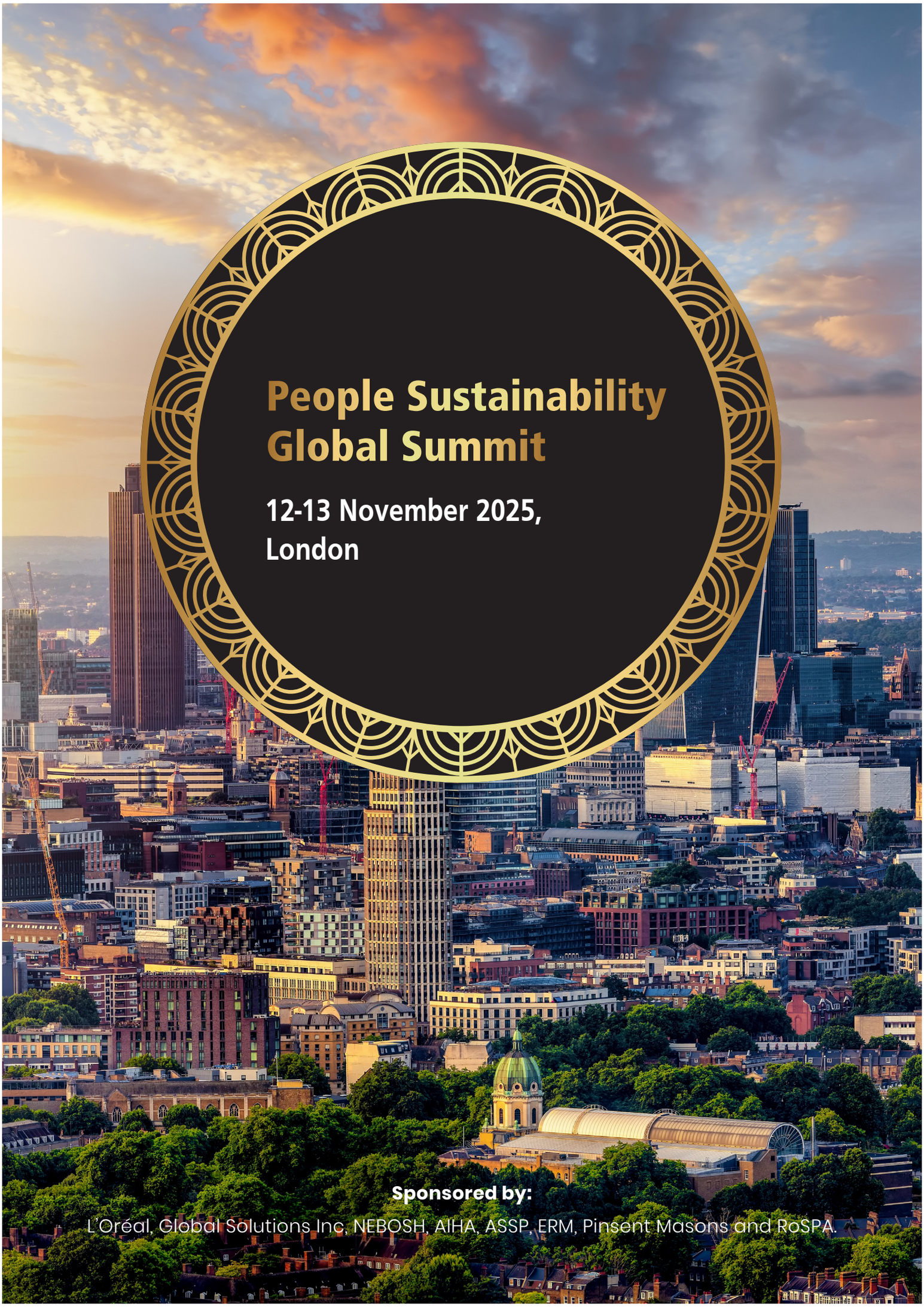


People Sustainability Global Summit

12-13 November 2025, London

Sponsored by:

L'Oréal, Global Solutions Inc, NEBOSH, AIHA, ASSP, ERM, Pinsent Masons and RoSPA.

Introduction

The People Sustainability Global Summit has become an annual highlight in the calendars of many sustainability and safety and health leaders since its launch in 2019, and for good reason.

The presentations at the November 2025 event, as you'll see in these pages, were as thought-provoking and inspiring as any previous year. We built on past summits by exploring concepts including impact accounting and how attributing a financial value to human capital can integrate people sustainability into business.

At a time when some corporations are less willing to nail their colours to the sustainability mast because of the prevailing political winds, we are proud to continue to show our commitment to putting people at the centre of business.

The fact that some organisations are less vocal about diversity and equity or other human capital issues is not necessarily a negative development. As Andrew Howard, Global Head of Sustainable Investment at fund managers Schroders, told the summit, when the tide goes out, you can see who is really wearing swimming trunks.

Some of the most successful businesses in the world continue to people at the centre of their operations as evidenced by their attendance at our 2025 summit.

We will continue to explore the value of human capital to business, how that can be accounted for and used to benefit organisations as well as their employees and the communities they operate in. Because experience shows us there is no better way to do business.

Thanks to Pinsent Masons who hosted us for the second year, and to L'Oréal, Global Solutions Inc, ASSP, Nebosh, AIHA, ERM and RoSPA for supporting the event.

Kathy Seabrook and Malc Staves

Key summit takeaways

- Companies can put a financial value on the benefits of investing in people and their safety health and wellbeing; many of the necessary metrics are already available internally.
- Investors are taking greater interest in businesses' generation of non-financial value and its impact on bottom line performance and tools are being developed to standardise impact accounting, including safety and health impacts.
- Safety and health policy and provision must be inclusive and recognise the differences between groups and individuals to offer them best protection.
- Artificial intelligence is providing exciting opportunities to improve employee protection but humans must ensure they remain in charge of safety and health strategy.

For openers

Malcolm Staves, Global Vice President Health & Safety at L'Oréal and Kathy Seabrook CEO of Global Solutions Inc, co-founders and co-chairs of the Project Group on Valuing Human Capital in OHS of the Capitals Coalition, opened proceedings at the fifth People Sustainability Summit, welcoming the 90 invited sustainability and safety and health leaders.

