

Resilience First Webinar Summary

‘Building emotional resilience in the rail sector’

in partnership with Railway Industry Association

Chair:

Dr Liz Royle, Director, KRTS International Ltd.

Speakers:

Mark Thurston, CEO, HS2.

Nick Radford, Head of Operational Security, Crime & Resilience, Network Rail.

Simon French, Chief Inspector, Rail Accident Investigation Branch.

Key Opening Remarks:

- Covid-19 has shed further light on the topic of emotional resilience with people struggling to come to terms with prolonged distancing from both colleagues and families.
- The rail industry has its own issues when dealing with emotional trauma but like the construction industry as a whole it has a high suicide rate among workers. In addition, staff within the rail industry are exposed to the emotional trauma presented when a member of the public chooses to end their life in front of a train. These events have sustained and long-lasting effects on the emotional wellbeing of those directly and indirectly involved in responding to these incidents.
- Managing trauma is different to general emotional resilience or, indeed, in recognising symptoms of anxiety and depression. The effects of a major incident or trauma on an individual may present themselves in a variety of ways and will not always be readily understood by the individual, their family or their colleagues. In the workplace, managers may feel disempowered and unsure of how to support their teams.
- Trauma creates a ripple effect throughout - from those directly or indirectly involved, through families, to wider society as a whole.

Key Messages from the Rail Sector:

Destigmatising Mental Health & Lessons from Covid-19

- We need to look at emotional resilience through the lens of a railway sector that includes construction. The construction industry of late has made great improvements in safety culture. However, mental health remains an area where more work is needed. Reporting rates indicate there is a greater likelihood of reporting physical ill health than mental ill health.
- The Covid experience has brought into focus the question of how companies and organisations within the rail sector can support the resilience of their staff to face not only the pressured environments within which they work but also the added pressures brought about by disrupted and different working arrangements.
- The language employed in communicating emotional resilience amongst a workforce can play a significant role in supporting and valuing the individual and the collective.
- Leadership has a major role to play in destigmatising mental health within the rail sector and across all sectors. If leaders act with integrity, empathy, openness and honesty on the topic, this can trickle down the organisation and reinforce an ‘it’s okay not to be okay’ narrative.
- There is a need to normalise talking about how we feel and freely communicating this beyond a cursory response. Acknowledging how something has made us feel can go a long way in dealing with an event or incident *and* reducing the risk of presupposing that something *is* wrong with a colleague.

- Covid-19 has also highlighted the social and informal support networks found in the workplace that we may have taken for granted during pre-Covid times such as the casual chats by the coffee machine. We now have to make a purposeful and concerted effort to maintain these informal support structures, and this is a quality that should be carried through when transitioning back in to the workplace.

Company Culture – Be Purposeful about People

- It is important to commit to your safety, health and wellbeing values as a company but also ensure that these values resonate and are upheld throughout your supply chain and contractors with as much commitment to health as there is to safety.
- Within the sector it is important to consider how those communities who live alongside an established rail route, or along a new line development, are affected by sector operations from a health, safety and wellbeing stance.
- Employers do need to consider how they create an environment that promotes open and honest conversations, allowing employees to feel valued and cared for beyond how well they perform in their roles. There is an obligation to their workforce to promote mental health.
- It has proven helpful to liaise with mental-health charities in creating the internal structures that support positive emotional resilience.
- Supporting line management is essential in supporting emotional resilience, they should feel confident in recognising when something is not right and in knowing what to do with what they observe.

Major Incidents or Traumatic Events

- How organisations seek to protect vulnerable people from harm externally through risk identification and management and how they support staff internally during the incident response phase are major challenges presented to the rail industry.
- Aside from removing physical risk and employing harder mitigation strategies, there is a need to consider a soft-skills approach. Sensitivity and contextual awareness of larger societal trends can be employed to prevent and de-escalate situations where traumatic incidents may occur.
- Traumatic incidents will affect individuals at varying levels of seriousness. There is a requirement to address how best to make use of employee assistance programmes and mental-health charities to support those affected by a major or minor incident.
- Within the rail industry, safety is often taken for granted, with modern rail being the safest it has ever been. Therefore, when incidents do occur, the shock of their occurrence and lack of understanding around causality often compounds the trauma of the event itself on those directly or indirectly involved.
- Talking about a shared experience can be invaluable in the aftermath of a traumatic event.
- Taking a holistic approach to potentially stressful events, be they foreseen such as working in adverse or severe weather conditions with high levels of risk exposure, or unforeseen such as responding to a fatality, can best position you to manage staff and resources effectively.
- Safety by design is a wellbeing issue: effective technologies that can relay critical information to those making safety-critical decisions will empower them to make decisions based on the best-available information.

Key Takeaway Message:

- One size support does not work in managing the emotional wellbeing of individuals in dealing with trauma. It is critical to take a multi-layered approach to meet diverse needs.

[Click to view full webinar recording.](#)



Speaker Biographies:

Dr Liz Royle has over 25 years' experience in her field helping organisations including the NHS, emergency services, the European Council, private and public sector, to strategically prepare for, and respond to, the human impact of workplace crises and trauma. As an experienced trauma psychotherapist, Liz has worked extensively with clients suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and crisis reactions including those following multiple fatalities, serious assaults and accidents, acts of terror and natural disasters. She was a founder member of the UK Psychological Trauma Society and is a multiple published, international author. Her company KRTS International offers a range of award-winning, digital solutions for managing the risks posed by workplace crises and trauma.

Mark Thurston joined High Speed Two (HS2) as Chief Executive Officer in March 2017. With more than 25 years' experience in project and programme management, Mark has worked in both the public and private sectors on some of the UK's largest infrastructure projects. Previously, Mark was Managing Director for Europe at CH2M and was with the company from June 2008. During his career with CH2M Mark spent a significant amount of time in leadership roles on major programmes, including three years as Strategic Projects Director on Crossrail, leading the Programme Partner joint venture Transcend. Prior to this Mark was Programme Delivery Manager on the London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games, where he led the Power Lines Under Grounding project and the £500 million Structures, Bridges and Highways programme on behalf of the CLM delivery partner consortium. Mark has a Master's Degree in Engineering Project Management from Loughborough University. He is also a Visiting Professor at the Bartlett School of Construction and Project Management at University College London and is a Fellow of the Institution of Civil Engineers and the Association for Project Management.

Nick Radford has worked in Network Rail for three years and prior to that he worked in British Transport Police for nine years. Throughout his career he has been involved in looking at how to safeguard against crime or vulnerability related incidents and looking at how we manage incidents and their impact when they do occur. As well as this, he also volunteers as the Chair of Network Rail's disability employee network where they seek to act as a voice for the business to influence how the business looks after disabled colleagues, including those with mental health related issues such as PTSD and the processes related to looking after staff during and after trauma.

Simon French joined the RAIB in 2004 and was Deputy Chief Inspector from 2009 to 2015. His previous railway career included:

- Six years as the Head of Operations and Safety with the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (later to become HS1);
- Ten years working on design and operational safety for wide range of railway projects in the UK and overseas including the Channel Tunnel, Heathrow Express and the Great Belt Tunnel (Denmark); and
- Six years in various operational roles with British Rail.

Simon is a graduate of the London School of Economics, holds a NEBOSH diploma in Occupational Safety and Health and is a chartered member of the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health.