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I wrote this book foremost for safety practitioners and students. Confession: I never was a lot about it too, or about topics affiliated with it. But I was never educated how to fly a big jet. Well, check that: out of curiosity, I did once take a week-long course that awarded me a Certificate IV in Occupational Health and Safety. But to say that it either educated or qualified me would be a stretch.

Over the past decades, I have worked increasingly with those who have been trained as safety practitioners—in a range of industries. Much of the education they have gone through was organized around applicable laws, regulations, policies, best practices, methods, and techniques, often driven by peer-to-peer influence—inspirations from what others in other organizations have done—and hand-me-down knowledge.

And actually, not all safety practitioners were educated as safety practitioners. In fact, many safety practitioners have backgrounds in operations, in HR, in engineering or chemistry or a mechanical trade or psychology, or something else altogether.

Whether it is a background in safety practice or something else, they are all great ways to get into, as David Provan would say, the safety of work and the work of safety. What I have learned, though, is that all could benefit from a more solid grounding in the foundations of the science of safety (such as it is, I hear Erik Hollnagel justifiably say (Hollnagel, 2014)).

I have found that without that grounding, it is easy to reinvent the wheel and happily embrace an idea or slogan simply because it is shiny and seemingly new. Without that grounding, it is tempting to apply a putative solution (such as putting a barrier in place) to a problem that is not only immune to the solution, but may well bite back by spawning more problems than the safety practitioner bargained for. Without that grounding, it is seductive to fall for expensive solutions (enterprise-wide introduction of risk matrices, hazard awareness campaigns, goggles for supposed eye protection) and force-feed them into the organization, even when they are based on a particular conceptualization of danger that is not applicable at all.

I have chosen an episodic approach to organizing this book. That is, I have divided it up into time slices. Every chapter is founded on the ideas of a particular era—each roughly a decade from the past century. It then explores how these have influenced our thinking in safety in other decades or ever since. Of course, the lines and categories of what belongs to which decade, or what inspired what exactly, can always be debated, as it should. They are not in this book to radiate an impression of linear, historical truth. Rather, they are a way for me to organize the ideas, and for you to start thinking with them.

How are today's 'hearts and minds' programs, for example, linked to a late 19th-century definition of human factors as people's moral and mental deficits? What do Heinrich's 'unsafe acts' from the 1930s have in common with the Swiss Cheese