Malcolm said it was a cause for celebration that they had reached the fifth summit, that the event was going from strength to strength and that the participants' commitment to people sustainability was as strong as ever. Kathy said the steering committee had been working hard to make the forthcoming two days as exciting and valuable as possible for an audience of thought leaders.

"As always, we pick topics that you don't typically hear about at conferences," she said, giving as examples upcoming sessions covering impact accounting, baseline safety, the cutting-edge work of the Capitals Coalition and the investor's perspective on the value of human capital and safety and health management in decision making.

Malcolm thanked lawyers Pinsent Masons for donating the conference facilities for the second year and Phil Newton of the firm's regulatory team said he welcomed the opportunity to learn from the global perspectives the summit brought and hoped delegates would enjoy the two days.

Malcolm introduced the summit's first keynote speaker Lord Jordan of Bournville, former governor of the London School of Economics, former General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and Life President of RoSPA.

Lord Jordan of Bournville: People first

Lord Jordan offered an overview of the changing world of work, citing consultants McKinsey who forecast up to 70% of jobs will have tasks reshaped by artificial intelligence (AI) in the coming years and noting that the combination of new technology and human beings had historically carried risks. "Health and safety professionals will now be continuously challenged to render that combination safe," he said. He argued for the extension of organisations' duty of care outside the workplace, since 80% of accidental deaths of working age people happen outside work. Non-work accidents, he argued, "do damage a company's workforce, do damage its productivity, its morale and, yes, its profits".

Many safety and health professionals still had a job to do to convince their organisations of the benefits of treating employee protection as more than a compliance issue. But Lord Jordan said it was important to keep trying to explain the business benefits of a healthy and safe workforce to business leaders, not least the reputational advantages. He quoted the American investor Warren Buffett, who said it takes 20 years for an organisation to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. Safety professionals had to convince workers too, he said, "who want to be safe at work, but not all of them think it's their job to make it happen." A two-way dialogue with frontline employees was essential to build safety culture.

Returning to technological change and AI, he noted that "it promises everything, but remember, artificial intelligence has caused airplanes to fall out of the sky. AI robots have killed the people they were there to help. Supercomputers have refused to shut down when told to do so by the people who built them." It would be up to the brightest and best safety professionals to come up with safeguards that allowed humanity to reap the benefits of the new technological capabilities while keeping people safe, he concluded. "You must; you can; you will."

> ***Health and safety professionals will now be continuously challenged to render the combination of people and new technology safe***
>
> Lord Jordan of Bournville

Kathy Seabrook: Dot matrix

Kathy's scene-setting session for the summit's discussions sought to look at the different aspects of sustainability and how it was being translated into action by businesses round the world. She said she wanted to connect the dots between corporate balance sheets and sustainability valuation measures, which are often considered non-financial aspects of business activity. The key is business integration.

As well as environmental impacts, she said organisations should consider the financial value of social aspects of sustainability, including health, safety and wellbeing, diversity equity and inclusion, living wages, and workforce development and retention, as well as external work such as community engagement. She introduced impact accounting methodologies to assist with identifying financial value.

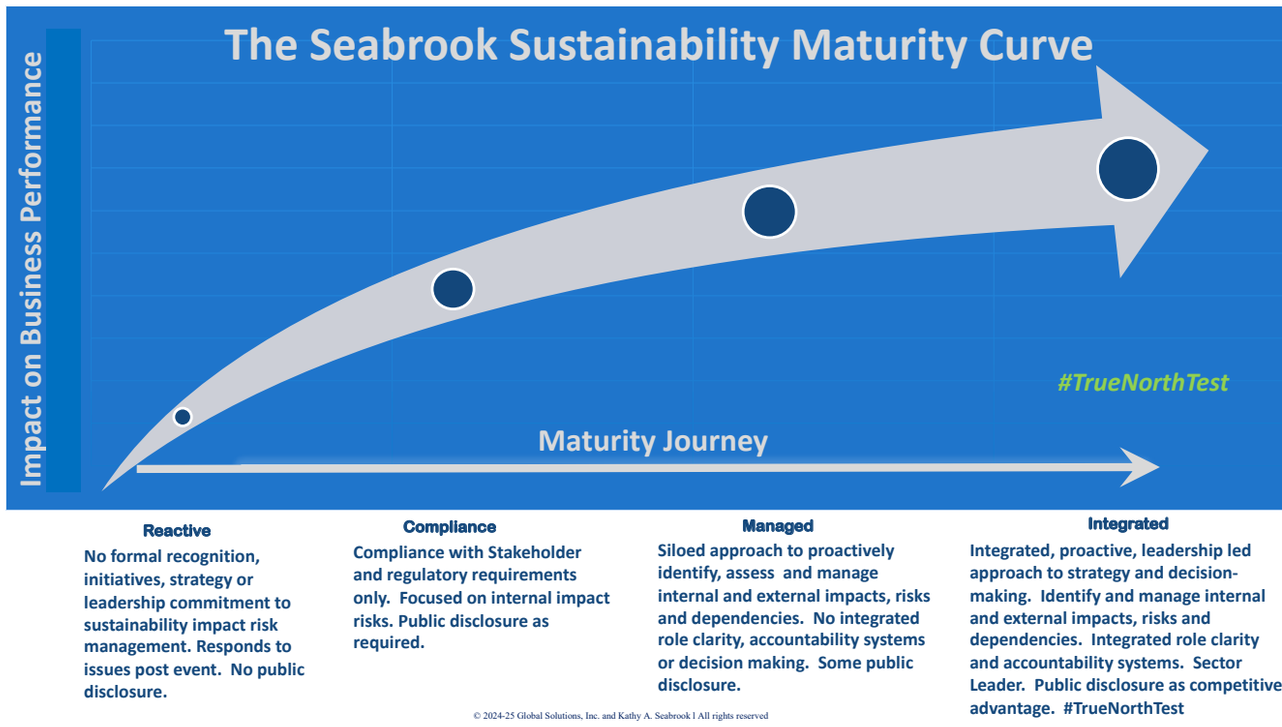
The internal factors translated into financial value through supporting and enhancing employees' contribution to the organisation. A business that passed her "True North" test was one "where the impact and dependency that an organization has on our people, including their health, safety and wellbeing, as well as the natural resources that they depend upon, they're actually valued, and they're reflected in all business decision making." This integrates people sustainability into the business.

