



APGA CONVENTION &  
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# From compliance to capability.

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A competency framework approach to transforming safety  
function effectiveness in asset-intensive organisations

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## SETTING THE SCENE

# The safety function is at a crossroads.

For two decades, safety functions have been measured by the systems they maintain and the paperwork they produce. That era is closing.

Boards, regulators, workers and communities now expect the function to shape decisions, not document them - and most safety teams were never built for that.

***The question is no longer whether you have a safety team. It is whether that team can deliver what you now need from it.***



### Rising expectations

Assurance, foresight and influence - not administration - are the new benchmarks.



### Expanding duties

Psychosocial regulation, officer accountability and industrial manslaughter have raised the stakes.



### Scarce talent

Capable safety professionals are hard to attract and keep - hardest of all regionally.

# Capability is a due diligence question.

Section 27 of the model WHS Act requires officers to exercise due diligence - a positive, personal, non-delegable duty. It applies in every harmonised jurisdiction, including the Northern Territory.

Two of its elements reach directly into the safety function: ensuring appropriate resources and processes exist and verifying they are provided and used.

***“Do we have a safety team?” is the wrong question.***

***“Can it deliver?” is the s.27 question.***

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## **OFFICER DUE DILIGENCE - S.27(5)**

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- a. Acquire and keep up-to-date knowledge of WHS matters
- b. Understand the operations and their hazards and risks
- c. **Ensure appropriate resources and processes to eliminate or minimise risk**
- d. Ensure timely information on incidents, hazards and risks
- e. Ensure processes for complying with duties and obligations
- f. **Verify the provision and use of those resources and processes**

***Highlighted** - the elements a capability review evidences.*

# Different sectors, same operating DNA.

The case study behind this paper is not a pipeline business - but its operating realities will feel familiar to anyone in this room.



## Dispersed assets

Long networks and remote sites stretch supervision and support.



## High-consequence risk

Low-frequency, high-severity events dominate the risk profile.



## Contractor ecosystems

Delivery depends on layered contractor and supply relationships.



## Regional workforce

Attracting and keeping capability outside the capitals is hard.



## Constant scrutiny

Regulators, communities and boards are all watching closely.



## Ageing assets

Renewals and capital programs compete for the same capacity.

# Competence is not capability.

### COMPETENCE

the knowledge and skills an individual holds today.

### CAPABILITY

the capacity to integrate and adapt them to meet future needs.

- the INSHPO distinction. Structure reviews count heads and qualifications; a capability review asks what the function can actually deliver - through one lens, three competency domains.



#### Technical

Domain 01

- Risk management
- Incident management
- WHS law and compliance
- Systems and assurance



#### Core

Domain 02

- Strategy and planning
- Leadership and management
- Governance and performance
- Resource and financial acumen



#### Behavioural

Domain 03

- Stakeholder engagement
- Communication and influence
- Personal performance
- Working with others

Anchored in the IOSH Professional Standards and the INSHPO Capability Framework - every criterion rated High, Medium or Low confidence, on evidence.

# Evidence, not opinion.

01 Discover



02 Define



03 Develop



04 Deliver



## 30+ interviews

Frontline to executive, across every part of the business.



## Field observations

Work-as-done, watched where it actually happens.



## Time in Motion survey

Where the function's hours really go, week to week.



## Documents and data

Strategy, systems, incident and claims records.



## Journey and empathy mapping

The lived experience of the function's internal customers.



## Benchmarking

Against peers, industry standards and better practice.

## CASE STUDY

# Inside a multi-site Australian organisation

A diverse operational risk profile - civil infrastructure, environmental services, community facilities and asset management.  
Presented de-identified and with the organisation's knowledge.

