

THE 5A-WAY TO ADJUSTING TO CHANGE IN WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH¹

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1. THE WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH ACT (2006)

The Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Act of 2006 is a fact of life outside the home in Singapore. When it was enacted on 1 March 2006, it mainly encompassed factories, shipyards, and construction sites.

From January 2008, the Act has been expanded to six more sectors, namely:

- Hotels and other places serving food and beverage;
- Transportation of goods and other logistics services;
- Clinics and other healthcare facilities;
- Veterinary hospitals and animal care;
- Landscaping and maintenance services; and,
- Water supply, sewerage and waste management.

Before long all other workplaces – with a few exceptions such as certain segments of the Government – will be brought under the Act.

The motivation for the Act, which is drastically changing the scene from the familiar Factories Act of 1973, stemmed from many causes:

- The increasing number, rate, and severity of workplace accidents;
- Singapore's 18th rank (Sweden being No. 1, rated with 1.2 workplace fatalities per 100,000 workers) among more than 100 countries;
- The stagnation of the accident rate curve at 2.2 per 1 million man-hours of work for many years;
- The spate of high-profile accidents in 2004; and,
- The fact that the Factories Act which was in force, in spite of changes in the interim, was outdated and too prescriptive.

The WSH Act was promulgated with the following basic principles and aims:

- Reduce risks at source;
- Make the regulations less prescriptive and more performance-based;
- Encourage professionals to be pro-active rather than reactive;
- Distribute accountability for risk management to all stakeholders;
- Promote industry ownership of standards and outcomes;
- Impose higher penalties for poor safety management;

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- Achieve reduction in fatality rate by half in 2015; and,
- Attain WSH standards comparable to European countries.

The WSH (Incident Reporting) Regulations of the Act had the following aims:

- To ensure that data on the state of OSH in Singapore is comprehensive to facilitate early detection of problems;
- To cover all workplaces, and not limit to ‘factories’; and,
- To widen the scope of existing reporting requirements, to include injuries to members of the public arising from work accidents.

WSH (Risk Management) Regulations were introduced on 1 September 2006 with the following intentions:

- To change mindsets so as to make those in charge take responsibility for managing their own safety outcomes, and not rely on the Government to prescribe standards.
- To require all employers and principals covered by the Act to assess risk to safety and health of any person who may be affected by the undertaking.
- To urge senior managers to lead the way, with risk assessment (RA) being an effective way to discharge general duties under Part IV of the main Act.
- To ensure that RA becomes a genuine attempt to identify hazards and risk of accidents, not a bureaucratic form filling exercise; hence the Regulation gave no prescribed template.

Penalties under the WSH Act are much higher than under the repealed Factories Act. For instance, penalty for corporate offenders, which was \$200,000 under the Factories Act, has now been raised to \$500,000.

Underlying all these actions by the Government was the key mission to change the mindset of all stakeholders to own responsibility for identifying and managing all workplace risks, and for enhancing the nation’s safety culture.

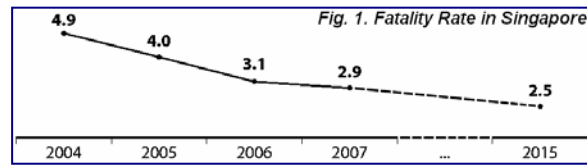
Since the passing of the WSH Act, Singapore Ministry of Manpower has launched many initiatives (now consolidated under the ambit of the WSH Council) to facilitate the changes proposed:

- Public information and education
 - Website
 - Seminars
 - Advisories
 - Statistics
 - Violations report line (6317 1111)
 - Hot line
 - OSH Alert
 - Compendiums
 - Subsidies
- Enforcement
- ProBE (Programme-Based Engagement)
- BizSAFE

Improved results are already visible. Overall fatality rate has fallen from 4.9 to

2.9 per 100,000 in three years, well on the way to reaching the goal of 2.5 in 2015. (Fig. 1.)