But safety and health professionals did not have to sit in silos trying to calculate the financial value of their organisation's human capital, she said, they could build bridges to business leaders and colleagues who already had those figures. She gave the example of Dave Stangis, former Chief Sustainability Officer at the Campbell's Company who she had interviewed for her recent book, co-authored with Tanis Marquette, Connecting the Dots: Environment, Health, Safety, and Sustainability. Stangis explained how he had asked his leadership team to help put a monetary value on employee retention. The head of HR had easily come up with a figure of $6000 as the cost of recruiting and inducting a new entry-level administrative "So then he said, 'That's how I started monetizing and actually helping the company make better decisions on our workforce and things like health and safety'," said Kathy. She said she recognised that not everyone was comfortable with reducing the value of the contribution of workers to financial sums, "but at the end of the day, guess what drives decisions? Money; financial capital."

Health, safety and sustainability specialists should reach out to the business leaders and colleagues in their organisations who could help them estimate the financial value of interventions such as investing in new ergonomic equipment to avoid manual handling injuries, including not just the returns in reduced sickness absence but also lower insurance premiums, increased productivity and lower employee turnover. These are all measures of human capital.

As an example of a company that had built previously non-financial value into its accounting system she offered Brazilian multinational Natura, owner of the Body Shop and Avon brands, which produces an integrated profit and loss statement which includes a valuation of around $750,000 for the people in its employ.

> ***This framework helps you communicate the sustainability strategy out to everyone in the organisation, so they have a roadmap***
>
> Kathy Seagrove



Kathy showed delegates a Sustainability Maturity Curve model she had developed through experience, to help organisations evaluate what stage of sustainability maturity they had reached. Sustainability professionals knew where their organisation was in the journey to better integration and full maturity, she said, "This framework helps you communicate the sustainability strategy out to everyone in the organisation, so they have a roadmap."

This integrates the financial value of human capital, including health, safety and wellbeing, into all aspects of business activity.

Key points

- OHS professionals can translate the value people contribute to the business (people sustainability) into financial equivalents.
- Business leaders and colleagues in allied functions can supply data for the calculations.

> ***This all starts with this idea and purpose of going towards True North. Where the impact and dependencies on people and their health, safety and wellbeing are valued and reflected in all business decision making and a true measure of corporate performance.***
>
> Kathy Seagrove

Rosie Russell: All inclusive

The message that one size does not fit all either for personal protective equipment (PPE) or for most other forms of safety control was conveyed powerfully to delegates by Rosie Russell in a session on inclusivity in OHS provision.

Rosie, who is Director of Environment, Health, Safety, and Sustainability at gene therapy company MeiraGTx and president of the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management, noted that EU Directive 89 391, the safety and health "framework Directive" drawn up before the fall of the Berlin Wall, had made it employers' duty to safeguard sensitive risk groups against dangers which specifically threaten them. More than forty years had passed, "Yet here I am talking still about what was behind the intent of that Directive," she said. It had taken until 2025 to produce an international standard for inclusive PPE, to ensure it fitted both genders and all body types, but that many employers were still issuing generic protective gear to everyone.

She noted that subcontractors, migrants, workers in the gig economy did not have more accidents than directly employed workers, but the accidents they did have were more likely to be serious ones. US OSHA research suggesting that poor risk communication was a root cause of 25% of accidents might provide some clue to these groups' exposure to more serious risks, she suggested. Communication was key she said, giving the example of pre-start safety information at a construction site which might not be properly absorbed by neurodiverse workers such as those with dyslexia or ADHD. Moving to other factors that might increase vulnerability, she cited a study from Italy looking at the healthcare sector which found employees with high job demands and low manager support who were in lower socioeconomic groups were 630% more likely to have accidents than those in higher social segments.

"But there is an emerging picture now out there in the literature that is showing that our risk assessments, when done at population level, are missing people." She quoted the novelist John le Carré, who said "a desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world," and she added that if OHS professionals work at a distance from the workforce "We are going to be missing something of their experience, which means we are going to be underestimating the risk that they are running. So please go back and consult the workers."

Key points

- OHS provisions need to take into account workers' individual characteristics and needs.
- Proximity to people and their working conditions ensures better judgement of how best to protect them.

Natalie Nicholles: Impact driver

From her start 15 years previously working for the New Economics Foundation thinktank in a converted garage in an insalubrious south London district, to Executive Director of the Capitals Coalition, Nathalie Nicholles described her career in trying to challenge conventional economics and to persuade businesses to account for their impact on the planet and for the value of their people.

She said the work of the coalition stemmed from people like the summit delegates saying "There is a risk there that we're not managing. There is an opportunity. We have got a dependency that we are not getting our hands around." "Fundamentally, we believe that in 10 years' time all of those decisions are going to be embedded into the financial economic system," she added. The work the coalition was doing, including the working group convened by Malcolm Staves and Kathy Seabrook, was to help develop the accounting methodologies and confidence in them so they could be used by accountants, businesses and the financial markets. Her organisation had committed to shutting down in 2035, she told delegates, because it believed the job of embedding impact accounting should be complete by then. "Either we succeed - and then yay! - or we don't, and we are part of the problem," she said.

The capitals approach, valuing human, social and natural capital alongside produced or economic capital, was the same as the integrated decision-making that Kathy Seabrook had described earlier, she said. She said the first three capitals had no financial figures associated with them at present "because we don't value them systematically. That's why we are having this conversation."

Businesses needed systematised ways to measure and report on their impacts and dependencies on factors such as a healthy workforce, and then to persuade bodies such as the International Accounting Standards Board to use these systematised metrics to build confidence in impact accounting.

