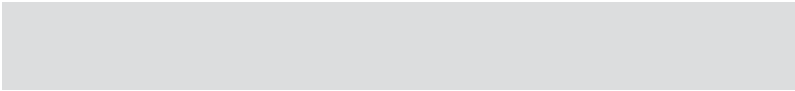


Developing a Safety Center of Excellence



How Organizations Can Deliver Safety Excellence

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Introduction



Safety excellence at work is within reach. Find out how with these tips and strategies for improving your organizational processes.

The Center of Excellence (CoE) model applies to a particular focus of an organization. It uses leadership, teamwork, research, training, support, and best practices to transform an area into one of the company's greatest strengths, or excellence.

EHS can be a CoE for a company that chooses to focus on safe work practices, high quality, and sustainable operations. The term is applied when a company demonstrates a high level of competency in these areas and this capability becomes a strength the company is well known for.

Businesses in pursuit of developing a CoE must invest in perfecting every detail, occurrence, and process within that area to ensure its feasibility, effectiveness, and the company's ability to maintain it.





The Action-Oriented CoE

CoE can vary in core focus, but they each share similar characteristics that define their commitment. Ultimately, it is the actions of the organization that define the CoE, not merely the vision of the CoE. The following sections explain how actions enable the CoE.

Once a focus area has been chosen, Centers of Excellence initiate a widespread strategy to transform it into a major strength. The CoE must provide ongoing improvement initiatives using actionable tasks, which turn insights into actions and give their findings substance to prove their value.

Corrective actions, objective actions, and continuous compliance are just three ways organizations can drive continuous improvement and excellence.

Corrective Actions

Corrective actions are an essential part of your strategy. Corrective actions refer to the action taken by an organization's representative to correct or resolve a situation or nonconformance.

They empower organizations to find and correct noncompliant work practices, processes, and actions—ultimately helping EHS departments to create a strong CoE. Another component that can affect your ability to continually improve is how corrective actions are managed by your team. Visibility, timeliness, and accountability are the key to success in using corrective actions to improve the organization's EHS performance.

Objective Actions

Objectives are the primary method used by organizations to identify and materialize goals defined in policies, helping to transform them into plans for improvement. Policies are created with the outcomes in mind. Objectives link the policy to the organization's goals. Well-defined objectives identify the organization's plans for improvement.

Objective actions help ensure the entire organization is making progress on its goals. They provide a framework for setting and reviewing department objectives to satisfy applicable organization, industry, or regulatory requirements.

Establishing benchmarks and standard processes for safety programs—from planning through follow-up—can ensure nothing gets overlooked.

Continuous Compliance

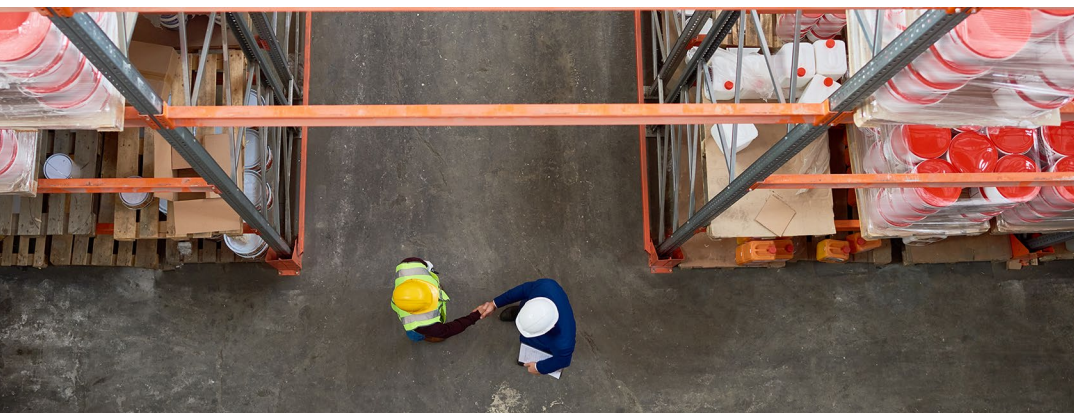
Many organizations respond to each new wave of emerging regulatory requirements by assigning a dedicated team to handle new requirements. However, the rate of change to regulations continues to increase as standards proliferate and evolve.

Compliance should not be seen as a one-time event, but as an opportunity to run the organization in a more consistent and predictable manner. Focus on these four points to strategically manage your compliance lifecycle:

- *Plan* - establish the objectives required to achieve and maintain compliance
- *Data collection and reporting* - collect, organize, and correlate compliance data, then manage by exception to identify issues early
- *Analysis and adjustment* - evaluate what went wrong to improve one area, then apply lessons learned across the organization
- *Verify and control* - measure new processes and compare the results against expectations to ascertain any differences and fine-tune new processes—ultimately determining where to apply changes that will bring the organization into compliance

Continuous compliance involves providing ongoing training, hiring subject matter experts, or even upgrading equipment, EHS software, and other work-related items.

