



# Wave generation: a model approach to socially sustainable safety and health

Catch  
the  
Wave  
with IOSH

May 2022



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## Introduction

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*The OSH practitioner is already an authority on decent, meaningful, and sustainable work*

**The goals of social sustainability and occupational safety and health (OSH) are broadly the same. Both are focused ultimately on making sure that people are protected, healthy, safe, and well – and on keeping them that way long into the future. And while social sustainability might extend into areas where practitioners have limited knowledge, there is no doubt that the ambition of OSH for the protection of people, prevention of harm, and a safe and healthy world of work is a fundamental part of the sustainability agenda.**

So, OSH professionals should not feel intimidated when it comes to contributing to reporting instruments, supporting with the preparation of non-financial disclosures, or estimating the social impacts of business activities. These activities and OSH professionals' daily work contribute valuably to socially sustainable organisations. When they identify or control a hazard, develop or deliver a piece of training, or consult with workers on OSH matters, practitioners are not only helping prevent harm, they are also creating conditions in which workers feel valued and can flourish.

However, there is currently no shared and straightforward method for reporting socially sustainable OSH. Consequently, even if it is commonly understood that OSH *is* hugely valuable and of strategic concern to organisations, many practitioners have struggled to know how to communicate this.

There are plenty of metrics and indicators in sustainability reporting instruments intended to express how seriously organisations are taking the task of looking after their people. Likewise, many practitioners are already experienced at showing how seriously they take the same task in their own reporting processes as part of OSH management systems. However, these measures may only tell part of the OSH story. Crude measures like injury and illness figures risk overlooking a key part of the narrative: impact.

### **A broad reach**

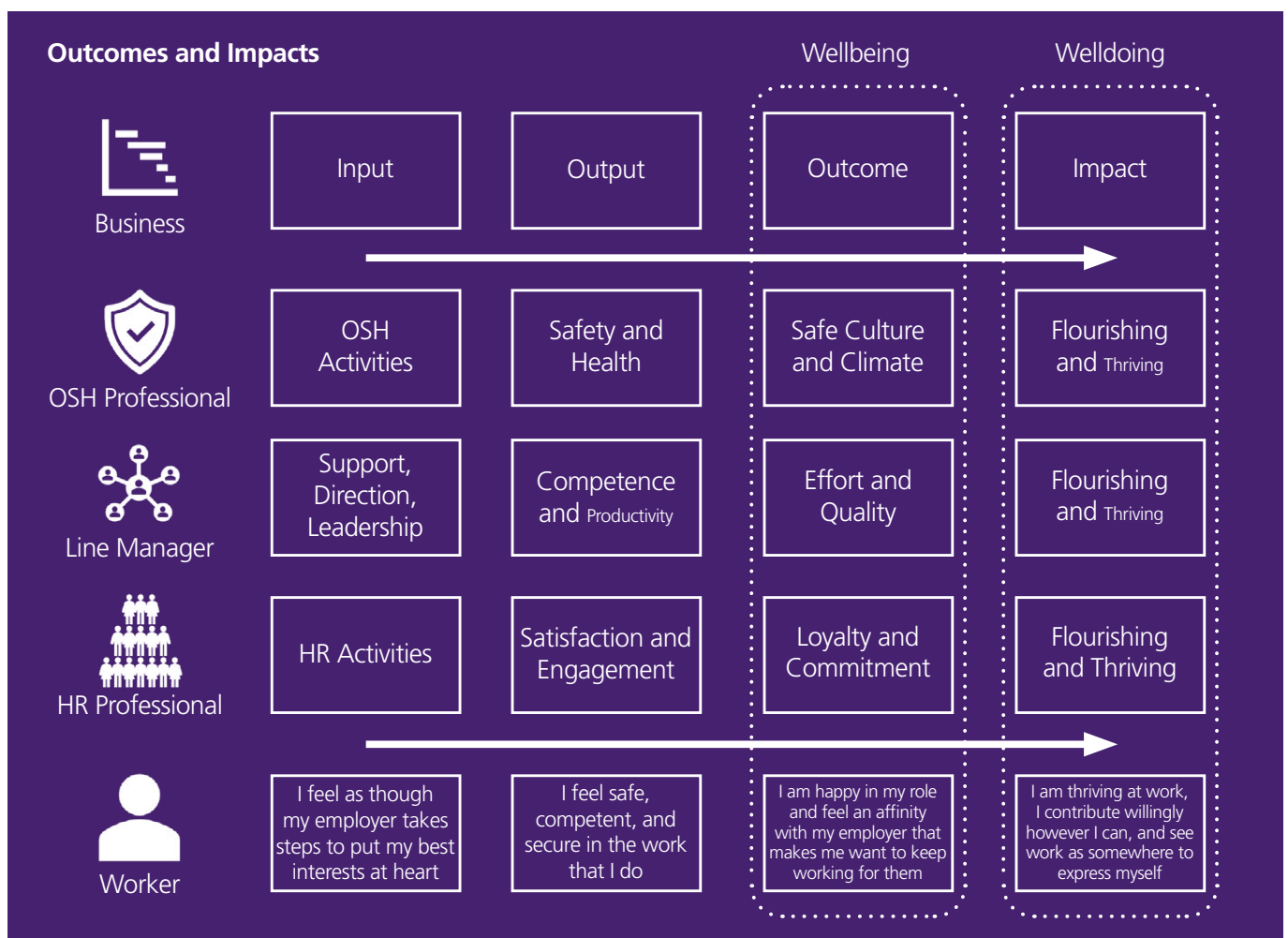
Safe and healthy work has an impact far beyond safe and healthy workers. The growing interest in social sustainability provides a huge opportunity for the OSH profession to demonstrate precisely how much value safe and healthy workers can bring to the organisations they work in and to the communities they belong to. It brings a chance to go beyond simply reporting that workers are safe and healthy. It is a chance to capture what workers feel and how they act to add value to their employers and the wider world *precisely because they are safe and healthy* (see Figure 1). If they can show these broader benefits, OSH professionals are likely to see that their efforts begin to influence discussions and decision making at the top of their organisations.

Agreement on the measures that best reflect impact – indicators that reliably predict the most meaningful returns of OSH practices and investment – may take time to fully emerge and to measure in practice. Even then, what works in one setting may not work in another.

But there is no better time for OSH professionals to take a broader look at what their work achieves. In an age when more and more organisations are considering the environmental impact of their business practices, it is an opportune moment to show that the social impact of OSH is positive and far-reaching.

Given the importance of good OSH practice in an organisation, it is important that this is driven not just by practitioners but also by operational managers. It is important that these managers are also aware of the role they play in enabling safe and healthy work. Operational managers are ideally placed to cascade the values of good OSH through organisational layers. Likewise, board-level leadership is required to achieve the full potential of good occupational safety and health.

Figure 1: The contribution that occupational safety and health functions make to the wellbeing outcomes is broad, and works in unison with other business inputs to create a whole worker experience



## The whole picture

OSH professionals have historically been driven by measures of the physical, intended outputs of management systems, such as the numbers of completed risk assessments, lower incident figures and personal injury claims. However, if we could show the ultimate impact of those outcomes it would help to create a clear feedback loop and would underscore the value of OSH investment.

There is research evidence of these impacts; studies have found positive links between meaningful work and job performance (Van Windergeren, 2018); job satisfaction and performance (Wright et al., 2007); psychological wellbeing and job turnover intention (Wright et al., 2007); working environment and job satisfaction (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015); and the presence of OSH practices and job performance (Perera, 2019). The happy-productive worker thesis argues that happier workers perform better than those who are less happy (Taris & Schreurs, 2009).

Some of these terms, such as wellbeing, meaningful work and job satisfaction, are large and composite. They also extend beyond the traditional parameters of OSH to incorporate other organisational factors. A comprehensive picture of wellbeing includes not just a worker's safety and health, but how they feel towards their employer, how they feel about their role, and how engaged they are with their work. Building such a picture may require extra effort, but doing so will generate valuable information for stakeholders – including OSH professionals themselves. Gathering data capable of establishing connections between inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impacts is hugely useful for decision making.

Figure 2: A comprehensive picture of worker wellbeing covers many outcomes



So OSH professionals must try to understand how the aspects of an OSH management system interact with other factors. Something as simple as the provision of gender-appropriate PPE might, have a particularly positive impact on worker satisfaction and engagement as well as preventing illness or injury. This *input-output-outcome-impact* approach helps to facilitate valuable learning opportunities. In turn, it creates a chance to refine and improve the entire system through a cycle of continuous improvement.

### Reporting highlights OSH value

Another challenge OSH professionals need to overcome is to articulate the impact of OSH in a way that is meaningful to a wide group of stakeholders – whether it is internally to colleagues and management, or externally

Figure 3: Examples of OSH and OSH-relevant instruments

- AIHA & CSHS: Best Practice Guide for Leading Health Metrics in Occupational Health and Safety Programs (2020)
- Campbell Institute & NSC: Beyond Safety: Leading Indicators for Health and Wellbeing (2019)
- Cascade: Health & Safety KPI Examples (2021)
- Committee on Workers' Capital: Guidelines for the Evaluation of Workers' Human Rights and Labour Standards (2017)
- CSHS: Best Practice Guide for Occupational Health and Safety in Sustainability Reports (2016)
- Danish Institute for Human Rights: Human Rights Compliance Assessment Tool: Workplace Health and Safety (2016)
- GRI 401: Employment
- GRI 402: Labour/Management Relations
- GRI 403: Occupational Health and Safety 2018
- GRI 405: Diversity and Inclusion
- GRI 406: Non-Discrimination
- GRI 407: Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining
- GRI 408: Child Labour
- GRI 409: Forced or Compulsory Labour
- Human Rights Campaign: Corporate Equality Index (2021)
- ICGN: Global Governance Principles (2021)
- ISO 26000: Social Responsibility
- ISO 27500: The Human-Centred Organisation (2016)
- ISO 45001: Occupational health and safety management systems (2018)
- ISO 45003: Psychological health and safety at work (2021)
- OHCHR: Human Rights Indicators
- SASB: Industry-specific disclosures (selected)
- UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework (2015)
- UN Sustainable Development Goals
- UNGC: Nine Business Practices for Improving Safety and Health Through Supply Chains and Building a Culture of Prevention and Protection (2021)
- Vision Zero: Proactive Leading Indicators (2020)
- World Bank Environmental and Social Standards Framework (2017)

to auditors, customers, suppliers or investors. Information in reporting instruments (that is, guidance on OSH indicators or advice on disclosure statements) may offer limited support in tackling this challenge. However, there remains the task of articulating the impact of OSH more generally.

This is where the growing range of sustainability reporting instruments is particularly useful. While it might at first appear complicated, the wide coverage of OSH-relevant aspects in these instruments serves to show how fundamental healthy and safe workers are to socially sustainable business. Aspects of OSH feature in instruments as varied as sustainability reporting guidelines, business and human rights principles, ESG (environment, social and governance) frameworks, social responsibility standards and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, strengthening the argument that sustainable organisations are built upon core OSH practices and principles.

### **Practitioners on the right track**

We undertook a review of the reporting landscape with the aim of understanding where and how OSH features in it. We also wanted to understand whether the parameters of OSH connect neatly with the parameters of social sustainability in these instruments. By supporting OSH practices and principles, are practitioners supporting the development of socially sustainable businesses?

The review included an examination of a significant number of reporting instruments that contained OSH and OSH-relevant aspects (see Figure 3), before building a model of *socially sustainable OSH management*. It reached two clear conclusions:

1. The core aspects of good OSH are recognised across the reporting landscape. This is important because it confirms that, fundamentally, the practices and principles of the OSH professional feed into sustainable business practice.
2. There are additional areas, some outside the traditional parameters of OSH, where the profession might also help build socially sustainable organisations. To do so, perceived functional borders, (between OSH and human resources (HR), for example, may need to be challenged.

There is little within the growing reporting landscape to suggest that a radical new approach to OSH is required in the specific context of social sustainability. The proliferation of OSH-relevant instruments helps to construct a model approach that could accelerate the evolution of the profession. Its scope provides a roadmap to take OSH from a primarily preventive pursuit to one that is socially enabling. Our counterparts in HR are undertaking a similar journey to better understand how human capital metrics are positioned within business models and strategies.

Professionals in people-focused disciplines would be well served by engaging with the concept of social sustainability (and the idea that OSH and HR management can enable a huge range of positive worker impacts over the long term) before then exploring the best ways to demonstrate this to stakeholders.

### **A familiar model**

The model approach in this paper takes as a starting point the structure of an OSH management system outlined in ISO 45001:2018, an international standard which gives organisations a framework to manage OSH risks and opportunities, prevent harm, improve employee safety, reduce workplace risks and create better, safer working conditions. ISO 45001:2018 is a risk-based standard and uses the familiar 'plan-do-check-act' approach, together with the high-level structure (Annex SL) which is common to all new ISO management system standards.

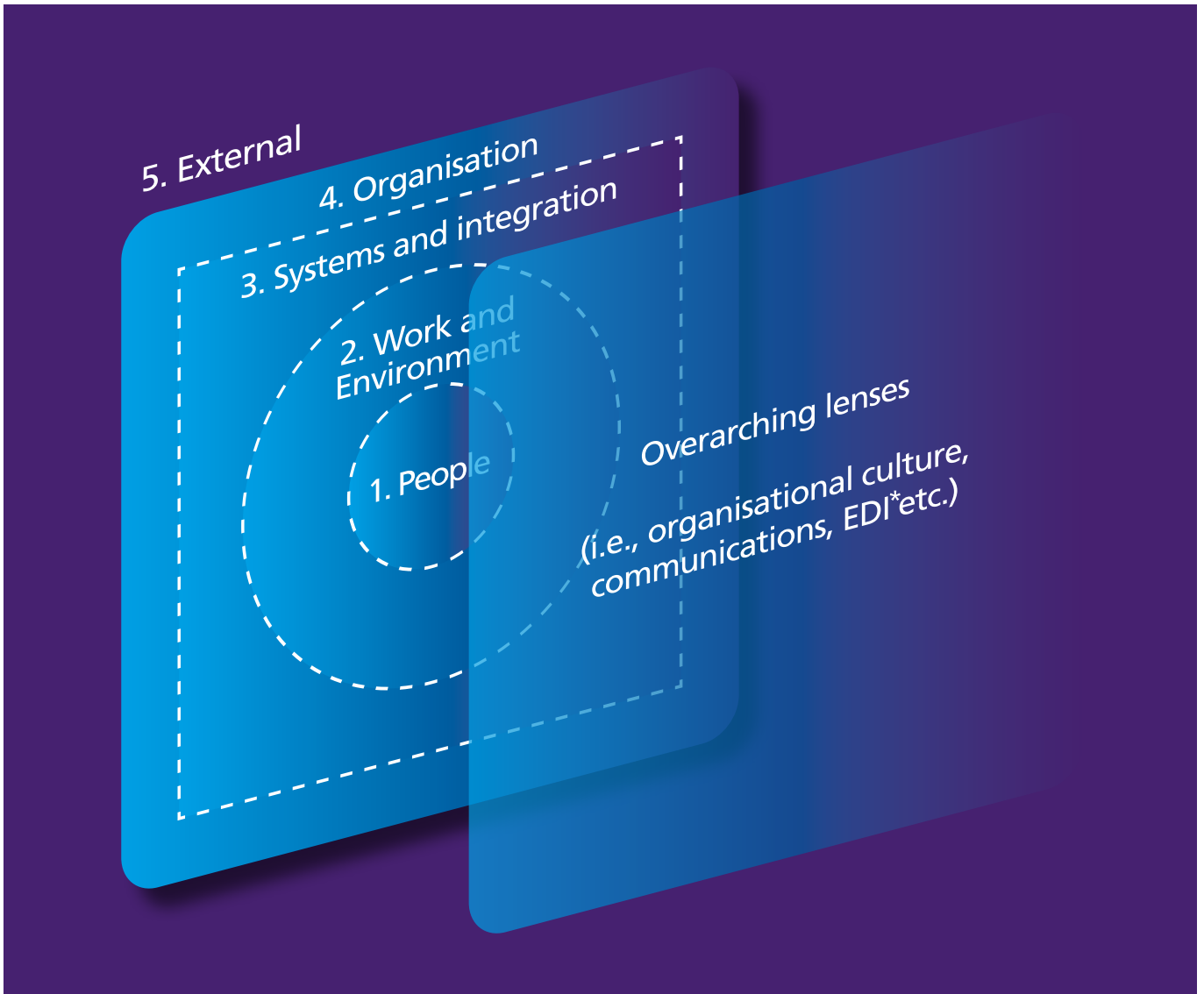
Helpfully, many of the aspects of good OSH (and therefore socially sustainable) practice that our review identified in the reporting landscape are also contained within this standard. This makes it a useful foundation on which to develop an understanding of *socially sustainable OSH*. Beyond this starting point, the model builds on the high-level structure of ISO 45001:2018 by also incorporating additional areas where OSH might also contribute to an organisation's social impact – for example, through cross-functional collaboration, supply chain relationships, community engagement and so on.