She said the Capitals Coalition had issued the Framework for Integrated Decision Making (https://capitalscoalition.org/capitals-approach/frameworkintegrated/) in the middle of 2025 to help organisations bring all the capitals together. The Capitals Coalition's recent merger with the International Foundation for Value would help advance the cause developing formal impact accounting standards, which would increase confidence among investors and regulators in the credibility of this new form of valuation. The OHS element of the new standards would put a monetary value on the impact of injuries and ill health among direct employees and in an organisation's supply chain.

Nicole welcomed Adele Thorani of renewable energy company Ørsted to talk about her organisation's experience of impact accounting. Adele explained that though the company was on course to achieve a net-zero target ahead of most companies it did not have a quantitative measure of its community and employee sustainability work. She said if Ørsted wanted its customers, commonly governments, to care about its sustainability efforts "we need to find a language that they will understand". Impact accounting, which they had been piloting, could provide that language but also give the company a steer as to which people sustainability initiatives to champion, because they created most value. She said the capitals approach had proved useful but it involved a lot of complexity. Ørsted would use some of the methodology but needed to develop its capacity to measure the human and social capital aspects. She agreed that the forthcoming impact accounting standards would be helpful.

Key points

- New accounting methodologies to assess value and impacts previously left of balance sheets are in development.
- Impact accounting standards for OHS will be published in 2026 to help organisations assess the value of low incident and accident rates.

Workshop 1: Making the case

"We're out of our comfort zone, we're thinking out of the box," said Malcolm Staves introducing the summit's first workshop. "This is all about decision making, influencing stakeholder management, stakeholder understanding." Hosts Natalie Nicholles, Executive Director of the Capitals Coalition and Kathy Seabrook, advisor and ambassador to the Capitals Coalition, explained that the question for delegates to consider was how to talk to senior executives in making the case for the value of OHS. Natalie instructed attendees to discuss in their table groups what they wished their CEOs knew about the value of safety, health and wellbeing.

Reporting back after time to deliberate, Rosie Russell said that at her table two points had come up. The first was that safety and health professionals tend to focus on data, but data is the plural of stories, and to lose connection with those individual stories risked losing touch with the human element. "The other thing is that in my own personal day to day over the last six years, I've reduced manufacturing downtime due to accidents tenfold. I can put a monetary value on that," she said. Another delegate said that their CEO should realise that when the organisation was in a "spot of bother", its people were the source of the way round the problems, rather than the first resource to be reduced.

Natalie noted that the answers had the common thread of wishing that CEOs would take a longer-term view, "And that's difficult in an environment that's asking for short-term returns." Kathy said that to build a business case it was a good idea to frame arguments in terms of risk. "Risk in general is what investors live and die on when they are choosing what companies to invest in," she said. Efficiencies and productivity were also strong points, since thorough incident investigation often revealed the potential for better working. Stakeholder expectations were another driver, whether it was from customers and contractors, regulators, employees or the communities a business operates in. Maintaining reputation was another factor, as was regulatory compliance.

Delegates went back into their groups to discuss a business case using the drivers of risk, reputation or productivity.

Risk

- Start by quantifying the executive's attitude to risk
- Present data on business cost of unmanaged EHS risk (spend X to avoid Y).
- Explain supply chain demands for better risk control – contract requirements.
- Potential for lost market share.
- Focus on serious injury and fatality risks.
- Represent risk in easily understood idioms.
- Maintain horizon-scanning approach to alert the executive to new risks.

Reputation

- Emphasise effect on talent acquisition and retention (employer of choice).
- Use case studies of organisations with poor safety records and reputational damage.
- Also showcase employers of choice with strong EHS investment.
- Emphasise benefits of investor and supply chain confidence.
- Discuss need for alignment with consumer/ customer values.

Productivity

- Compile data on accident-related downtime costs.
- Include knock-on costs: investigations, claims management.
- Elevated loyalty and trust increase discretionary effort and creativity.
- Increased retention avoids recruitment and training costs and skills loss.
- Reduced absenteeism generates direct and indirect financial gains.

Key points

- OHS professionals need to talk the language of business to make a strong investment case to business leaders.
- Arguments based on risk management, avoiding reputational damage, valuing the contribution of workers and maintaining productivity are sound bases for a business case.

James Pomeroy: Word power

"Words create worlds," said James Pomeroy, at the start of a session on the power of language in shaping and directing professionals' attention and efforts. James, who is Global HSEQ Director at engineers Arup, focused particularly on metaphors used to describe safety management and practice. "Words really matter," he said, "because we talk a lot in safety about culture, and one of the foundations of culture is words."

James said in his work towards a Doctorate he had identified nine common metaphorical frames used by safety practitioners to describe their work. These included safety as a journey, characterised by the use of words such as milestone, step, plateau and setback; safety as vision, with terms including scanning, foreseeing, focus and blindness; and safety as voice (amplified, heard, silenced). Metaphors could be used to enlighten and motivate but also to distract attention, he warned, offering the example of an oil and gas company which had published the statement "We are really proud of our journey to zero harm, and have made significant milestones this year, but we regret to report the death of four workers."

Metaphors could also direct action for good or for ill he said, noting the US automobile industry's lobbyists coining of the term "jay walking" in the early 20th century to encourage legislators to favour vehicles over pedestrians.

He said that the metaphorical frames used to describe safety, whether it was an ecosystem (having roots and needing to be nurtured so it could grow and evolve) or a machine (with components to be calibrated and adjusted) affected the way it was managed and communicated. Questioning people about their use of metaphors in a spirit of open enquiry could provide a real insight into the way they viewed safety.

The practical lessons he offered delegates were to be more conscious of using metaphors to describe safety, to consider the perspective and even bias that metaphorical frames gave their work and to take care when using metaphors in formal safety communications. "There's a lovely phrase I use," he said. "If you want to change your understanding, change the metaphor."

Key points

- Framing safety performance and aims through the use of metaphors is almost universal.
- The choice of metaphor has a strong effect on how safety is perceived and managed.

Panel: Humans at the heart

ASSP past-president and owner of Riverlure OSH Services, Pam Walaski, steered a panel discussion on how to create business value through people-centric organisations.

