



# *Formalism* in Professional Safety

## Good Practice or a Limiting Approach?

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San Diego Chapter ASSP – June 14, 2022







No, not as in art<sup>1</sup>, but as in our approach, i.e.

- Excessive adherence to prescribed *forms*
- A description of something in formal mathematical or logical terms
- But no absolutes (not a hedge, a reality) – more on this in a minute

<sup>1</sup> But I like the art!

# Things I think about...

- A few years under my belt
  - Differential thinking
  - Analogical thinking
- But no absolutes (not a hedge, a reality) – more on this in a minute.
- Willing to be tested and bashed about.

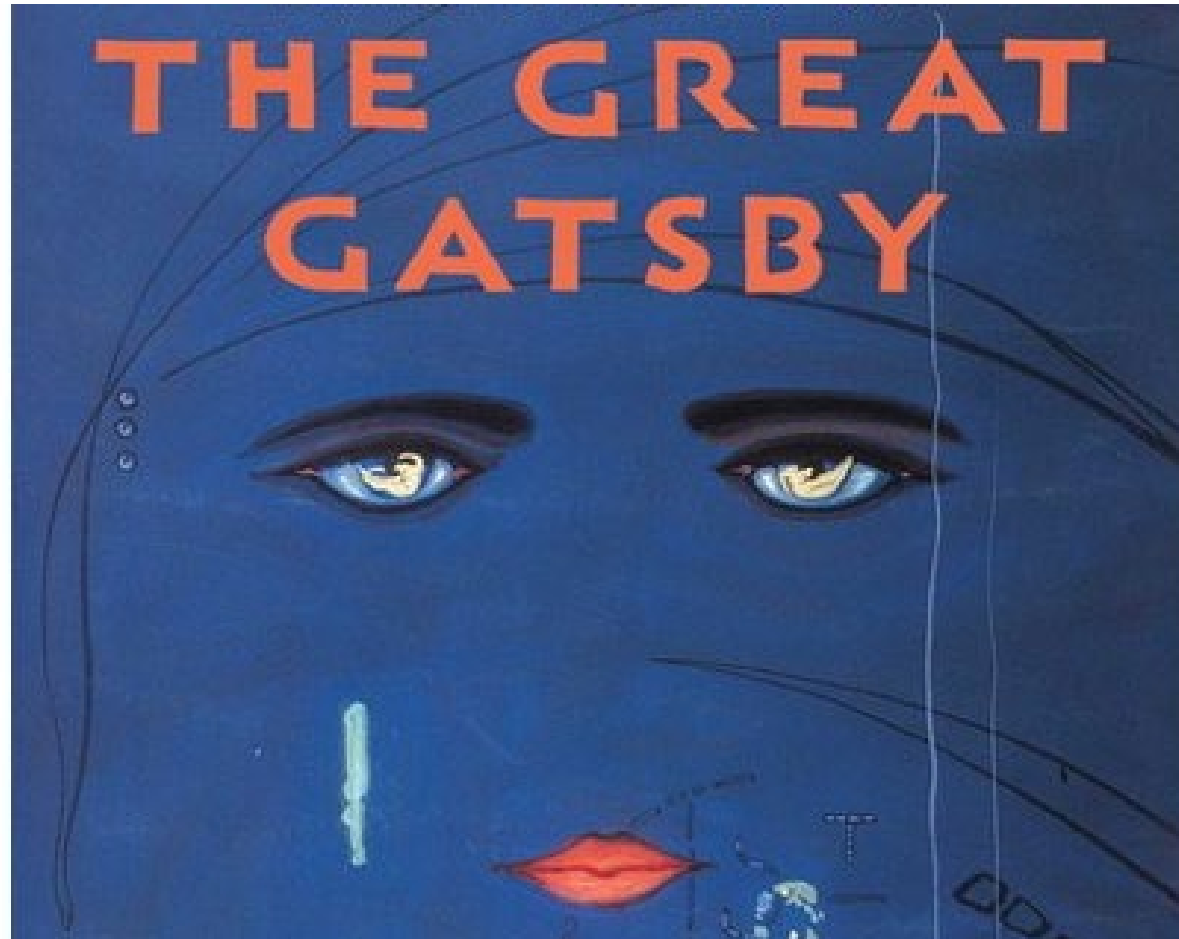
# Can we describe formalism in the professional practice of safety and health?

