

October 2018

Everyday Work Learning Teams

Hancock Forest Management NZ wanted to find out why its operations in the Tiaki Forest Estate were performing so well. So, it trialled a new approach that involved learning from what goes right at work every day.

Kerry Ellem, GENERAL MANAGER,
HANCOCK FOREST MANAGEMENT (HFM) NZ

► Why we undertook this trial

The HFM NZ Peak Health Safety and Environment Committee (made up of contractors and HFM NZ staff) had noticed that our forestry operations in the Tiaki Forest Estate were performing very well on both production and health and safety. We wanted to know why this part of the business was doing so well, so we could share the lessons with the rest of our business.

We didn't think we would uncover this information from a traditional audit, because audits tend to focus on what can go wrong rather than what is going right. So, at the suggestion of our Health and Safety Manager Glen Coleman, we decided to adopt a 'Safety II' approach and to set up *Everyday Work Learning Teams*.

Safety II is based on the idea that work goes well most of the time, and we can learn as much from everyday work as we can from when things go wrong and incidents occur.

► What we did

Glen worked with Safety II expert and psychologist Dr Hillary Bennett from *Leading Safety* to set up and run the teams for us.

Dr Bennett ran four facilitated sessions, creating *Everyday Work Learning Teams* made up of people working in harvesting, distribution and engineering in the Tiaki Forest Estate. The sessions involved 35 people and were run in May 2018 at the Kawerau Fire Store.



The question put to participants was: What, in your opinion, enables the work to be done successfully every day, despite the varying – and at times difficult – conditions you work with in the forest.

The discussion was structured to surface views on what helps and what hinders good performance. In particular, it centred on identifying:

- » **Dependencies:** What things (tools etc.) or conditions (good lighting etc.) do you need to get the work done safely and effectively.
- » **Sensitivities:** What things make your work easier or more difficult (time available, layout of work space, clarity of procedures, etc.).
- » **Good practices:** What practices support safe and effective work.

"The different operations working in the Tiaki Estate viewed themselves as one team and helped each other. Each person understood the requirements of the next job in the process and proactively worked 'to set up the work' for the next person."

► What we learned

Dependencies

Dr Bennett did a report for us summarising the findings from the teams. The report said the teams identified four 'dependencies' – the most important things they needed in order to work well:

- » Having experienced, knowledgeable **people**
- » Access to fit-for-purpose and well-maintained **gear**
- » Open, honest **communication** within the crews and across the operations (e.g. trucking, engineering) at tailgate meetings and during the day
- » Good **planning**.

This list didn't really come as a surprise – these are things you'd expect to see on any good site. They're things we would commonly assess during audits.

Sensitivities

Probably more surprising were the 'sensitivities', particularly what the teams said made the work easier. These were largely intangibles, and weren't necessarily things you'd pick up on in a standard audit.



Dr Hillary Bennett – Leading Safety

They were:

- » **Inclusive, visible and approachable leadership:**
The crew bosses and contractors didn't dictate but involved crews in planning and allowed crews to be self-managing, rather than policed. The managers and contractors were in the bush often and understood how the work was done. They set clear expectations that safety came before production and supported any operation that stopped work for safety reasons.
- » **Trust, respect and confidence:**
Having stable, small (6-8 people) crews that knew, trusted and got on with each other was important. Trust built confidence and respect, which encouraged people to speak up about problems or concerns. A flat chain of command prevented issues raised getting bogged down in bureaucracy and paperwork. That meant issues got resolved quickly and 'close to the ground'.
- » **Teamwork, common goal and collaboration:**
The importance of working as a team and having a common goal was emphasised. The different operations working in the Tiaki Estate (harvesting, distribution and engineering) viewed themselves as one team and helped each other. Each person understood the requirements of the next job in the process and proactively worked 'to set up the work' for the next person.
- » **Cross-functional knowledge and skills:**
A crew where all members had the knowledge and skills to do jobs other than just their own was seen as vital. This reduced the likelihood of someone having to do a job they weren't competent to do.