At the same time, many of the changes introduced by the WSH Act have been so numerous, comprehensive, and



far-reaching in their impact that it has not been easy or smooth for the employers and employees, management and workforce, contractors and sub-contractors, in short to almost every individual and organisation concerned, to understand and implement the regulations.

This is all the more true for the fresh sectors that have been brought into the safety net, and even more so for the smaller enterprises which do not have the personnel or the resources to digest the technical aspects of the regulations.

Rest of the paper will focus on how adjustment may be made to the changes.

2. THE 5-A WAY

From time immemorial, advice – generally free in olden days – has been available on how to face crises and make decisions in personal and professional lives. Now with the all-pervading world-wide web, there is too much of it, maybe at a price!

In recent times, many smart entrepreneurs (rather than wise altruistic do-gooders) have proposed and in fact become popular (and rich!) by presenting blueprints for success and templates for good management.

In contrast to most of these, author right away disclaims any originality in his proposal. His 5A-Way may not even be a “discovery” like Newton’s discovery of gravity or Columbus’s discovery of America. Two of his ‘5-A’s appear in the “Triple-A” nutrition programme. Three seem to have already been strung together by big guns (pun?) like the U.S. Army, if in a different sequence.

All five elements of his 5A-Way are generic, as timeless as Confucius, Gandhi, and Socrates, to name a few of the stalwarts, and as widely published as the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the Bible, and *I-Ching*, again to name just a few of the classics. The author stands, *a la* Bernard, “on the shoulders of giants”.

What the author does claim are the following:

- The catchy name;
- Easy identification with the five fingers we count upon;
- Gradual and steady evolution of the guiding principles starting from zero to (now) five, distilled from his own personal and professional experiences;
- A recent focus on workplace safety; and,
- A passionate desire to help the confused see more clearly and the slow move faster in this drive towards increased safety and decreased injury.

So whatever credit or blame may be attributed to the 5A-Way presented here should be laid at the author’s door.

The '5-A' are as laid out in Table 1:

Table 1: The 5-'A's

A-1	Attitude	The beginning, the base and basis for all we want to do. Believe in the chosen goal.
A-2	Awareness	Learning all the ramifications and implications of the task. Know what is expected of you.
A-3	Acceptance	Shouldering responsibility for all the consequences. Take responsibility for it.
A-4	Analysis	Developing the right procedures, selecting the right tools. Plan what to do and how.
A-5	Action	Putting our money and our effort where our mouth is. Just go ahead and do it.

Not only the five A-words, but their order is critical to the five-finger exercise. They will be discussed in the following sections with reference to safety.

3. THE 5A-WAY TO SAFETY

While the 5A-Way can be applied to anything and everything, it is ideally suited to promotion of safety in the workplace because of the many complex interacting factors involved. The graphics in Fig. 2 was developed by the author and MOM, to highlight the five A-s involved.



What follows are explanatory notes on the five themes:

A-1. ATTITUDE:

- It means that we want every one of the workers who comes to work in the morning, not to be injured or killed at the workplace, while doing the work.

- It means that we wish to share with our cohorts, all information and knowledge about accidents and incidents.
- ... So that we can assure ourselves, and proudly tell others: *“I accept work-place safety as a core value!”*

A-2. AWARENESS:

- It means we must learn what can cause harm, to whom, with what impact.
- It means that we must see the potential dangers, hear and sense them ... to identify them, so that we can avoid or control them.
- ... To save employees from injury or death, to save our property from damage, and our environment and reputation from harm.

A-3. ACCEPTANCE:

- It means being accountable for the welfare and safety of all the stakeholders.
- It means treating all the stakeholders as partners, and committing ourselves to the actions and their consequences.
- ... To make risk management our vision and our mission, and to declare their content and our intent to all concerned.

A-4. ANALYSIS:

- It means identifying the hazards, estimating the likelihood and severity of accidents, and what their combined risk level would be.
- It means deciding which risks are acceptable, which are unacceptable, and thus, which are tolerable.
- ... So that we can plan to manage them, by elimination or mitigation by means of suitable safeguards.