This model (see Figure 4) contains five elements that reflect the maturity of OSH from a core, preventive function to a more outward-looking and future-oriented function that feeds into the development of socially sustainable organisations. These five elements are:

1. People
2. Work and environment
3. System and integration
4. Organisation
5. External

The model also contains a sixth element, which reflects the fact that OSH management is materially affected by a number of broader contextual factors. These factors are shown as an overarching lens which always affects the main model itself.

Figure 4: A model of socially sustainable OSH management



\*Equality, diversity and inclusion



# 1

## People

Consultation, participation and representation

Leadership and commitment

Roles and responsibilities

Training, education and development

Worker satisfaction and engagement

# People

**There is an argument that “organisations don’t do things; people do things” (Buckingham, 2018). The statement reminds us that safety, health, and wellbeing (OSH) should be human-centred. Achieving sustainable and decent work relies fundamentally on people continuing to feel willing, able, and ready to work.**

The success of an organisation’s approach to both OSH and the broader pursuit of long-term sustainable value depends on leadership and commitment. All individuals within an organisation should understand their roles and responsibilities so that accountability for the safety and health of all people is clear.

It is also important to acknowledge that workforces consist of people, not simply workers. It falls upon the organisation to ensure that its people are fit, healthy and well; sufficiently equipped to undertake their roles, competent, and engaged and satisfied at work. Only such a broad approach takes account of the full work experience and the full expression of individual wellbeing.

Finally, given also that people working in organisations possess valuable reserves of knowledge, skills and experience (which are work- and non-work-specific), it is vital that this human capital is not only protected, but developed and utilised meaningfully. Gathering and disclosing clear information about aspects such as these shows the extent to which an organisation is truly focused on people.

## **Potential returns**

- Investment in people creates greater feelings of job satisfaction and job security among workers as they feel more valued and appreciated.
- Focus on people creates supportive working environments and encourages a more productive workforce.
- Workers experience greater sense of inclusion and engagement, leading to a greater willingness to participate.
- Participation generates ownership and a greater worker contribution to business outcomes.
- Increased stake in business outcomes creates commitment and loyalty.
- Increased loyalty results in lower turnover of workers and greater retention of organisational knowledge and skills.
- Training and development improve workers’ competence and also give them opportunities to learn, develop and advance.
- Workers who are well-skilled and clear about their roles and responsibilities are likely to be more confident.
- Workers feel valued and have a clear path to personal or professional growth.
- Business reputation increases when workers feel happy and motivated enough to advocate for the organisation to the wider world.

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## Consultation, participation and representation

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Through consultation, participation and representation, organisations actively engage with and seek to learn from their workforces and their representatives. This might take the form of involvement in process development, mechanisms for workers to make OSH-related suggestions, or opportunities for them to sit on safety and health committees.

Encouraging participation and consultation with workers is key to both the development of OSH management systems and to fostering a positive health and safety culture. Deferring to the expertise of workers (Dekker, 2014) is both a sound approach to OSH and also an exercise in empowering them.

While consultation and participation activities are important in their own right, organisations should also seek to ensure that the range of individuals involved in them reflects the diversity of the workforce. Any mechanism designed to include workers in consultation to inform decision-making needs to include the experiences and insight of all of them. For example, an organisation that employs shift workers should ensure that the unique experiences of this cohort are included in consultation exercises and decisions that might affect their wellbeing. The same applies to any groups defined by worker type, age, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, and any changes to ways of working, such as remote working and homeworking.

The failure to consult workers authentically – or at all – can lead to disengagement, erosion of trust, poor motivation, and lower intention to participate in future. The impact of this disengagement on safety, health and wellbeing can be even more damaging over the long-term.

Organisations may benefit from the consultation and participation of workers in two important ways. Lower incident rates may come from more worker-driven improvements to the working environment and workers may feel more involved in, and empowered by, the decision-making processes.



### Food for thought

*There are some key misconceptions about worker consultation. Some organisations might confuse it with communication more generally, which is a different process. Consultation should be a two-way and genuinely participatory process. The integrity of the process of engaging with workers is important. Being consulted with but not listened to may be more detrimental than not being consulted at all.*

*Organisations that fail to proactively consult with their workers, or to respond to workers when they speak up, may risk discouraging workers from participating. Having a sense of voice is an essential building block when it comes to the maintenance of worker relations.*

### What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?

- *ISO 45001:2018; ISO 45003:2021* – A demonstration of how all workers are provided with: mechanisms, time, training and resources to enable consultation and participation; timely access to clear, understandable and relevant information; opportunities to participate in decision-making and process development ( including on OSH policy, assigning roles, fulfilling legal requirements and establishing objectives) (ISO, 2018, 2021)
- *Vision Zero Proactive Leading Indicators* – A quantitative measurement of the degree to which workers are recognised for good OSH performance; a quantitative measurement of the suggestions made by workers for improving OSH, and the degree to which these suggestions are followed-up adequately. (ISSA, 2020)
- *GRI 403: Occupational Health and Safety* – Information on processes for worker participation and consultation in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the OSH management system; details about the process of providing access to and communicating relevant OSH information; a description of any joint management–worker health and safety committees and details on responsibilities, meeting frequency, decision-making authority. (GRI, 2018)
- *DIHR: Human Rights Compliance Assessment Tool* – Clear stance on whether the organisation provides employees with the opportunity to fully participate in OSH-related management and monitoring processes at the workplace, without fear of retaliation. (DIHR, 2016)
- *GRI 405: Diversity and Inclusion* – The percentage of individuals within the organisation’s governance bodies ( including on OSH committees) in different diversity categories including: gender; age group (under 30 years old, 30-50 years old, over 50 years old); and any other diversity indicators (such as minority or vulnerable groups). (GRI, 2016)

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## Leadership and commitment

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Showing leadership and commitment in OSH requires that the management and board of an organisation demonstrably prioritise the safety, health, and wellbeing of workers. This involves both showing formal, documented commitment (through policy, objectives, investment, and so on) and more visible day-to-day commitment by way of walk-throughs, regular communication, role modelling, and so on. In combination, these activities contribute to the development of a prevention culture in which workers are likely to follow the example set by leaders.

Policy sets the tone for OSH leadership and commitment because it helps to embed worker safety, health, and wellbeing in organisational activities. To show genuine commitment, policies must be meaningful and aspirational. Having the most senior manager or board member responsible for OSH authorise and issue the policy statement sends a strong message of commitment. OSH commitments to worker safety, health, and wellbeing include:

- seeking to prevent work-related injuries and ill-health through systematic hazard identification
- business management or leaders taking ownership of the OSH management system in the same way they do other business systems
- recruiting new leaders with proven OSH records ensuring that workers and their representatives are routinely consulted and encouraged to participate in all aspects of OSH
- listening to workers and utilising their skills, knowledge and experience
- investing in OSH to create a positive, risk-driven and evidence-led culture amongst the workforce.

Beyond structural commitments to OSH, the visible expression of leadership and commitment – when leaders are seen to prioritise worker safety, health and wellbeing – sends a clear message to the workforce that their organisation values them as highly as profit. Demonstrating leadership in this way might come in the form of Senior management showing leadership through regular OSH communications with workers, or by conducting regular site walkthroughs.

The contribution of OSH leadership and commitment to socially sustainable organisations is significant. This is evidenced by the number of reporting instruments that ask organisations to demonstrate how committed their senior management and board are to OSH. The benefits for organisations are also significant: not only are workers better protected where authentic prevention cultures exist; they are more likely to show commitment to the organisation in turn.



### Food for thought

*As OSH policy sets the overall intent of the organisation, there are challenges in achieving a balance between being aspirational and realistic. A commitment simply to comply with OSH legislation – important as this is – is not enough to suggest genuine aspiration. Organisations can aspire to go beyond compliance in determining good practice and improving OSH performance, while ensuring their commitments are realistic and include only goals the organisation genuinely intends to meet.*

### What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently being requested?

- *ISO 45001; ISO 45003* – A demonstration of how the top management of an organisation demonstrate their leadership and commitment to physical and psychological OSH through: responsibility and accountability; establishment of policy and objectives; integration of OSH into business processes; making available the resources required to establish, implement, maintain and improve the OSH management system and so on. (ISO, 2018, 2021)
- *Vision Zero Proactive Leading Indicators* – A quantitative measurement of the degree to which leaders visibly demonstrate their commitment to OSH through processes and behaviour (e.g. through walkthroughs); a measure of the extent to which leadership recruitment considers motivation for or proven record in OSH. (ISSA, 2020)
- *AIHA & CSHS Best Practice Guide for Leading Health Metrics* – A quantitative measurement of the number of leadership reviews that have been confirmed and scheduled during the reporting period. (AIHA; CSHS, 2020)

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## Roles and responsibilities

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Establishing the roles, responsibilities and authorities of individuals in an organisation's OSH management system – and in any management system – is important to ensure that workers at each level understand who owns each element and their role in it.

Setting out these role and responsibilities instils accountability for the safety, health, and wellbeing of workers firmly in the system. Formally laying out expectations of a role helps secure the long-term effectiveness of the system, not least because it provides for the role's present and future occupants. In the case of movement between roles, the parameters of accountability are not lost.

There are a number of critical considerations to ensure that roles and responsibilities are not only set out in principle but put into practice.

Documentation is important; it helps to define:

- the scope and purpose of a role
- responsibility and delegated authority of a role
- resources needed to undertake a role
- competence (the knowledge, skills and experience needed to undertake a role)
- communication, monitoring and reporting needed to fulfil a role
- handover/backup of the role if role holder is absent

However, clear and documented roles will not be sufficient alone. As with other OSH activities, the effectiveness of formal documentation relies on, two-way communication that helps ensure all individuals fully understand where their responsibilities begin and end.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that workers themselves should take ownership of their own health, safety and wellbeing, and work to protect anyone else who might be affected by their work. Exercising this responsibility involves following safe work procedures, using protective equipment where necessary, seeking treatment for workplace injury, and so on. On the other, particularly when workers are engaged, they may begin to consider how their responsibilities interact with their rights.

Understanding one's role and responsibilities can be a matter of empowerment as much as it is a matter of accountability. Ultimately, where workers are knowledgeable and competent, they are better equipped to both meet the expectations required of them and also to identify problems.



## Food for thought

*Even when documented, roles and responsibilities may not be well scoped-out or fully understood. Some organisations may not sufficiently identify and describe the key aspects of roles, meaning that the knowledge, skills, and experience needed for the role are not clear. Consequently, workers might be given roles without the resources or training necessary to carry them out.*

*A lack of defined roles and responsibilities can lead to workers feeling unsure about their work, and lacking confidence that their health and their safety are being protected. In turn, workers may lose confidence in senior management due to a perceived lack of planning.*

*External stakeholders may request evidence demonstrating that roles are well defined, well resourced, and have been allocated to workers with the right knowledge, skills and experience. And while evidence in the form of documentation may partially help to fulfil this request, demonstrating the competence and awareness of workers themselves is a vital dimension of roles and responsibilities.*

### **What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?**

- *ISO 45001; ISO 45003* – Evidence that responsibilities and authorities for relevant roles within the OSH management system are assigned and communicated at all levels within the organisation and maintained as documented information. (ISO, 2018, 2021)
- *The Campbell Institute: Implementation Guide to Leading Indicators* – A quantitative measure detailing the percentage of the workforce that leads safety meetings, indicating the level of organisational maturity around OSH. (The Campbell Institute, 2019)

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## Training, education and development

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Opportunities for training, education and development are important to OSH and to sustainable human capital management more generally. While building and maintaining competency is essential to ensuring work is carried out safely, learning opportunities can extend beyond the acquisition and refreshment of basic skills and abilities. It may cater more broadly to the lifelong learning of workers, providing transferable knowledge that could support professional growth and career progression inside and beyond the organisation.

Investment in the training and development of workers is as important as the investments made in maintenance of physical equipment. Investing in longevity of people, is key to ensuring safe, healthy and sustainable workplaces.

Without training and development opportunities, workers may lose the motivation and aspiration necessary to engage with work activities. This in turn may stifle innovation and inspiration among the workforce, as well as negatively impacting morale and safe behaviour.

By contrast, offering good-quality learning opportunities may not only improve workers' skills directly, but may increase their work engagement and loyalty to the organisation, particularly where they see room for future development.

The importance of learning opportunities can be seen in the demand for training provision disclosures in sustainability reporting instruments. An organisation's commitment to upskilling and developing its workforce is seen as making a positive contribution not only to socially responsible organisations, but to sustainable communities more generally.

<sup>1</sup> For further information, see [IOSH's policy position on OSH training](#).



### Food for thought

*The true value and impact of training, education and development may not always be captured by organisations. With OSH training in particular, if the motivation for training is compliance or meeting legal requirements, the cheapest, most readily available provision may be chosen. In such cases, the training provider and materials may not be adequate to meet the learning objectives.*

*Consequently, decisions about training and development provision should be preceded by determining the needs of the recipients. Specify what the individual or group should be able to do following the completion of the training; what it should lead to next; whether additional training will then be necessary to reach the next level. It should be tailored to meet specific circumstances, limitations, accessibility requirements and so on. Finally, it is important to evaluate the training to try and identify whether it has had the desired outcome.<sup>1</sup>*

*Providing workers with training, education, and development opportunities in which they can see benefits for both themselves and for the organisation will help to foster a sense of shared development.*

### What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?

- *GRI 403: Occupational Health and Safety* – Information on numerous aspects of training development, delivery and evaluation, including: how training needs are assessed; how the training is designed and delivered (the content or topics addressed, the competency of trainers, which workers receive the training, the frequency of the training, and whether the training is provided in a language easily understood by workers); whether the training is provided free of charge and during paid working hours – if not, whether it is mandatory for workers to attend, and whether they are compensated for this; how the effectiveness of the training is evaluated. (GRI, 2018)
- *Vision Zero Proactive Leading Indicators* – A measurement of the extent to which OSH is included in organisational training provision ( the percentage of leaders and workers for whom OSH is covered in their induction and/or refresher training). (ISSA, 2020)
- *The Campbell Institute: Implementation Guide to Leading Indicators* – Quantitative measurement of training provision and participation, including: percentage of new workers that have completed orientation training; number of certified trainers in safety; ratio of training hours to work hours; number of safety culture and leadership hours for leaders.. (The Campbell Institute, 2019)

- *GRI 404: Training and Education* – Information on the availability of wider training and education opportunities, including: the average hours of training that the organisation’s employees have undertaken during the reporting period (disaggregated by gender and employee category); type and scope of programmes implemented and assistance provided to upgrade employee skills; any transition assistance programmes provided to facilitate continued employability. (GRI, 2016a)
- *SDG4: Quality Education* – Measurement of the participation rate of in formal and non-formal education and training, disaggregated by gender.