Good practices

The teams also come up with five key work practices they believed supported safe, successful work:

- » **Plan the harvest each day:** Mix difficult areas with easier ones. Leave trees near the skid, so when conditions mean trees further away can't be felled there are still some trees to harvest.
- » **Respond to changes in conditions:** Stop and assess the risk, adapt the plan and reallocate the crew as needed. Tell everyone about the change in plan.
- » **Monitor the cut wood to keep a buffer:** Ensure there is a buffer of 3 days' supply of wood cut at any stage.
- » **Review the day's activities at the end of each day:** To identify anything that needs to be dealt with in preparation for the next day.
- » **Anticipate when the work may get difficult:** And plan for it.

Three key things the learning teams said make work difficult

- » Skids sites that are too small or in poor condition, e.g. poor drainage.
- » Equipment breakdowns.
- » Changes in trucking schedules that affected the work flow and the loader's ability to pick up other jobs.

► Conclusion

Running these *Everyday Work Learning Teams* has been a very valuable experience for us.

It highlighted some key principles we will continue to work on. This includes the importance of workers being able to make dynamic risks assessments, and knowing they have our support to stop work for safety when needed. It also re-enforced the value of the safety culture and leadership development work we are already doing.

Based on this experience, HFM has decided to adopt *Everyday Work Learning Teams* as a way to identify work practices that support good outcomes. We will also explore the value of sharing with the rest of the business the five good work practices that the Tiaki teams identified.

I'd recommend trying the *Everyday Work Learning Teams* approach to other businesses. In addition to identifying positive strengths we can build on, it has given our Board extra insights into the business and a level of assurance they could not get from a traditional auditing process.



The Safety II approach

The guiding principle behind Safety II is that things go right at work much more often than they go wrong – so there are as many opportunities to learn from everyday work as there are to learn from incidents.

This includes understanding when, and why, people do things differently from what's in the formal, written procedures in order to get the job done.

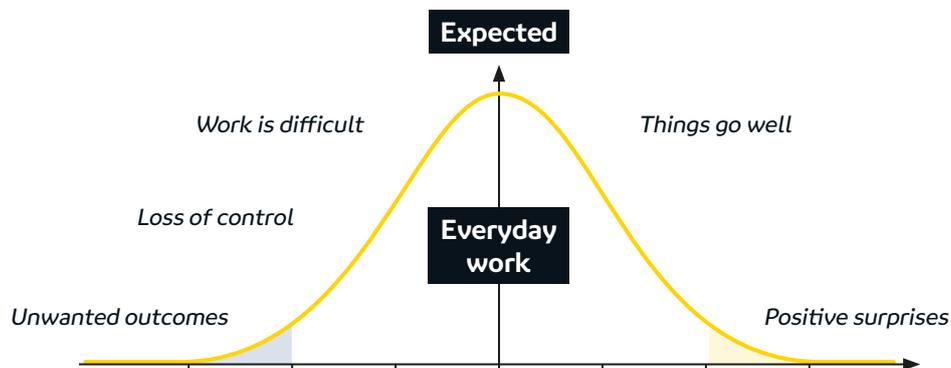
When we understand what's necessary to make sure things go right, we can focus on

ensuring these factors are present in the workplace every day.

Involving workers and contractors is crucial to gaining this understanding.

Everyday Work Learning Teams give workers and contractors an opportunity to highlight the things they believe underpin positive outcomes at work.

Most of these factors would not be identified by traditional auditing processes.



"In order to achieve a state of safety we need to understand what happens when things go well. We need to understand the nature of everyday performance variability. Indeed, even when we notice that something has gone wrong, we should realise that it probably has been done many times before (and will be done many times again) and that it usually has gone right – and will go right."

Professor Emeritus Erik Hollnagel – the creator of the Safety II concept.

► About **safetree.nz**

Safetree.nz is an online one-stop-shop with free health and safety information and resources for people working in forestry. It is run by the Forest Industry Safety Council (FISC), a partnership between government, industry and worker representatives that's working towards a safe, resilient and professional forestry industry.

- » **Email:** info@safetree.nz
- » Or find out more at: safetree.nz

► About the Forum

The Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum inspires and supports its members to become more effective leaders on health and safety. The Forum has more than 350 members, who are CEOs or Managing Directors of significant New Zealand companies.

- » **Email:** info@zeroharm.org.nz
- » **Phone:** +64 4 499 1897
- » Or find out more at: zeroharm.org.nz