A-5. ACTION:

- It means getting all the stakeholders to understand, accept, and participate in the risk assessment and management process.
- It means documenting all information relevant to risk assessment, implementing our decisions, and communicating with all concerned.
- ... So that we may get on with the business of safety, and the safety of our business ... demonstrating safety first proves that safety lasts.

Many workplace safety applications³ of the author’s 5A-Way are presented in the author’s paper and book (Ref. 1, 2.)

³ In his courses, the author suggests to the participants that they apply the 5A-Way to non-technical matters. A favourite example is for young (unmarried) people to apply it to the idea of getting married – which, in Singapore with its alarmingly low birth-rate with its dire consequences to future social stability and national productivity, is not the joke it sounds!

4. THE 5A-WAY IN WORKING AT HEIGHT

One specific example of application of the 5A-Way to workplace safety is the important topic of working at height, which is acknowledged to be among the most critical hazard not only in Singapore but around the world. It is not just a worker problem or a supervisor problem but should be a concern for all the stake-holders from owner to worker, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The 5A-Way to working at height

The '5-A's	Stake-holders					
	Owner	Designer	Contractor	Manager / Engineer	Supervisor / Foreman	Worker
A-1. Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Safety is a core value, just as the well-being of my family. ▪ No worker should fall from height. ▪ The company should succeed in its safety policies. 					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I (and all co-workers) should be safe. ▪ Company should succeed.
A-2. Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Falling from height is certain death to the worker ▪ Many losses and drastic legal penalties will follow ▪ Loss of reputation will affect business, and have industry-wide and national impact 					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most common accident with worst tragedy ▪ Bad for company
A-3. Acceptance	<i>Will accept responsibility to:</i>					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Address all legal, financial, and other consequences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Design risks out, through-out the life-cycle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure safety during scaffold erection, use and dismantling, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implement design, SWP and safety measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enforce SWP and safety ▪ Constantly attend to critical job steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work safely ▪ Use PPE correctly ▪ Follow all safety instructions
A-4. Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Financial and work planning ▪ Check site conditions ▪ Conduct RA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Design details and drawings, for life-cycle safety ▪ Include RA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Erection details, materials, etc. ▪ RA and SWP ▪ Rescue measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drawings ▪ RA and SWP ▪ Method statements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Checklists, RA recommendations ▪ Rescue details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work details, health care ▪ Avoid bad practices and misuse of PPE ▪ Learn self-rescue
A-5. Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide funds and facilities ▪ Accept RA ▪ Empower safety staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Submit complete design and drawings ▪ Interact with contractor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide all materials, services, and safeguards ▪ Interact with designer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oversee, organise, coordinate, and manage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Check constantly and ensure strict compliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Properly check, use, and maintain PPE ▪ Adhere to rules

5. THE 5A-WAY FOR ADJUSTING TO CHANGES BY THE WSH ACT

So then, how do we adjust to major and far-reaching changes brought about by the WSH Act? Let us apply the 5A-Way to this challenging task.

A-1. ATTITUDE

Professionals in the workplace at all levels must re-examine their attitudes toward work, their workplace, and their workers, and come to terms with a more holistic view of their attitudes.

Why should they be concerned about workplace safety?

Author asks his course participants: *“Why do you think you are here?”*

The common answer is: *“Because I want to learn about workplace safety.”*

Not quite true. After some probing, the basic reasons come out:

- *“Because my boss told me to go.”*
- *“Because I want to get a certificate to enable me to continue to work or to get a promotion/raise.”*
- *“Because MOM insists on such formal training.”*

Of course, once the decision to attend the course is made, it follows that almost everybody wants to learn the material – which is a pretty good attitude.

Some do have higher goals:

- To improve their personal service record in the company
- To develop a good safety culture in their company
- To reduce the accidents in the industry
- To raise the safety rating of the nation in the world

The author’s grandchildren (among others) ask him why at his (‘ripe, old’ unsaid) age he is running around checking worksites, writing papers, delivering talks, and slogging away at the computer.