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## Worker satisfaction and engagement

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The degree to which a worker is satisfied and engaged with their work is affected by how much they feel the organisation values them. Job satisfaction reflects whether workers are generally happy in their work while employee engagement illustrates whether workers are motivated, absorbed, dedicated, and show vigour. Both are outcomes of decent, meaningful work.

Workers benefit from feeling that the work they are doing has purpose and that they are contributing something worthwhile. When satisfied and engaged, they are more likely to show commitment to the organisation – and to the OSH principles and practices that it promotes.

The organisation has a role to play in explaining, contextualising, and designing work in a way that makes workers feel that what they do has a purpose and adds value. Alongside this, workers must feel that they are considered in the day-to-day running of the organisation. Consulting with workers, letting them take ownership of duties, allowing them to make decisions, and permitting them to act with autonomy in their roles, are some ways to improve satisfaction and engagement. Of course, this in turn may foster trust, collaboration and empowerment.

The relationships between satisfaction, engagement, and broader wellbeing are multi-directional, so it is important for organisations to understand the root causes of outcomes – positive or negative. Unsafe behaviour by employees might reflect a lack of engagement, and vice versa. Low job satisfaction might result from workers not feeling safe and valued, and vice versa.

Organisations should consider exploring how else to influence satisfaction and engagement positively through OSH. This might include measures as straightforward as ensuring that workers are given long enough breaks, that they are provided with outside spaces to disconnect from work, and offered good quality training that allows them to develop.

Worker satisfaction and engagement are of interest to a range of stakeholders in an organisation. For the OSH professional, they can simultaneously be the cause and effect of good safety, health and wellbeing outcomes. At organisational level, the benefits of better engagement and satisfaction are numerous:

- Workers increased sense of safety due to measures or improvements they can see in the working environment.
- Greater willingness to participate among workers due to a sense of trust and appreciation.
- Greater willingness to come forward with suggestions for improvement.
- Greater productivity due to workers feeling happier, motivated and valued.
- Decrease in job turnover intention due to workers experiencing a sense of belonging and worth.



## Food for thought

*A challenge for organisations is that not all workers will find their work challenging, satisfying and engaging. Some might find their roles mundane, their tasks monotonous, and struggle to find motivation or feel a sense of worth whilst at work.*

*An organisation can try to manage the wellbeing of these workers by creating a broader working environment and culture in which they feel connected to the business, through general wellbeing interventions, greater opportunities for development and improved communication channels. This may promote a sense of worth in workers, increase their motivation and participation levels and, importantly, keep them safer and healthier in the long run.*

*Another challenge is the lack of a straightforward way to understand the relationship between employee satisfaction and financial performance, which could help to build the business case for great focus in these aspects. However, this relationship is one that should be explored.*

### **What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?**

- *The Campbell Institute: Implementation Guide to Leading Indicators* – Various quantitative measurements of the level of engagement and participation in OSH-related activities, including: percentage of attendance at OSH committee meetings or safety events; percentage of job turnover; number and quality of workplace observations submitted. (The Campbell Institute, 2019)
- *Cascade: Health & Safety KPI Examples* – Survey feedback from employees on satisfaction with physical surroundings, desk, office, noise levels, building, toilets, greenery, emotional environment. (Cascade, 2021)
- *ISO 27500: The Human-Centred Organisation* – Evidence of staff being given time to engage in socially responsible activities within work time (as well as in their own time). (ISO, 2016)



# 2

## Work and environment

Competence

Corrective actions

Emergency preparedness

Hazard identification and risk management

Incident management

Legal requirements and compliance

Planning and design

Support resource and facilities

# Work and environment

**A cornerstone of socially sustainable organisations is the protection of works and the provision of working conditions that are safe and healthy and promote decent and meaningful work for all people, all of the time.**

This begins with the identification of hazards and the management of work-related risks. For stakeholders interested in the long-term sustainability of an organisation, demonstrating how potentially harmful work impacts are managed – through assessment, planning and design, control strategies, objective setting, emergency preparedness and so on – shows them how committed the function is to looking after its people.

Beyond risk management, the working environment is a dynamic space that influences the way in which workers think, feel and behave. With the emergence of increased virtual working and technological advances in the world of work, this may be especially true.

There is a clear opportunity for OSH professionals not only to provide a safe physical and psychosocial environment and appropriate equipment, but also to help create through this process an environment in which workers can find purpose, autonomy, and job satisfaction.

## **Potential returns**

- Engaged and satisfied workers are more likely to behave safely.
- Engaged and satisfied workers are more likely to contribute to decision-making processes relevant to OSH matters.
- Competent workers are better able to undertake work with confidence.
- Workers who are granted genuine opportunities to contribute to OSH issues (through objective setting or incident management, for example) feel a greater sense of empowered.
- Workers feeling safer and happier because of improvements or controls in the work environment they can see first-hand.
- Increased productivity is fostered by good workplace facilities, safe working conditions, and comprehensive safety infrastructure.
- Transparency and fairness of OSH processes leads to workers feeling included, valued, and well-informed.
- A more stable workforce with lower turnover allows organisations to consumer and manage resources more efficiently.

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## Competence

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see [IOSH's policy position on Education](#).

Competence is an umbrella term for the skills, experience and knowledge that an individual possesses. In the OSH context, it extends beyond the question of whether an individual can carry out work tasks, to whether they are able to manage their safety, health and wellbeing more generally when doing so.<sup>1</sup>

Socially sustainable organisations are built on a foundation of competent workers. These organisations realise that their success depends on how capable their people are. It is thus important that organisations engage meaningfully with their workers to determine whether they have the requisite resources to work safely and healthily. Beyond this, they should seek to identify the most suitable ways to increase competence.

Formal education does not necessarily equip workers with the appropriate skills to thrive in the workplace. So training and development activities should be tailored to meet workers' requirements. These requirements can be identified through processes such as job planning and design, worker consultation and participation, and performance monitoring which determine the competencies workers have and need.

Competent workers have a clear idea of their role, what to do and how to do it. However, the benefit of a competent workforce is not only that work is carried out effectively and safely. More than that, competent and capable workers also possess valuable and transferrable human capital, which might be used elsewhere in the organisation or beyond.

The disadvantages of incompetent workers extends beyond unproductive or unsafe work. Workers who lack the competence to carry out their work may also suffer from self-doubt and lost confidence, which may lead to reduced engagement, a decreased sense of purpose, and generally lower wellbeing.



### Food for thought

*When organisations experience financial strain or have to restructure, short-term budget cuts might reduce training and development opportunities for workers. While the rationale for such an approach might be that skill shortages can be made up in time, evidence suggests that this rarely happens.*

*The world of work is changing, and successful organisations should consider worker competence to be a form of renewable human capital, rather than something dispensable, on the basis that these workers provide the greatest value in the longer term. In the context of technological innovation and its impact on work, the competence workers require is likely to evolve quickly, meaning that organisations will have to help them keep pace.*

*Where organisations fail to view their people as assets to be valued and developed, higher job turnover may follow, resulting in higher costs to replace those who leave. Costs saved on recruitment may ultimately help to fund an organisation's training and development budget.*

### What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?

- *ISO 45001* – Evidence that an organisation has determined the necessary competence of workers; that workers possess the relevant skills knowledge and experience to undertake their roles (including the ability to identify hazards); that steps are taken to acquire, maintain, and evaluate competence. (ISO, 2018)
- *ISO 45003* – Evidence that workers are competent enough to identify psychosocial hazards, manage psychosocial risks, and understand the interaction between different hazards; that steps are taken to acquire, maintain, and evaluate competence of psychosocial risk; that interest parties are able to implement protection measures and/or report issues where necessary; that any activities in this area take into account the needs, experience, language skills, literacy and diversity of individual workers. (ISO, 2021)

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## Corrective actions

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In essence, corrective actions refer to the steps that an organisation takes following OSH issues or incidents or nonconformity. Timely, comprehensive, and effective responses enhance the preventive quality of the system, and they also give confidence to stakeholders that an organisation is committed to preventing recurrence, learning from lessons and improving safety, health and wellbeing. Similarly, failing to take corrective action has a greater consequence than just leaving the issue/nonconformity in question unaddressed.

The expectation for organisations to complete corrective actions features in many reporting instruments, emphasising the responsibility to make changes following audits, risk assessments and incidents. A robust system is required to deal with, and close out, problems.

Workers trusting their employers is a prerequisite for developing human capital within organisations. So issues must be resolved in a timely and effective manner, but workers must also be included in this process along with other interested parties. This consultation provides an opportunity to gather concerns and recommendations from workers with sharp-end knowledge, who will consequently value their inclusion in decision making.

In addition to better-informed corrective actions, greater worker involvement in managing incidents and issues may also lead to:

- workers feeling safer because of corrective actions they have contributed to directly
- greater willingness to participate in future because of enhanced trust and appreciation
- greater worker input into productivity due to workers feeling happier, motivated, and valued.

Another requirement of the corrective action process is for organisations to be transparent and to find a solution that works for all parties, promoting ongoing worker involvement.

The way an organisation undertakes corrective actions encapsulates its broader approach to protecting its workforce, which is why information on this subject is often requested in reporting instruments. Not only does it indicate how far organisations are committed to improving the safety, health and wellbeing of workers, the process also illuminates other aspects of the OSH system, such as consultation and participation, communication and incident investigation.



### Food for thought

*Organisational finance can be a significant challenge when it comes to corrective actions. Where people and profit are in competition, organisations may try to incur as few costs as possible in order to maximise profits. It falls on OSH professionals to argue that closing out corrective actions to the necessary standard– even where this requires investment – equates to sustainable investment in human capital. Ultimately, they will need to make the case that, if workers can clearly see the commitment to improvement in OSH, they are more likely to be feel more safer, valued, happier, and productive at work.*

### What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?

- *ISO 45001* – Evidence that an organisation has a timely, responsive, and risk-focused process for reporting, investigating and taking action, to determine and manage incidents and nonconformities. (ISO, 2018)
- *The Campbell Institute: Implementation Guide to Leading Indicators* – A quantitative measure detailing the average time taken to complete corrective actions; number and percentage of completed corrective actions by due date; number of open issues without a corrective action assigned.. (The Campbell Institute, 2019)
- *Cascade: Health & Safety KPI Examples* – A quantitative measure detailing the average time taken to resolve risks and Issues. (Cascade, 2021)
- *AIHA & CSHS Best Practice Guide for Leading Health Metrics* – Quantitative measurement showing the percentage of completed health corrective actions carried out by due date; number of corrective actions/lessons learned from drills, table-top sessions and incidents. (AIHA; CSHS, 2020)

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## Emergency preparedness

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Emergency preparedness relates to the way an organisation plans for potential disasters and emergency situations. These disasters and emergencies could vary in terms of scale, time and severity but are events which could overwhelm the resources of the organisation. Emergency preparedness and response encompass exercises such as risk assessment, prevention planning, mitigation planning, developing response measures and determining roles and responsibilities, with the ultimate aim of protecting people and ensuring business continuity.

Each organisation will have an emergency preparedness profile which reflects the nature of its undertakings, geographical location, neighbours and other factors. In some cases, the extent to which workers are involved could be limited. In others the workforce may form part of the on-site team tasked with response, control and containment.

A collaborative approach to emergency preparedness, which includes the participation of all key stakeholders, is encouraged (York & MacAlister, 2015). In such cases, responsibility would not sit with an OSH professional alone, although their contribution would be integral to the process. The preparedness and response documentation may also be used within an organisation's business continuity arrangements, just as business impact assessments should consider OSH and wellbeing.

Planning thoroughly for future events, regardless of their likelihood, is a positive expression of an organisation's OSH culture. For the OSH professional, this sort of planning is not only an exercise in good risk management and strategic forethought; it also demonstrates a level of care for the safety, health, and wellbeing of workers that may be repaid with their trust.

Organisations that are willing to listen to workers' ideas or concerns about emergency preparedness show those individuals that their opinions are valued. Training and practice in responding to emergencies is likely to create both competence and confidence. Investment in emergency management training will prepare workers but will also demonstrate the value an organisation places on protecting its people.

Against the backdrop of both the COVID-19 pandemic and growing concerns about the effects of climate change, external stakeholders are increasingly likely to request OSH-related information from organisations about their emergency plans.



### Food for thought

*The challenge in emergency preparedness is ensuring that the emergency scenarios envisaged are credible and that the training and practice provide realistic experiences to the workers. Training simulations are an efficient way of reaching larger numbers of workers, but they should be tested for effectiveness.*

*In specialised fire training, for example, workers should be able to gain sufficient practical and realistic experience in relation to situations that they could feasibly face. Where training is unrealistic, workers may not be fully prepared to carry out the roles they have been assigned under the pressure of a real emergency.*

### What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?

- *ISO 45001; ISO 45003* – Evidence of the establishment, implementation and maintenance of processes needed to prepare for and respond to potential emergency situations, with coverage of aspects such as: planned response to emergency situations; the provision of training for the planned response; periodical testing and evaluation of the planned response capability. (ISO, 2018, 2021)
- *World Bank: Environmental and Social Standards Framework* – The existence of emergency prevention and preparedness and response arrangements to emergency situations. (World Bank, 2017)
- *DIHR: Human Rights Compliance Assessment Tool* – Confirmation that organisations ensure that all appropriate measures are taken to respond to OSH emergencies or accidents that might arise in its operations; existence of emergency procedures, prevention plans, and training programmes to protect against dangers and handle emergencies; guarantee that emergency measures appropriate to the industry and premises are made available to workers at no extra cost; assurance that workers will be immunised against disease and protected OSH threats that are particular to the local working environment and weather conditions or climate. (DIHR, 2016)

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## Hazard identification and risk management

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Hazard identification and risk assessment are essential practices of OSH management, but they also feed directly into the development of socially sustainable organisations.

As the world of work changes and brings with it new challenges, the capacity for practitioners to prevent incidents, injuries, and ill health in the workplace will require a comprehensive, sophisticated, and inclusive approach. While hazard identification and risk management are practices that have always benefitted from rigor, the hazards that emerge from new ways of working will require that practitioners adapt and refine their practices so that they keep pace. The increased recognition in recent years of psychosocial risks in the workplace reflects the broadening scope of OSH professionals' remit.

More than ever, consulting with workers will be essential in order to understand the difference between work as it has been imagined and work as it is done in practice. This will enable the continued development of effective controls, documentation and so on.

Organisations that overlook this need for consultation will be more likely to suffer higher incidence rates, defects, and errors. Beyond that, worker dissatisfaction and disengagement may also be a likely consequence where workers feel that their views, their knowledge and their experiences are ignored when it comes discussing hazards and risks that they experience first-hand.