Carina Hjørngaard Hjorth, Global Head of Health, Safety, Environment and Safety Transformation at shipping giant Maersk, kicked off the conversation on people-centricity, saying that high-performing teams had to have the right enabling structures including a good balance between resources and the demands on them and support from managers and colleagues. Sustainability and OHS professionals had to ensure leaders understood the importance of these frameworks, but also how to spot the signs when they were inadequate and employees were succumbing to stress, and to have the appropriate mechanisms to help individuals get back on their feet.

RoSPA chief executive Becky Hickman said it was essential that leaders recognised people were "the living embodiment and the active agent of any business strategy", and created environments for them to thrive in. She said that included special provisions for groups who needed them, including younger and older employees and that leaders had to understand the growing risk of burnouts and mental ill health and to ensure they had data to spot "the early warning indicators of organizational fragility that really affect resilience and affect sustainability". Boards needed to tailor support initiatives to the make-up of their workforces, adopting a whole-life, whole-person approach.

Pam asked Carina and Stephanie Thery, Head of Sustainability, Global Manufacturing, at Philip Morris, to explain what Becky's strategic approach looked like in a major corporation. Carina said that one of Maersk's core values is that it cares for its people, has a no-blame culture and promotes psychological safety. She said these principles can sound "awfully theoretical" to a warehouse manager but the company has built these elements into Lead with Care, its safety leadership programme, through four leadership principles: we lead with care, we learn and adapt, people are the experts and we are resilient. As well as the leadership programme, a new collaborative model with the operations function ensured that the messages were reinforced at all 700 Maersk sites.

Stephanie said Phillip Morris was "blessed" to have health at the centre of its strategy. The company has a network of 300 wellbeing champions but she admitted that mental health was an issue where their support was still developing. Beyond that they were exploring how the way leaders framed messages could act as a multiplier for wellness and energy rather than a brake.

Pam moved the discussion on to AI and Becky said that to realise its massive potential, humans needed to steer it, since the technology "has no inherent moral compass". "I would frame it around three interconnected themes: capability, fairness and trust," she added, emphasising the need for humans not to let AI erode their skills, to ensure its work is audited for bias and that workers should be involved in its deployment and use, rather than subjected to it.

Phillip Pearson, chief executive of the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management, made the point that a younger generation coming into the workforce had a much better grasp of the potential and use of AI and other new technologies and that should be harnessed and embraced rather than seen as a challenge by the older generations. Carina added that leaders needed to create psychologically safe environments in which people felt confident to experiment and even fail with new technologies and to ensure people remained at the centre. Pam agreed, saying there were plenty of people in workplaces who were "fearful and angry" about AI's potential, "so I think we need to reach out to those folks who are feeling concerned and worried about where things might be going, and help bring them along in whatever way we can."

Key points

- Provision for all employees, especially those with specific needs, should be at the heart of strategic planning.
- AI should be embraced as a tool but not allowed to dictate people strategy and specialists using it must not allow their own skills to fade.

> ***I think we need to reach out to those folks who are feeling concerned [about AI] and worried about where things might be going, and help bring them along in whatever way we can***
>
> Pam Walawski








EVISU

DAY 2

Andrew Howard: Where the smart money goes

Andrew Howard, Global Head of Sustainable Investment at asset managers Schroders, which stewards £816 million of funds on behalf of its clients, returned to the summit for a second year to talk about fund managers' assessment of businesses based on their people sustainability efforts.

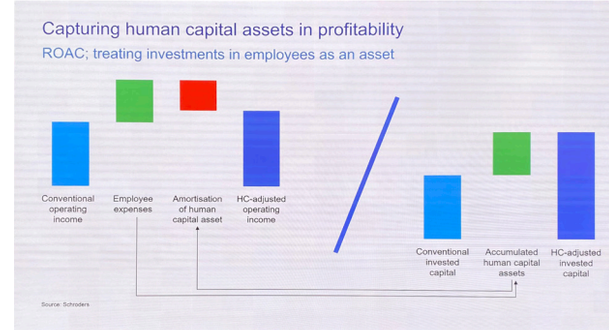
He said Schroders had always been interested in the longer-term performance of companies and that was dictated by their ability to attract and retain talent, as well as reliable supply chains and loyal customers. He cited a meta-analysis by pollsters Gallup of 450 studies covering 3 million employees in almost 100 countries, which found companies scoring in the top 25% for employee engagement also had just over 20% higher profitability, just under 20% lower absenteeism than the average. "The jury, to a large degree, I think, has returned on whether workforce management, managing employees effectively, is a useful thing to do," he said. His task, he said, was to try to identify that positive association between engagement and productivity at individual company level.

He observed that AI could be a differentiator for business performance but "It's about the use of it, rather than simply about spending money on it". But it was already having a disruptive effect on companies' intention to hire more labour, but not in the way many expected. He showed data from accountants PwC that showed almost 50% of CEOs expected efficiency gains from AI in the next 12 months but less than 20% planned to reduce headcount, while more than 40% expected to hire more people.

Echoing Natalie Nicholles' point from previous summits that robots are treated as assets on a balance sheet and humans as a cost, he said "We've always thought of human capital and paying employees as being simply an expense ...

So there's always been a tendency therefore to try and minimise the expense." He said Schroders had flipped that idea and, viewing employees as an asset, sought to measure organisational investment in human capital in higher wages, training expenditure or low employee turnover and plotted it against their profitability. Combined with all the other measures of return on capital invested, their analysis of around 10,000 companies showed that those companies that had invested more in human capital had performed about 3% a year better than the average. "There is actual, tangible analysis that we can bring to this equation that at the margin at least helps us identify companies that are going to make better investments, that are certainly more profitable and that all have a more durable form of competitive advantage," he told delegates.

To move away from the historical analysis and pick good companies to invest in involved identifying those who are currently on a trajectory of improving their investment in human capital, since they are more likely to outperform the average in the years to come. He said Schroders' asset managers engaged directly with companies to gather information and was pushing with a group of major investment companies for more disclosure of human capital information. He noted that the recent political cold winds about environmental sustainability and human capital elements such as EDI in some countries, had been helpful in showing which companies' commitment had been genuine and those who had



been just making gestures. Employees, he said, had yet to become a dirty word and "over the next few years, probably will start to get more attention within the context of sustainability, if only because it's an area that still remains one that companies can talk about, investors can talk about and we can focus on."

