



How to make
health and safety
more resilient

dss⁺

Protect. Transform. Sustain.

Thought leadership

Health & safety

Leaders know the importance of planning and delivering successful health, safety and sustainability programmes. But the ability to improve employee health and reduce accidents at work is only measured when put to the test. Resilience is often defined as an organisation's ability to continue to provide services when struck by events that adversely impact operations. As we have seen with COVID-19, companies that are successfully navigating the crisis are those whose health and safety strategies are more resilient to the knocks and shocks of the pandemic.

However, by focusing solely on the operational resilience of health and safety strategies, leaders miss out on fundamental principles that can bring much more significant transformational benefits to plans and strategies. So what steps should leadership consider to maximise the benefits of adding resilience to the mix? What are the critical qualities required to allow all companies to improve the resilience of their health and safety programmes?

The industry has tried to address the numerous risks with a wealth of technical safety precautions, process safety rules and systems such as ISO and HACCP. Each manufacturer, processor or packaging company will also have their own additional guidelines and processes. But there is still a variable the industry struggles to control: human behaviour.

Anticipate the 'What if?'

Integrating resilience as part of your company's DNA adds more options to the decision making process. But vision is vital. In a shock event such as the COVID-19 health crisis, safety leaders need the ability to pull a rabbit out of the hat, which means anticipating shock events and having alternative protocols in place in advance. This type of vision should equally apply to more long term health and safety impacts, such as adapting procedures and protocols to take account of an increase in home workers; or an increased emphasis on mental health issues. Or thinking about future plant design to account for the possibility of future social distancing requirements or considering the impact



of wastewater on local communities. By having a framework that analyses different scenarios before an event happens, safety leaders de-risk the decision making and trade-off process required if a shock event does occur. By constantly asking what if? Leaders demonstrate the vision necessary to add or improve resilience to their health, safety and sustainability strategies.

Achieve true agility

Being agile is less about coming up with a speedy solution to a problem and more about being ahead of the curve. If a framework enables companies to react, then having a range of potential solutions in place as events unfold offers true agility. It's a way of managing risk that avoids knee-jerk decisions which may offer short-term health and safety solutions but are unsustainable in the long term. It's a proactive mindset that goes beyond simple reactions to allowing leaders to alter the strategic course quickly and effectively as the business and economic landscape changes. Significantly, it adds the necessary resilience to respond to a crisis more effectively.

What is your culture?

Culture is the engine that drives resilience forward. From the C-suite down to the shop floor, employees need to understand why health and safety programmes are required, how they will be achieved; and a clear understanding of the benefits. Success in gaining buy-in from the greatest percentage of the workforce will depend on instilling a culture of adaptability and collaboration as integral parts of a company's DNA. An energetic and robust leadership culture can inject the necessary levels of anticipation and agility into business plans. Building up competencies through leadership training and coaching can help visualise what culture looks like and hone skillsets that empower leaders to create the cultural building blocks needed to achieve strategic resilience in health and safety.

4 lessons learned from current challenging times

1

Most employees have a strong safety culture. However, for many of them, the organisation is dysfunctional, leading to inappropriate decisions taken or not at the right pace.

2

Risk management is not integrated enough across the company's value chain. Not all employees fully understand or are aware of how their decisions can impact safety.

3

With the growing complexity and acceleration of the safety changes required, company risk profiles are not updated continuously, leading to poor risk awareness and prioritisation of what matters most.

4

The new leadership skills required to drive resilient safety performance are mostly missing. Programs to reinforce such skills focus mainly on training and not enough on implementation.

As we go forward, it's essential that leaders take on board the above lessons and make the necessary operational and strategic changes to strengthen their occupational safety and health systems to build resilience to face crises now and in the future.

Join the movement

Sustainability is imperative and has become the focus of most organisations. dss+ has supported small and large companies worldwide on strategies to strengthen, develop and implement sustainable strategies to keep businesses operational in a safe manner. Using this experience, we have developed a '4 steps and 8 moments' plan to prepare your teams for future operational challenges in 2021.

As we celebrate The World Day for Safety and Health 2021, we invite you to join the movement on raising occupational safety and health system standards together.

Business leader



Sebastien Planche

Safety & Operational Risk Management

Director, Europe

Sebastien.Planche@i.consultdss.com



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