

The benefits an occupational health and safety (OHS) professional can provide to an organization are numerous and reach far into all aspects of that organization's operations. What is perhaps unique to an OHS professional in an organization is that to fulfil their complete mandate, they must emphasize different aspects of their role to the various stakeholders involved. There is no hidden agenda, but for all parties to get the maximum benefits, the OHS professional has to be a skilled diplomat to have different groups work together to achieve common goals based on different motivations.

Saskatchewan's passing of its Occupational Health and Safety Act in 1972, the first of its kind in North America, gave the framework for an ever-increasing amount of OHS-relevant legislation and resulting regulations. It also established occupational health and safety committees, and laid the groundwork for the modern safety movement. (Goetsh & Ozon, 2006) There have been continuously growing amounts of OHS-pertinent legislation and regulation put into place since that time. It has become ever more difficult for employees not engaged in safety as their primary responsibility to keep abreast of the hundreds of regulations, let alone have the time to learn about upcoming revisions and trends in safety management. Safety was initially largely concerned with being reactive. It focused on following all existing regulations. While being 100% compliant with regulations is laudable, it still means that only the minimum safety requirements are being met. The emphasis for OHS today, and increasingly so in the future, is an emphasis on proactive safety efforts.

Initially in industry, certain employees in related fields were gradually tasked with keeping abreast of current health and safety regulations. Those employees came from diverse fields such as engineering, fire protection, human resources, nursing, and various levels of

management. Sometimes safety was a secondary or tertiary aspect of their employment. There were few professional organizations or training programs for occupational health and safety.

As the rate of change in society increases, the gap between compliance safety (provided by codes, standards and regulations generated by traditional trial-and-error experience) and optimum safety (provided by OHS professionals use of system safety methods) tends to grow wider. Additionally, increased competition in the world market will tend to demand greater speed of production and shorter upstream safety efforts. Survival in this competitive environment will depend upon an organization's ability to "do it right the first time, every time." (Stephans, 2004)

The International Standards Organizations occupational health and safety standards (ISO 45001) are scheduled to be published in October of 2016. (ISO) Based on the effect their 9001 and 14001 management standards have had in industry, it is likely that being 45001 compliant will gradually become a de facto requirement for businesses being competitive in a global marketplace. Having a skilled and knowledgeable OHS professional to develop the necessary policies, programs, paperwork and to carry out the auditing that will be required to achieve ISO 45001 status would be highly advantageous to a business, and streamline and facilitate the process.

An OHS professional with their combination of knowledge, training, skills, and experience is in a position to determine in what areas safety efforts can be scaled back, in order to free up limited resources to apply in areas that will have the maximum benefits in terms of worker safety, and reductions of incidents/accidents that will then increase productivity. A proactive way of providing benefits to an organization is to use strategy management. This entails the OHS professional acquiring an in-depth understanding of the organization's long-term

and short-term goals and plans, and then tailoring safety efforts to support those goals.

(Winstead, 2011) Ed Winstead in a 2011 article details ways of how an OHS professional can maximize benefits to the operations of a business. Some of those are as follows:

- Examples of supporting production may include:
  - Reducing downtime from accidents
  - Improved quality control due to lower turnover of employees
  - Provide a consistently stronger and less fatigued (more productive) workforce due to ergonomic improvements
- Examples of supporting human assets may include:
  - Building an employee valued culture
  - Reducing worker injuries
  - Providing a career that won't wear out the body(Winstead, 2011)

The ethical requirement to keep employees free from harm as far as reasonability possible in the workplace is the fundamental reason for the OHS professional's existence. Frontline workers are those most likely to incur workplace injuries or develop industrial diseases from long-term exposure to adverse things. It is important to develop a good relationship with workers, supervisors, and in the case of unionized jobsites, union officials. From them is obtained the much of the information about what OHS related issues/hazards and potential hazards exist on a job site.

The OHS professional develops programs that foster an internal responsibility model of safety where workers feel that their safety, their co-workers' safety, and the safety of the physical plant are their responsibility and that their safety concerns are valued and addressed.

An example of this is tasking experienced, competent employees to model behaviours so that safe work practices can be developed and documented to provide less experienced workers the knowledge of the best practice way to carry out a task.

Management with its focus on profitability, production and the bottom line, and workers with their desire for a safe and healthy workplace are two of the stakeholders in a business. There is always a third group—the general public. It is increasingly common these days that occupational health and safety professionals are tasked with environmental concerns. In response to this trend OHS educational programs have included courses in environmental science in their curriculums to prepare their students for this added role. Employees not formally trained in the OHS field are more likely to lack this specialized knowledge and may not react to developing environmental concerns until an environmental disaster is well underway. This could result in a very time consuming and expensive clean-up and mitigation effort, with the attendant ill will generated by the surrounding populace.

A competent OHS professional will be aware of the environmental dangers posed by the materials and processes in their workplace, work to mitigate those risks, and have an effective emergency plan in place to deal with incidents. They would be able to support the public relations department in educating the neighbourhood of potential scenarios, and informing them of what actions they should take in the event of an environmental incident. By being transparent to the neighbours it acts to decrease their anxiety and promote good will towards the industry in their backyard.

Currently there are many occupational health and safety programs conferring broad-based education and specialized knowledge to its graduates. There are a variety of safety

professional associations, governmental agencies, and certifying organizations whose mandates are to constantly strive to provide up-to-date continuing education to its members and constantly improve and ensure the competence of its certificants. This process ensures employers, workers and the public that the best possible staff is assigned to be vigilant over their collective well-being. This last benefit of bringing the services of an occupational health and safety professional into an organization—peace of mind—is one to be valued.

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