Key points

- Investment managers are taking an interest in companies' nurturing of their human capital as an indicator of their future financial performance.
- Political fluctuations aside, people sustainability indicators are likely to be more of a focus for investors in years to come.

> ***We've always thought of human capital and paying employees as being simply an expense... So there's always been a tendency therefore to try and minimise the expense***
>
> Andy Howard

James Hay: Reporting flux

The past year's progress in implementing the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) was the subject of a session from James Hay, Principal Sustainable Finance Advisor at summit hosts Pinsent Masons. Under the majority position agreed by parliamentarians on 13 November, the threshold for companies reporting under the CSRD would be raised to 1,000 employees and €450 million in revenues.

James said the scope of the CSRD is currently in revisions as reporting requirements for companies have been pushed back to give them breathing space to prepare for the new obligations. The largest companies in scope will now have to report on the environmental and social issues that impact their business and their own impacts for the year starting after 1 January 2027. The number of businesses with EU operations that fall under the Directive could be reduced by up to 80% from the estimated 50,000 originally expected, he said. Small listed companies are no longer in scope and companies with non EU-based parents may also no longer need to report. The amount of information on impacts that organisations could reasonably request from supply chain partners was also under discussion, he noted.

For those larger companies who were still in scope, the experience of preparing for the first year of reporting had led many to improve their ESG data systems and get better to grips with the concept of double materiality – comprising the financial risks and opportunities of a sustainability factor (financial materiality) and the factor's potential or actual effect on people or the environment (impact materiality). James said organisations were still struggling with the breadth and depth of the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS) underpinning the Directive and how meshed with other reporting standards such as GRI 403.

He advised anyone drawing up a materiality assessment for the first time to avoid trying to go it alone and to try and draw on the work of others in their sector who had gone before. Despite the tweaks underway in EU reporting obligations, James said the direction of travel was towards more corporate disclosure of environmental and social impacts that that the UK government's plans for its own sustainability reporting regulations made the CSRD worth monitoring. One lesson companies could learn was to start gathering data early, as many companies prepping reports for the CSRD had found themselves running out of time.

Key points

- The number of companies covered by the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive has been radically reduced.
- The pressure to report on sustainability factors impact on business is likely to increase again in future.

Panel: All shall be well

Why must wellbeing be treated as a strategic business imperative? This was the first question tackled by an expert panel chaired by Mark Rix, Managing Director of conference organisers Wellbeing at Work. Crystal Danbury, Director of Group Safety, Insurance and occupational Wellbeing at retailer Sainsbury's, said that one reason that might focus organisations' minds in the UK was a regulatory shift. Crystal said the Health and Safety Executive was ready to take enforcement action against employers that failed to safeguard the wellbeing of their workers. Another driver was the need to maintain productivity in leaner workforces. She said organisations that didn't prioritise wellbeing were likely to be haemorrhaging money in sickness absence, compensation claims and poor performance, "So it has to be at the base of any business strategy," she concluded; "there's too much loss in not doing it."

Mental health consultant Georgia Bryce Hutchinson related a simile used by Liz Horvath of Mental Health Canada, in a session at the inaugural Safety on the Edge conference held in the USA earlier in 2025. Liz had said that most businesses' approach to employee wellbeing and mental health was like a village based at the top of a steep cliff whose response to its citizens falling off the cliff was to build a hospital at the bottom to treat the casualties. "I represent that hospital," said Georgia, since many of her patients were people referred for treatment by their employers. She said that parking struggling employees with therapists was not an adequate strategy. Supporting Crystal's point, she noted that the multiple months she signed employees with stress conditions off work all affected their companies' bottom lines.

In response to a question from Mark about use of employee assistance programmes (EAPs) by employees with stress and anxiety, she said take-up in the US was low because individuals were worried about the confidentiality of the services. Mark McBride-Wright, CEO of inclusion consultancy EqualEngineers, said that trends in EAP use were worth monitoring for clues as to root causes in companies that could be tackled before they led to costly discrimination claims. He said that senior managers "leading stoically and not being vulnerable" was a critical barrier to psychological safety and employees opening up about their vulnerabilities.

Stuart Hughes, Head of Health and Safety, Mercedes-AMG Petronas Formula 1 Team, said he wanted to flip the idea of losses from poor wellbeing to look at the positive gains from investing in it. For employees signed off with stress-related conditions he said the common approach was analogous to bringing back someone to work who had chopped their finger off in a machine and asking them to work on the same machine with no additional guarding.

He said that in developing Mercedes-AMG Petronas F1 Team's Wellbeing programme he had spent the first year in calibration, rejecting off-the-shelf solutions and trying interventions to see what worked. He said 85% of the 1300 employees go through health assessments. "The things that give me the most pride are the individuals that come and have conversations about what's changed in their personal lives, in their health, in their wellness, in their mental capabilities," he said.

"How do leaders embed wellbeing into health and safety systems rather than treat them as separate?" Mark asked. Crystal said one of the problems was that few. organisations knew where responsibility for wellbeing rested, whether it was with HR or safety and health functions. "So I think in terms of embedding it, the first thing has to get really clear on what it is and where it sits," she said.

Mark McBride-Wright added that allowance had to be made for the varying perceptions of different generations and that wellbeing programmes should be designed to break down the barriers between different groups in the workforce. Georgia said that the ISO 45003 standard set out clearly what psychosocial hazards looked like, so businesses had no excuse for not addressing them. Stuart cautioned against basing programmes directly on set frameworks. "The challenges within organizations are different, the makeup of the people are different, the cultures are different," he said.

Asked by Mark Rix for a summary piece of advice on wellbeing, Georgia said: take care of your people. Honestly, it's as simple as that. For me, if your if your employees do not exist, you don't have a business."

Key points

- Rather than focusing solely on the potential costs of poor wellbeing, OHS professionals should promote the positive business benefits of a fit and healthy workforce.
- Organisations need to be clear where responsibility for wellbeing is located.