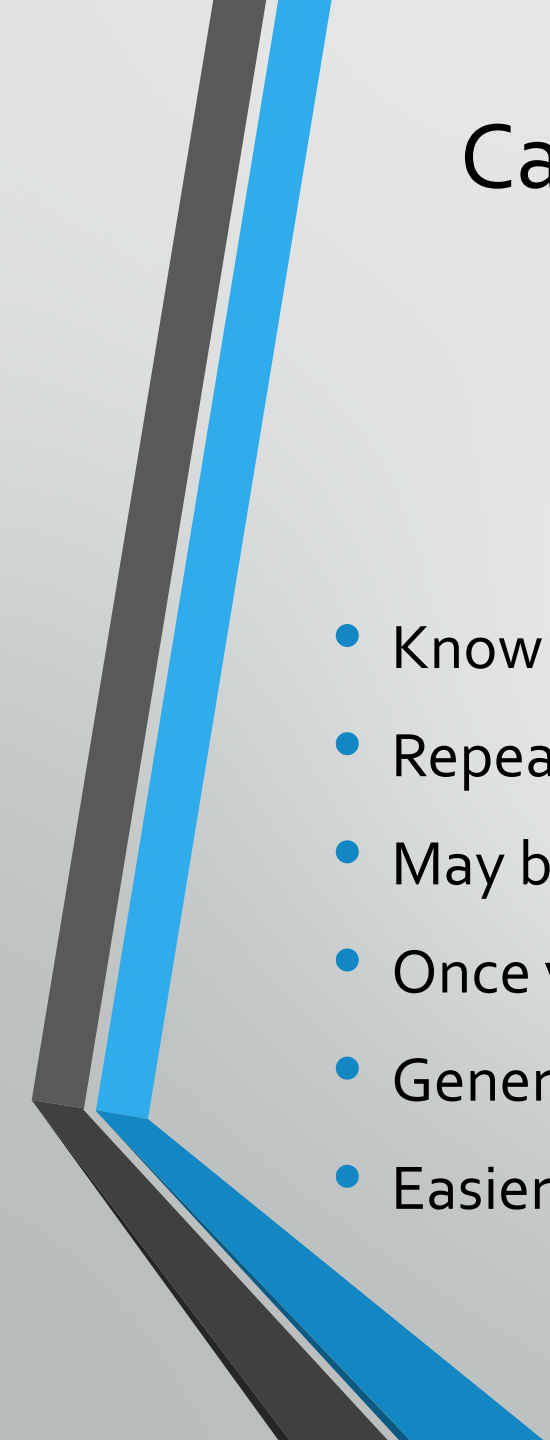
Sure, we can.

- When and how we do inspections
- Rote on-boarding
- Unedited, modified programs
- Our approach and responses are 'one trick ponies'
- Reliance on a regulatory approach – compliance is your way

# Process v. outcomes

- Structure of what we do may be rigid
- Unilateral
- My way or the highway
- Focuses more on arrangement, not (necessarily) outcomes



