



Navigating Towards a Safe and Compliant Workplace

The role technology
can play in ensuring
better workplace safety



Introduction

Ensuring workforce safety is not just an option; it is a necessity for any responsible organisation. In sectors with a large field-based workforce, employees are often placed in situations which may potentially leave them open to health and safety risks. It is their job roles that need to be completed to a high standard which is seen as generating value for the business they are employed by and the clients they serve.

This means organisations in the Facilities Management, Construction, and Energy & Utilities industries for example, need to prioritize providing a safe work environment and creating programs that foster a culture of safety and security amongst all staff.

All organisations involved in field-based activities are aware of the importance of providing a safe and secure workplace environment. Failing to do so can cause physical damage and emotional trauma to staff on the frontline.

The 'human cost' of a health and safety incident is one any employee should not have to bear. It is not just the 'human cost' should an incident occur but also the wider impact on the business. For example not being able to fulfil an important client contract as the right skilled worker is not available, lower productivity from team members who may have taken an extreme 'risk averse' approach, as well as the potential regulatory compliance fines, increased insurance costs, legal liabilities, and penalties.

According to the UN agency ILO
(International Labour Organisation)

340 M

occupational accidents occur annually

160 M

of people fall victim
to work-related illnesses.



The Labor Force Survey in the UK
revealed that

441,000 people

suffered a work-related
injury in 2020-21

1.7 M

people suffered from
a work-related illness.

It underlines the importance of ensuring health and safety at the workplace. Organisations must examine their health and safety strategy if they want to discover ways to keep staff safe, boost productivity, and reduce organisational costs & liabilities.

What are the challenges of establishing workplace safety?

Several factors inhibit ensuring a safe workplace with working conditions to promote employee wellbeing.

1. Knowledge and understanding of the organisation's current health and safety position

Many organisations are discovering it is difficult to keep up with the pace of changing health and safety standards of regulatory compliance and ensure workforce safety across different geographies. The changing health and safety landscape means knowledge, reporting, management, and maintenance of standards become challenging.

If organisations cannot keep up with the pace of change, they are potentially exposed to penalties due to non-compliance.

As a starting point, Health and Safety teams in any organisation should be regularly reviewing their KPIs and reporting dashboards; asking themselves,

- If the data is enabling them to gain an accurate picture of the organisation's health and safety position?
- Is the data enabling them to identify areas for improvement or risks which need to be managed in short to long term?

2. Access and understanding of written health and safety programs

Every organisation should have a written occupational safety and health program to meet the compliance standards covering areas including:

- Management commitment and employee involvement
- Worksite analysis and hazard identification
- Hazard prevention and control
- Employee safety training

However, it is not enough to keep this program documented. Organisations should also make sure employees have easy access to this information. For example can your employees easily report an incident? Can management teams inform field-based workers about any changes quickly and effectively? Are employees aware of the health and safety documentation in relation to the tasks they are undertaking?

3. Remote employee training

One key factor which is often overlooked or found to be out of date is the health and safety training programs for field-based staff. All organisations need to ensure they have a deep understanding of the health and safety standards they need to comply with and then review their training programmes for staff on a regular basis.

Training programs should not be seen as a 'one-off' fix. Instead, they should be made available to remote field-based staff along with relevant information updates. This will help employees stay aware of the potential hazards in their workplace, how to protect themselves against these risks (for example, the proper use of personal protective equipment, the emergency action plan in case of mishaps), and much more.

4. Sustained efforts to prevent injury

Even when businesses are aware of workplace safety issues, they often lack proactive measures to correct them unless an accident happens. As mentioned above, it is not only essential to invest in a safety program, but it is critical to proactively maintain and enforce it to prevent accidents in the workplace. For example;

- How regularly are your employees reminded of their health and safety responsibilities?
- How often are they communicated with any changes in compliance laws and their responsibilities?
- Can staff easily access updates when they are working away from company sites?





5. Enforcement of safety rules

Workplace safety training can be highly beneficial in protecting employees from possible health hazards. However, businesses need to ensure strict and consistent enforcement of the rules and policies of the training program to protect employees effectively.

- Does your organisation have a clear incident reporting process for example?
- Is the process set up so management teams can easily access data and evidence to understand any breaches of health and safety rules?
- Can your field-based teams access the rules and standards you expect them to adhere to, or are they hidden away?

Making accessibility changes and using technology to communicate rules and expectations are great steps forward. Leaders must focus on enabling staff and management teams to have two-way feedback and assure safety rules are understood and adhered to at all times.

6. Efficient and effective incident reporting mechanisms

For those organisations with a large field-based workforce, a thorough investigation of any accident or near-miss accident is critical when the employees deal with waste, hazards, and other 'on the floor' risks. Employees working on the frontline often do not know how or do not have an efficient and established way to communicate an incident.

Organisations are often unable to learn from previous errors, which may have led to incidents due to employees being unable to accurately/timely report risks, actions taken, etc. Also, if the reporting systems and processes are siloed and disjointed, it becomes difficult to prove compliance with the regulatory bodies.