Where OSH features in reporting instruments, it includes a prominent requirement for organisations to provide information about their hazard identification and risk management activity. There is also growing interest in the way that organisations differentiate these activities to ensure they manage the hazards and risks to individuals or specific groups, such as older workers, shift workers, pregnant or nursing workers, and so on.



### Food for thought

*There are several misconceptions about the hazard identification and risk assessment process, particularly in relation to the inclusion of workers. Where risk control measures are designed by those who don't undertake the work themselves and don't include those workers in the process, the decisions made might not be fit for purpose. In such a scenario, this may lead to workers determining their own practices and ignoring measures that have been developed for their use.*

*To reiterate, the inclusion and participation of worker input and experience should be a key consideration of the hazard identification and risk management process, especially where individual or group risk factors are present and cannot reasonably – or ethically – be decided by a practitioner alone.*

### **What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?**

- *ISO 26000; 45001; ISO 45003* – Evidence of processes to identify physical and psychosocial hazards and to assess risks and opportunities, including information about work organization, routine and non-routine activities, potentially dangerous situations. (ISO, 2010, 2018, 2021)
- *Vision Zero Proactive Leading Indicators* – Quantitative measurement of the number of OSH risk reduction measures that were planned to be implemented as a result of OSH risk management over the previous 12 months; and the percentage of measures that were evaluated concerning their effectiveness and relevance for each aspect of OSH. (ISSA, 2020)
- *AIHA & CSHS Best Practice Guide for Leading Health Metrics* – Numerous occupational health indicators, including percentage of processes for which occupational health exposures have been completed (of number required); percentage of locations with completed baseline monitoring (of locations requiring baseline monitoring); workers with reported risk factors completing repetitive stress injury self-assessment and annual training. (AIHA; CSHS, 2020)
- *DIHR: Human Rights Compliance Assessment Tool* – Confirmation that the company defines any materials that are prohibited as hazardous or harmful to the health, safety or moral development of young workers; assesses the physical and psychological risks related to specific jobs and tasks, and identifies those that are inappropriate for young workers; reduces or eliminates risks to the health and reproductive capacity of employees, pregnant and nursing women and their new-born children. (DIHR, 2016)

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## Incident management

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The degree to which an organisation is willing and able to manage unexpected incidents reflects its broader appetite for continuous learning and improvement, discussed elsewhere. Learning organisations are those that are structured in a way that reflect meaningfully on their experiences. In such an organisation, incident management is regarded as an opportunity to create more sustainable outcomes rather than just an administrative procedure.

One of the key objectives of an incident investigation is to prevent a similar incident in future. Using the simplest definition of sustainability, in which activities in the present do not negatively impact the future, learning from unwanted incidents to stop them happening again is fundamental to sustainable OSH.

Organisations that fail to learn from incidents are more likely suffer recurrences. Aside from the obvious legal and financial implications, this is likely to reduce worker confidence, morale, and engagement.

Opportunities to learn from incidents are created by gathering sufficient information and perspectives. First-hand worker experience is – as elsewhere – a crucial component. Learning is built on integrity, inclusivity, and impartiality.

All incidents come with a cost. The financial implications of workplace incidents commonly include damage, fines, sick pay, worker compensation. Less directly, although no less significantly, costs might also be incurred from the subsequent impact on workers who either face the same risks because incidents are not dealt with, or who lose confidence in their employers' ability to protect them.

Good incident management is about developing trust between the organisation and its workforce. The process must demonstrate that the organisation is willing to fulfil its commitment to OSH. Crucially, incidents should not become opportunities to blame individuals. Where workers' opinions are valued during an investigation – rather than used to find culprits – those workers will be more open to the idea of engaging in similar processes in future.



### Food for thought

*While investigations might be aimed primarily at reducing the risk of further incidents, they may miss the point that workers' willingness to participate in the process is a key part of the identification of risk reduction measures. Participation is not only beneficial in terms of learning from incidents, but in terms of trying to prevent them in the first place.*

*It is possible to carry out incident management exercises by appointing an independent team. While independency may have its merits, it may miss meaningful first-hand information from those most closely tied to the event. Processes such as these can thus unintentionally become trust-damaging rather than trust-building.*

### What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently being requested?

- *GRI 403: Occupational Health and Safety* – A description of the processes used to investigate work-related incidents, including the processes to identify hazards and assess risks relating to the incidents, to determine corrective actions using the hierarchy of controls, and to determine improvements needed in the OSH management system. (GRI, 2018)
- *ISO 45001* – A demonstration that the organization has a process in place to determine and manage incidents and non-conformities. (ISO, 2018, 2021)
- *ISO 45003* – A demonstration that the organization has a process have a process to address nonconformities and incidents related to psychosocial risk; and awareness that the organisation should also consider developing a specific process to investigate nonconformities and incidents in this area given the sensitive nature of incidents that that impact on psychological health, safety and well-being at work. (ISO, 2018, 2021)
- *Cascade: Health & Safety KPI examples* – Number of reported accidents and incidents, also expressed as a ratio e.g. 0.001 accidents per employee). (Cascade, 2021)

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## Legal requirements and compliance

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In many organisations, the OSH professional is likely to be a point of focus when it comes to meeting legal requirements to prevent harm and provide safe and healthy work. The laws and standards in any jurisdiction will have been introduced to address risks to the safety, health, and wellbeing of people at work. So a fundamental aim for organisations should be to ensure that they are, at the very least, legally compliant in terms of OSH provision.

As well as ensuring that an organisation stays on the right side of the law, compliance also sends a reassuring high-level message to its stakeholders. However, sustainable human capital development – and the benefits that accompany it – requires that organisations subscribe to the spirit and practice of going beyond compliance. In other words, organisations should not be content with meeting the bare minimum legal requirements that they need to in terms of protecting their workers; they should be driven to consider what they could do.

The concept of a “social license to operate” looks at corporate success not solely through the legal compliance lens, but states that success also depends on an organisation’s “ability to satisfy the wider public of their good citizenship” (IOSH 2016). Failure to do this could result in reputational, business and other costs. These instances relate to improved social awareness, alignment to human rights, the environment, racism, harassment and sexism, and involves organisations taking their social responsibility seriously.

In essence, a beyond compliance approach to OSH in the workplace takes the worker as the real starting point (having met legal compliance as a bare minimum) and asks what good occupational safety, health and wellbeing might look like for them – and what the associated outcomes would be. This might involve engaging meaningfully with workers to see if there are ways that OSH might improve overall experience. Whether these improvements come in the form of, say, new policies, better OSH communication, or individual worker interventions, is less important than the beyond compliance spirit in which they are achieved.

Indeed, being a legally compliant organisation will largely fail to register with workers. Going beyond compliance will resonate far more with them and other stakeholders.



### Food for thought

*Compliance with legal requirements should not be seen as an ultimate outcome. Like the assurance that comes from auditing and certification, meeting legal requirements is a way to ensure the integrity of any commitments to protect workers. Beyond the simplest benefit of compliance, though, the impact is likely to be felt further afield, not least among workers themselves, who experience the results in their daily working lives.*

*Indeed, where workers are able to see results (such as cleaner, quieter, less dusty working environments), it is likely that they will respond with a safer and more positive attitude to work. As discussed in other sections, there are considerable returns on trust between workers and their employers. Setting out and meeting clear compliance standards is a fundamental starting point for this trust.*

#### **What sort of OSH-related information or practices are requested?**

- *ISO 45001; ISO 45003* – Demonstrate that the organisation has a) determined and has access to up-to-date legal requirements and other requirements that are applicable to its hazards, OSH risks and management system; b) determined how these legal requirements and other requirements apply to the organisation and what needs to be communicated; c) taken these legal requirements and other requirements into account when establishing, implementing, maintaining and continually improving its OSH management system; determined the extent to which it has fulfilled legal requirements and other requirements. (ISO, 2018, 2021)

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## Planning and design

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Proactive planning and design enable an organisation to determine where its risks and opportunities lie. With OSH in mind, they provide an opportunity both to anticipate where potential safety, health and wellbeing issues could arise, and to build good practice into business activities from the beginning.

As the world of work changes and organisations' risk profiles evolve, driven by forces such as climate change or new technology and innovation, the importance of a forward-thinking approach to planning and design cannot be underestimated. Without them, emerging workplace hazards may be overlooked and preventable incidents may occur.

In terms of the implementation and maintenance of an OSH management system, planning activities may include:

- determination of risks and opportunities
- determination of legal and other requirements
- hazard identification and assessment of OSH risks
- establishing OSH objectives to maintain and improve the management system.

Identification of risks and opportunities, including legal and other requirements, safeguards an organisation from unexpected losses and negative social impact. The successful management of risk and opportunity helps the organisation to retain the value of its human capital.

Planning may also extend to the development of objectives to measure progress, and to define the expected OSH improvements. Where workers are involved in, and engaged with, objectives that their own efforts help to achieve, they are more likely to show commitment and to want to succeed.

For workers themselves, the benefits of good planning and design are numerous. Working for an organisation that is economically stable and shows clear signs of forethought will give workers confidence that their role is sustainable. They will feel less likely to be injured or suffer ill-health through their work activities.



### Food for thought

*A common misconception is that responsibility for OSH planning and design sits with the OSH professional alone. Broader involvement in these activities – among senior management, middle management, and workers – will help to nurture a culture of accountability for OSH. For example, senior management might be involved in higher-level risk assessment processes, including those that relate to business risk. Middle managers could be trained in the core practices and principles of OSH so they are able to incorporate them into their own planning and design processes. And workers themselves might be consulted to contribute their own thoughts and expertise to planning and design.*

*Involving all internal stakeholders in planning and design makes the organisation more resilient and its decision making more comprehensive. No individual in an organisation possesses absolute knowledge, and workers are always likely feel more engaged, trusting and satisfied where they have opportunity to play an active role.*

### What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?

- *ISO 45001; ISO 45003* – A demonstration that an organisation assesses the risks and opportunities that are relevant to the intended outcomes of the OSH management system associated with changes in the organisation, its processes or the OH&S management system; and, in the event of planned changes, a demonstration that this assessment undertaken before the change is implemented. (ISO, 2018, 2021)
- *Vision Zero Proactive Leading Indicators* – A calculation of the percentage of times that OSH was systematically considered when planning and organizing work in order to create clear job roles and expectations that align with the organization’s overall goals. (ISSA, 2020)
- *The Campbell Institute: Implementation Guide to Leading Indicators* – Percentage of routine tasks identified; percentage of assessments conducted and completed per plan/target/strategy; ratio of levels of risk identified through assessments (high/medium/low). (The Campbell Institute, 2019)

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## Support, resources and facilities

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Support, resources, and facilities comprise the infrastructure that organisations must invest in for workers to carry out their work efficiently. From an OSH perspective, aspects of this infrastructure might include elements of the physical environment, protective equipment, and wellbeing interventions.

While investments are required to meet basic legal and human requirements, organisations should also consider how the working environment influences the thoughts and feelings of workers. When the workforce feels looked after, they are likely to be more positively engaged with work. Not all organisations will be able to provide employee assistance or wellbeing programmes, state-of-the-art facilities, or regular training, but any employer should at least look to provide the infrastructure that sufficiently supports workers in their roles.

Providing sufficient infrastructure requires organisations to consider how to meet the needs, desires, and expectations of their workers, and to understand exactly how this begins to unlock benefits for both parties. Workers do not feel valued only by how much they are paid; they also perceive their value in the way their employer maintains and invests in their work infrastructure to make it a better and safer environment.

Allocating capital to support, resource and facilities is in itself an investment in human capital development. As with other aspects of OSH where investment is required, the key is for practitioners and their organisations to appreciate the potential returns. Research has suggested a positive association between work environment and worker job satisfaction (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015), although it is an area that organisations will benefit from exploring themselves.



### Food for thought

*Investing in people is costly, especially in the areas of support, resource, and facilities. Finding the balance between saving capital or investing in people, especially where there is no simple way to measure the benefit, makes it a difficult choice for organisations. Some may be tempted – or pressured – to maximise margin by minimising cost of employment.*

*To add to this, the costs associated with refurbishing facilities or providing external training for workers are significant, which is why many organisations struggle to justify spending capital that takes from their profits. However, for organisations that make formal commitments to prioritising OSH and their people, investment is a compelling way to demonstrate this. Consideration should be given to measuring the return on investment, although the return may not always be directly quantifiable and may be more subjective (worker perceptions and feelings, for example).*

### **What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?**

*ISO 45001 and ISO 45003* discuss support in relation to organisational resources, competence, awareness, communication and so on. In the context of the aspect here, we discuss support, resources and facilities in relation to the wide-ranging organisational infrastructure provided to prevent and promote occupational safety, health and wellbeing of workers.

*GRI 403: Occupational Health and Safety* – A description of the occupational health services' functions that contribute to the identification and elimination of hazards and minimization of risks, and an explanation of how the organisation ensures the quality of these services and facilitates workers' access to them. (GRI, 2018)

*AIHA & CSHS Best Practice Guide for Leading Health Metrics* – Quantitative measurements of health and wellness provision and coverage, including indicators such as: ratio of occupational safety and health professionals to employees; percentage of employees with health insurance coverage; percentage of workers eligible for employee assistance programmes; percentage of locations offering health promotion and wellness activities. (AIHA; CSHS, 2020)

*World Bank: Environmental and Social Standards Framework* – The provision of facilities appropriate to the circumstances of work, including access to canteens, hygiene facilities, and appropriate areas for rest (World Bank, 2017)

*DIHR: Human Rights Compliance Assessment Tool* – Confirmation of the provision of free and independent medical examinations and free health services to all employees who are exposed to hazardous substances or conditions, including independent medical examinations at no cost to employees (pre-role and in-role); free health care on an ongoing basis to address work-related ailments (DIHR, 2016)





# 3

## System and integration

Auditing and certification

Learning and improvement

Monitoring and performance evaluation

OSH management system

Scope and context

# Systems and intergration

To consider systematically people and the work they undertake is to begin to understand the intricate relationship between the two. In other words, it is to acknowledge that the way people work is affected by their individual circumstances and by their working environment.

A systematic and integrated approach to OSH is founded on mechanisms designed to identify the relationships mentioned above, as well as gathering the sort of information that can influence decision making.

It is essential that organisations develop the capacity to monitor, review, report on, and learn from the dynamic relationship between people and work. This is not just beneficial to OSH management; the existence of a systematic approach to OSH will also provide reassurance – particularly when certifiable or independently reviewed – to those interested in the long-term stability of an organisation.

## Potential returns

- Workers and other stakeholders gain confidence and assurance from certification, audit, and management review of OSH system.
- Worker involvement in rigorous monitoring and performance evaluation creates feelings of reassurance.
- Higher levels of trust result from transparency and integrity of the OSH system.
- Learning and improvement opportunities allow the organisation to make positive, noticeable changes that improve worker wellbeing.
- Workers feel safer and happier where the OSH system clearly meets needs and expectations.
- Workers experience a sense of achievement and success when OSH performance improves.
- Worker confidence increases when the impact of OSH controls is clear.
- Greater confidence in leadership, paving the way for future investment in OSH.

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## Auditing and certification

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Organisations that plan to formalise their commitment to OSH management may wish to work towards independent certification of an OSH standard. These standards may be voluntary, and they set requirements that need to be met to achieve and maintain third-party certification. Similarly, audits are typically carried out against legal requirements, company and international standards, or good practice guidance, to review OSH performance.

