

Book review: Productive Safety Management

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Van der Stap, T. (2025). *Productive Safety Management: How to mitigate residual and entropic risks* (2nd ed.) Boca Raton. CRC Press. 271 pages, 10 chapters, each referenced

We read or hear something and find it describes what we already believe so it must be correct. This is called confirmation bias.

Reading *Productive Safety Management*, I found the author, Tania Van der Stap, had written much that I believe. Was I suffering from confirmation bias?

Van der Stap opens with the thought that workplace health and safety legislation requires the protection of workers and others from risks to their health and safety, but the law does not say that work cannot be efficient. This is hardly a radical idea, but it is rarely stated; health and safety professionals need to make this a theme in their work.

The author advocates for productive safety management by the integration of health and safety, efficient production and quality assurance. Again, this is not novel, but she shows how this can be achieved. With some thought and research, a reader could extend the idea to other management systems, leading to integrated management with a focus on business objectives.

Some of chapter 1 reminded me of work in the 1960s and 1970s by Frank Bird on *Loss Control Management*. His statistics were wrong, but the ideas bear re-examination, and Van der Stap does this well, bringing in health and safety ideas that help improve productivity.

The author also brings in chaos theory, an approach to workplace health and safety that has received little attention. Simply put, causal factors of an event and the consequences of that event can be highly variable, making analysis chaotic. Controls must then be sufficiently robust to reduce variable probability of the event and its consequences.

Van der Stap argues persuasively that control entropy – increasing disorder – is a risk factor (if not a risk type) and is a major theme in the book. Controls can degrade over time, leaving management believing that risks are adequately controlled to prevent harm when the reverse may be true – the “drift into danger”. Entropy is not a new idea but is well-argued in the book; health and safety professionals should think how this might apply in their work. The counter to control entropy is chronic wariness, a state of mind that senior managers and directors should exercise.

The book shows eloquently how the risk matrix (a pet hate of mine) gives a poor representation of worker and process safety because it cannot include key factors other than consequence and likelihood or probability. The author then identifies those factors and how they can be used to better analyse work-related risk.

Due diligence is covered in several places, sometimes without naming it as a legal requirement but always in relation to the State workplace health and safety legislation of Western Australia, and without noting that each State in Australia (as well as New Zealand) has its own version of the legislation. A reader needs to be alert to this and other parochial information.

Van der Stap makes a strong comment that:

It's a mistake to assume that senior managers know what the issues are especially if they aren't receiving truthful information from the operational level. Managers simply can't dedicate resources to problems they don't know about.

The author mentions work as imagined (WAI) and work as done (WAD). In the context of due diligence, these are currently important issues in New Zealand (and elsewhere) and they are fairly placed in the context of governance. Some useful open access references show how governance can be extended from the corporate to the societal area.

Some negatives

Chapter 7 provides a different approach to risk quantification but does not include risk velocity, the

speed with which an event or its consequences can develop.

An important omission is a definition of risk. My preference is in ISO31000 Risk management – guidelines – the "effect of uncertainty on objectives" - which provides opportunities to explore the meanings of effect, uncertainty and objectives. For a book so oriented to risk management this should be remedied in a third edition.

Some risk assessment techniques are discussed, including HAZOP. Unfortunately, this is not indexed at the end of chapter 3. I also found some incorrect references.

Should you buy the book?

Van der Stap gives much food for thought and brings many important topics into her book giving much to think about and try out in practice. Inevitably, there is not enough space to explore each thoroughly. That is for enquiring readers to follow up on. The book helps place health and safety as a key part of what businesses are for – production of goods and services.

The book is not for a beginner health and safety practitioner but should be read by people with a few years' experience. Those facing operational challenges will find useful ideas to help improve productivity.

The book is available in the Victoria University of Wellington Library, and I will use parts of it as course readings.