Panel: Back to the future

In the first of two sessions on the state and future of the safety and health profession NEBOSH Chief Quality Officer Dee Arp asked a panel how they believed the discipline had changed in the course of their careers to date. Shirley Parsons, Brand Ambassador of the eponymous recruitment company she founded, said she had a unique perspective in the room as the only person who could look back 50 years. She noted that in an equivalent gathering in the mid-1970s she would probably have been the only woman. She said she had seen safety and health managers grow from "the well-meaning amateur to these days where they are highly qualified, well-respected professionals."

Caitlin Vaughan, Senior Project and Stakeholder Engagement Manager at safety research charity Lloyd's Register Foundation, said her body was at the start of research into the efficacy of interventions by OHS professionals through its Global Safety Evidence Centre. She said their initial research suggested there was no central repository of OHS knowledge and much of it was tacit understanding and expertise that could be lost to organisations when individuals moved jobs or retired. She said the foundation would be funding research into what works in OHS and what does not, to provide a more robust evidence base.

Lawrence Webb, Chief Safety Officer at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory said the COVID pandemic had created new expectations of OHS professionals, since they had been vital to recovery. "We need to make sure that we can make the most of those expectations," he said, "because it gives us a shop window to what I think is the most important subject in any business, a real opportunity to enable and design out harm at the earliest possible stages we can, rather than help them maintain the norm."

Dee asked Monique Parker, Senior Vice President, Safety, Environment and Health, Piedmont Lithium and President Elect of the ASSP if there was a possibility the role of OHS professionals was being extended too far. "It's going to get bigger, and the more we get integrated into businesses, the more of those roles and expectations are going to change," said Monique. "Because you sit at the table and you're expected to be the expert in this area." She said the important thing was for individuals to ensure they acquired the skills to embrace their enlarged roles fully and the make sure that newer professionals coming into organisations gained the necessary experience to cope as well.

Asked what she thought would be the impact of artificial intelligence, Shirley said that she believed it would be limited in the immediate future in her field of recruitment. "Mostly, when companies hire people, they hire them based on their technical skills and their knowledge," she said. "In our opinion, however, when they part company with a candidate, it's normally because of their character and their behaviour doesn't fit. I don't really think that AI is going to help with that." Caitlin added that there was a "patchy evidence base" for the benefits of emerging technologies in OHS to date. Lawrence added that people had to fight the temptation to let AI stop them thinking for themselves. Monique backed him up, saying "We, as professionals need to be the ideation of what's next. How are we going to do things?"

Lawrence said the profession still had a sales opportunity in selling the advantages of good OHS to executive boards. Monique agreed and advocated finding an advocate at board level rather than trying to go it alone. Caitlin said she believed the need to manage the impacts of climate change and psychosocial conditions in the coming years could give the profession more traction with senior management.

Key points

- OHS professionals must recognise their roles are changing, embrace the challenge and develop the skills needed to adapt.
- AI can be a supporter, but idea generation and planning has to remain in human hands.

> ***OHS professionals' role is going to get bigger, and the more we get integrated into businesses, the more of those roles and expectations are going to change***
>
> Monique Parker

Workshop 2: Future fit

Building on the previous panel discussion, safety writer Louis Wustemann and Sarah Ischer, Senior Director of Expertise at the US What Works Foundation, convened a workshop on the future of the OHS profession. They asked delegates to split into two groups and to consider two questions. The first was what are the skills OHS practitioners will need to help make OHS a core organisational value? The second was how and where can they gain those skills? The combined results are shown below.

Skills to make OHS a core value

- Technical competence
- Legal
- Business acumen
- Technological
- Financial literacy
- Data analytics
- Project management
- Change management
- Strategic thinking
- Critical thinking
- Understanding power dynamics
- Communication
- Change agency
- Pragmatism
- Agility
- Resilience
- Growth mindset
- Brevity
- Sensitivity
- Listening
- Emotional intelligence
- Psychology
- Compassionate leadership
- Influencing
- Storytelling
- Self-care

How and where to gain those skills

- Professional literature
- Training
- Continuing professional development
- Professional organisations
- Mentoring
- Networking
- Industry/educational exchanges
- OHS veterans
- History
- Allied professions
- Benchmarking
- Experimentation
- Situations of discomfort
- Failure
- Talent selection
- Challenging status quo
- Constant curiosity
- Nurturing talent
- Succession planning

Panel: Planetary alignment

"The World Meteorological Organization reports that frequency and intensity of extreme events have risen sharply," said Martin Bardle. "Environmental degradation is no longer a distant environmental threat, it's here, and it's here now." Martin, who is Senior Vice President of HSQE at renewable energy multinational RES, was setting the scene for a discussion about environmental changes by a panel that included Carole Smets, Global Social Sustainability Director at drinks maker Pernod Ricard and Veronique Zerrouki, VP, Group Health, Safety & Environment at aviation equipment manufacturer Safran.

Carole started the conversation, saying that global warming directly affected her business because it was highly dependent on water to make alcohol and to crops that could be threatened by rising temperatures. She gave the example of Cuba where Pernod Ricard had to balance its own requirements for water and sugarcane to make rum against those of the island's population. Veronique said a measure of how important climate change was to her business was that though she had initially been head of environment, health and safety, environment had been split out as a separate function a few years ago. Now part of the remit had come back to her, she said, specifically dealing with the health and safety impacts of global warming.

The chair asked if there was help at hand to help organisations manage climate impacts. There was, said third panel member, Martin Cottam, former chair of the TC283 group that oversees development of ISO OHS standards. The group had spent several years shepherding ISO 45007, a publicly-available specification (PAS), due for publication in 2026. The standard will offer organisations guidance on the risks from climate change and from the measures, such as carbon capture, taken to mitigate it. Martin noted that alongside the specific advice in ISO/PAS 45007, all the ISO management standards covering issues such as safety and health and quality, were being adjusted for more of an emphasis on climate change as they came up for cyclical review.

Martin Bardle asked panellists how organisations could integrate climate resilience into their operations. Veronique said that as a global employer, Safran had plants in places such as India and Mexico where climate adaptations were already in place, but also facilities in Europe. “The most difficult part of the job right now is to make our people and our leaders understand that what our colleagues in Singapore or Chihuahua, have experienced is what we will experience in Paris or Holland,” she said.

