Implementing an Integrated Approach

Weaving Worker Health, Safety, and Well-being into the Fabric of Your Organization

Executive Summary

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CENTER FOR WORK, HEALTH, & WELL-BEING

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Executive Summary

An emphasis on worker health is an emphasis on business health. While many organizations realize this, it's not always clear how to simultaneously create positive outcomes for both. That's where an integrated approach comes in. It views work and the workplace as having tremendous potential to improve employee safety, health, and well-being.

It empowers your organization to address deeper, systemic issues, and in the process, weave together your safety, health, and organizational goals. The purpose of this guide is to demonstrate how to implement an integrated approach to worker safety, health, and well-being at your workplace. The first chapter covers the essentials of the approach: what it is, what makes it different, and why it's valuable. The second chapter examines how to build support for an integrated initiative among leadership and throughout your organization. The final three chapters walk through how to plan, implement, and evaluate an integrated approach. Throughout the guide, you'll find real-world examples from various organizations that exemplify the concepts and processes presented.

This guide shows you how to:

- Inspire key worksite stakeholders to support and participate in an integrated approach
- Identify goals and objectives for an integrated initiative
- Target your efforts on working conditions
- Implement policies and practices that create and sustain positive working conditions
- Evaluate and continually improve your efforts to enhance worker safety, health, and well-being

We summarize the contents of each chapter below.

Chapter 1

An Integrated Approach to Worker Safety, Health, and Well-Being

An integrated approach is a comprehensive, management systems approach to worker safety, health, and well-being that's shaped by employee input and participation. The difference with this approach—and its greatest strength—is a sharp focus on using policies and practices to influence working conditions, which are often the drivers of safety, health, and well-being issues.

By targeting working conditions, an integrated approach naturally guides your attention to the systems level, which has several critical advantages. A systems approach can demonstrate how multiple factors contribute to health and safety issues. And looking further upstream may allow you to address root causes instead of just symptoms. A comprehensive approach that's collaboratively designed and implemented is the most effective path to improved safety, health, and well-being outcomes. And it can positively impact employer outcomes, as well.

Key Characteristics

An effective integrated approach is based on six key characteristics:

- **Leadership commitment.** Leadership makes worker safety, health, and well-being a clear priority for the entire organization. Leaders drive accountability and provide the necessary resources and environment to create positive working conditions.

- **Participation.** Stakeholders at every level of an organization, including employees and organized labor, help plan and carry out efforts to protect and promote worker safety and health.

- **Policies, programs, and practices focused on positive working conditions.** The organization enhances worker safety, health, and well-being with policies and practices that improve working conditions.

- **Comprehensive and collaborative strategies.** Employees from across the organization work together to develop comprehensive health and safety initiatives.

- **Adherence.** The organization adheres to federal and state regulations, as well as ethical norms—such as a respectful workplace—that advance worker safety, health, and well-being.

- **Data-driven change.** Regular evaluation guides an organization's priority setting, decision making, and continuous improvement of worker safety, health, and well-being initiatives.

What Makes It Valuable

A growing body of research shows that an integrated approach can lead to healthier and safer employees, as well as improved operating and financial outcomes. Organizations already using this approach have found that it:

- Improves market performance [1]
- Leads to safer workplaces [2, 3]

- Boosts productivity and worker satisfaction [4]
- Reduces absenteeism and lowers turnover rates [4, 5]
- Bolsters employee participation in safety, health, and well-being initiatives [6]
- Creates stronger health and safety programs [7]
- Results in greater improvements in health-related behavior changes [8-10]

Chapter 2
Integrated Leadership and Collaboration

Buy-in and collaboration from across your organization are vital to the viability and sustainability of an integrated approach. Also important are leaders who show clear commitment to improving working conditions, managers who facilitate the process, and workers at all levels who provide input and participate in your initiative. To build support for an integrated initiative, you'll need to:
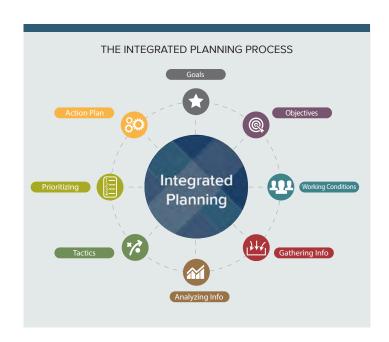
- **Seek top leadership support early on.** Leadership can set the tone for new initiatives, influence management and employees, commit resources, and create supportive environments. Such actions demonstrate a clear commitment to worker health and safety and serve as an essential driving force behind an integrated initiative.

- **Encourage collaboration.** Whether you create an integrated approach team or tap into another collaborative effort within your organization, diverse perspectives and expertise can help with everything from planning the initiative to continual improvement.

- **Work closely with middle managers.** Middle managers often hold the keys to successful implementation of an integrated initiative because they directly manage both workflow and employees. It's critical that they understand how to support both the effort and their workers.

- **Give workers clear opportunities to participate.** Involving workers in your initiative is a key characteristic of an integrated approach. You'll need to show employees that their involvement will lead to substantive change and improved outcomes.

