter 6 does the reader find a discussion of WSH management systems as such. Finally, because the ECT technique (more than Systems thinking, in fact) is used to position certain chapters, clearly this book is oriented more towards the prevention of accidents (or even environmental spills) than towards the prevention of occupational illnesses and diseases.

The index at the end is a bit minimal. A list of acronyms would also help, as there are a great deal throughout the book. The main title starts with the word “Introduction”, and that’s exactly what it is. None of the chapters explore their themes in any great depth. It is clearly a conceptual book more than a “How to...” book; so indeed “Practitioners will strengthen their conceptual understanding and widen their perspective” (back cover) but they are unlikely to find much to help them take their practice to the next level.

Finally the link between WSH management and organizational excellence is assumed more than clearly demonstrated.

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Les services essentiels au Québec et la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés

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L’ouvrage de Jean Bernier, professeur émérite du Département des relations industrielles de l’Université Laval, revisite l’histoire des services essentiels au Québec sous le prisme des dernières décisions rendues par la Cour suprême à l’aune de la *Charte canadienne des droits et libertés*. Dès les premières lignes, nous retrouvons avec plaisir l’écriture de ce professeur émérite aux activités scientifiques toujours très nombreuses.