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● Bringing the Prioritizing People Model[©] to life

Make your people's psychological health,
safety and well-being a priority

An interview with Kate Field, Global Head
Health, Safety and Well-being, BSI



● Introduction

Addressing your people's psychological health, safety and well-being offers the greatest potential for organizations to reap the benefits of prioritizing their people through the elevation of an engaged, committed, productive workforce. That's the view of BSI's Prioritizing People model® originator.

This in-depth interview with Kate Field, Global Head Health, Safety and Well-being, focuses on the Psychological needs of workers and the opportunities to achieve significant cultural change, which builds organizational resilience.

Organizations that address the Psychological needs of their workers, will unlock the sense of belonging and esteem that is essential to developing a culture of trust. It is this culture of trust which unlocks people's potential and creates an engaged, committed and productive workforce. It also provides a springboard to the pinnacle of the Prioritizing People Model® – fulfilment that leads to sustained innovation.

In the interview, Kate brings to life the model's central element on Psychological needs.

To find out more about what workplace well-being best practice looks like, read the full interview [here](#).



● Full interview

What is the relevancy of the Prioritizing People Model® in the context of where we find ourselves in terms of workplace evolution?

Kate Field: In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, something strange and unexpected happened in the corporate world. It rediscovered the value of its humanity. It was a disruption that impacted everyone and the hierarchical values of ‘them’ and ‘us’ were replaced by ‘we are all in this together’. It created a culture of care that simply had not existed in many organizations before the pandemic. The challenge however is for organizations to embed this culture of care for the long-term, rather than simply provide a series of quick fixes. We are already seeing the implications of failing to do so, with a huge tsunami sweeping through the employment market. Organizations that don’t care are losing talent and organization that can actively show they do – are reaping the talent rewards. BSI’s Prioritizing People Model® provides a best practice framework for embedding a culture of care for the long-term.

Under the psychological needs part of the Prioritizing People Model®, you talk about it helping to create an engaged, committed, productive workforce. What does that look like for you?

Kate Field: To meet the psychological needs of individuals, which is a key component of well-being, you need an organization that creates belonging and provides esteem, and removes the barriers that can impeded this. This means providing an environment that meets the human need for ‘social capital’ – good relationships at work and at home – to maintain good mental health and engagement. This means providing a good work/life balance and positive relationships within inclusive, fair and respectful workplaces where appreciation is shown, and personal development and autonomy are valued. It means identifying and eliminating the work causes of poor psychological health – psychosocial risks. Getting this right unlocks discretionary effort and loyalty which bring the business benefits of an engaged, committed, and productive workforce.

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The second stage – psychological needs – seems to be the most complex with eight elements that make up this part of the Prioritizing People Model®, is that right?

Kate Field: Yes, this stage offers the greatest potential for organizations to reap the benefits of prioritizing their people. It is also the one where there is enormous opportunity to achieve true cultural change, rather than simply deliver a set of initiatives to tick corporate social responsibility boxes. This also means it is also the hardest to get right, with only the best, most committed organizations being able to truly deliver the benefits. This stage embraces Belonging and Esteem and has eight stages, all of which interact with each other: consultation and participation, collaboration and positive relationships, work-life balance, social engagement, fair and respectful workplaces, effort/reward balance, career development and autonomy. It is little surprise that psychological needs starts with Belonging and the ability of workers to engage with, and influence, those work aspects that impact them.

Why is consultation and participation so important?

Kate Field: There is a myriad of evidence that shows the best performing organizations are the ones that have the most engaged workforce. A key aspect of engagement is consultation and participation. In fact, it is so important that in many countries, engagement with the workforce is written into National and State legislation. Often however, this legislative driven engagement is half-hearted and ineffective and often does more damage than good as organizations go through the motions of consulting with the workforce, rather than actively seeking participation. If an organization is truly committed to prioritizing its people, effective and ongoing consultation and participation of workers is essential – however and wherever they are working. This means actively listening and taking action on the answers and then checking-in regularly to see if it's working. If workers feel that they are being actively engaged for genuine contribution, their commitment and motivation will be enhanced. If they see that their contribution is making a difference and their feedback is being not only listened to but acted upon, they will engage more and feel more empowered. This will reinforce a culture of trust, becoming a positive, perpetuating cycle.

