

VISION ZERO

Vision Zero: Bold Thinking for Occupational Safety and Health

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PRACTICE



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The successful implementation of VISION ZERO is more than a question of organization and rules, of products and services. Ultimately, it's about creating a firmly anchored cultural understanding of occupational safety and health among everyone involved. If such awareness is continually strengthened, it will have a lasting effect. This is a very practical example of sustainable entrepreneurial action in the company. It affects employees in the production facilities as well as the management, but also external partners such as the manufacturers and developers of the corresponding solutions. This article describes the strategies and perspectives that Dräger follows on the way to Vision Zero. It is an appeal for creative, agile and courageous thinking. For more safety in the workplace. For all of us.

At first glance, the path to achieving Vision Zero seems clear. After all, in Germany, for example, the statutory accident insurance (Deutsche Gesetzliche Unfallversicherung, DGUV) has been following this concept for a world without work accidents and work-related illnesses through comprehensive prevention work for more than 15 years. Vision Zero has been established as a global strategy since 2017, including through the International Social Security Association (ISSA).

But a clear strategy or a straight path does not mean that the way to achieve the goal is easy. In the case of occupational safety and health this is due to the complexity of the topic and many different factors. This starts with the challenge of firmly anchoring simple actions in everyday life - for example using handrails in stairwells. And it extends to establishing a flexible organizational structure, which consciously prepares for developments that are difficult or impossible to predict.

Thinking in Scenarios instead of only following Tried and Tested Structures

Why do developments which are difficult or impossible to predict, represent such a big challenge for all of us and for achieving the goals of Vision Zero - Safety, Health, Wellbeing? The challenge reflects the fact that the world is changing more dynamically today than in previous decades, that it is becoming more complex and more agile. This megatrend influences business models, supply chains - and

the daily work of entire workforces as well as every single individual.

At this point we should once again become aware of how we normally work: There is an organizational framework structure made up of, among other things, timelines and specifications, business plans and agreements on how to achieve goals. And yes, this structure usually works well in times that we would define as normal. This is demonstrated not least by our individual and collective memories of how well our methods work. This is understandable, because these memories help to efficiently control our actions within the coordinate system described by repeating successful patterns.

But what happens when the anchor points shift in the coordinate system of a business plan, for example, or in the economic activities of a company or an entire branch? Then decision-makers can quickly doubt themselves and their abilities if they are completely focused on acting within the given structure. That's exactly why it's so important to always keep in mind the fact that, no matter how structured we are, we cannot predict the specific future - that is, unforeseen developments can occur at any time.

To deal with this realization, it helps to think in scenarios. Because anyone who imagines the possible future in such complex and dynamic sequences of actions can better think about unexpected influences. To always analyse possible future risks based on established routines is, in comparison, considerably more static.

Raising Awareness for the "Cone of Possibility"

To convert this knowledge in the actions of individuals and entire organizations, thinking in terms of the "Cone of Possibilities" is extremely helpful. This fascinating thought model describes the increasing diversity of possible futures the further we look into the future. It was initially developed under the name "Cone of Plausibility" by Charles Taylor in 1990 ("Creating Strategic Visions"). Among others, Clement Bezold and Trevor Hancock in 1994 ("Possible Futures, Preferable Futures") and Joseph Voros in 2003 ("A Generic

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Foresight Process Framework”) further developed it. This tool for forecasting, future research and innovation processes makes it clear that the future is not linear and that it can differ very significantly from our individual or collective projection of future events. The corresponding categories range from probable, plausible, possible, and desirable to absurd.¹

Humans tend to ignore possible events mentally, the more they fall in the category of absurd. This leads to us not preparing for theoretically imaginable but seemingly absurd scenarios. Nassim Nicholas Taleb described this phenomenon in 2001 as the black swan theory. But in fact, future events can fall into all of the above-mentioned categories, including the absurd – like the black swans, whose existence was considered absurd in Europe until they were discovered in Australia in 1697! Or in short – things sometimes turn out completely differently in the future than expected.

We can all visualize examples of such deviations from our vision of the future, even for a period of only a few years, through current developments: For example, who would have foreseen the global crisis in the supply of electronic components because of the Covid pandemic? The dramatic escalation of international conflicts and its economic effects were also not anticipated

Transferring Insights to Vision Zero

What can be derived from the knowledge and insights described above for the topic of occupational safety and health? Basically, we should always remember that there is no single and unchangeable path to Vision Zero. Because how you work without accidents is a question of culture. Only it can bring about a lasting change in people's behaviour so that they can work without accidents.