Both the certification and auditing processes are broadly driven by two aims. In the first place, they seek to answer the question of whether an organisation is doing both what it professes to be doing and what it has set out to achieve. Secondly, where an organisation's commitment to safety, health, and wellbeing can be independently verified, it provides valuable assurance to stakeholders, giving them confidence that the organisation puts its people first. It also demonstrates the organisation's credentials as a learning organisation, in which any areas of non-compliance/nonconformity or opportunities for improvement are identified and corrective actions carried out.

Because auditing and certification require independence, transparency and accountability, they play an important role in both trust- and reputation-building. Externally, the communication of certification or audit reports may make the organisation more attractive to a range of stakeholders, such as potential investors and potential recruits. Audit and certification also provide workers with evidence that their employers' outward commitment to look after them is being realised.

In an age where organisations are increasingly being scrutinised and asked to demonstrate that their practices are socially sustainable, the process of certifying and auditing an OSH management system can be a valuable means of assurance.



### Food for thought

*Certification to an OSH standard can be expensive both to implement and to maintain. Many organisations, particularly those with small margins or low turnover, may have to consider whether the benefits are worthy of the cost. An organisation can have a fully functional OSH management system that keeps workers healthy and safe, as well as providing conditions in which they can flourish, without needing to attain certification. However, they may still adopt and follow the core principles of a management systems standard. Practitioners should always attempt to show that their systems and arrangements are working effectively, not least because this is an important stepping stone towards assessing the impact of the system.*

**What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?**

- *ISO 45001; ISO 45003* – Demonstrate that: audits are planned at intervals including consideration of physical and psychosocial risks; findings are used to assess the effectiveness of the management system; results are reported to relevant managers; ensure that relevant audit results are reported to workers, and, where they exist, workers' representatives, and other relevant interested parties; gaps in performance are used to identify opportunities to continually improve the management of psychosocial risks. (ISO, 2018, 2021)
- *CSHS: Best Practice Guide for Occupational Health and Safety in Sustainability Reports* – percentage of owned or leased manufacturing, production, or warehousing facilities that have had their OHS management systems audited. (CSHS, 2016)

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## Learning and improvement

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Learning and improvement describes a general openness to – or specific mechanisms that support – better OSH performance. This may involve learning and improvement at individual, group, or organisational level.

While learning might stem from dedicated training and development activities, it may also take place through activities such as monitoring and performance evaluation, auditing, and management reviews. Learning is not an automatic outcome of these activities; it requires a concerted effort among those carrying them out to reflect fully and to identify areas for improvement.

Organisations which profit most from learning opportunities are generally thought to be those that are adept both at gathering and transferring knowledge and in finding ways to improve as a consequence. However, the ideal conditions for learning are not simply applied. They may be predetermined by the larger culture of the organisation and the behavioural trends this culture has instilled in workers.

The benefits of learning and improvement are many. From an OSH perspective, taking an approach built not only on rigorousness but also reflection is likely to lead to better performance. The value of an incident investigation, for example, does not come from the investigation itself but from the positive changes it helps to identify.

A culture of learning and improvement in an OSH function – where changes are made based on insight and reflection – is felt further afield within the organisation. Practitioners are able to explain more clearly to managers how key decisions were reached, what changes were agreed on and why, and the impact of those changes.

In the individual worker case, cultures of learning and improvement help indirectly to encourage personal development and growth. Where learning and improvement is an established and instinctive practice, workers are more likely to reflect on their own performance, which may enable them in turn to see how it can be improved. This opportunity for job crafting may bring with it a sense of purpose and mastery.



### Food for thought

*Learning and improvement are partly quantifiable, in the sense that the volume of formal learning opportunities can be counted, or performance improvement can be measured or observed over time. However, the two are perhaps better thought of as approaches rather than as individual activities. While quantitative information relating to activities might communicate valuable information to stakeholders, the true value of learning and improvement lies in the impact that it has in the long term.*

*Due to many underlying factors, organisations may not have cultures that are supportive to learning and improvement. In other words, there may be very few established learning and improvement mechanisms in place, which would make it unlikely for there to be a general appetite for it. However, OSH has the advantage of being a function built on the practice of looking forward at what could happen and back at why things did happen. In this respect, it is ideally placed to be – or become – a centre of learning and improvement within an organisation.*

### What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?

- *ISO 45001* – Evidence that the organisation is committed to improving the OSH management system by: enhancing performance, promoting a culture that supports the system, promoting the participation of workers, communicating system improvements to workers, maintaining evidence of improvement. (ISO, 2018)
- *ISO 45003* – Evidence of information gathering to identify opportunities for improvement in the management of psychosocial risks, to fulfil legal and other requirements, and to achievement OSH objectives. (ISO, 2021)

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## Monitoring and performance evaluation

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<sup>1</sup> For information, see [IOSH's policy position on performance reporting](#)

Effective monitoring and performance evaluation underpin any meaningful attempt to understand how effectively an OSH management system is working. In the continual cycle of improvement, both are concerned with checking how (and how well) work is happening in practice. Not only do these activities generate the sort of data that practitioners can use to adjust the system; they can also generate the sort of meaningful, comparable and reliable OSH performance data that can be communicated more widely to stakeholders.<sup>1</sup>

Performance evaluation involves reviewing, analysing, and evaluating the data arising from monitoring and measurement activities, and then determining whether a certain OSH aspect is achieving the desired effect. Meaningful data from monitoring can be used to inform improvements. In this respect, it is important that the process is undertaken in the spirit of continuous learning and improvement.

While the links between monitoring and evaluation, and human capital development might be less obvious than elsewhere, there is no doubting the contribution this aspect makes to socially sustainable workforces. In the first place, monitoring and evaluation offer another opportunity to consult workers. It may be the case that their first-hand experience helps to help shape or to fine-tune monitoring parameters.

Secondly, where monitoring and performance evaluation is undertaken effectively, OSH professionals will be able to gain insight from the system that allows them to articulate how the safety, health, and wellbeing needs of workers are being met. This is of tremendous value to both professionals themselves, whose improvement efforts it informs, and for other internal and external stakeholders, who can be notified about the level of the OSH performance. (OSH performance is clearly vital information to communicate to stakeholders. Where other information might help to express the intent of an OSH function, information on performance is an indication of the reality.)



### Food for thought

*In monitoring and reporting on an OSH management system, determining what to monitor and measure is a challenge. Efforts should try to focus on areas where workers' safety, health and wellbeing is being impacted most, and where the highest levels of risk to workers occurs. For example, there would be little point in monitoring machine errors from an OSH perspective if these errors do not pose a threat to workers operating the machines. Practitioners need to find ways of defining what they are monitoring so that the data it is giving them is genuinely useful to their decision-making.*

*Equally, workers are likely to feel safer if the organisation communicates to them what it is measuring (such as the percentage of scheduled management reviews completed or the percentage of overall corrective actions completed in time), especially if they are able to understand from the resultant data how they are being kept safe and healthy.*

### What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?

- *ISO 45001* – Demonstrating the establishment, implementation and maintenance of a process for monitoring, measurement, analysis and performance evaluation, which covers: the extent to which legal requirements and other requirements are fulfilled; progress towards achievement of the organization's OSH objectives; the effectiveness of operational and other controls. (ISO, 2018)
- *ISO 45003* – Demonstrating a systematic approach for monitoring and measuring and evaluating activities related to managing psychosocial risk, which covers: data on activities related to psychological health and safety in the workplace, recognising the need for confidentiality of personal information; determining whether processes for psychosocial hazard identification and assessment of risk are in place and controls are operating effectively. (ISO, 2021)
- *Vision Zero Proactive Leading Indicators* – Quantitative measurement of the percentage of targeted programmes and their OSH improvement goals that were evaluated over the previous 12 months. (ISSA, 2020)

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## Occupational safety and health management systems

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*<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that a generally systematic approach does not automatically constitute an OSHMS.*

The term Occupational, safety and health management system (OSHMS) describes a framework of elements within an organisation to achieve its OSH policy and objectives. Essentially, it is how an organisation looks after its workers in an orderly, integrated, and systematic way <sup>1</sup>. An OSHMS is likely to include many of the aspects included elsewhere in this paper and is designed to act as a knowledge-generating mechanism within an organisation. The value of an OSHMS lies in its ability not only to prevent harm and protect the safety, health, and wellbeing of workers in the first place, but to facilitate improvements to worker experience more generally.

The contribution of OSHMSs to socially sustainable organisations is that a systematic approach to OSH protects the human capital within an organisation. It also highlights ways in which that human capital can be developed – that is, via improvements to the system that start to give workers a greater sense of security, satisfaction, knowledge, and confidence. Workers who are well, safe, engaged, feel supported, and so on, will be more productive and motivated at work.

Implementing an OSHMS starts with identifying the nature and level of risks and opportunities in an organisation, the likelihood of adverse effects, the level of disruption, the costs associated with each type of risk. It also involves the identification and effectiveness of the controls in place to protect workers and prevent and manage those risks. Finally, it requires the organisation to set objectives and processes to deliver them against the OSH policy. At the other end of the system, monitoring and performance evaluation mechanisms and reporting processes provide opportunities for learning and improvement.

Workers and other stakeholders want to know that organisations are taking the necessary steps to ensure that workers will go home in the same – or a better – condition than when they arrived. The comprehensive nature of the OSHMS, and the information it can generate, should provide assurance that the organisation is doing just this.

Like other aspects of OSH provision, it is important that organisations consider management systems as enabling mechanisms, rather than just protective mechanisms. In the sense that they help to identify meaningful safety and health indicators, OSHMSs provide a foundation for thinking more deeply about worker safety, health (both physical and mental) and wellbeing in the context of social sustainability. They also provide an opportunity to integrate the management system with other management systems, and to help embed OSH into core business activities.



### Food for thought

*A misconception about OSHMSs is that they add a layer of bureaucracy to an organisation, or that they exist primarily to guard against compensation claims or fines. While they do protect an organisation, the primary functions of an OSHMS should be to systematise the arrangements for keeping workers safe and healthy, and to enable learning opportunities that might improve worker wellbeing.*

*The more skilled and empowered the workforce, the more productive it tends to be. Investment in an OSHMS may yield long-term rates of return that exceed most standard investments in technology or capital. A profitable, safe organisation will be more likely to keep workers employed and value their contributions over time.*

*Anyone developing systems with human capital as a specific priority may run the risk of adding bureaucratic elements that detract from the system's utility. For example, requests from management for increasing monitoring and reporting activities might unintentionally divert attention away from the question of whether an activity within an OSHMS is actually providing a benefit to workers. In turn, it may be the case that where workers begin to consider OSH management as a bureaucratic exercise, they become disillusioned and disengaged, cutting off a valuable avenue of input.*

### What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?

- *ISO 45001* – To claim conformity, an organisation must demonstrate that all requirements outlined in the standard have been incorporated and fulfilled without exclusion. (ISO, 2018)
- *GRI 403: Occupational Health and Safety* – The organisation should outline whether an OSHMS has been implemented and under what circumstances (eg because of legal requirements or because of a recognised risk management and/or management system standards/guidelines); and provide a description of the scope of workers, activities, and workplaces covered by the system. (GRI, 2018)

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## Scope and context

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Understanding the context in which OSH operates in an organisation is vital to determining what is required, what might be effective and how best to manage it. Equally, having a well-defined picture of where the coverage of OSH aspects begin and end is important for making clear to stakeholders where accountability lies. To achieve the most positive impact through OSH practice, determining scope and context is a foundational activity – establishing how, when, why and where it operates.

Context here comprises any internal and external factors that affect the way OSH functions in the organisation. These are the factors that influence the way work is done and how OSH fits into this relationship. Internal factors include the organisation's structure, culture, levels of resource and capacity, competence and working conditions. External factors include geographical, political, economic, technological, legal, or sectoral drivers, labour relationships (with contractors, subcontractors and suppliers), or relationships with other external parties (such as regulators and communities).

For example, OSH professionals in a highly hazardous and tightly-regulated industry are likely to find that the workers they act on behalf of engage differently with wellbeing issues from workers elsewhere. While this might seem clear, the way in which contextual factors filter down and interact at the micro level may require exploration. It falls on the OSH professional to place individual issues – such as low participation, high reporting of incidents, low competence around psychosocial risk – within an organisational context to formulate the most effective response.

Scope relates to the boundaries of an OSH management system. It is important that an organisation establishes how far its accountability for the safety, health, and wellbeing of workers extends. Many reporting instruments will specify the scope that should be applied when following its guidance. For example, some instruments determine that the status of "worker" should apply not only to people formally employed by an organisation, but to any individual over whom the organisation has a degree of control. In these cases, an organisation is required to consider the OSH impacts on contractors, subcontractors, informal, temporary, casual and platform workers without traditional employment contracts.

In the socially sustainability sphere, organisations are increasingly asked to consider the furthest-reaching impacts of their business activity on the safety, health, and wellbeing of workers. It is likely therefore that the scope of OSH management will be naturally come to extend beyond those workers with a formal affiliation or contractual relationship with an organisation. OSH professionals may begin to consider how to cascade good OSH principles and practice more widely among a broader pool of workers, reaching through supply chains, and bearing in mind the different contextual factors that exist in each case.



### Food for thought

*The scope of a single OSH management system may not need to extend to all aspects of an organisation's operations. Some organisations will have discrete operations with radically different needs and expectations. For example, a large multinational engineering organisation might acquire a business in the mining and extraction industry. The various contexts of the newly-acquired business are likely to be different enough from the existing operations that it is more logical to implement a separate system with its own scope.*

*Different operations in an organisation will require different controls to keep workers healthy and safe. Workers may be acutely aware of these differences. Varying the approach to reflect the context and the needs of workers will not only benefit them through tailored controls and measures. These measures will also reassure workers and other stakeholders that their circumstances are being accounted for.*

### What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?

- *ISO 45001* – Organisations should understand the internal and external issues that may influence the function of an OSH management system. These issues might include the cultural, social, political, legal, financial, technological, economic and natural surroundings and market competition; introduction of new competitors, contractors, subcontractors, suppliers, partners and providers, new technologies, new laws and the emergence of new occupations; key drivers and trends relevant to the industry; and so on. The organisation should also be clear on the boundaries and applicability of the system and should be sure to include within it any activities, products and services that have or might impact OSH performance. (ISO, 2018)
- *ISO 45003* – Organisations should understand how factors such as supply chain relationships, shared workspaces, economic conditions affecting availability or duration of work, the nature of work contracts or employment conditions, worker demographics, rapid technological change, labour force mobility and increased diversity among workers, and so on might be relevant to psychosocial risk within the system. (ISO, 2021)





# 4

# Organisation

Governance

Human resources

Information technology

Procurement



# Organisation

**An OSH management system operates in the context of other organisational factors. Its effectiveness is likely to be determined by the relationship between OSH and other functions, which could be complementary or conflicting. The work of other functions offers OSH professionals an opportunity to deliver a more comprehensive and tailored service, as well as additional considerations to account for in any attempt to ensure worker wellbeing.**

There are natural areas where OSH might contribute more meaningfully to the development of socially sustainable organisations. For example, the practices and principles of good OSH might be incorporated into purchasing decisions, human resource management, technological innovation, business continuity and business risk management processes.

Equally, developing relationships based on common interest may lead practitioners to knowledge and information that could enhance OSH provision. Given that some of the most valuable information related to OSH performance is thought to come from other functions or external sources, cross-functional collaboration and communication streams may be hugely beneficial.