“Organization that acted quickly and provided clear guidance and reassurance immediately removed this source of stress and have created a more loyal workforce, as workers now know they will be looked after.”

We saw this first-hand during the pandemic. Those organizations which engaged and actively listened to their workers about their concerns and fears; and then acted upon them, where those organizations that kept working, or returned to work most quickly. More importantly however, this demonstration of a culture of care, helped individuals with the psychological impact of the pandemic by directly addressing fears and concerns. A particular example of this was sick/absence pay during self-isolation/quarantine. For many workers, particularly those on low incomes, or zero hours contracts, the financial insecurity of not knowing whether they would be paid was a huge psychological stressor (also known as psychosocial risk) impacting their physical and mental health. They were faced with the emotionally devastating choice of working but risking their health and the health of those around them, or not having enough money to buy food and keep a roof over their head. Organization that acted quickly and provided clear guidance and reassurance immediately removed this source of stress and have created a more loyal workforce, as workers now know they will be looked after.

The standard that best supports effective consultation and participation is ISO 45001 Occupational Health and Safety Management.



Collaboration and positive relationships seem to be a loose, intangible goal – how would you define it?

Kate Field: Workplace relationships develop via a set of social interactions with customers/clients/contractors, peers, the organization and, most importantly, the worker/line manager relationship. In simple terms, the more positive the interactions, the more positive the benefits for psychological health. Conversely, if these relationships are poor, then they can have a significant detrimental impact on physical, mental, cognitive, and emotional health and fundamentally undermine our sense of well-being.

All these relationships should encourage openness, honesty, responsiveness and commitment, providing consistent, fair, respectful and inclusive behaviours and communication. It also requires agreement, clarity and consistency on which behaviours are unacceptable, and accountability and most importantly, action, when these standards are not met. This is essential to creating a culture of trust. Collaboration and positive relationships also encapsulates the need to create an environment where constructive challenge and feedback are sought and accepted

What really underpins success for this element are high levels of emotional intelligence, particularly for those with line management responsibilities. However, we are still facing a culture where managers are valued for their technical or commercial skills and not their people management. People management is still seen as a chore and ‘add-on’ to the main job, rather than a highly skilled and essential role in its own

right. When we prioritize people, this includes prioritizing people management as an essential skill and business deliverable.

In terms of employer / employee relationships, the standard that best support this is ISO 45003 Psychological health and safety at work. To support other relationships, such as those with suppliers and contractors, then ISO 44001: Collaborative business relationship management systems is a great tool.



We hear a lot these days about work/life balance, what does it mean in terms of the Prioritizing People Model®?

Kate Field: This is one of the areas where trust can be most easily gained. Having time to spend with family and friends is an essential part of an good mental health. As well as the positive benefits that social connection and relationships bring, any imbalance can create negative effects and tension at home. As well as the physical and mental harm associated with fatigue arising from long working hours; a worker who feels disconnected from their family and personal life is likely to experience psychological harm such as burnout and depression.

The importance of a healthy work-life balance must be fully supported and advocated by leadership who lead by example. Senior managers who send or receive emails out of hours or during annual leave set an expectation on what is required to succeed which is directly at odds with a healthy work/life balance and will undermine the trust being sought.

An organization needs a comprehensive range of working arrangements and patterns which reflect the diverse needs of individuals. The pandemic has shown that one of those options – home working – is completely feasible where it was deemed not so before the pandemic. Even sectors like construction are showing that flexible working is possible. Finally, it is essential that any alternative working patterns are not deemed career limiting; for instance part-time workers should have the same opportunity for career development and promotion as full-time workers.