For example, with software, you can automate various regulatory procedures to ensure company-wide compliance. This allows you and your team to schedule audits and inspections, or other predefined activities to be sure all aspects of your compliance program are in effect.



How Organizations Can Deliver Safety Excellence

Workplace safety is important for multiple reasons, including the well-being of the employees themselves, the cost savings of not having to pay regulatory and other fines and penalties after a workplace safety incident, and ongoing efficiency and productivity that's not interrupted by safety incidents. But what really goes into achieving safety excellence?

Development of Effective Safety Practices

An employer is responsible for evaluating and assessing workplace safety risks. Employers also draft policies, procedures, and training that increases employee awareness of these risks, inform employees about how to handle those risks and provide opportunities for hands-on practice and drills. By ensuring that all employees are on the same page as far as addressing workplace safety incidents and practicing emergency measures, a workplace can be more likely to reach safety excellence.

Part of that excellence comes from the full and active participation of employees, too.

Employees should engage in the creation of JSAs, standard operating procedures, the designing of machine guards, and other key initiatives. Having buy-in from the leadership team is a significant part of becoming a world-class safety organization.

While employers have to assess risk and offer training, employees must actively participate in that training and follow company policy and procedures to minimize and mitigate risk. Safety excellence may require rigorous and on-going training, depending on the industry; some safety training may be required for regulatory compliance.

More and more companies are switching to mobile solutions to solve ongoing safety problems, promote better worker engagement, and develop stronger safety programs.

Adoption of Safety Tools and PPE

Some workplace equipment can be further enhanced for safety with the installation of features like guards for cutting tools or specialized flooring to reduce slips and falls. In places where employees are subject to hazards like slips and falls, electricity, chemicals, puncture wounds or compression injuries, the purchase and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) are also crucial to achieving safety excellence.

But PPE use should always be a last resort when it comes to protecting workers from hazards. However, when an employer is unable to mitigate or eliminate hazards through other means and they must incorporate PPE, the employees who have to wear that PPE should be included in the PPE selection process. If employees feel as if they had a hand in selecting the style of PPE they have to wear, it almost guarantees they will actually wear it.

Employers are typically responsible for providing these enhancements and PPE, while employees are responsible for keeping equipment and PPE in good working order. Employees are also obligated to participate in any available training on how and when to use safety gear at work.

EHS Software Tools

For busy EHS professionals who are responsible for workplace safety throughout a company, having a single, centralized location for data, reports, and resources can drive efficiency, consistency, and accuracy.

EHS teams and employees can access safety-related documents independent of location in a cloud-based system, which can be extremely helpful when a quick response is needed. Safety incident reports can be filed electronically for immediate review by those entitled to access and to collect related documentation in one place.

The ability to share incident data among “like” facilities is also really important to safety excellence. If a facility has an injury on a piece of equipment that 10 other locations also have—being able to share this information through their EHS software system is a big deal. An EHS software platform can also support the security of safety reports and documentation of incidents. And EHS teams can pull reports that measure safety excellence in the short- and long-term. These can show places where safety planning is having a noticeable positive effect and places where improvement may be needed. EHS software can help track employee safety training and document completed training in the event of a workplace safety incident.

Achieving safety excellence is a marathon, not a sprint. It takes organizations that are willing and able to establish and adhere to safety practices and procedures. It also requires a serious approach to the selection and usage of safety features and tools.

And finally, the implementation of EHS software tools can make tracking and analysis easier, identifying areas of success and need for ongoing improvement.



Establishing Trust and Safety

In many ways, trust and safety go hand-in-hand at work. Employers trust employees to be their eyes and ears in observing and notifying them of potential safety hazards. Employees trust their employer to fiercely resolve hazards quickly and effectively to reduce the chances that someone will get hurt on the job.

This trust is built through a partnership between the management and the workforce where employees are made aware of how much individual actions play a role in building and strengthening a safe environment where accident avoidance is a priority. This realization can encourage workers to follow safety policies and procedures more faithfully with the expectation that others will do the same. Here are some ways that building trust at work can benefit the organization and the workers, too.

Greater Engagement in Workplace Health and Safety

Trust in the workplace can lead to better employee engagement which can lead to more active participation in tasks. That participation may include observing and reporting workplace safety issues.

It can also be seen in things like joining in workplace training opportunities without complaint, asking thoughtful questions related to health and safety practices, and talking to coworkers about health and safety issues with the intention of minimizing risk and incidents.

Manage Change Better

Trust makes it easier for employees to deal with change because they believe their organizational leaders have the best interests of the company, including their interests, at heart. Sometimes, ongoing workplace safety hazard assessments can result in changes to policies and procedures. Workers are more likely to get on board with these changes and adhere to them if there is a strong culture of trust and safety in the workplace.

Trust and safety go together in keeping workplace incidents down. See how more trust among employees at work can result in a stronger CoE.