Carole said there was still work to do in Pernod Ricard to ensure that employees and raw material supplies were safeguarded to protect the group’s finances and reputation. Veronique said the problem of fuel transition from hydrocarbons to other forms of energy could be existential for her company since the future of aviation depended on a successful shift.

Martin added that climate change adjustment could mean life or death for many companies, especially smaller ones. In the next round of revisions to ISO 45001 there were discussions about how much larger businesses should be made responsible for helping their smaller suppliers adapt OHS practice to a changing climate. “I think it's a good place, really for us in this discussion is to ask ourselves, so what are we doing?” he said. “… we all have supply chains which create vulnerability.”

Key points

- ISO/PAS 45007 offers guidance to employers to protect workers from climate change OHS impacts.
- Climate change adaptation could mean the difference between survival and extinction for many organisations.

Workshop 3: Urgent adjustments

Following on from the panel session, RoSPA CEO Becky Hickman and Charles Redinger, Founder and CEO of the Institute for Advanced Risk Management, led a communal session on adjustment to environmental degradation.

Becky put up a slide showing average sea level rise on a steep upward curve over recent decades, and noted that in the US, high-tide flooding has tripled in frequency over the past 50 years. "The point I want to make is that when we are talking about now. This is not a future worry," she said. "It's not something to strategise about, I'm not worried about your plans for 2050, this is now."

Charles said they would use the whole group of delegates as a panel to consider how to positively affect environmental degradation, and that they could do so bearing in mind a variety of contexts or angles. These were: regulations, non-governmental standards, financial disclosures, stakeholders, impact accounting, and risk management.

The first question to delegates was how their companies, clients and other stakeholders were experiencing environmental degradation.

A delegate from Procter & Gamble said in Northern China his company's facilities would be given 24 hours' notice that they had to cut production by 50% because of the need to manage poor air quality in the region. "So we need to build in resilience to that into our strategies."

Another delegate said that in Dubai, his company's operations had to cope with average temperatures of 50 degrees Celsius. "It's not just the impact directly on us but on our supply chain as well." Another said that her organisation was having to take increasing measures to prevent heat stress even in its French plants, and that expenditure on those controls took budget away from other safety spending. Another said that pipe expansion due to extreme heat also in a French factory had caused a joint to fail causing a leak of toxic gas.

Kate Field, Global Head Human and Social Sustainability at standards body BSI, said she had been talking to her organisation's policy lead on renewable energy and had asked whether any of the discussions about increasing solar generation in the UK involved discussions about modern slavery and labour rights in China where the majority of photovoltaic panels are manufactured. She said it was clear from their reaction the issue had never occurred to them. She said she thought the new ISO 45007 specification was important because it included such indirect health and safety implications of attempts to mitigate climate change.

Louise Hosking Head of Health and Safety Transformation at youth body The Scouts, said there were studies linking areas with high pollution with raised stress levels among the people who lived in them: "So for me as an environmental health person who has come to specialise in occupational safety and health, joining those wider dots is an area we could explore more deeply."

Charles asked whether these issues were factored into delegates' organisations risk profiles and even materiality assessments. Lawrence Webb said that his previous employer Costain had been forced to stand down employees for heat breaks on some UK construction projects in hotter months. "When you have a programme and a plan that has a load of things linked, it's a domino effect. It throws your schedules out, deliveries can't come, everything has to change."

Monique Parker noted that it was becoming more important to ensure workplaces were configured to support older workers to maintain a productive workforce because environmental factors reduced fertility rates, while the current population was living and working longer.

Melissa Mark-Joyce, Head of HSE at WSE Soda, brought the conversation back to the original questions and confirmed that her employer had identified climate change as one of the material factors impacting its mining operations. "We have had to shut down at times because we were competing with the community for water," she noted.

"It's absolutely true what Malc says; everybody in this room is a leader," Becky said, wrapping up the session. "And if you are a leader you have responsibility to continually look to challenge the status quo and continually look to drive improvements, that is the job." To balance the theme of environmental degradation she listed some examples of environmental wins in the previous year, including the fact that the reintroduction of the white-tailed eagle into the UK had been "hailed as one of nature's greatest comeback stories". Charles added that the message they would like to leave summit attendees with was about the power of leadership, that it gave professionals the capacity to soar like eagles.

Key points

- OHS professionals are already faced with the need to make climate-related changes to working patterns.
- Organisations need to look beyond the primary health impacts of climate change, such as heat stress, to manage secondary effects.

> ***For me as an environmental health person who has come to specialise in occupational safety and health, joining those wider dots is an area we could explore more deeply***
>
> Louise Hosking

Concluding thoughts

Malcolm and Kathy signed off the fifth People Sustainability Global Summit with their reflections on the event. Malcolm said it had been two days of continuous learning. "Being able to learn is what keeps us going, keeps us passionate, stops us getting stagnant," he said. He highlighted a few of the phrases that had stood out for him in the preceding two days. "I loved 'thrive not survive" he said. He said the summit had added the eagle to his menagerie of metaphorical safety creatures that already included the hummingbird, the elephant and the canary.

Kathy took delegates back to the first summit in L'Oréal, Paris in 2019. "The idea was to bring together thought leaders, to bring together people who could make a whole greater than the sum of its parts ... we have had an opportunity to introduce new thinking, about impacts and dependencies and impact evaluation. We are moving things forward and I think we'll do more of that next year. She said she hoped everyone at the summit would act like the hummingbird and do their small part to effect change. "What if we take this into our organisations? All of us have places we can influence. That's our hope."

She thanked Pinsent Masons for kindly hosting the event and for the catering, L'Oréal, NEBOSH, AIHA, ASSP, ERM, RoSPA and Shirley Parsons for their support. Malcolm finished by asking if delegates were interested in a future summit. The answer was a unanimous yes. So he asked delegates to save the dates of 8 and 9 December 2026 and wished everyone a safe trip home.

Steering group

Thanks to the summit steering group for all their hard work in making the 2025 People Sustainability Summit possible.

- Dee Arp
- Natalie Nicholles
- Charles F. Redinger
- Kathy Seabrook
- Malcolm Staves