Clause-by-clause Guidance

ISO 45001:2018

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4 Context of the organization

4.1 Organizational context

Clause 4.1 of ISO 45001:2018 requires the provision of a high-level understanding of key issues that can affect health and safety management system both positively and negatively within the organization. Using this information will help develop an understanding of internal and external issues and the interaction of activities to help plan and develop controls within the system.

What are internal and external issues? There are many internal and external issues that affect, or have the potential to affect, the health and safety management system. It is imperative these are identified so that there is a clear understanding and appreciation of the operating environment.

Internal and external issues are circumstances, characteristics, and changes that can positively or negatively influence the health and safety management system. 'Annex A' of ISO 45001:2018 has been developed to provide examples of internal and external issues.

Use the *Context & Interested Parties Matrix* to document any external and internal issues relevant to your organization's operational purpose and strategic direction that may affect its ability to achieve the intended result of the management system.

To assess whether your organization has a high-level, conceptual understanding of its internal and external issues that affect it, either positively or negatively, its ability to achieve the intended outcomes, you should describe the processes used by your organization to identify internal and external issues and make reference to all objective evidence, including examples of these issues. Examples of organizational issues might include:

1. Health and safety conditions capable of affecting or being affected by the organization;
2. External: cultural, social, political, regulatory, financial, economic, natural, and competitive issues, whether international, national, regional or local;
3. Internal: organization's activities, products, services, strategic direction, and capabilities (people, knowledge, processes, systems).

You will need to determine and understand the various health and safety conditions and internal and external issues typically experienced in your type of organization that can have positive or negative impacts.

The standards do not specify that these internal and external issues, or their monitoring and review, be documented, so there might not necessarily be lists of issues or records of reviews. However, information can be obtained via interviews with relevant top management in relation to your organization's context and strategic direction, the identified issues and conditions, and how these may affect the intended outcomes of the health and safety management system.

Collate evidence to provide assurance that your organization is regularly, or as necessary, reviewing and updating its external and internal issues. Although there is no requirement for documented information to define the context of the organization, your organization will find it helpful to retain the types of documented information listed below to help demonstrate compliance:

1. Business plans and strategy reviews;
2. Competitor analysis;
3. Economic reports from business sectors or consultant's reports;

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4. SWOT analysis for internal issues;
5. PESTLE analysis for external issues;
6. List of external and internal health and safety management system issues and conditions.
7. Management system action plans and objectives;
8. Annual reports;
9. Minutes of meetings (Management review and, e.g., Safety Committee Meeting minutes);
10. Process maps, tables, spreadsheets, mind mapping diagrams.

Reviewing your organization's context could include interviews with senior management, questionnaires, surveys, and research. Cross-functional input is essential for the specific expertise required to identify the full breadth of issues, such as finance, training, human resources, commercial, engineering and design, etc. Not only will this ensure a broader appreciation of the context but also wider engagement, particularly with those functions not previously involved with the health and safety management system.

Using the ***SWOT*** and ***PESTLE*** analysis templates, undertake an analysis of internal and external issues. This provides clear evidence that a comprehensive process has been carried out to understand the context within which your organization operates. This activity will also help to determine the scope of the health and safety management system as required under Clauses 4.3 and 9.3.

With the information that is gathered during discussions at all levels of the organization to determine context, it is recommended that this information be placed into a report. The benefit of this is that it provides a cohesive explanation and a good reference to support present and future business strategies.

Identifying Internal issues

Using the ***SWOT Analysis Template,*** identify and analyze your organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Below are typical examples; however, each issue will be focused on the individual organization:

Strengths are characteristics of our organization that allow operation more efficiently and effectively than competitors. We consider:

1. What does our organization do well?
2. What advantages does our business have over other internal sections or external organizations, including competitors?
3. What makes our organization different from competitors?

Weaknesses are areas that are recognized as needing improvement. We consider:

1. What can be done better?
2. What causes problems or complaints (information from root-cause analysis)?
3. Which capabilities need modifying, strengthening, or divesting for the future?

Opportunities are trends, circumstances, or business opportunities that may be taken advantage of. We consider:

1. What are the changes in technology or markets?
2. What local and global events may be useful?
3. What are the changes in customer/societal values?

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