Enjoy Better Regulatory Compliance

When employees feel like they can trust their colleagues and employer, they may follow through on regulatory compliance in a more accurate or timely fashion because they believe it matters. These workers know that by adhering to regulatory standards, it protects their coworkers, and they believe their coworkers will protect them in the same way.

Avoid Silos and Improve Communication

While some departments are very much entities unto themselves, this silo-style way of thinking can hurt organizations when it results in lowered trust.

Instead of openly discussing health and safety challenges without fear of some negative impact, employees might keep things quiet, thinking they're protecting themselves, their colleagues or their department.

When employees can trust each other and their employer, they can discuss safety topics without fear of retribution, confident that valid problems will be addressed promptly and properly to ensure employee safety. Safety should always be a collaborative effort!

If an employer wants to improve its workplace safety record, one way of doing that is by improving the level of trust shared by employees and employers.

Trust can make it possible for employees to speak up when a safety hazard presents itself because they know the employer will take it seriously and work to resolve the issue; otherwise, employees might not say anything because they assume their employer doesn't care, exposing employees and the employer to serious risk.



Adapting to Organizational Change

We know that change is good for us. So why are we so resistant to change?

This is especially true of the workplace. The problem is that employee cooperation (or lack thereof) can make or break a company in transition.

For many employees, change means news that they don't want to hear. "Going in a new direction" translates to "sudden job insecurity," even if you don't intend it that way. And in a time of nationwide uncertainty, change at work is another stressor that your employees didn't sign up for.

That doesn't mean that successful organizational change is impossible. It just means that you have to aggressively plan ahead. Here are a few ways to help your team transition successfully.

Tell Your Team Early

One of the best things you can do for yourself is to tell your team about the change as early as possible. You shouldn't expect to hold just one all-hands meeting. You should expect to hold several.

Plan more time than you think you'll need to introduce employees to the new status quo. Also, go beyond all-hands meetings. Host several smaller departmental meetings and individual team meetings.

The goal here is to give employees time to process. You also have to give them enough time to ask questions and respond to the news. Leaders should be part of this incremental rollout. That is, you have to coordinate announcements so that none of your managers are caught by surprise when the news is released at different times.

Demonstrate Genuine Concern

This is also an opportunity to demonstrate genuine concern and hear out your employees, which is one of the best things you can do at the start of organizational change. Employees often turn to management for solutions, especially in times of significant stress and change. The best leaders know that they need to step up to the plate to help employees provide their best work.

Organizational change is necessary for your company to grow, but it's also incredibly stressful for employees. Management is critical to success. Learn how a CoE model can help employees adapt to change.

To do this, don't be shy about demonstrating your concern. During organizational change, employees are afraid that their jobs and value at your organization may be at risk. The best way to mitigate this is to show them that you do appreciate their concern and genuinely want to assuage their fears.

Remember, you want your employees to be able to speak freely. Be prepared to answer gracefully if they bring up something you don't like, or if they come back with constructive criticism.

Organizational change is a learning process for everyone—including management. If you want to keep everyone invested, you have to show that everyone matters by showing your employees that you're ready to listen, especially if their concerns can help your company grow.

Be Positive

Finally, while positivity is important in any workplace, it's especially important during organizational change.

Remember, any period of change can be incredibly stressful for your employees. They're going to turn to management to find out how to respond.

You don't need to skip for joy, nor should you expect your employees to skip for joy. But taking a positive outlook on the situation is one of the best ways to ensure that employees stay calm and committed.

The benefits of positivity can also show through after organizational change is finished, as positive workplaces tend to be the most productive.

Organizational Change Is Natural

Organizational change is stressful for managers and employees alike, but as the old cliché goes, change is the only constant in life. In fact, organizational change is a natural part of making your organization stronger.



Transforming Your Organization into a Center of Excellence

Keep in mind the term *Center of Excellence* is not an official designation for an organization, but rather a shared idea that your company excels in an area due to great effort on your part.

For many organizations, their CoE becomes their competitive advantage and an identifier that defines their brand. It declares that EHS, quality, and sustainability are of the utmost importance to everyone in your organization. It gives your company a distinct way of operating to uphold specific standards.

It's not enough to simply create the framework for Centers of Excellence – you also must be certain your efforts won't be wasted. Only then will you be able to accomplish the superior performance you set out to achieve and fully function as a CoE.



About EHS Insight

EHS Insight is the world's most flexible, powerful, easy to use environmental, health and safety software. Since 2009, the team at EHS Insight have been on a mission to make the world a better place. Today, hundreds of thousands of workers in nearly every country rely on EHS Insight software, services, and support to transform the way they work and to lower the environmental impact of their operations. EHS Insight is software for improving EHS performance by managing risk and increasing efficiency. An effective management system is necessary to prevent injuries and illnesses in the workplace and severe impacts to the environment. It's important. It's the right thing to do. EHS Insight makes it easier.



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