He announces proudly: *“I am saving lives!”*

But the argument does not stop there. They ask: *“But you are not a doctor; how can you save lives?”*

To which, author answers: *“Well, when a doctor makes a mistake, it can usually affect only one patient at a time. But if we engineers and other technical staff at the workplace get careless, dozens, why, thousands may be injured or killed!”*

That ends the argument. How is that for an attitude?

The following are cues for further thought.

(a) *Workplace safety as core value:*

- Safety starts with risk assessment; safety needs risk management.

- Think of the workers and staff as your workplace family. If n workers walk into your site every morning; n workers must go home safe and sound every evening – on their own two feet.
- Safety is not a 9 to 5, Monday to Friday thing. It should become a “24/7” (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) awareness and commitment, be it at home or workplace, on street or vacation.
- It should be a matter of pride that the industry is taking responsibility for its own safety rather than wait to be told. In advanced countries, industry tells the authorities what is needed.

(b) Safety culture:

Safety culture is not a fad or a fashion. Safety culture is:

- Covering up outside clothes-drying pole holder pipes at home when not in use, to prevent the breeding of dengue-spreading mosquitoes;
- Picking up a banana peel in your path and dropping it into a dust bin rather than just stepping around it and walking on – possibly saving a pregnant wife or a doddering grandfather or a hyperactive toddler a few steps behind you from slipping on it;
- Taking seriously posters and videos, recommendations and warnings, that authorities provide for safety – and cooperating as they ask;
- Reporting any missing scaffold planks at a worksite, unattended baggage at MRT-s, and violations of safety norms anywhere;
- Learning more about what can cause harm, who can be hurt, and how every one of us can help all of us avoid it;
- Making a habit of seeing better, hearing better, feeling better, understanding better – to catch signs of danger; and,
- Getting up the courage:
 - To stop young kids from jumping around on escalators;
 - To stop workers from using cell-phones when on the job; and,
 - To warn workers, the very first time they ignore the personal protective equipment (PPE) rules or violate any law, that they will be dismissed if they are caught doing it again.

Safety culture is thus rectifying a situation which can cause harm to others, if not to ourselves. In short, safety culture is concern about the safety of others as much as our own. It should become a way of life.

A-2. AWARENESS

Once we got the attitude right, we must get the complete and correct data, and understand all the consequences and outcomes of doing the job. This implies a lot of information gathering and study.

In the beginning, the concepts may be complex and the terminology tough. This is when most need to attend – and/or depute others to attend if they have

the power and responsibility to do so – short courses, workshops, seminars, conferences, etc., which abound in the country from many sources.

Attendance at such group meets must be serious and focussed, not just to network with others in the same field and of the same temperament, not just to accumulate PDU-s, not just to get another certificate, but sincerely to learn more, to clarify doubts, to share expert opinions.

Incomplete or vague understanding may sometimes be more dangerous than complete ignorance. For instance:

- Can hydrogen sulphide always be detected by its “rotten egg” smell?
[No; in very heavy concentrations, it paralyses the smelling nerves!]
- Can a fallen worker hanging by his body harness be saved at any time?
[No; if he is not rescued within about half an hour, he may die of the pooling of impure blood in his feet!]
- Can more and more PPE increase safety?
[No; it must be coupled with some other higher level controls, and also must not be beyond the worker’s optimum comfort level!]

You must know what is expected of you, as well as what is not required:

- There are no prescriptive rules for all of this. But there are numerous guidelines and performance requirements.
- RA/RM reports need not be submitted to the authorities. But companies must have risk register and other documentation ready and up-to-date, if and when the inspectors come, even without an accident!