ISO 45003 is the best standard to support establishing effective work/life balance practices.

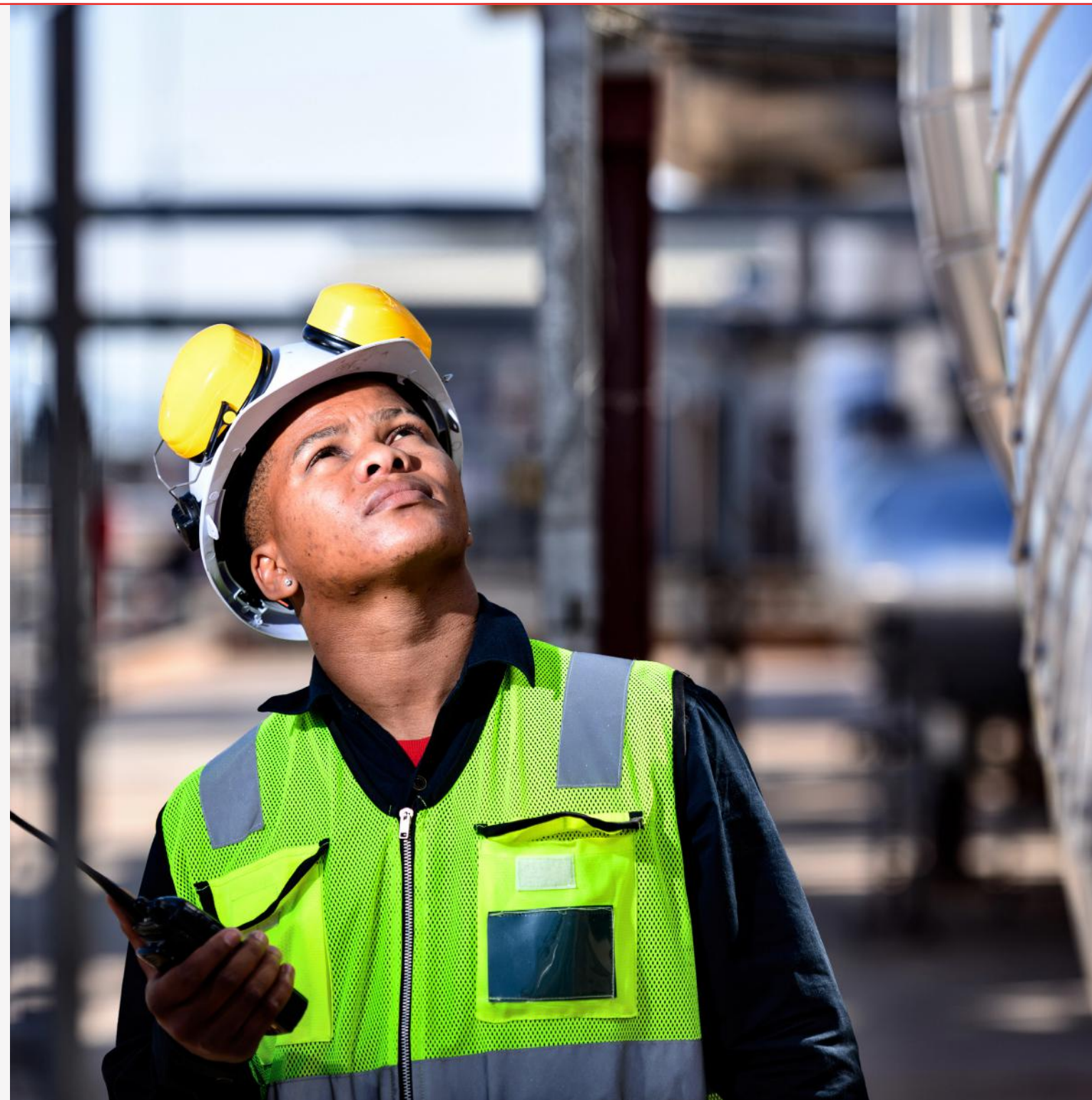


The Prioritizing People Model® points to the importance of social engagement, does that mean the annual Christmas or summer party is no longer enough?