This includes setting off and continuously orienting yourself towards the goal. So, the path to Vision Zero is a journey. And on this journey, you must act courageously, you have to be open to new things. If a cultural understanding develops that you always take care of yourself and of others, then we are all on the right path. One stage of this journey can, for example, be the intrinsic understanding of how to use the

handrail in the stairwell – for employees in production as well as for top managers.

Occupational safety and health requires authenticity at all levels and in all areas. We achieve this by everyone personally living the Vision Zero approach. And no one should underestimate the potential that comes from even small actions like the example of using the handrail. A famous example of this is the return of grey wolves to the Yellowstone National Park in the USA in the mid-1990s. This seemingly small step towards a better ecological balance in the world-famous nature reserve had a long-term impact on the entire ecosystem by a cascade of further developments. In the end, even the flow of the rivers has come closer to its origins, with positive effects on the water balance of the whole protected area. Success stories like the one about the wolves who changed the river can also be told in occupational safety and health when the individual's attention is on ensuring that others and themselves act safely.

Future needs Attitude

Occupational safety and health is a goal that users and manufacturers can only achieve together. It is therefore necessary that the culture at Dräger as a supplier of products and services is geared towards a dynamic time with an open future.

Sometimes that means we want to go to the moon for Vision Zero. No, not personally and not actually. But metaphorically nevertheless! This is because a world-famous example of courageous and future-oriented action is US President John F. Kennedy's appeal for a manned moon mission. In 1961 he addressed his goal to the nation. And he said in a speech at Rice University on September 12, 1962: “We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win”.

¹ <https://thevoroscope.com/2017/02/24/the-futures-cone-use-and-history/>

The result? On July 20, 1969, two American astronauts became the first people to set foot on the moon. A bold project was successful. And Kennedy's "Moon Shot" had achieved its goal. Even if Vision Zero does not seem as far away as Earth's satellite, everyone involved must always think and act just as courageously to get closer to this goal. This is a question of attitude towards one's own actions and towards the future.

Trust your Crazy Ideas and Love What you Do

What can we learn from JFK and his vision of sending man to the moon in the early 1960s? At the time, the charismatic politician was open to accepting new and untested solutions. In a nutshell: He trusted what many contemporaries believed was a crazy idea and managed to get people excited about it. We need exactly such impulses to make processes and products different and to improve them through fundamental change.

You want to advance occupational safety and health and make Vision Zero to become reality? Then trust your crazy ideas! They can be major steps for the occupational safety and health and well-being of employees. For this strategy to work, a culture of openness is needed. It is important in several ways. Because looking openly to the future doesn't just mean being open to the "crazy" ideas described above. It also ensures that people and organizations are open to things developing differently than we imagine today. Where this attitude does not exist, a cultural change is needed. Yes, this requires an appropriate structure, especially for organizations such as commercial companies. But just as important as the processes is the appropriate attitude among the workforce.

Finally, two more factors are needed: love and persistence. Steve Jobs gave us the motto "Love what you do." Love, passion for a cause – this is the only way to achieve great things. But it also requires persistence, sometimes even to the point of self-exploitation. Love – needs passion, for a topic. Anyone who has these qualities as an individual or team can develop good, sustainable and innovative solutions for their customers and for the entire market.

From Theory to Practice

And how does this strategy actually work? It is not an easy goal to jointly develop the culture of safety in an organization and thereby increase agility and openness for the future.

In a company, for example, many employees who rely on traditional structures may say "that's too far removed from what we do." Or they encounter new business models with statements like "we don't want to offer this service" and "we don't want to develop this product".

That's why the work of pioneers needs an environment that they can trust. An environment in which they can try out and experiment. There is a strong mental picture for this: If I place a ball (the pioneers) on an upside-down cup (the conventionally structured organization), the ball is in a fragile equilibrium: both its own movement and impacts against the cup can cause the ball to fall. However, if the cup is turned over (the company with a strong culture of trust), the ball can roll back and forth safely, but will always be caught by the cup.

Dräger INARA: Implementing the Vision Zero Journey towards the Vision Zero Culture

This article has so far shown how important unconventional, innovative thinking and the corresponding structures in a company are if we want to really exploit all the dimensions of the cone of possibilities. Let's make this understanding clear with a successful example from the world of Dräger:

More than six years ago, in 2018, Dräger had a „crazy“ idea. The idea was to develop a completely new solution for the monitoring of critical works at industrial plants worldwide. That was our moon shot. The result is Dräger's new solution INARA, a digital safety guard. It provides planning security, can be adapted to current needs and can help compensate for staff shortages. INARA is more than a product. It is a holistic service offering to help people and companies worldwide to work safely. Dräger Safety sees this innovation as a sustainable contribution to the global Vision Zero campaign.



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