Businesses should consider putting up an efficient and holistic reporting system that effectively captures all incidents and analyses trends and patterns to help discover root causes and offer corrective actions. These metrics and analysis will not only help create effective staff training programs but can also act as a repository that the employees can access to know how to deal with specific scenarios. The reports will also facilitate the HR teams to accurately see where health and safety risks may exist for employees and put proactive measures in place.

The importance of measuring workplace safety standards

Measuring the performance of the existing workplace health and security tools and processes is essential to the 'plan-do-check-act' management process. The fundamental purpose of measuring health and safety performance is to evaluate the progress and current status of the organisation's initiatives to control occupational health and safety risks.

The objectives of measuring performance are to assess how the system operates in practice, identify areas that require remedial actions, and create a baseline for continuous improvement. Organisations should create a comprehensive reporting mechanism for health and safety performance to facilitate effective decision-making. The data from these online reports enables internal stakeholders including directors, line managers, supervisors, and employees to understand their responsibilities and ensure workplace safety.

Increasingly, organisations also need to demonstrate accountability to external stakeholders such as regulatory bodies, insurance companies, shareholders for example. By confirming that they have installed safety guidelines, clear processes, reporting mechanisms, etc., and using technology to make sure the data is captured and used in the most effective way, organisations will be better placed to protect their employees and the working environment.

But this is not an easy task. To help health and safety teams start using data and technology to measure workplace safety standards, they should be willing to answer some fundamental questions including:

- How easy is it for the staff to access health and safety information in field-based roles?
- Do you have the right alerts, processes, and procedures in place for reporting an incident? Are management teams and field-based staff aware of how to action, report, and be updated?
- How often are management teams reviewing health and safety legislation and adapting to any changes which need to be made?
- Can management teams easily communicate changes to health and safety regulations to field-based staff via any device?
- Are the KPI's and reporting metrics using the right qualitative and quantitative data so management teams can assess their regulatory positions in relation to health and safety?

Understanding the improved data usage and technology deployment, business leaders can then start to develop the right set of reporting metrics for their organisation. They can then start to implement programs of change that will help to reduce workplace health and safety incidents. And, harnessing digital technology could be the best lever in this assignment.

How can technology help in promoting a safer workplace?



Ensuring employee safety

Instead of a paper-based incident tracking system, accessible, user-friendly tools facilitate a connected culture where every employee can contribute to safety conversations. Investment in smart tech can enable employees to put in real-time suggestions on improving reporting rates, capturing critical data that is essential to producing high-quality insights, and offering increased visibility of the safety and compliance status. Simple, AI-enabled mobile apps can easily encourage employees to report incidents in real-time, from wherever they are, and receive quick tips or help in case of emergencies.

These digital apps can also help monitor the external workplace environment using environmental sensors like checking air and gas quality, offering weather feeds, etc. Employers can provide wearable devices to blue-collar employees so they can monitor heart rate, blood pressure, and skin temperature to detect potential health complications. Digital health kits can provide quick solutions to health-related questions in a few clicks.

These safety solutions can also trigger alerts to facilitate emergency response and rescue measures or proactively warn workers so that they can take necessary precautions or preventive actions.

Tracking attendance can be another significant challenge when the blue-collar workforce is dispersed across different locations, shifts, and working conditions. Intelligent technology like GPS tracking can help efficiently record attendance and time. In case a blue-collar employee is not feeling well on-site, he or she can simply queue a sick leave on the company's digital attendance management system and inform his reporting manager or the employer with an instant notification feature. This can be a great step towards extending digital healthcare to the remote workforce.

Meeting regulatory compliance requirement criteria

Apart from ensuring employee engagement and satisfaction, maintaining workplace safety and health standards is also critical to meeting regulatory compliance standards. In almost every country, federal and state laws enforce mandatory health and safety regulations for employees, and maintaining these regulatory practices is often a challenge for Human Resources.

An innovative HRO solution can offer multiple benefits ranging from creating digital safety data sheets to pushing automated notifications and updates regarding essential safety policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs) to the employees' mobile devices and conducting virtual safety training that employees can access from anywhere. The solution can also play an essential role in automating risk tracking like scheduling inspections and digital audits, measuring the performance of safety procedures by creating incident metrics, dashboards, and reports as well as issuing safety alerts.

Transforming workplace safety with digitization

Maintaining workplace safety and controlling health hazards are critical requirements for every organisation. A safe workplace with practical tools and instructions makes employees feel that their safety is a business priority, promotes loyalty and engagement, and improves productivity. Fostering a healthy workplace also results in workers taking fewer time-offs, curbing absenteeism.

Workplace safety is also crucial to establishing a good business reputation, earning the confidence of internal and external stakeholders, and eliminating costs like regulatory penalties and insurance payments.

A comprehensive, digital HR solution with a complete array of 'hire-to-retire' lifecycle capabilities can help manage workforces effectively, enhancing productivity, optimizing costs, ensuring workplace safety, and promoting employee confidence and engagement.

Digitized incident reporting, maintaining an AI-based health and safety management system, and integrating next-gen technologies like IoT to create monitoring devices that provide real-time information on hazards will promote a culture of communication and collaboration around workplace safety. Partnering with an HR tech expert can help you transform your human capital management services by leveraging people-first digital strategies that streamline and automate processes, unlock operational efficiencies, improve employee engagement, and create true business value.





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