An Integrated Safety Management System Primer



What is an integrated management system and why does a company need one?

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An integrated management system is the framework of policies, systems, processes and procedures that organizations use to fulfill all of the tasks required to achieve their pre-defined business objectives.

Why do organizations need such a formalized or structured management system to achieve their goals? Systems might be unnecessary when business competition is weak, risk is minimal and business activities are uncomplicated or mature. But if changes take place, the need for a more formalized system will emerge.

For example, the company's processes and business knowledge may reside not in a formal system but solely in the heads of the individuals who manage and work for the company. That works fine as long as those people remain around. However, if those individuals move on, the company's strengths can become its weaknesses.

Thus, larger organizations or those with complicated activities are more likely to have clearly defined processes, documented procedures, well-developed personnel hierarchies and sophisticated record keeping. The need for structure to manage risk and ensure consistency, efficiency and continuing capability is easy to understand.

Integrated Management Systems Options

More and more organizations are implementing formal and strategic management systems to ensure effective control and meet the requirements of customers, stakeholders, regulators and the community at large. Some of the more recognized management system models include:

- ISO 9001 (Quality Management Systems);
- ISO 14001 (Environmental Management Systems);
- OHSAS 18001 (Occupational Health & Safety Management Systems);
- CSA Z1000 (OHS Management System/Canada);
- ANSI/AIHA Z10-2005 (OHS Management System/US); and
- ILO-OSH 2001 (OHS Management System/International).

Implementation of Integrated Management Systems

Sometimes, it makes sense for organizations to implement more than one system, depending upon the type and complexity of organizational activities. For example, it's fairly common for organizations to create separate management systems to control quality, occupational health and safety or environmental areas, and sometimes discreet functions within those areas.

At its most evolved state, an integrated management system would involve managers taking care of a range of functions within their area of responsibility. A common example is the QHSE Department, wherein QA/QC, Health and Safety, Environmental Management and even Security have processes in common and are managed together within the umbrella of the QHSE management system to serve organizational goals and objectives.

But the success of even the best systems can be undermined if those systems don't consider and complement each other. It's been suggested that without a holistic approach to their management and interaction, even good systems can result in bureaucracy, duplication and sub-optimization.

Compatibility Is Key

The experience of companies—large and small—to implement quality, health and safety, and environmental (QHSE) management systems has given rise to an understanding of the importance of system integration. The overriding lesson is summed up in a single word: "compatibility." Companies that achieve compatibility in their management systems are the ones that reap the rewards of "working smarter and not harder."

ISO Guide 72, the guideline for writing management system requirement standards, defines "compatibility" as the suitability of similar standards for use together under specific conditions to fulfill relevant requirements without causing unacceptable interactions. In other words, if common characteristics can be rationalized and implemented in a shared fashion, without duplication or conflict, the management systems are deemed to be compatible.

The common characteristics of some of the well-known management system models include:

- Policies and associated targets;
- Planning that reflects the strategic and management system objectives and utilizes factual information flowing from the management system;
- Organizational structure defining roles, responsibilities and authorities for work that impacts the management system objectives;
- Processes, procedures and resources to carry out organizational and management system activities;
- Methods for measuring and evaluating performance;
- Correction of identified problems and implementation of opportunities for continuous improvement; and
- Management review of system performance providing feedback to the planning process.

The Case for Integration

The potential benefits that come from implementing management systems and

consolidating common system requirements include:

- Alignment of business and QHSE goals and maximization of key performance indicators;
- Recognition of how all people and processes interact and affect each other for more effective management of interfaces;
- Creation of an integrated team approach focusing on mutual goals and benefits;
- Establishment of common objectives, processes and procedures;
- Creation of synergies, thereby reducing redundancy and increasing effectiveness and efficiency;
- Reduction of risk through management based on factual data and overall analysis of performance metrics;
- Systematic prioritization of effort for greatest organizational benefit;
- Enhancement of performance across all functional areas;
- Comprehensive identification and analysis of problems and opportunities to improve;
- Prevention of sub-optimization, i.e., advancement of one area at the expense of another;
- Increased understanding of all customers' and stakeholders' needs, wants and perceptions;
- Savings of time, money and effort;
- Establishment of accountability and clear boundaries; and
- Improvement of internal processes and communications.

And the list goes on and on.

Conclusion

By establishing objectives and targets, and then measuring progress against them, top management can ensure that the decisions and directions taken by the organization serve customer expectations and the strategic business goals of the organization. Clearly communicating the objectives and targets and establishing key performance indicators (KPI) that reflect them promotes understanding by the organization's personnel of the goals and how their activity and effort contributes towards achieving them. In other words, "I know how what I do around here contributes to the success of the company, which in turn garners me and my staff a continued pay check." And isn't that really the bottom line for any business?