Kate Field: Social engagement, beyond family and friends, is recognized as an important part of belonging and psychological well-being. Social engagement does include opportunities for building more informal relationships at work, which may include the Christmas or summer party. It of course also includes having a work/life balance that allows time with friends and family, but social engagement is much more than that.

Social engagement is about activities that contribute to “social value” – preventing harm and creating sustainable benefits to the wider community’s social, economic and environmental well-being. This encompasses organizational led activity such as supporting the sustainable development goals, becoming carbon neutral and preventing modern slavery but, more importantly, for individual psychological health and workplace well-being, it is about what is encouraged at an individual level. This means creating opportunities such as raising money for charities and other causes, paid and unpaid time off for volunteering or other activities such as mentoring young people from the local community. This is the final stage of the Belonging aspect of BSI Prioritizing People Model®, next is Esteem.

BS 8950, Social Value, provides guidance on understanding and enhancing social value.



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We hear a lot about diversity and inclusion these days, how do we avoid the accusation of ‘virtue-signalling’ and make a genuine attempt to address the issue?

Kate Field: When you have a voice in your company, everyone benefits. Organizations that embrace diversity and inclusion allow ideas and innovation to flourish. Employees must feel safe and secure in the workplace regardless of their race, gender, sexuality, background, religion, disability or age. Preventing adverse social behaviour is addressed in the Safety aspect of the model, and ensuring positive relationships is covered in Belonging. Fair and respectful workplaces at this stage in the model is about the fundamental culture change that is needed within organizations to genuinely create a culture which is inclusive, fair, and respectful for all. Sadly, many initiatives taken by organizations on diversity, equity and inclusion are half-hearted attempts to fit the perceived ‘other’ into the perceived ‘normal’ – virtue signalling; some training here and a policy there is not changing the culture and removing the barriers. Achieving real diversity, equity and inclusion requires a profound overhaul of people governance policies and processes, followed by a step-by-step rebuilding with robust and meaningful representation from a truly diverse group. Few organizations are prepared to invest the time, money and effort into such cultural change; this is why diversity, equity and inclusion issues persist. I think there is also a nervousness about what to do and how to do it. This is where International Standards bring such value. Experts from around the world come together and share all their knowledge and best practice – and this gets distilled into a ‘how to’ guide for organizations to follow. In the case of diversity and inclusion, we have ISO 30415, based on the earlier British

Standard BS 76005. ISO 30415 incorporates guidance for organizations on fostering diversity and inclusion in the design, development, and delivery of products and services; in stakeholder relationships; and, in supply chain partner organizations. It provides a holistic and comprehensive approach with hands-on guidance, providing recommendations that focus on actions, measures and outcomes.

It is also important to understand that creating a diverse and inclusive workplace is essential for organizational resilience, particularly the adaptive capacity and innovation that is required for resilience. Diversity ensures that there are different perspectives, views and ideas that bring the creativity needed to develop innovative behaviours and ideas. Feeling safe, in a fair and respectful workplace is what creates a working environment that promotes new insights and ideas through imagination and unconventional approaches. This is essential to creating trust, which unlocks innovation at the Actualization level of BSI Prioritizing People Model®.

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It's often assumed that reward and financial earnings are synonymous. What does the Prioritizing People Model® indicate?