30+ interviews, frontline to executive

Four converging evidence streams

Fieldwork  
May – July 2025

A WHS strategy already endorsed

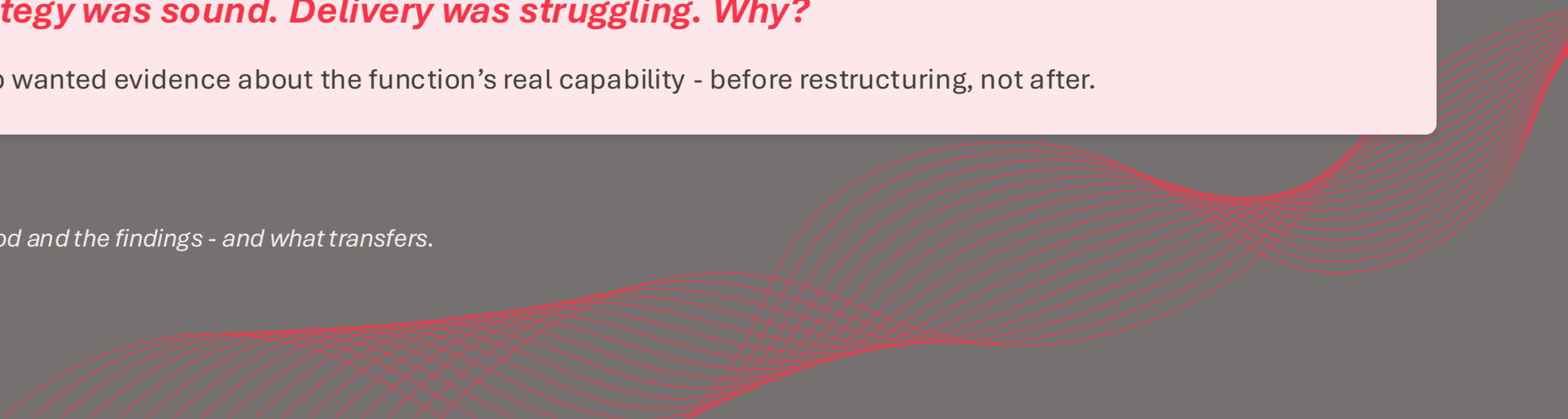


### THE PRESENTING QUESTION

***The strategy was sound. Delivery was struggling. Why?***

Leadership wanted evidence about the function's real capability - before restructuring, not after.

*The focus from here is the method and the findings - and what transfers.*

A series of thin, red, wavy lines that flow from the bottom right towards the center of the slide, creating a sense of movement and design.

# Where the time actually goes.

**~40%**

**Administration and  
incident response**

Capacity consumed after harm,  
not before it.

**4%**

**Risk management**

Well below industry benchmarks.

**<5%**

**Strategy and engagement**

Minimal presence where decisions  
are made.

*The function was not unwilling - its capacity was being consumed downstream of harm.  
That is the reactive trap, in numbers.*

# The capability picture.

## TECHNICAL



### STRENGTHS

- Sound foundational knowledge
- Established systems and reporting

### GAPS

- Incident triage and closure
- Policy currency
- Data and analytics capability

## CORE



### STRENGTHS

- Clear strategic direction
- Sustained investment support

### GAPS

- Structured planning and prioritisation
- Business cases that prove value
- Translating strategy into team plans

## BEHAVIOURAL



### STRENGTHS

- Pockets of real trust with operations
- Care and personal commitment

### GAPS

- Consistent influence and partnering
- Self-awareness under pressure
- Confidence in the partner role

*The pattern - technically adequate, strategically underpowered, behaviourally inconsistent - is common well beyond this case.*

# FROM FINDINGS TO ACTION

## A roadmap in three horizons.

### NOW · 0–3 MONTHS

01

- Targeted capability and behavioural interventions
- A structured WHS coaching program
- System fixes to cut the admin burden
- Clear accountabilities and protocols

### NEXT · 3–6 MONTHS

02

- Structured technical and behavioural development
- Visible leadership from the function
- Metrics and governance co-designed with the executive

### BEYOND · 6–12+ MONTHS

03

- Business-partner model with central admin support
- Predictive analytics and automation
- WHS embedded in departmental strategies

**What it takes** - executive sponsorship, role redesign, systems investment, disciplined change management.

**What it returns** - a proactive, credible function and evidence officers can rely on.

# Five transferable lessons.

01

**Anchor in the legal duty** - s.27 gives a capability review its executive gravity.

02

**Triangulate the evidence** - Data, observation and voice together - never one alone.

03

**Capability before structure** - Org design should follow the findings, not precede them.

04

**Development, not blame** - Psychological safety in the review shapes what people tell you.

05

**Sequence the roadmap** - Quick relief first; model change last.

TAKE IT HOME

# Five questions for your organisation.



Do you know where your safety function's time actually goes?



Could your officers evidence s.27 due diligence over the function's capability?



Are you assessing capability before you restructure - or after?



Are behavioural competencies developed as deliberately as technical ones?



Is your pathway to a business-partner model sequenced and resourced?



*Pick one - and act on it within a month. The Time in Motion survey is the cheapest place to start.*

# Thank You.

Questions and conversation welcome.



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