## **Potential returns**

- A cross-functional safety and health lens provides workers with more comprehensive wellbeing support.
- Workers feel better supported and are more inclined to engage with services on offer.
- Collaboration between OSH and other functions drives the pursuit of decent work for all workers.
- An increased sense of worth, belonging and loyalty results from safety, health, and wellbeing being integrated in mechanisms across the organisations.
- Workers experience greater feelings of inclusion and feel they have a voice.
- Workers demonstrate a greater sense of loyalty and a reduced inclination to seek alternative employment.

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## Governance

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Corporate governance is the interconnected system of rules, practices and processes by which an organisation is directed and controlled. It involves balancing the interests of a company's stakeholders, including senior management, customers, suppliers, investors, governments, and communities. It also provides the framework that enables an organisation to attain its objectives.

Governance in the OSH context relates to the extent to which the safety, health, and wellbeing of workers are incorporated into the fabric and the structure of an organisation. Good OSH governance comprises arrangements including policies, strategies, commitments, monitoring and review mechanisms, all of which assure that:

- at a fundamental level, the organisation is always compliant with the legislative requirements that it is obliged to meet
- the leadership of the organisation is always informed, competent, accountable, and committed in matters related to OSH
- workers are always consulted on issues that may impact their safety and health in some way, and allowed and encouraged to participate in matters related to OSH, and
- the diversity of workers and their unique needs are always equitably and inclusively represented in decision making that impacts OSH.

Sustainable organisations take steps to ensure that their current operations do not negatively impact their ability to operate in the future. OSH governance is a means of building a socially sustainable structure in an organisation – one that provides the best chance of guaranteeing the long-term safety, health, and wellbeing of workers.

As with other aspects of well-applied OSH, the benefits of good governance are far-reaching. In the first instance, it is a step that helps ensure organisational commitments to OSH are supported by leadership. Governance puts in place the formal mechanisms needed to prioritise safety, health, and wellbeing.

For workers, good governance not only embeds OSH firmly within the decision making of an organisation; it provides an opportunity for all workers to participate in these decision-making processes.



### Food for thought

*A key challenge for OSH governance stems from the fact that workers are sometimes overlooked in arrangements. Often there is greater focus on leaders' decisions on the direction of the organisation. Given that worker participation and consultation are said to be highly effective (IOD New Zealand, 2013), OSH professionals and organisations more generally should look to establish mechanisms that encourage workers to raise issues, generate and share ideas, and participate in OSH matters at development, implementation, monitoring and review stages. Two-way feedback mechanisms should be a core aspect of organisational structure.*

*Good OSH governance should also account for the fact that the human capital associated with an organisation extends beyond its own workers. Organisations and OSH professionals should ask themselves how the skills and experience of stakeholders outside the operational business structure are also impacted by, or contribute to, those operations. These relationships should be reflected in governance arrangements.*

### **What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?**

While there is little in reporting instruments on the specific issue of organisational governance's direct relationship with OSH, there are natural areas where the OSH function might support good governance.

- *Various reporting instruments and standards* – Evidence of mechanisms for consultation and participation; evidence of leadership accountability for OSH.
- *ISO 26000: Social Responsibility* – Evidence of fair opportunities for underrepresented groups; two-way communications with stakeholders. (ISO, 2010)
- *GRI 405: Diversity and Inclusion* – The percentage of individuals within the organization's governance bodies (including on OSH Committees) in different diversity categories including: gender; age group (under 30 years old, 30-50 years old, over 50 years old); and any other indicators. (GRI, 2016)

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## Human resources

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Human resource is the umbrella term for an organisation's workers and their skills and abilities. A Human Resources (HR) department has traditionally been a function that provides support to those workers. This support might include onboarding and induction training, assistance, and guidance during a worker's tenure, and overseeing the process of workers leaving the business. A strategic aim of human resources management (HRM) might also be to develop the commitment and capacity of the workforce (Boyd, 2003). HR is thus interested in the entire lifecycle of an employee.

In the social sustainability context, the role of the HR function is thus integral to the way an organisation attracts, recruits, develops, manages, deploys, and retains human capital. The success of this work is likely to depend on collaboration, not least because other functions have an equal stake in an organisation's people. Given that OSH exists at the intersection of "safety science, occupational psychology, human resource management and employment relations" (Fan et al., 2020), it is fair to say that OSH and HR require strategic alignment.

So both functions should be jointly committed to a worker-centred approach and to providing decent and meaningful work that engages, protects, and satisfies workers. There are significant benefits from doing so. Healthy and safe workers are more likely to be happier, which in turn makes them more engaged, productive, and committed.

A definition of decent work highlights the natural points of contact between OSH and HR and provides a blueprint for closer engagement between the two functions. Eurofound (2018) suggest that decent work indicators might include:

*intrinsic job quality, skills and lifelong learning, gender equality, health and safety at work, flexibility and security, inclusion and access to the labour market, work organisation and work-life balance, social dialogue and worker participation, diversity and non-discrimination, and overall work performance. (Eurofound, 2018)*

Cross-functional collaboration could help with the following:

- Development of processes in which work organisation (including job design, work pace and work scheduling) is tailored to the wellbeing needs of different workers.
- Refinement of workplace transition policies such as return to work from illness or absence, and retirement.
- Strengthening worker participation mechanisms, such as consultation and union representation.
- Enhancing an organisation's equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) offer by coordinating efforts to provide work that is healthy, safe, and inclusive
- Alignment of data-gathering practices to establish decent work, meaningful work, and worker wellbeing indicators
- Developing an organisational culture that promotes the shared values and behaviours of OSH and wellbeing

Not only is OSH a significant aspect of HR, it is increasingly considered vital to the achieve operational efficiencies and competitive advantage (Zanko & Dawson, 2012). As such, collaboration could be a value-generating activity.



### Food for thought

*There has historically been a lack of alignment between OSH and HR functions; something that is reflected in a shortage of HR research that focuses on OSH (Fan et al., 2020). This may explain a similar shortage in practical guidance in this area. Nevertheless, concepts such as decent work, meaningful work, and worker wellbeing, which are prevalent within the social sustainability space, provide a useful vehicle with which to drive collaboration.*

*To gain traction with leaders and other stakeholders, it is important for OSH professionals to be clear on the contribution that safe and healthy work makes to broader social sustainability metrics. The help that an HR lens offers in terms of explaining this contribution could make collaboration between the two functions valuable for OSH professionals to help demonstrate the sustainable value of the work.*

*Social sustainability metrics should consider the worker in the first instance, ensuring that OSH, wellbeing, EDI, human rights, employment factors, and so on are all considered. These measures should be included in annual reports in a form that is accessible to stakeholders.*

### What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?

*ISO 26000: Social Responsibility* – Organisations are expected to recognise the importance of secure work, equal opportunities for workers through adherence to labour practices including the provision decent working conditions around hours, OSH, holidays, cultural and religious expectations. (ISO, 2010)

*SDG8: Decent Work* – Frequency rates of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries, disaggregated by sex and migrant status.

*Cascade: Health & Safety KPI Examples* – Average overtime hours per person. (Cascade, 2021)

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## Information technology

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The relationship between OSH and Information Technology (IT) in an organisation is multifaceted. It is also likely to become an increasingly important strategic relationship as the world of work changes. Advances in technology are impacting the way that work is done, where and when it is done and how it is managed and monitored. The nature of the employer-employee relationship will change. Both OSH and IT functions both have a vested interest when it comes to matters that touch on workplace technologies that have a potential impact on workers' health, safety, wellbeing and security (e.g. wearables, sensors, surveillance etc).

Currently, there are several areas where the two functions might naturally engage:

- Where IT systems help to support the administrative obligations of the OSH function (such as in the management of OSH documentation).
- Where there are OSH implications of IT systems on work and workers (ergonomic, cognitive, or psychosocial impacts of workplace technologies).
- Where OSH measures can be incorporated into the design of IT and technological resources
- Where there is interplay between safety and security (such as the management of personal OSH data).
- Where core principles of OSH, such as risk assessment and management, might be used in IT management. (Nikolić and Ružić-Dimitrijević, 2009)

In the context of social sustainability, the overlap between IT and OSH may become particularly significant in terms of organisations' pursuit of decent work, since the concept incorporates various components of occupational health, safety, wellbeing, and security. Since increased use of emerging IT has a similar capacity to create disruption and uncertainty as it does to improve safety and efficiency, there is a potential tension with OSH. In particular, there is a risk that a human-in-command approach (where people remain in control) may be overlooked in favour an approach that neglects the potential impact on workers' physical and mental health.

Possible challenges for OSH and IT functions include:

- Workers facing increasing stress because of wider use of worker monitoring and wearable technology, round-the-clock availability/engagement and blurred professional-private boundaries.
- Ergonomic impacts of greater online working and the use of mobile devices in non-office environments.
- Ergonomics and cognitive load risks developing from new human-machine interfaces.
- Risk of obesity and non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes due to an increase in sedentary work.
- Technologies such as AI, wearables and other monitoring devices causing a loss of control for workers over their data, and issues related to data protection, information inequality, performance pressure and so on.
- Workers lacking the necessary skills to use emerging IT, cope with change and manage their work-life balance.

*Adapted from Foresight on new and emerging occupational safety and health risks associated digitalisation by 2025 (EU-OSHA, 2018).*

Technological and data-driven solutions are undoubtedly key components in creating smarter working practices. However, it is likely that aspects of these solutions, particularly those involving monitoring and surveillance technologies, will require cross-functional collaboration between OSH, HR, compliance, legal and IT teams to ensure sustainable implementation (Lehmann, 2020).



### Food for thought

*Open dialogue and coordinated effort among stakeholders are required to manage what will in some cases be competing priorities within an organisation. For example, there may be tension between employers and health and safety representatives about data protection, when the representatives request information they are legally entitled to, but which organisations are reluctant to provide (Robertson, 2018). Equally, regular consultation with workers will also be necessary, especially in relation to tensions that may arise from wider use monitoring and surveillance (UNISON, 2020).*

*Organisations of all types will need to find ways to manage the balance between the expected benefits of smarter, more productive and safer working that emerging technology facilitates, and the potential problems that they could also cause: data and security issues, general worker uncertainty and distrust, psychological and wellbeing risks and so on (Braganza et al., 2021; Deshpande et al., 2021; UNISON, 2020)*

### **What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?**

The interplay between sustainable OSH and IT is acknowledged in some reporting and standards instruments – for example, in terms of making technology accessible and adjustable to all worker types, or in demonstrating evidence of OSH consideration in relation to technology use – although only to a limited extent. The developing relationship between the two functions does not currently feature markedly in OSH instruments.

- ISO 27500: The Human-Centred Organisation – Demonstrating that a human-centred design process was followed properly, by providing evidence of good practice and meeting technical standard requirements, regardless of developments in the technology; demonstrating that organisational and the technological systems have been designed in parallel with on another; evidence of investment in office and other technology which is adjustable to a wide range of users; information around the avoidance of errors, system failures from mismatches between people, their work environment, and technology. (ISO 27500, 2016)

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## Procurement

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The development of sustainable procurement practices, in which social, economic, and environmental factors are evaluated alongside price and quality considerations (CIPS, 2022), is an important part of building modern organisations. Purchasing decisions engage an organisation directly with its supply chain, so obtaining goods and services touches on occupational safety and health matters in both client and supplier organisations. As such, there is an opportunity for OSH professionals to contribute to good safety, health and wellbeing through inputting to procurement practices that recognise OSH.

Sustainable procurement moves beyond an approach where goods and services are sought for the most competitive price. Instead, it adopts a more ethical approach based on supply chain due diligence principles. This might include pre-qualification or tender requirements which rule out making purchases from suppliers who cannot demonstrate that they sufficiently protect their own workers, or that the goods they supply are conducive to safe and healthy use.

Sustainable procurement in the longer term might also involve engaging with approved suppliers to build relationships based on trust, commitment, interdependence, cooperation, communication and joint problem solving.

In the OSH context, the main motivation for involvement in procurement practices is to secure the provision of equipment, goods and services that meet the OSH needs of all workers – in both supplier and client organisations. A demonstration of good OSH practice might be integrated into purchasing decision making. Equally, where good relationships are developed over time, good OSH practice might be cascaded more organically through supply chains, through advice for example. Sustainable procurement practices are likely to make workers in the client organisation feel valued, in the sense that they are being provided safe, suitable, and well-maintained equipment.

As part of their ESG requirements, external stakeholders are increasingly requesting that organisations' procurement processes incorporate OSH considerations. While organisational leaders will drive this, it is also likely practitioners will be expected to take a proactive role in this area.



### Food for thought

*Procurement professionals may not currently seek insight from their OSH counterparts. This may leave them unaware of the repercussions their decision-making has in terms of OSH and human capital more generally. Where procurement processes are structured primarily on cost considerations, important checks and balances may be overlooked that are needed to ensure the credibility of the supplier and their goods and services.*

*It is also worth noting that procurement decisions may be subject to pressure from senior and middle management, who want to obtain goods and services for the lowest price, paying little heed to OSH implications. Where this is the case, it is likely to reflect the broader culture of OSH – or the lack of one – in an organisation.*

### What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?

- *ISO 45001; ISO 45003* – Evidence of a procurement process that ensures equipment, installations and materials are safe for use by workers, and which covers elements such as delivery, testing, installation, commissioning. (ISO, 2018, 2021)
- *Vision Zero Proactive Leading Indicators* – The percentage of cases over the reporting period where OSH was included in procurement processes. (ISSA, 2020)
- *UNGC: Nine Business Practices for Improving Safety and Health Through Supply Chains* – The inclusion of OSH and employment injury protection in procurement practices. (UNGC, 2021)
- *ISO 26000: Social Responsibility* – Evidence of the integration of health and safety in purchasing, distribution and contracting policies; encouragement other organisations to adopt similar policies. (ISO, 2010)



# 5

## External

Community engagement

Human rights

Supply chain



# External

**Social responsibility and sustainable development efforts in an organisation are likely to bring improved operational effectiveness. Beyond this, understanding what external issues impact the organisation, being aware of stakeholder expectations, and engaging with them may provide greater opportunity to drive sustainability further afield. Developing an OSH management system requires that an organisation identifies its internal and external issues (using PESTLE or STEEPLE analysis).**

From an OSH perspective, external engagement might involve attempts to cascade good practice through value chains, engaging with community groups, or identifying lifelong learning opportunities for groups outside the organisation. The core principles of safe and healthy work should be seen as universally applicable. As such, efforts to expand the reach of these principles – be it within other organisations or in non-working environments – are to be regarded as valuable contributions to social sustainability.

External engagement may not require the establishment of new relationships, but rather the development of existing ones so that they are transparent, mutual, and aligned in value perception. Only by doing so will it be possible to understand the nature of the relationship between an organisation and its key external stakeholders – and to identify ways that good OSH can have a positive impact on them.

Reporting instruments increasingly require organisations to consider their engagement with, and impact on, stakeholder groups. Given the universal nature of its principles, OSH could well be seen as being a valuable vehicle for organisations to engage externally.

## **Potential returns**

- Engagement with external stakeholders through safety, health, and wellbeing helps develop the business's reputation as a socially sustainable organisation.
- Workers experience greater sense of pride in and belonging to their employers.
- Prospective workers are drawn to the organisation because its record for providing decent, meaningful, and sustainable work.
- Community engagement helps disseminate the practices and principles of OSH and wellbeing beyond the organisation.
- Workers utilise the OSH knowledge and skills they have developed within the organisation, in the wider world.

