



Shush...

this article is about

health & safety

In the previous issue of Cambridge Business, Marcus Johnson gave a graphic account of how Christchurch in New Zealand had stood still since the tragic earthquakes, and said this was largely due to Health & Safety. For a start, any dynamiting was forbidden – and still is – even though it would make the whole process of recovering and rebuilding much easier and quicker.

Health & Safety professional **Paulo Anaia**, read the article and asked us if he could respond. We said we would be delighted, but only if he could say who had given H&S its bad name.



Health and Safety. Three little words with a big meaning. Regrettably the mere mention of these words evokes negative perceptions, fuelled by misconceptions, sensationalism in some media and a general lack of awareness of its core principles.

Health and safety is often used in a pejorative sense. David Cameron has called it a "monster" and has vowed to "kill off the health and safety culture for good". Some news stories focus on the actions of a small group of people, leaving a false impression that all health and safety is exaggerated. Stereotypes include pen-pushing 'anoraks' and bureaucratic killjoys whose sole existence is to make business as difficult and costly as possible. Adding fuel to the fire is the inappropriate use of health and safety as a convenient, catch-all excuse to justify the fear of court action. The result? People and businesses are left feeling exasperated and resentful, which paints a rather negative image of health and safety in general. This creates a real challenge when it comes to awareness-raising and promoting a positive culture. At times it's a case of one step forward, two steps back.

The notion of health and safety was conceived with the absolute best intention, which is to prevent injury and save lives. So who is responsible for health and safety's damaged reputation? Negative media reporting is partly to blame, perpetuating myths and wrongly citing 'elf 'n' safety' as a reason to prevent people from enjoying reasonable and low risk activities. Many bans and restrictions are erroneously blamed on health and safety and are based solely on ignorance or cost.

Another contributing factor is frivolous litigation, making it acceptable for anyone to seek compensation for a personal injury even if no one else is to blame. It's no wonder 'compensation culture' is a new buzzword and its mere perception can intensify risk aversion. However, all risk can never be completely eliminated, which brings us back to the excessive and inappropriate use of health and safety. This seemingly unending circle plays a role in reinforcing negative public perception and the misuse and overzealous interpretation of health and safety rules makes people less receptive to the true principles of health and safety.

In the wake of the government commissioned Löffstedt Report examining health and safety legislation, political response to the report's findings and ensuing debate, health and safety has been a contentious issue in recent months. Even though the report was met with a generally favourable reception, a hotly debated topic risks perpetuating negativity which, in turn, can reinforce negative perceptions. The time has never been better to redress the balance and I welcome the opportunity to do so.

Health and safety is a big subject and encompasses many aspects. As a health and safety professional specialising in compliance for the built environment, I will focus on the construction industry. But in a general sense, the intention of health and safety is to reduce death, injury and ill health in the workplace by properly

managing risk and finding sensible solutions that are proportionate to the task.

The key words are 'sensible' and 'proportionate'. There is no absolute safety but many workplace accidents can be prevented. The poor management of risk damages lives and the economy but a healthy and productive workforce supports economic growth. After all, good management of health and safety is vital to good business.

Construction sites are one of the most dangerous workplaces. Yet there are still misconceptions that health and safety increases costs, delays projects and is filled with unnecessary, over-the-top requirements. The reality is that health and safety arrangements are most effective when they are proportionate to the type and scale of the project.

Developers, commercial property owners, contractors, designers (including architects, structural and civil engineers, building surveyors, landscape architects and other consultants) undertaking construction, refurbishment or demolition works should be aware of a key piece of legislation: the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007, or CDM 2007 for the sake of brevity. The management of health and safety forms part of these regulations.

If the project is expected to last longer than 30 days or involve more than 500 person days of construction work, it becomes notifiable under CDM 2007 and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) must be notified in writing before construction work starts. This is when a CDM co-ordinator needs to be appointed. But is this a bureaucratic barrier? Not in the least. You may be surprised to learn that alleviating administrative burdens on businesses is one of the key principles of CDM 2007, and that the spirit and intent of CDM is effective planning, management and monitoring as well as the reduction of paperwork.




co-ordination of health and safety issues throughout the site, helping the project team eliminate or avoid hazards and risks.

In terms of good business sense, the benefits of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007 are many. Proper co-ordination ensures projects are completed on time, within budget and to the required standards. Good health and safety and risk management reduces costs, prevents delays and avoids bad publicity and fines resulting from accidents, or worse, fatalities. Corporate image and reputation are paramount to a successful business and no one wants to be associated with a company that flouts the law, be it health and safety, human rights, tax, etc.

Businesses make our economy tick and it can only keep ticking if workers are protected through a sensible and proportionate approach to health and safety and the management of risk. Fortunately, there are many positive sources of information to counterbalance the negative perceptions of excessive red tape and legislation. The HSE website (www.hse.gov.uk) contains a wealth of user-friendly information. The "Looking after your business" section offers guidance to help businesses of all sizes manage health and safety and comply with the law. There is also the "Myth of the month", which takes a cheerful look at dispelling some of the most widely believed health and safety myths and goes a long way in raising awareness.

Despite the challenges created by negative perceptions, progress continues. Great Britain's health and safety performance has improved over the last three decades. The Löfstedt Report summarised that there is no case for radically altering current health and safety legislation and that the existing regulatory requirements are broadly right. However, there is a renewed commitment to simplify health and safety legislation and streamline the law to help businesses understand their duties and manage health and safety in a more efficient and less costly way. We're headed in the right direction. If we focus on a positive health and safety culture and leave negativity behind, perhaps we will be able to take not one, but two steps forward.

Paulo Anaia is the managing director of P A Safety Management, based in Cambridge and London. His company has been accredited by the Association for Project Safety as a Registered Practice for CDM Co-ordination and has attained certification to ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and BS OHSAS 18001. Paulo holds a BSc (Hons) in Design and Construction Management from University of Greenwich and is a qualified CDM Co-ordinator. He is on the Occupational Safety and Health Consultants Register (OSHCR). His professional affiliations include Incorporated Member of the Chartered Institute of Building (ICIOB), Chartered Member of the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (CMIOSH), Registered Member of the Association for Project Safety (RMaPS) and Member of the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management (MIIRSM). And no, he does not fit the health and safety stereotype, mentally or physically (he says).



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The CDM co-ordinator is the heart of a project's health and safety strategy, facilitates the process and works with the team to maintain the flow of relevant health and safety-related information. The CDM co-ordinator provides proactive advice to the client and ensures that all the required information is in place for the project to be carried out safely. In addition, the early appointment of a CDM co-ordinator (after initial design work) ensures the