Certain imperatives control risk management:

- Prepare yourself for a long haul. Benefits of investment in safety will:
 - (i) Take time to bear fruit, like the maturing of a tree; and
 - (ii) Be spread around the industry, and may not be just one to one on the individual company investments.
- Spread the risk, share the risk, transfer the risk.
- Share your problems and solutions with your cohorts. That will be the win-win situation.
- For routine situations do not wait for, or depend upon, the authorities to tell you what to do. Do it yourself. You know your problems best. For special or very critical cases, they or an expert may be approached.

A-3. ACCEPTANCE

When you have gathered and digested the necessary information, and are aware of all the implications, you must individually and on behalf of your group, decide to consciously and voluntarily accept your duty to the goal.

First remind yourself, and tell others:

*“I accept workplace safety as a core value ...
As I accept my family, my community, my country as core values.”*

(a) Responsibility:

You must unequivocally accept responsibility and become accountable for your decisions and actions in this matter:

- To the extent of your assignment,
- Within the limits of your authority,
- In good faith, and,
- To the best of your abilities.

No more, no less!

Responsibility means also:

- Speaking out your mind when you know that something is more dangerous than others assume or accept,
- Not be cowed down by more senior people in the loop, and,
- Not accepting responsibility beyond your capabilities or training, or against your inclinations.

Even a worker has the right to refuse to work at something he considers dangerous, such as manual handling of a heavy object. But most immigrant workers as well as many local workers do not know this. In fact many do not even know the dangers of many tasks they do. Further, even if they feel hesitant, they will not say so. Then it becomes the responsibility of the foreman or supervisor to think and act safely on behalf of the workers.

Senior personnel must serve as role models, in using PPE, in incident reporting, and other pro-active tasks.

(b) Authority:

In many instances, bosses are happy to assign responsibility, but not so eager to share authority.

Author knows of one site engineer who placed an 'indent' through his purchase department – hopefully they did not advertise for bids! – and waited for a week to get a few helmets, while a couple of workers worked helmet-less. How much more sensible it would have been for the engineer to have sent out a foreman on a two-wheeler to get a couple of helmets, each costing all of \$4.50! Alas, the engineer did not have that authority.

Acceptance of responsibility therefore implies as a corollary, receiving – or requesting if it is not voluntarily forthcoming – authority to implement critical ad-hoc decisions not costing an arm and a leg.

Go ahead, accept your responsibility to implement safety. But be sure to get the authority to:

- Spend small amounts on first aid, minor safeguards etc.
- Rotate strenuous, repetitive, or boring work.
- Remove from site (although not fire!) a worker who is not fit, or

does not follow safety measures even after being instructed.

Stick to the letter of the law or Safe Work Procedures (SWP-s) unless something is patently wrong or dangerous. But if you happen to know more or know better, try to fulfil the spirit of the regulation also.

A-4. ANALYSIS

Armed with the right attitude, awareness, and acceptance, now is the time for analysis, of what needs to be done, and how to do it.

This involves technology, management, and expertise.

All analysis must be based on the principles embodied in the WSH Act:

- Do whatever is necessary to eliminate or mitigate the accidents at the workplace, ‘as far as is reasonably practicable’.
- Do not wait for accidents to happen. Anticipate them, prevent them.
- Do not ignore incidents (“near misses” or “close calls”). Document and report them, for the general good.

Overall, there are now fewer rules than before, but it means you have the freedom – and the duty – to protect your workers.

MOM won’t tell you how exactly to do it. It may – must – set certain boundaries within which you must operate, but in general, it is going to let you decide your own methods to provide the safeguards necessary.

Thus, the minimum height of guard-rails is set at 1m. But if people will be carrying loads above waist level, that will raise the centre of gravity of the worker. Then the guard-rail height will need to be increased or additional alternative protection must be provided.

If your worker cannot work with a guard-rail between him and the work, you may choose to omit the guard-rail but provide him with a work-restraint or a fall arrest depending on whether he is to work from a stable platform or not.

(a) Risk Assessment:

Almost all risk can be managed by careful adherence to relevant regulations and by carrying out a detailed risk assessment.