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## Community engagement

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To decide where and how OSH might contribute within a given community, it is necessary first to consider what is meant by the term community – and its specific meaning in relation to business organisations. There are communities of place (entities linked by geographic proximity) and communities of interests (entities linked by common concerns and/or values). Both are key stakeholders wherever the impacts of business activity extend into them (Googins, 1997). Business activities that cause poor air quality, pollution, deforestation and so on, for example, have a direct effect on local community health.

Community relationships represent both threats and opportunities to the organisation, depending on the way the relationships are managed. Ultimately, it also depends on how much trust exists between organisations and their communities. One model (Bowen et al, 2010) suggests that community engagement may be conducted in three ways:

1. transactionally (e.g. information sharing, charitable donations, volunteering);
2. transitionally (e.g. town hall meetings, public consultation, stakeholder dialogue);
3. transformationally (e.g. joint decision-making, joint project management).

The precedent for OSH engagement in the community is clear when considered in relation to the idea of community wellbeing. While wellbeing is a broad and composite idea, any consideration of wellbeing should take account of social relationships, work conditions, and safety and health (What Works Wellbeing, 2017).

If we consider OSH to be a fundamental enabler of human capital development, organisations should see that they have a significant opportunity to contribute to community wellbeing. They can do this both by ensuring the individual wellbeing of their own workers, and also by promoting the core aspects of safety and health further afield. On the one hand, organisations can engage with communities through OSH as a contribution to the development of societal human capital in a general sense (e.g. as a contribution to the common good). On the other, their investment in people outside the organisation may lead indirectly to value creation within it (Fobbe & Hilletoft, 2021).



## Food for thought

*A number of preconditions are likely to influence the long-term success of community engagement activities:*

- 1. Building capability – developing cultural aspects (norms and values) and structural aspects (processes and policies) so that engagement with community stakeholders is sustainable and meaningful.*
- 2. Establishing high-quality relationships – recognising that mutually beneficial relationships are built on trust, loyalty, honesty, integrity, fairness and equity, and that quality relationships required continuous development through communication and cross-cultural bridging.*
- 3. Aligning sustainability values and perceptions of value – recognising that community stakeholders will hold different views on value and that these need to be compatible with an organisation's own.*
- 4. Recognising the influence of an organisation on its stakeholders – considering the degree to which an organisation can exert influence over communities. This might include educating or training community stakeholders in sustainable practices, which might lead to value creation through the exchange of knowledge and resources.*
- 5. Recognise the influence of community stakeholders on the organisation – acknowledging that organisations need the proactive support of community stakeholders and their willingness to work with the organisation to develop sustainable business models.*

*Adapted from (Fobbe & Hilletoft, 2021)*

*With these preconditions in mind, the contribution of OSH to an organisation's communities could come in the form of either outward-facing activities such as disseminating OSH knowledge, principles and practices through educational work, or in the form of more collaborative interventions that seek to both understand and respond to the most pertinent safety and health issues in those communities.*

*Research suggests organisations need to assign the right representatives to build trusting relationships with community stakeholders (Dobele et al., 2014). OSH practitioners may be best placed to understand the wellbeing needs of these stakeholder groups and to identify ways to engage meaningfully with them.*

### **What sort of OSH-related information and practices are currently requested?**

While the demand for evidence of community engagement in reporting instruments does not refer to OSH information specifically, there is a logical basis for considering OSH as a meaningful aspect of it.

- *ISO 26000: Social Responsibility* – Evidence of community involvement including: the promoting and support education at all levels; engaging in actions to improve the quality of and access to education; the promotion of learning opportunities for vulnerable or discriminated groups; consideration of facilitating human rights education and awareness raising; helping to developing or improve skills development programmes in the community where these are inadequate. (ISO 26000, 2010)
- *ISO 27500: The Human-Centred Organisation* – Evidence of organisations acting in socially responsible ways (i.e., behaving ethically and instilling pride and confidence in personnel, customers, and the local community. (ISO 27500, 2017)

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## Human rights

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With the landmark declaration on the 10th of June 2022, the International Labour Organization adopted a resolution to add the principle of a safe and healthy working environment to the International Labour Organization Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. As part of this recognition, Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No.155), and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) will be considered as Fundamental Conventions.

Prior to this decision, the demand for a stronger coherence between human rights and occupational safety and health was recognised in a number of international instruments (see Figure 1). Demonstrating that human rights have been met at work – both within host organisations and throughout wider supply chains – is now a prominent aspect of sustainability reporting standards. The right to decent, safe and healthy working conditions are obvious elements of this.

There has been some debate over whether declarations are realised effectively at the workplace level (Hilgert, 2013), especially since an estimated 2.78 million people continue to die annually from work-related accidents or illness. Furthermore, the degree to which businesses globally are held to account for these OSH obligations varies.

However, declarations aside, organisations are increasingly being urged not simply to comply with human rights legislation, but to go beyond compliance and to engage with “the spirit of human rights protection” more broadly (Bernaz et al., 2011). In other words, regardless of whether instruments related to OSH are effectual or meaningfully applied, all corporate governance practice should focus on “upholding of the inherent dignity and worth of every individual” involved (Bernaz et al., 2011).

For OSH practitioners, engaging in the area of human rights comprises two main strands: firstly, making every effort to ensure that, at the very least, “favourable conditions of work” are present across all of the business’s activities, in line with human rights obligations; and secondly, working towards secure, dignified, and worthwhile work for all individuals, in the broader spirit of human rights.

Figure 5: History of OSH in human rights





## Food for thought

*There is growing momentum globally among governments, institutional investors and civil society organisations to require companies to undertake human rights due diligence. In the workplace context, human rights consideration in OSH might take the form of:*

- *Ensuring that favourable working conditions for all individuals are provided through OSH policy, physical and psychosocial risk management, the provision of adequate safety equipment, training, and OSH guidance.*
- *Providing comprehensive, tailored, and beneficial working conditions for all worker types: for example, by providing OSH coverage in and beyond the workplace; by differentiating OSH policy and practice to meet the needs of different worker groups (including young workers, pregnant workers and disabled workers); or by identifying ways to develop workers' knowledge and skills through training, development, and lifelong learning.*
- *Contributing to broader organisational policies and practices to ensure any externally-sourced products and services are procured from suppliers who engage in socially responsible consumption and production systems and are also compliant with human rights obligations.*
- *Contributing through OSH policy and practice to upholding the five principles of decent work:*
  - o *Freedom of association – ensuring that workers are able to meet and raise concerns about working conditions without fear of reprisal.*
  - o *Elimination of forced or compulsory labour – e.g. providing training that educates workers to identify signs of non-consensual labour.*
  - o *Abolition of child labour – ensuring that supply chain due diligence processes include child labour prevention as well as OSH checks.*
  - o *Elimination of occupational discrimination – ensuring that work is suitable and sustainable and reflects individual workers' profiles; implementing and maintaining remedial mechanisms in the event that discrimination occurs.*
  - o *The effective protection of a safe and healthy working environment - ensuring that sound occupational safety practices protect workers against sickness, disease and injury at work.*

*While the relationship between business and human rights is evolving and is interpreted and applied differently in different countries, the matter is perhaps more straightforward at the organisational level. The fundamental principles of OSH contribute directly to the provision of decent work and constitute a foundation of sustainable development.. Beyond this, and in the context of “precarious employment, increasingly disorganised work, and hazardous workplaces” (Hilgert, 2013) across the global working landscape, the challenge is to ensure that good OSH is maintained among the workers who need it most.*

### **What sort of OSH-related information and practices are currently requested?**

- *ISO 26000: Social Responsibility* – Demonstrating evidence of human rights policy; human rights assessment process; integration of human rights throughout the organisation; not providing goods to, or entering into agreements with entities that carry out human rights abuses; keeping informed about entities within supply chain; avoiding discrimination of vulnerable groups. (ISO 26000, 2010)
- *UN Global Compact: Ten Principles* – Organisations should foster respect for human rights by implementing effective occupational health and safety policies and practices, and by providing safe and healthy working conditions; address any problem-solving or other needs of interest to workers and management, including restructuring and training, redundancy procedures, safety and health issues, at the bargaining table. (UNGC, 2022)
- *DIHR: Human Rights Compliance Assessment Tool* – Demonstrating that services and facilities are tailored to specific worker groups; e.g. night workers, pregnant or nursing workers, young workers; demonstrating the provision of OSH services that extend beyond the occupational setting (e.g. independent medical examinations, appropriate transport or accommodation where necessary). (Human Rights Compliance Assessment Tool: Workplace Health and Safety, 2016)
- *ICGN: Global Governance Principles* – Evidence of appropriate due diligence processes, strategy, disclosure, engagement, accountability, and other measures to deal with human rights issues. (Global Governance Principles (GGP) 2021)
- *UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights* – outlines the foundational principle that business enterprises should respect human rights. It details corporate responsibility to respect human rights, which includes those that are fundamental rights as set out in the ILO's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, adopted in 1998 and amended in 2022)

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## Supply chain

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A supply chain is the combined system of organisations, people, activities, information, and resources involved in supplying goods and services. A value chain, meanwhile, relates to the value-creating activities that underpin the supply chain lifecycle. The idea of a value chain is useful when considering the question of how stakeholders such as OSH practitioners can contribute to sustainable supply chains.

There is an increasing pressure on organisations to influence standards within supply chains positively. In light of the estimation that 60 to 80 per cent of world trade involves global supply chains (ILO, 2022), OSH professionals have an opportunity to try secure better working conditions for workers beyond their own organisations by contributing to agreements with supplier organisations.

For example, where the criteria for awarding contracts includes good OSH performance, supplier organisations are more inclined to invest in their safety infrastructure and performance. It is worth noting that driving OSH performance could have positive or negative implications on suppliers. While these expectations may improve working conditions, they might also indirectly put pressure on workers due to increased demands.

Organisations need to take a considered approach to their supply chain interventions, assessing how their demands impact suppliers and their workers. Auditing suppliers and questioning their workers on the impacts of OSH performance data requirements could indicate how the measures have been received among workers themselves. This consultation process would also be an opportunity to gather sharp-end opinions on how things could be improved.

Ultimately, OSH improvement in supply chains is likely to come from the development of trusting, transparent, and supportive relationships between organisations. Understanding what suppliers need to succeed – whether through sharing policies, procedures, or guidance, or by sharing equipment and worker experiences – will not only help suppliers meet expectations, but will benefit their workers.

Although exerting influence through procurement processes may be worthwhile, it should form only part of a larger engagement effort with suppliers. It is also worth noting that engagement within supply chains need not only take the form of downward pressure (pushing good proportionate OSH down the chain), but should also include two-way dialogue and knowledge-sharing.

<sup>1</sup> For further information, see [IOSH's policy position on Micro – Small and Medium Enterprises and OSH](#).



## Food for thought

*It is unrealistic to expect that adding OSH performance criteria to contracts will improve standards immediately. Though a contract may be binding, it may not result in suppliers meeting all requirements. There is a risk that additional pressures on suppliers could lead indirectly to workers suffering through unfair pay or other unsatisfactory working conditions.*

*Another challenge is dealing with transparency and transferability. Some suppliers who operate in unfamiliar or culturally contrasting settings may not recognise the same governance or good practice frameworks.*

*It is also important to remember that Micro-Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a key role in national economies around the world, generating employment, adding value and contributing to innovation, sustainability and inclusive growth. However, workers operating in Micro-SMEs are often at greater risk of workplace accidents and work-related ill health<sup>1</sup>. As Micro-SMEs operate in supply chains it is important they are supported and proportionate systems and controls in place (and this includes proportionality within procurement processes).*

## What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?

There are numerous pieces of guidance on sustainable supply chains, including OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises (MNE), UN Global Compact, Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC) framework, UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human rights. OSH's place in supply chains, is referenced in various ways in instruments:

- *ICGN: Global Governance Principles* – Evidence of transparent reporting and disclosure of how a company identifies, prevents and mitigates workforce safety risks in its operations and supply chains, particularly in terms of the risk assessment process, policies and procedures. (ICGN, 2021)
- *CSHS: Best Practice Guide for Occupational Health and Safety in Sustainability Reports* – General description of reporting relationship, including which department the OHS function reports to (eg legal, operations, supply chain, human resources, financial, and the position to whom it reports directly (an officer of the company such as the CEO or president, director of a department). (CSHS, 2016)

- *ISO 45001; ISO 45003* – The standards encourage organisations to understand how relationships with contractors, subcontractors, suppliers, providers and other interested parties might affect the OSH management system and/or psychosocial risk. (ISO, 2018, 2021)
- *GRI 403*: – The reporting guide suggests that a reporting organisation should include any worker in its data where it “has control over the means or methods, or directs the work performed with respect to its occupational health and safety performance”. This may include workers who are employed by a supplier but whose work and/or workplace is controlled by the reporting organisation. (GRI, 2018)





# 6

## Overarching

Communication

Culture

Equality, diversity and inclusion



# Overarching

**Sustainability reporting instruments increasingly include requirements for organisations to provide information about overarching aspects which are seen as reflecting their long-term sustainability, including aspects relevant to OSH, such as culture, communication, approach to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).**

While these aspects are reportable (albeit using unrefined measurements) and may be informative to the stakeholders who request them, they are particularly important to practitioners at a more fundamental level. These overarching factors invariably determine the way that an organisation conducts its activities and, consequently, the way in which OSH functions. Aspects such as the operating model, business model, and the business environment will also be determining factors.

So it is essential for organisations to consider these overarching aspects as discrete and measurable items, because it helps to meet disclosure expectations. But it is also important for practitioners to understand how these factors – culture, communication, approach to EDI and so on – influence everything that happens in an organisation. Knowing this may provide the sort of insight that explains the success or failure of the OSH management system.

Finally, practitioners should also realise that, through their own principled approach to securing sustainable work, they can exert a positive influence on those same aspects in return.

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## Communication

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The relationship between good communication and positive OSH outcomes is unquestionable. However, what constitutes good communication – and the conditions needed to achieve it – may not be immediately clear. In the first place, the ways an organisation communicates about OSH are exhaustive and extend far beyond the direct communication facilitated by OSH practitioners. The way leaders, line managers and workers understand and communicate about OSH is an ongoing reflection of the degree to which they are engaged and equipped to do so.

Standard setters, investors and other stakeholders' growing interest in communication is reflected in many OSH reporting instruments. Many require evidence of communication in the form of:

- formal OSH documentation (such as policy and procedure documents, clear outlines of roles and responsibilities)
- internal communication mechanisms (such as safety talks, bulletins and access to online resources)
- training and education schedules;
- the participation and consultation of workers in decision making (illustrating two-way communication)
- clear, meaningfully articulated leadership and commitment to OSH; and
- internal and external reporting processes.

*The communication mechanisms mentioned above are quantifiable and help demonstrate the way an organisation engages its internal and external stakeholders in OSH. This in itself may be a predictor of positive OSH outcomes. But there is also the question of quality and accessibility of communication.*

All forms of OSH communication – from safety process documentation to external reporting practices – require careful consideration of their intended audience and purpose. Those responsible for any given form of OSH communication might take the following into account:

- Audience identification - who are they and what do they require from the information being shared?
- Knowledge of the audience - are the needs of that audience known, and is it necessary to tailor the information to them?
- Key messages and/or behavioural objectives - is there anything that the audience needs to know or do with the information?
- Format and distribution channels - how do the factors above influence the way information should be communicated?
- Pre-testing, revising or evaluating where necessary - is there a way to ascertain whether the chosen communication will be, or has been, appropriately comprehended by the audience?

