



# Strategic Safety Management

## Part: One

By Wayne J. Harris

Strategic management is often misunderstood when it comes to safety. We have to accept that an organization operates in a dynamic marketplace with legislation, competitors, consumers, technology, and local social economic factors affecting them on a day to day basis.

In order for the safety professional to get buy-in they must be able to demonstrate that any proposed changes will have a tangible benefit and contribute to the businesses overall success and profitability.

Today's business executives need to be able to justify any revenue expenditure in order to be competitive in the marketplace. Yet, many safety people still fail to convince their companies that the safety inputs can add true revenue potential?

### **Why Organisations get it wrong (The 7 deadly sins)**

One of the biggest errors made by organisations is the failure to approach safety in line with other business management practices. If we look at the typical mistakes which happen in organisations when it comes to developing their overall safety strategy:

1. The process tends to be primarily led, driven and managed by HSE staff, which means there will be an instant obstacle to any buy-in from other functional departments.
2. HSE has not been quantified within a financial budget for medium to long term growth. Lack of analysis to define real costing's from implementation, maintenance, to profitability, with no financial indicators. Any change will be difficult to effectively manage or measure.
3. No consideration given to stakeholder requirements for business efficiency or maintainability. Justification for change is mainly focused on incident prevention and compensation, difficult to justify if there are very few or no incidents or claims occurring.
4. Purchasing off the shelf HSE programmes or software, then trying to adapt the organisation to fit the system. Off the shelf systems often turn out to be dysfunctional and fail to meet the overall culture and style of management adopted with a company, often seen as a silo management practice add-on

5. Lack of a clear strategy plan to make the change in line with other business requirements. Quite often they are developed and rolled out more like a high-level idea, and lack any real planning or analysis. Calling something a strategic plan doesn't make it one if it has not been done properly.
6. HSE personnel are often not involved in other strategy decisions of the organisation or its business objectives, which often means a direct miss-alignment in the main business strategy or growth. There is no such thing as a standalone function within a company.
7. Poor communication and consultation with appropriate functional specialist or departments. It's no good developing a strategic plan, and then keeping it secret within a small group of people. Every tactical action supporting the strategic objectives needs to be included in an overall communication plan so that the strategy is reinforced. The failure to communicate the vision and strategic objectives to other stakeholders is a disaster just waiting to happen.

If any of the above apply to your organisation, then ultimately you're highly likely to fail in delivering a real corporate strategy that will make any sustainable and financially beneficial improvements.

I've lost count of the number of times I have seen companies spend money on making changes to their systems, training of staff etc., just to find out that things have not really changed. Strategic Safety Management requires a comprehensive examination of all major components of management strategy and their integration in order to be successful.

In my next article I will expand into how you can develop a safety strategy that can help you succeed in gaining support from your top management and more importantly a higher chance of success. One thing for sure, there is no magic solution, but you can reduce the risk of failure by utilising appropriate management tools to create a cohesive safety vision within the context of an effective organisational business strategy.

Remember the safety profession are viewed as advisors, so we need to act accordingly and ensure organisations are given the best advice and guidance to enable them to achieve their vision and ultimate objectives.

About the Author: Wayne J Harris



Wayne is a highly regarded international specialist in developing corporate risk and HSE management systems with over 30 years' experience within high-risk environments. He has advised major organisations both private and governmental, on key issues of strategy and organisational risk and safety management. Wayne's experience in dealing within the international arena and multiple cultures from Europe, Asia-Pacific, to the Middle East has given him a comprehensive understanding of the global risk issues facing an organisation in today's business economy. He has held various senior corporate roles, and has sat on the Board of Directors of several companies including a Chamber of Commerce. He is also the Chairman of ISQEM, and a Director of the World Safety Organization (WSO) UN-NGO.