With the new Act, all enterprises must carry out risk assessment before commencing every project, and as soon as possible for ongoing projects. All unacceptable risks must be either eliminated or brought down to tolerable or acceptable level. There are enough guidelines and training opportunities to assist the risk assessor in this regard.

Your analysis must not treat RA as a necessary evil, a paper routine, or an academic exercise, but instead as an opportunity to detect unusual hazards and to innovate workable and effective controls.

Here, the RA team takes precedence over the normal chain of command, because of the contribution by many heads reaching consensus on all the identified hazards. Where the limits of the team members’ experience and

in-house expertise are exceeded, it would be wise to get a consultant.

Certain points must be kept in mind during the risk assessment phase:

- Keep the assessment simple.
- Do not increase the number of levels of severity or likelihood beyond three unless really justified.
- Do not increase the number of risk categories beyond three unless controls can uniquely address all of them.
- Severity must be assessed for the situation of if and when the accident happens, and not whether or how frequently it will happen.

(b) Risk Control:

Analysis implies not only the identification of hazards and the assessment of their likelihood and severity and thus their risk category based on existing (or mandatory) controls, but also the recommendation of additional controls to bring down the unacceptable risks to tolerable or acceptable level, as well as to further mitigate tolerable risks.

What is decided here will be the pivot around which all subsequent safety revolves. A missed hazard, a compromised decision, insufficient SWP, flawed execution, or missing details in documentation of the analysis and its recommendations, will probably lead to disaster.

Certain points must be kept in mind during the risk control phase:

- ‘Existing’ controls – which will have to be taken into account while assessing the likelihood or severity – imply the implementation of all controls required by regulations and good practice.
- Controls must be considered and recommended according to the conventional hierarchy of (i) Elimination, (ii) Substitution, (iii) Engineering Controls, (iv) Administrative Controls, and (v) PPE, the last being the least effective, for well-known reasons.
- If the RA team comes up with a task as unacceptably risky, the only two ways to carry out the task will be:
 - (i) Bring down the likelihood and/or severity so that the risk becomes at least medium and hence manageable; or,
 - (ii) Eliminate the task by redesigning the process, or by farming it out to specialist sub-contractors who can take the risk.

A-5. ACTION

Enough of the talk and paperwork. Now is the time to “Walk the talk” as Aristotle is supposed to have inspired, that is, to implement your decisions.

- Do a risk assessment, regardless of speciality or size.

- Do it before a project starts.
- Do it immediately for ongoing projects.
- Implement the recommendations.
- Communicate, across, up and down.
- Monitor and review control effectiveness, and modify as needed.

(a) Implementation:

If after all the introspection and the brainstorming your team comes up with a list of recommendations and you simply forward it to the higher ups and the underlings, nothing more may happen.

Someone, somewhere, must assign actual people to the various tasks, must specify a time frame by which the tasks must be done.

If it is your duty to assign, assign some person or department to carry out the recommended additional controls. Even if you don't know the particular individual responsible, enter someone by designation, or at least, delegate that chore to some administrative entity.

Otherwise 'Mr. Nobody' will do everything.

Likewise, for every task to be completed set a tentative date or state the number of working days. Here again, if you do not know the exact duration for the task to be done, place a tentative time frame on it. "Immediately" is usually unrealistic, and hence is a wasted directive.

The worst that can happen is that the recipient will complain that it cannot be done in the allotted time, in which case, a more reasonable time frame may be negotiated.

But if you don't mention a date, even when 'Mr. Somebody' is assigned the task, he/she may do it "as and when convenient" or not start at all, since no deadline is given.

In any case, don't leave blanks in your Risk Control sheet.

Risk assessors also must know that the responsibility for action does not end with assigning various tasks. It needs follow-up by:

- Monitoring the implementation,
- Getting feed-back and suggestions for improvements,
- Checking on the efficacy of the controls at reasonable intervals,
- Ensuring continued compliance with (i) planned maintenance, (ii) regular inspection, and, (iii) strict supervision.