*Adapted from Clear Communication Index (CDC, 2014)*



### Food for thought

*When it comes to OSH and communication, an approach that reflects a broader sense of organisational transparency, empathy, and openness is encouraged. Ultimately, OSH communication in its broadest sense is concerned with the creation and sharing of knowledge within and beyond an organisation. This is likely to happen only where the conditions either permit or encourage it.*

*For example, workers are not only unlikely to report OSH concerns where there is no mechanism for doing so, but also where open and blame-free communication is not an embedded practice. Meanwhile, managers are unlikely to communicate meaningfully about OSH with their workers not only due to a lack of training, but perhaps because of a lack of tailored, good-quality training. Finally, communicating OSH information to external stakeholders will be hampered not only if reporting practices have not been established, but if good-quality information is not being gathered by the organisation.*

### What sort of OSH-related information and practices are currently requested?

- *ISO 45001* – Evidence of procedures detailing how, when and where the organisation communicates internally and externally on OSH matters; demonstrating that an organisation takes into account diversity aspects (gender, language, culture, literacy, disability) in its communications. (ISO, 2018)
- *ISO 45003* – Demonstrating that an organisation provides opportunities for feedback to top management from workers on actions, programmes and policies intended to facilitate worker involvement. (ISO, 2021)
- *ISO 27500: The Human-Centred Organisation* – Demonstrating that the organisation has effective comments and complaints schemes so that issues can be addressed early and out of the public glare; and that any reasons and thinking behind difficult decisions are communicated effectively. (ISO, 2016)
- *The Campbell Institute: Implementation Guide to Leading Indicators* – Frequency of communication (volume of updates per month) to stakeholders, employees and management; number of pre-shift safety talks completed; number of bulletin boards containing relevant and/or current information etc.; and number of forms of communication. (The Campbell Institute, 2019)

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## Culture

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Many definitions exist for organisational culture, and many views exist on its constituent parts. Generally speaking, organisational culture refers to the predominant assumptions, beliefs, and norms within an organisation, which shape the way that things are done (Hald, et al., 2020). In other words, culture influences how people think and behave – both for better and for worse. While the climate within an organisation (the prevailing mood at any given time as perceived by workers) might be transient, culture is more stable and thus provides a means of understanding drivers of behaviour. It is worth noting that sub-cultures or micro-cultures may also exist within an organisation, and they may conflict with one another.

Even though attempts to measure culture and cultural change can be cumbersome, time-consuming, and expensive (Katzenbach, et al., 2012), building a general picture of the context in which work is performed can be illuminating for stakeholders.

Models designed to quantify or articulate organisational culture differ in approach; however, they often employ the use of scorecards measuring different aspects of the organisation's structure, strategy, and operations. This might include an appraisal of its overall mission, the degree of employee involvement in decision making, consistency, adaptability and so on. This perspective of organisational culture might then be articulated in a way that sheds light on its present status and its future orientation. For example, the knowledge that an organisational culture is, say, results-oriented, process-oriented, people-oriented, or dynamic (OCAI, n.d.) might help to indicate what the long-term prospects are for its people, its profits and the planet.

Insight like this is useful to the OSH function. However, OSH also creates its own subculture in an organisation (Furst, 2021), and this too is measurable. Various models and questionnaires exist, designed to appraise different aspects including:

- management commitment and visibility
- quality and effectiveness of communication
- employee participation
- training provision
- workforce motivation and engagement
- compliance with procedures
- capacity and learning

The interest of stakeholders in organisational culture – and in OSH culture specifically – is unsurprising. While the association between culture and performance has not been proven beyond doubt, research indicates significant links between certain cultural aspects and negative OSH outcomes. For example, where an organisation’s cultural norms are either too results-based, too weak, or conflicted, there is a higher likelihood of anxiety among the workforce (Yip, et al., 2021), from which worker risks are enhanced in turn. Equally, culture might be linked with avoidable safety failures: on the one hand, some cultural practices (including poor prioritisation and ineffective management) might ultimately lead to failures; while on the other, a lack of good communication and receptiveness (such as listening and responding to worker concerns) might mean that chances to avoid failures are missed (Hald, et al., 2020).



### Food for thought

*Cultural factors are not isolated. As Hald et al. (2020) point out, a failure in OSH might derive from the fact that, for example, poor regulation has led to inadequate training, which has meant that workers feel unqualified to speak up about problems and remain silent. This might result in a range of negative outcomes, including disengagement, stress, anxiety, accident, injury, or illness.*

*Cultures of prevention, based on a three-dimensional approach based on risk prevention, health promotion, and return to work, have been advocated as a means of addressing the global burden of injury and ill health (ISSA, 2016). Workplaces are seen to offer the ideal environment in which to develop such cultures because they are places where training measures and prevention efforts can be implemented.*

*Organisational culture both influences the OSH function and can be influenced by it. Understanding the factors driving workers to think and act in the way they do may enhance knowledge of what is and is not working. Improvement in a seemingly distinct aspect of an organisation – in a single training module or in an incident reporting process, for example – ultimately contributes to the shape of OSH culture more generally.*

### What information and practices are currently requested?

Many instruments request disclosures on the discrete aspects of OSH culture (such as management commitment, good quality and effective communication) rather than on culture itself, although the UN Global Compact is interested at a general level in “building a culture of prevention and protection” (UNGC, 2021). So understanding OSH culture in an organisation will be relevant to practitioners.

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## Equality, diversity and inclusion

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Like culture, the concept of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) is not a singular, discrete aspect of an organisation's activities. Nor is it straightforward to operationalise or to report on. Instead, EDI is best thought of as part of the overarching lens that influences the way an organisation conducts its activities.

There is an increasingly compelling business case for organisational focus on EDI, with suggested outcomes including improved performance, greater diversity of thought, creativity, and innovation – although research in this area is not yet conclusive. However, there is an even more convincing individual, moral, and social case for doing so: sustainable, healthy and safe work for all workers, and the many benefits it brings. According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, “by being inclusive and supporting diversity, organisations (and importantly, the individuals within them) may benefit in a variety of ways that are not typically measured, such as retention of diverse talent, employee satisfaction and wellbeing” (CIPD, 2018).

While the OSH function may have limited influence when it comes to the composition of a workforce, the scope of EDI extends well beyond the inclusion of certain groups. A diverse workforce does not in itself constitute an inclusive organisation (Powell & Sang, 2013). It is worth noting that, as Özbilgin suggests, “as diversity increases in the workplace, so does diversity in the nature of discrimination and exclusion that workers, especially foreign/immigrant workers, experience during employment” (Özbilgin, 2009).

The potential contribution of the OSH function to EDI is both the equal, diverse and inclusive representation in the workforce, and the equal, diverse, and inclusive treatment of the workforce. In this respect, an objective for the OSH function could be to develop, operationalise and mature practices that cater to the diversity of individual worker needs while appropriately reflecting the context of the organisation and the work itself.

The function of EDI-driven OSH practices is twofold: such practices work to protect people by identifying, understanding and managing a diverse range of worker risks; and then they create the conditions in which all workers' human capital can be developed and utilised. The OSH function can incorporate EDI into its activities by:

1. Developing policies to address any inequalities in OSH practice, such as considering whether gender-neutral policies sufficiently reflect biological differences between workers.
2. Ensuring consideration of differences in risk management, acknowledging that the specific nature of work and the accompanying risks will be different for different worker groups.
3. Developing inclusive OSH indicators that gather data disaggregated by factors such as gender, ethnicity and ability.
4. Promoting equal access to occupational health services and healthcare for all workers, not only in terms of general coverage, but also ensuring it is readily and easily accessible; for example, outside of traditional working hours for shift workers or night workers.
5. Ensuring the representation and participation of all worker types in OSH measures, health promotion and decision-making, making sure that OSH issues and decisions are reviewed by a diverse and reflective cross-section of the workforce.
6. Developing OSH information, education and training that both explains, and is sensitive to, differences between workers.
7. Designing inclusive work equipment, tools and personal protective equipment that accounts for differences in body size and shape.
8. Managing the OSH implications of working time arrangements on different worker types, ensuring that risk assessments consider unique risks of shift or night work, for example.

Adapted from *Guidelines for Gender Mainstreaming in Occupational Safety and Health (10 Keys for Gender Sensitive OSH Practice – Guidelines for Gender Mainstreaming in Occupational Safety and Health, 2013)*



### Food for thought

*A key challenge for managing EDI in the workplace is to understand the various, overlapping contexts in which work takes place. Not only is consideration of this context useful for organisations in understanding where performance might be improved, but it provides the OSH function with a better picture of where diverse teams may be challenged. For example, certain risks may arise among culturally or linguistically diverse teams where communication is a key determinant of safety, or among gender-diverse teams in settings where gender parity is low (CIPD, 2018). With the latter example in mind, given that women are more likely to have reduced working hours, suffer job losses or leave the labour market, it follows that OSH management systems need to include gender-sensitive assessments of, and controls for, women workers' psychosocial risks.*

### What sort of OSH-related information or practices are currently requested?

- *GRI Standards* – Disaggregated OSH data collection (by ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, military and disability status)
- *DIHR: Human Rights Compliance Assessment Tool; TUC: Personal protective equipment and women* – Evidence of language-appropriate training provision (DIHR, 2016); person-specific work equipment (tailored PPE for different worker types) and so on. (TUC, 2017)
- *HRC Foundation: Corporate Equality Index 2021* – Integration of gender identity and/or sexual orientation in professional development, skills-based or other leadership training; workplace protections and adaptations for different worker groups (i.e., policy includes sexual orientation for all operations; policy includes gender identity or expression for all operations). (CEI 2021, 2021)
- *ISO 30415:2021 Human resource management: Diversity and inclusion* – standard requires that in the context of diversity and inclusion organisations recognise diversity (valuing the diversity of groups and individuals); govern effectively (through inclusive organisational systems policies and so on); act accountably (i.e., promoting decent work for all); work inclusively (developing an accessible and respectful workplace environment); communicating inclusively (communicating to workers according to their individual needs); and advocating and championing diversity and inclusion (actively influencing and promoting inclusive organizational practices and stakeholder relationships). (ISO 30415, 2021)

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## Glossary

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Asset	A type of resource, tangible or intangible, from which firms can potentially derive competitive advantage. (Fulmer & Ployhart, 2014)
Assurance	Service (generally independent) used to improve the quality or context of information being gathered for decision makers (Deloitte, 2021)
Comply or explain	A reporting practice whereby companies are asked to either comply fully with a given code or clearly and meaningfully explain their reason(s) for not doing so
Common good	That which benefits society and the planet as a whole (Dyllick & Muff, 2016)
Decent work	Decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity (ILO, 2013)
Decision-useful	Relevant, accurate, comparable and timely information that is capable of informing the decision making of different stakeholders.
Declining occupations	Work roles that are increasingly displaced by new technologies, including those such data entry clerks, administrative secretaries, assembly and factory workers etc. (WEF, 2020)
Diversity	A set of conscious practices that involve understanding and appreciating the interdependence of humanity, cultures, and the natural environment; practicing mutual respect for qualities and experiences that are different from our own; recognizing that personal, cultural, and institutionalised discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others. (Patrick & Kumar, 2012)
Emotional intelligence	The ability to recognise, understand and manage one's own and others' emotional states.
Environmental, social, governance (ESG)	Criteria for evaluating organisations used by those looking for socially responsible investment.
Human capital	A particular set of acquired human capabilities. These generally are taken to be durable traits, persisting over some significant portion of the life of the person who acquires them, and yielding some positive effects upon the person's performance in one or more among a wide variety of socially valued activities (David & Lopez, 2001)

Human-centred	A design approach that focuses primarily on user needs and requirements and applies human factors/ergonomics etc. This approach enhances effectiveness and efficiency, improves human well-being, user satisfaction, accessibility and sustainability; and counteracts possible adverse effects of use on human health, safety and performance. (ISO, 2010)
Impact	Positive or negative social, environmental, or economic changes resulting from business activities
Indicators	Quantifiable metrics that enable evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness of business process (del-Río-Ortega, et al., 2013)
Intangible	An identifiable but non-monetary asset without physical substance (IFRS, 2021)
Integrated report	A concise and reliable communication which combines information about how an organisation's strategy, governance, performance and prospects lead to the creation of value (ACCA, 2021)
Integrated thinking	Working in a way that enables "interconnected information across multiple capitals, including natural, social and relationship, human, manufactured and intellectual." (Value Reporting Foundation, 2021)
Lifelong learning	The continuous building of skills in formal, non-formal and informal environments, which takes place throughout life and in various settings (i.e., school, the workplace, home and the community.)
Long-term value	The ability to align financial value creation with social and environmental value generation in a way that encourages future competitiveness and earning capacity (Kurznack, et al., 2021)
Manufactured capital	"Material goods or fixed assets which contribute to the production process rather than being the output itself" (Forum for the Future, 2021)
Materiality	The principle that determines which of an organisation's impacts on the economy, the environment and/or society are sufficiently important that it is essential to report on them. (GRI, 2016)
Natural Capital	Any stock or flow of energy and material that produces goods and services (Forum for the Future, 2021)
Non-Financial Disclosure	Information provided on areas of an organisation's performance that extent beyond that which is used for developing financial statements. This could include information on intellectual and human capital, environment etc. (Erkens, et al., 2015)

Predictive (or leading) indicators	Measures of activities or processes that have a significant effect on future performance, which are causal roots of the outcomes they ultimately influence. (Badawy, et al., 2016)
Productivity	Expressed either mathematically or narratively, best thought of as the ratio of inputs to production to the production outputs resulting from it.
Reporting Provisions	Any requirement or guidance (either voluntary and mandatory) issued by a government, regulator, stock exchange etc. which outlines what organisations should or must report on.
Social contract	A set of socially established norms determining what behaviour is and is not acceptable for businesses to engage in. These may exist in the form of formal standards against which companies can easily be measured. (Kirkup, 2020)
Social capital	Value derived from the links, shared values and understandings that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and work together. (OECD, 2007)
Social Sustainability	Identifying and managing the impacts an organisation has, both positive and negative, on people within and beyond it.
Socio-emotional skills	A number of non-cognitive competencies (i.e., perseverance, sociability, self-esteem) which may help to improve health-related outcomes and subjective wellbeing. (OECD, 2015)
Soft skills	Set of personal and social competencies which are transferrable to many roles and tasks.
Sustainability reporting	The key platform for communicating about an organization's non-financial (i.e., environmental and social) performance and impacts
Stakeholder engagement	The ongoing process of identifying to whom an organisation is responsible, and determining how far that obligation extends, with the intention of achieving objectives such as consent, control, co-operation, accountability and involvement (O'Riordan & Fairbass, 2014)
Virtuous (business)	Characterized by having high integrity, a striving for excellence in their provision of products and services to consumers, in addition to excellence in business leadership and management practices, a culture of open communication, cooperation and collaboration, and a system of measurement and accountability throughout the organization. (Hein & Wilkinson, 2015)
Workplace wellbeing	A positive subjective state which is contributed to by any number of factors including physical health, psychological and emotional safety, economic security and so on.

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A large, decorative graphic of a wave composed of many thin, parallel lines in a light blue color, set against a dark blue background. The wave flows from the left side of the page towards the right, with a central crest and a trough.

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