



Automating Health & Safety Processes Creates Value

In this uncertain business climate, a growing number of organizations are taking a closer look at creating value for their customers and shareholders. In the health and safety arena, this emphasis on value creation, specifically on saving costs and minimizing risks, is leading many organizations to focus on injury prevention.

By Erik Andersen

Injury prevention reduces workplace injuries, related costs and inevitable business disruptions. If managed properly, injury prevention also can increase product and service quality, employee retention and productivity.

However, enabling a shift toward a prevention-based health and safety approach comes with challenges. In many organizations, existing health and safety processes, resources and bud-

gets solely exist to manage regulatory compliance efforts. Moreover, health and safety departments are struggling to keep up as their organizations grow the workforce, add new types of jobs and manage geographically-dispersed employees working off-site, from home or at a customer's location.

Multiply these issues by hundreds or thousands of employees, jobs, tasks and risks and it is clear that health and safety managers are challenged. Their

plate already is full with managing health and safety using existing processes and tools. Not too much attention is paid to creating value for their organizations. Indeed, even when an organization implements various health and safety programs, it can be difficult to track results, measure changes and progress and ensure program participation. This is particularly true for organizations that are still using paper- or spreadsheet-based systems to manage their health and safety activities.

With all the complexity of maintaining existing health and safety programs, it is little wonder that some health and safety managers find it difficult to add proactive initiatives, such as injury risk assessments, that can lead to better injury prevention results.

Enter BPA

The good news is that there are positive developments on the horizon. Health and safety managers can take a page from their peers in other areas of the organization, such as sales and supply chain management, by introducing business process automation (BPA) into the health and safety arena. By leveraging BPA, a growing number of organizations are better utilizing their health and safety department's time and resources, collecting information to prioritize employee assistance and tracking the success of specific safety and wellness initiatives for all employees. The power of BPA is that it enables organizations to define and measure job tasks, look for trouble spots and make improvements to produce better outcomes in the form of healthier employees and, ultimately, more successful organizations.

In practice, technology-enabled BPA gives health and safety managers the tools necessary to put resources in the hands of the right stakeholders to improve overall health and safety and prevent occupational injuries. For example, by ensuring that managers and supervisors on the front lines are receiving regular reports on the effectiveness of current risk mitigation activities, those individuals can make changes to the jobs or processes that are driving injury-related losses. In addition, some of this information can be funneled directly to employees in the form of personalized communication and information about risk avoidance



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and mitigation, based on the level and type of risk each employee faces in a specific environment. This information empowers each employee to make behavioral changes independently without any expert intervention.

With technology generating valuable insight and up-to-the-minute information, organizations can bring more stakeholders into the conversation about improving health and safety and reducing costs. As a result, departments and functional areas, including facilities and occupational health, can get out of their functional silos and weave health and safety risk management into the fabric of the organization's operations.

Rather than simply throwing more training resources at health and safety issues without a clear idea of their impact, a BPA-based approach can generate solutions that get right to the heart of problems. As these solutions take hold, organizations that show consistency and discipline in sharing best practices across the enterprise can develop a storehouse of critical information on the best way to deal with specific risks.

Getting Started

There are three key steps involved in using BPA to enhance injury prevention activities—identify, mitigate and discover. As these three steps are repeated in a continuous loop, an organization stands a better chance of reducing workplace illnesses and injuries and by improving the overall work environment, raising employee

morale and setting the stage for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Identify. The first step in using BPA to manage injury prevention is to gather as much information as possible on the current state of the organization's occupational risks using assessments, observation, inspections, specialist reviews and so on. This information should be gathered in a consistent, structured manner in person or through other means, such as an online survey. Leveraging technologies, such as the internet and email, allow the organization to reach everyone from the installers in the field to the employees who work at a customer's facility.

This personalized approach to identifying risks and gathering risk-related information provides important insight into what is currently happening on the front line, including how work is actually being done, and the key issues that employees and supervisors face when it comes to avoiding injuries.