By then, of course, it is time to review what the team has done, match it with the changed conditions at the site (such as an aging machine, or a crew from a country for the first time), and up-date the risk assessment.

Action is the goal-post. It is what proves a winner or loser. Without action, all that went before was a dream, while the reality will be a nightmare.

(b) Communication:

An often forgotten part of the action is communication, the art and science of getting the message across to the people concerned, in such a way that they understand, and accept, even if with certain negotiated modifications.

In countries such as Singapore with multi-cultural and multi-lingual mix of personnel, communication problems get compounded with the influx of immigrant labour.

Not only the many languages but also the syntax of communication within a single language become important.

Not surprisingly, the language we use becomes critical when so many levels of management and execution of a project are involved, with personnel from different cultures and languages handling important phases of the project.

Author humbly (but with half a century of teaching experience!) suggests that companies use the simplest terminology required for every occasion, if and when forms are to be distributed to, data is to be gathered from, and information is to be used by, many levels of personnel, including the under-educated, the language-challenged, and the insufficiently informed.

‘Low’, ‘Medium’, and ‘High’, abbreviated to ‘L’, ‘M’, and ‘H’, are good enough for three levels of safety-related measures.

Add ‘Very Low’ and ‘Very High’ at the two ends, and you get five levels.

Likewise, avoid ambiguity in abbreviations. Not everybody can or will stop and place every abbreviation into the right context.

List expansions of abbreviations, and key definitions and decision matrices on every form to be filled, so that the person who fills out a form does not have to guess or fudge his responses.

Confirm your oral instructions in writing, as simply and unambiguously as possible, as promptly as possible.

Encourage both your superiors and subordinates to seek clarifications – even disagree – instead of blindly accepting whatever you put down. It may be more “make-work”, but it will be much safer.

Don’t hesitate to use an interpreter when addressing workers or even foremen on important issues. Ask if they have understood your spoken or written words. They may not volunteer information by themselves.

This is not just a Singapore problem. In recent decades, immigrant workers from South America flooded the southern parts of the USA – the influx still continues – and construction accident rates went up.

They discovered that it was due to lack of communication between the locals and immigrants. Now, most signs, brochures, and websites are in both English and Spanish, and all foremen, supervisors and site engineers in these states must pass Spanish as a second language!

Interestingly enough, they also found that the immigrants performed better when they were told why they were being asked to do things in a certain way than when they were simply ordered to do so.

6. BENEFITS OF ADJUSTING TO CHANGE

At the end of all this effort, with the 5A-Way or any old way, what will be the benefits of adjusting to the latest changes in workplace safety regulations?

Apart from humane, social, professional, and legal benefits, there are many inherent advantages in adjusting to the changes in handling workplace safety according to the WSH Act, such as the following:

1. Presently in Singapore, risk assessment has become the prime factor for authorities to judge the compliance of companies with the WSH Act, and to examine as a main factor in accident prevention. Hence doing it right will become an essential component of safe practice.
2. Company branding and bidding criteria will include safety records, based on how well the personnel have adjusted to and apply the new Act.
3. Safety management systems will be evaluated under the new Act to a much greater extent than heretofore.
4. Customers will seek out companies with good safety records, again automatically requiring effective and quick adjustment to the changes.
5. Good and quick adjustment makes for better risk assessment and management, and hence naturally leads to development of good SWP-s.
6. Proper adjustment will be reflected in the self-assessment of a company's performance, in the staff evaluation, in third-party audits, and in the public perception of a company's safety record.
7. Well-adjusted personnel can spearhead elimination of bad practices and to innovation and improvement of good practices.
8. Beyond all these is the 'Business Case' for safety: Safety is good business – and only fully adjusted personnel at every level can guarantee this.

7. CONCLUSION

The 5A-Way proposed here may not be a brand-new sophisticated technique or a panacea for all our workplace ills. But author hopes it will be one more path – a fresh strategy if you will – to pro-actively understand and logically address the adjustments to recent changes in workplace safety management.

8. REFERENCES

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