Kate Field: Effort and reward imbalances have been shown to be linked with negative physical and mental health outcomes, so it is an important but often overlooked aspect of Psychological needs and health. High effort, low reward jobs in particular are associated with burnout. What is important to understand is that reward is not simply about financial remuneration; it's about recognition and appreciation; the simplicity of a thank you, or feedback on a job well done, the opportunity to develop and move on. We are seeing the outcome of getting this wrong as the world tentatively emerges from the pandemic and employers are facing The Great Resignation, or as Gallup put it The Great Discontent. People are leaving not because they aren't paid enough, they are leaving because they don't feel appreciated.

We are also seeing this on the other side, as workers seek new jobs. Wages are going up, but workers aren't choosing employers based on the size of the pay packet; they are choosing employers who provide the right culture for their well-being; one that is flexible, fair, respectful, provides opportunities for growth, will keep them safe and healthy, allows them time and an opportunity for a life outside of work... If organizations are to succeed in The Great Recruitment, then they need a comprehensive approach to workplace well-being. This is what the BSI Prioritizing People Model® provides.

“People are leaving not because they aren't paid enough, they are leaving because they don't feel appreciated.”





Not all organizations have sufficient scale to be able to offer regular promotion to its people. If it's hard to be able to guarantee career progression, what else is there?

Kate Field: Like reward being about more than wages, career development is about more than promotion. Of course, there is an element of this. There are those who want to move up, but many people don't – this doesn't mean that they don't want to develop in other ways. Organizations need to offer a comprehensive range of development tools to allow continuous learning and development; and support sustainable employability – ensuring that workers have the skills they need for the future, not just the now.

The ability to develop and grow is recognized as an important aspect of positive psychological health. However, if there is a mismatch between skills, competency and the role someone is doing, this is a form of psychosocial risk that can lead to psychological harm such as anxiety and depression. This is why career development sits in with the Psychological element of the model. This mismatch can be an over skilling or under skilling, or a lack of understanding on what is required. This is often seen in the recruitment of line managers – as I covered earlier, they are often promoted for their technical skills, not their people skills. Line managers hold the key to many of the crucial elements required at the Belonging and Esteem level, from creating fair and respectful workplaces, to providing recognition, to empowering workers through autonomy, so it essential they have the right skills and competencies.

It is also important to recognize that the people managers of today are the leaders of tomorrow, they're the ones that are setting the culture of the organization – creating (or eroding) trust. For organizations seeking the cultural step change that is needed to embed the Prioritizing People Model®, organizations need to equip people managers with the right skills to make sure that trust is truly woven into the DNA of the organization.

There are two standards that are relevant for this part of the model: ISO 45003 to address the psychosocial risks associated with career, skill and competence imbalance and ISO 30405 on recruitment. Also under development is a new international standard focussed on learning and development, ISO 30422.