Chapter 3
Integrated Planning

Successful initiatives typically start with a clear, thorough plan. While the steps outlined below are typical of many detailed planning processes, integrated planning focuses on working conditions to improve employee safety, health and well-being. It also emphasizes comprehensive solutions, collaboration, and participation by all levels of employees.

Here are the key steps:

- **Define your goal.** An effective goal provides direction for your team. When you align the initiative's goal with your organization's mission and business objectives, you also increase the odds that you'll get buy-in and support from across your organization.

- **Choose SMART objectives.** SMART objectives—Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound— help you get the most from your process. They drive accountability and clarify what you want to accomplish.

- **Identify relevant working conditions.** By targeting working conditions, you work at the systems level and focus on the root causes of health and safety issues.

THE INTEGRATED PLANNING PROCESS

Goals

Action Plan

Objectives

Integrated Planning

Prioritizing

Working Conditions

Tactics

Gathering Info

Analyzing Info

- **Gather and analyze essential worksite information.** Focused information gathering gives you a baseline to measure progress, verifies your choice of objectives and working conditions, and helps you select and prioritize your tactics.

- **Select tactics to achieve your objectives.** Your tactics influence which policies and practices you'll need to create or change to improve working conditions.

- **Create an action plan.** A well-crafted plan charts your course and drives accountability. It also guides efforts to track progress, allowing you to identify areas that need improvement.

- **Identify required resources.** Consider especially if staff needs to be hired or tasks reassigned, and if new funds are required for items like changes to the physical environment, new employee benefits, or training costs.

During your planning process:

- Make sure to reach out to those impacted by the initiative, including workers, as they may offer critical suggestions and solutions.

- Contact those who need to be convinced about the initiative's value and invite them into the process.

- Allow for plenty of time and discussions around planning. This early effort may help prevent later surprises or roadblocks.

Chapter 4
Integrated Implementation

With a plan in place, you can move on to implementation. This is where the rubber meets the road, and you see how changes to policies and practices actually play out in the workplace.

To facilitate implementation:

- **Start small.** Do a trial run of your plan before scaling up more widely. You'll likely learn important lessons in these first steps, allowing you to tweak your tactics before making broader changes.

- **Change working conditions through policies and practices.** For instance, to increase the use of mechanical lifts in areas where moving heavy items is common, you can use worker and management input to implement standard operating procedures for lift use, inspection, and maintenance.

- **Monitor progress.** It's important to track progress toward your objectives and to check how the process itself is going. You'll learn not only if your tactics are working, but also why, which helps make your process even more effective.

- **Review accountability procedures.** During implementation, it helps to examine the procedures you put in place to ensure that all those responsible for implementing an integrated approach know their roles and are held accountable.

- **Communicate with leadership, management, and employees about progress.** This helps maintain interest and build support and participation for an integrated approach.

- **Train employees for successful implementation.** Weave integrated approaches into your existing trainings. And, consider training all levels of employees, including management, on their roles in protecting and promoting worker safety, health, and well-being.

As you go along, remember to:

- Give employees opportunities to participate in implementation—this is critical for your initiative's long-term success.

- Use existing processes. For example, continuous or quality improvement processes in industries such as health care or manufacturing, or pre-task planning in construction, can serve as great platforms for an integrated approach.

- Engage leaders in an on-going way through frequent meetings and communications.

- Communicate often—you'll build trust and support, gain valuable insight, and increase participation.

- Identify the resources you need. If some employees take on new responsibilities, consider shifting their responsibilities to prevent work overload.

- Listen to stakeholders. Workers and managers at all levels can provide critical insights. It helps to listen closely to their input and keep an open mind to changing which tactics and working conditions the initiative focuses on. If key stakeholders aren't participating, talk to them and address their concerns.

Chapter 5
Integrated Evaluation and Improvement

When you monitor and analyze data about your initiative, it helps you measure success and improve policies, processes, and practices to reach your objectives. You also get concrete evidence to guide decision-making and resource allocation. Organizations vary in their capacity for evaluation, so gear your effort appropriately for your worksite.

As you evaluate and continually improve your initiative:

- **Remember the key characteristics of an integrated approach.** This will help keep your efforts focused on working conditions.

- **Use a variety of data collection methods.** You'll develop a more complete picture of the issues at hand when you gather evaluation data in multiple ways, such as surveys, walk-throughs, and conversations with employees.

- **Limit how much data you collect.** Focus just on the data that helps you evaluate the objectives, working conditions, and tactics in your action plan.

- **Form a diverse evaluation team.** A team with a variety of backgrounds, skills, and experience gives you a wider range of perspectives and insights.

- **Evaluate as needed.** There's no formula for how often to evaluate your initiative. It's based on your objectives and capacity, and it may change over time.

- **Communicate often.** Regularly share the results of your findings and ask for feedback.

- **Let the data guide you.** Your evaluation results help determine your next steps so you can continually improve your initiative.

Looking Ahead

For more information about weaving worker health, safety, and well-being into the fabric of your organization, download Implementing an Integrated Approach. Whether you use this document as a trusted guide or an occasional reference, you will have a framework, processes, tips, tools, and resources to improve working conditions and achieve better outcomes for your employees and your organization.

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