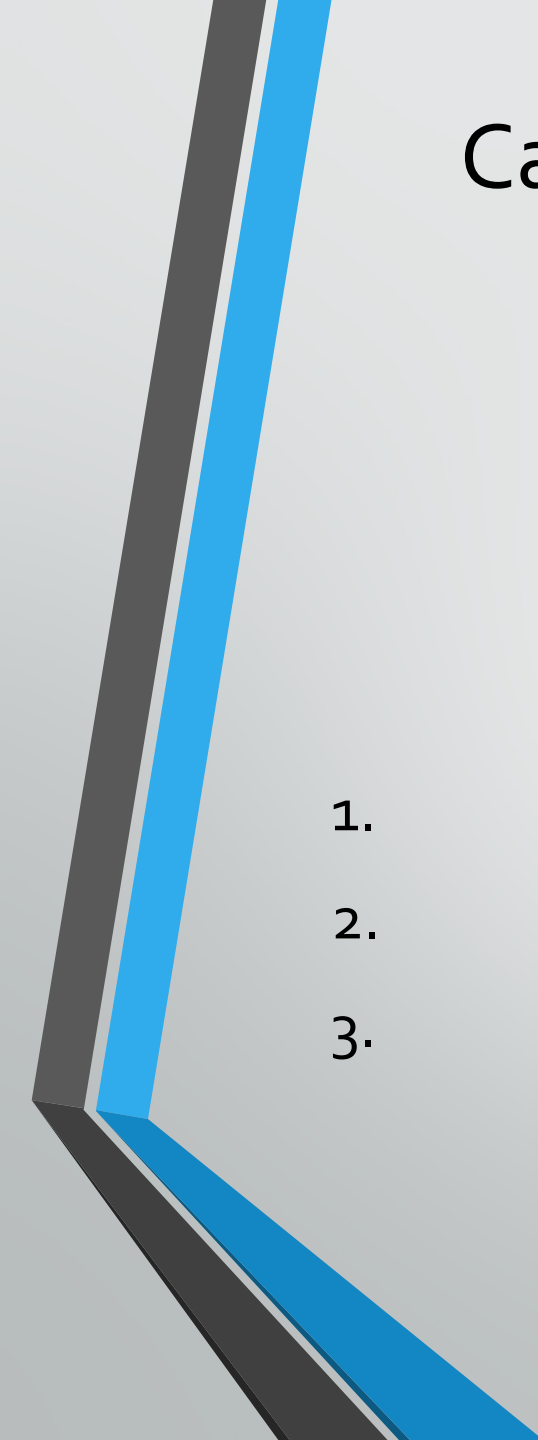


# Can we define any advantages of a formalistic approach in safety?

Sure, we can.

- Know what to expect
- Repeatable
- May be easier to measure things
- Once you learn it, you got it
- Generally, covers the basics
- Easier to teach others or have them step in for you





Can we define any advantages of a formalistic approach in safety?

Can you think of others?

1.

2.

3.




IS IT ENOUGH?

My perspective...


Probably not.





OK, then. What are some of the possible ***disadvantages*** of a formalistic (formulistic) approach to safety; these are not absolutes, but my perspective and experiences.

- Why do we need to discuss them?



OK, then. What are some of the possible *disadvantages* of a formalistic (formulistic) approach to safety – but first, a definition:

- **Formalist** – someone who exhibits a reliance on or adherence to formulae (or a formulistic approach)



## Some possible disadvantages:

- Stunts creativity
- Slows critical thinking
- Impacts decision – making
- **Reduces natural actions and intuitive actions**

## Some possible disadvantages:

- Creates a mind-set that is hard to get out of
- Results in 'blinding' alignment
- **It's orthodoxy over intent**

## Some possible disadvantages:

- Checklist warrior v. analytical fixers
- Diminishes contrary thought
- Easy(ier) to get past bosses
- **Impairs alternative views**

## Some possible disadvantages:

- It's not developmental
- Can lead to political correctness
- Shallow safety v deep thinking
- **Perpetuates the easy**  
(throw rotten tomatoes now!)



## Some possible disadvantages:

- Replicability is OK, but...
- Reliance on data driven but that can stunt growth as well
- **Reduces “being there” safety**



Ouch!



Can we **overcome** a formalistic approach?

I think so.

- *Let's review some possible methods.*

## Overcoming:

- *Try something new, different, out of your comfort zone.*

(The big caveat – I'm not trying to get you in trouble – maybe a little uncomfortable.)

# Overcoming:

- *Speak*

How the heck does that help?





## Overcoming:

- ***Write/publish***

Having your ideas challenged only makes you better, and stronger.



# Overcoming:

- ***Create***

You must have a good idea worthy of getting out there.





## Overcoming:

- ***Engage***

New people, new groups – you help them, and they make you better.

**Overcoming:**

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**Each of the Overcoming's  
help you get out of your  
*four walls* and your  
approaches will blossom.**

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**Create your own.**

# Summary



Evaluate if you are stuck in a formalistic approach to safety.



Analyze the disadvantages – any apply to you?



If so, any advantages to getting out of the approach?



Can you use any of the “overcoming” approaches? One, two, all of them?



Can you create any of your own?

# Overcoming a formalistic approach in safety.

- *Thank you*



**Dan:**

**ideas,  
challenges,  
agreements,  
discussion –  
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