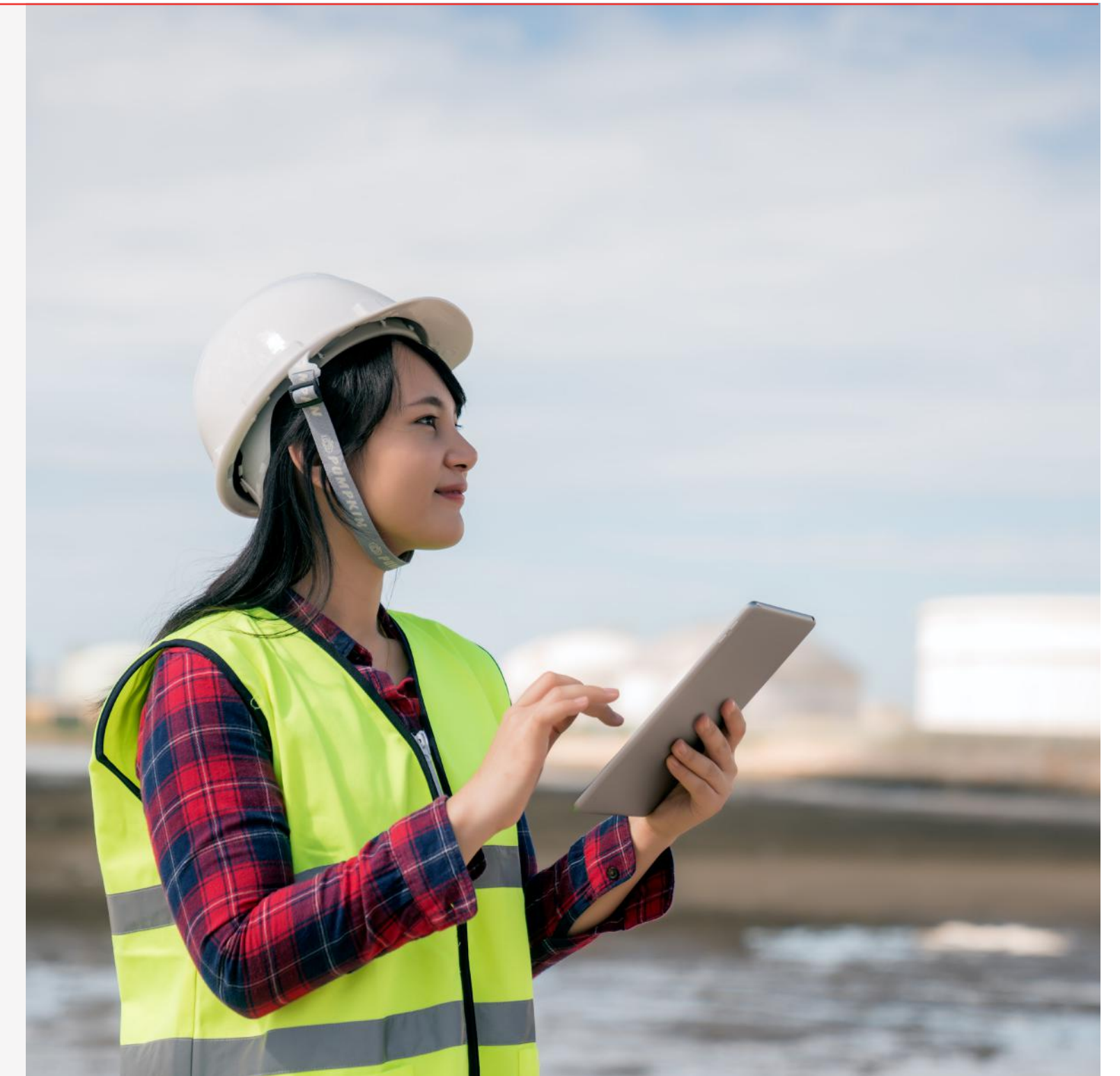
What's the significance of focusing on autonomy as part of the Prioritizing People Model®?

Kate Field: This is perhaps the most overlooked aspect when prioritizing people, as the issue of trust is at the heart of it.

It is also where having all the previous elements of the model in place becomes crucial. What people are seeking at this level is the esteem that comes from independence and freedom. It means empowering people to make decisions about the way they work and includes aspects such as discretion over the way the work is carried out: pace, deadlines, and workload; the ability to control work through participation in decision-making; and the autonomy to decide when and where the work is delivered, such as flexible working; the freedom to develop. Providing autonomy in this way unlocks discretionary effort and therefore delivers productivity and quality benefits for the organization. Additionally, if workers feel trusted, they feel appreciated, creating loyalty and reducing the risk of losing talent. Finally, without autonomy and the creative freedom that comes from it, organizations cannot unlock the final element of the model – innovation – but we will cover that more on another day!

Once again, ISO 45003 is the best standard to help organization with this element of the model as it recognizes the importance of autonomy in creating psychologically healthy workplaces.

“Additionally, if workers feel trusted, they feel appreciated, creating loyalty and reducing the risk of losing talent.”



● Building an engaged, committed, productive workforce



Join in our journey to prioritize your people's psychological health, safety and well-being

Read more about BSI's Prioritizing People Model®