This information also provides an important foundation for BPA as the organization defines its risks and determines what actions have the most impact on those risks. By connecting directly with employees on the job, health and safety managers can ask them about their behavior – for example, asking a service technician about the personal protective equipment he or she uses – their typical tasks and the associated risks in order to establish a baseline risk profile. From there, stakeholders can schedule and prioritize follow-up activities, such as reassessments or work observation, based on the results of these baseline risk assessments.

Once identification efforts have begun, the organization will end up with a treasure trove of information about all of the types of risk that occur in the workplace, including musculoskeletal risks, the use of proper tools and equipment, environmental risks and much more.

Mitigate. Developing a list of risks is just the beginning. Creating value for the organization requires a way to visualize and manage these risks as a whole. Technology-enabled BPA brings all of these risks together in one place and enables a fundamental shift in thinking about risks. Instead of relying on multiple experts who focus on tasks that have a high probability of severe injury but a relatively low probability of occurring, organizations can take a process-driven approach that focuses on tasks with a moderate probability of injury and a higher probability of occurring. For example, if the "Identify" phase reveals that certain unsafe tasks are being performed by the field service organization, such as lifting a heavy replacement part multiple times while standing on a ladder, a process engineer can use this knowledge to redesign or eliminate this task, thereby avoiding a significant risk that otherwise might not have been identified or managed properly.

By providing this level of insight and information, technology-enabled BPA allows organizations to develop a risk profile of the entire organization and to see where the greatest risks occur throughout operations. With this type of information, an organization can focus its risk mitigation efforts where they are needed most. Furthermore, the organization can develop a process for reaching out to those stakeholders who have the greatest opportunity to take action to mitigate those risks, including engineering and design professionals and employees on the front lines. Those risk mitigation actions may include training, reengineering jobs or tasks and getting feedback and suggestions for improvements directly from those who are doing the job.

By using this information to make investments in risk mitigation activities, organizations will be more confident that they are emphasizing the right things and investing in areas that will reduce on-the-job injury rates. Rather than allowing anecdotal information

to drive mitigation activities, this approach relies on hard data to achieve better results.

Discover. After risks have been identified and mitigation efforts are under way, the “Discover” phase is where stakeholders can gauge the impact that these efforts are having on injury rates and the organization’s risk profile using a constant flow of data generated by BPA.

With this information, the organization can act quickly to reallocate resources or to change tactics if efforts do not yield expected results. This way, stakeholders can be sure they are directing resources to the right people and to the highest risk jobs in order to reduce risk in a measurable way. Sales leaders use analytics to understand the effectiveness of their staff and the sales process and supply chain leaders use statistics to understand defect rates and bottlenecks. Now, health and safety leaders also can use analytics to determine where to act first.

This “Discover” phase is part of the

cycle of continuous improvement; insights from the results of the “Identify” and “Mitigate” phases allow stakeholders to set priorities for areas that warrant a deeper dive into risk identification and mitigation. The result is a virtuous cycle driven by technology that allows companies to create value by addressing what, in many cases, used to be considered intractable problems.

In short, these analytics allow safety leaders to compare the performance of different geographies and organizations, focus on encouraging the right behaviours in a targeted way, redesign those tasks which pose the greatest risk and measure risk reduction over time.

Leadership is Key

Although the design of a technology-enabled BPA approach to injury prevention will depend in large part on an organization’s culture, appetite for risk and risk management philosophy, its success will rise or fall based on the level of commit-

ment from the company’s leadership. If the company’s leadership views injury prevention as a priority, this effort will stand a better chance of leading to successful risk management and lower total costs for the organization.

Fortunately, in this age of increased corporate social responsibility and greater adherence to Six Sigma principles of zero defects in production, more organizations are seeing a parallel benefit in promoting a healthy and safe work environment. Most organizations never would accept a 5 percent defect rate in a product, so they should not accept a 5 percent injury rate among their employees. Enabling a constantly updated flow of information about injury risks is a key way to drive injury prevention, to protect the workforce, and to create value for key stakeholders. **OH**

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