

Introduction to occupational safety and health management systems: understand

IOSH guides

This free *Introduction to occupational safety and health management systems: understand* is part of a series from IOSH aimed at workers, supervisors and managers (including senior managers) and links to the competency framework theme identified on the next page. The series provides general information on a range of important occupational safety and health (OSH) topics, helping the reader to understand better the role they can play in ensuring that OSH risks are well-managed.

For other titles in this Introduction series, search for 'IOSH guides'.

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The IOSH competency framework

The framework covers all the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed by occupational safety and health professionals. It has 69 competencies, divided into 12 areas which together make up three categories:

- 1 technical
- 2 core
- 3 behavioural.

These guides align with the framework with four levels:

- 1 understand
- 2 implement
- 3 lead
- 4 innovate.

Some guides are aligned to multiple levels. The levels indicate your career stage and your experience as an OSH professional.

[Find out more about the competency framework.](#)

This guide aligns to the following technical competencies:

- OSH management systems: understand level.



Introduction to occupational safety and health management systems

Why is OSH important?

Managing occupational safety and health (OSH) is important for many reasons:

- **Moral** – organisations have a moral responsibility to look after workers and minimise incidents and injury; after all, they created the risks in the first place.
- **Legal** – in most countries, there are legal requirements for organisations to manage OSH.
- **Financial** – in addition to the cost of fines for breaching legal requirements, there are many other costs related to incidents, such as added labour costs, increased insurance premiums, loss of reputation that can lead to loss of business, as well as claims for compensation from injured parties.

In many countries there is a legal requirement to have an OSH policy but, if not, the International Labour Organization (ILO) recommends that organisations have one. A statement of policy should feature:

- a commitment from senior management
- compliance with important basic legal requirements and good practice
- worker participation
- how the organisation will assist by appointing OSH professionals
- continuous improvement in managing OSH.

Policy

A first step in managing OSH is to set out an intention, or commitment, to ensure good health and safety management in a statement of policy. This sends out a powerful message to the organisation and other interested parties on the importance of OSH and its careful management. To underline this commitment, the statement of policy should be signed by the most senior manager in the organisation.

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A traditional approach has been to add responsibilities for OSH and arrangements for its implementation to the policy statement, producing a larger policy document. The disadvantage of this is that OSH can be perceived as a subject area separate from other organisational management practices.

Increasingly, OSH responsibilities are being incorporated into the overall roles of all managers and workers. This provides a system of accountability for compliance with duties. Arrangements can be incorporated into procedures and processes for all aspects of the management of the organisation. Such an approach can demonstrate that OSH is of equal importance to other business functions.

In terms of responsibilities, while everyone in an organisation (not just OSH professionals) is responsible for OSH, the parts they play in an OSH management system (OSHMS) will differ, depending on their level or specialities in the organisation.

A policy alone may not deliver effective OSH management and an OSHMS approach is needed. Everyone in an organisation will face various risks which are inherent in the work they do. These can include physical risks from machinery, chemical risks from substances, risks to hearing from noisy

equipment, risks of slips and trips, violence from others and many more types of risk. The organisation itself will face risks – legal, financial and reputational. An effective OSHMS can help to ensure that all such risks are considered and addressed in a structured and consistent manner.

Benefits of an occupational safety and health management system

- Complying with legislative and other requirements.
- Helping to deliver the OSH policy.
- Enabling improved identification and management of OSH risks.
- Providing a competitive edge by demonstrating to customers good OSH management.
- Providing synergy with good business management, with OSH of equal importance.

Features of an occupational safety and health management system

There are many models for an OSHMS, derived from guidance or standards. Whilst differing in some respects, there are common elements to these models. A popular structure for management models is the Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) model, shown in Figure 1.

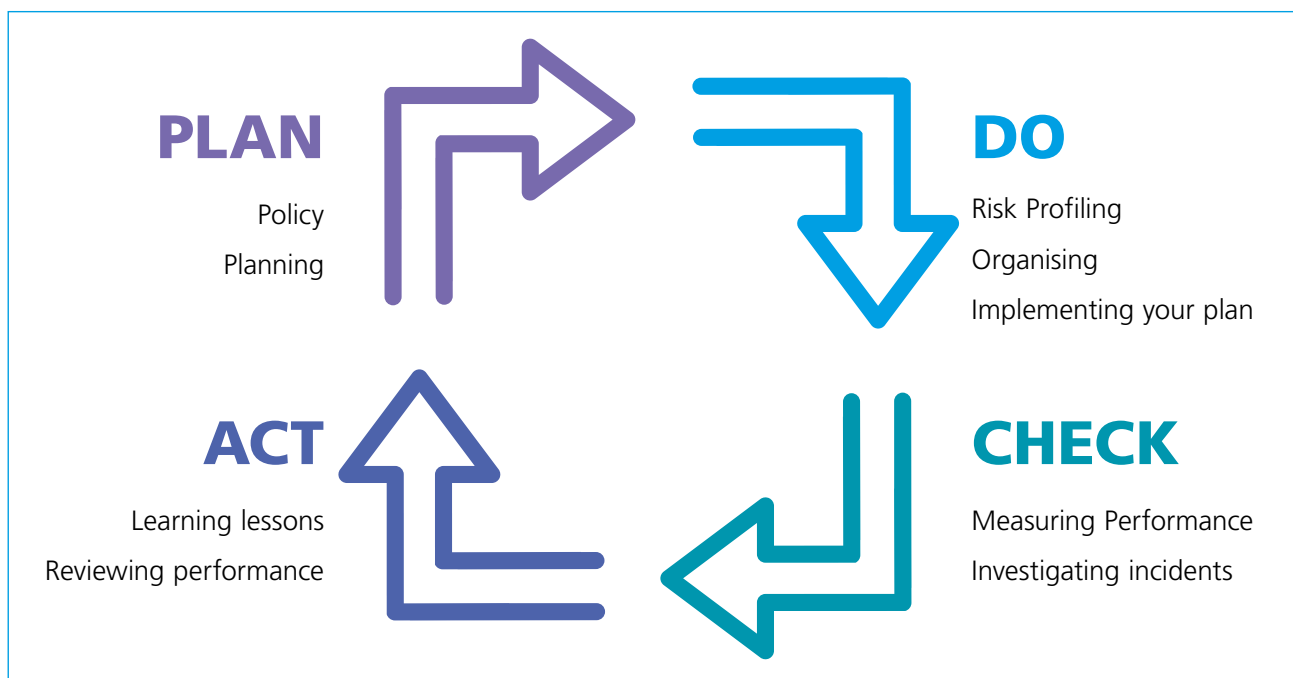


Figure 1: The PDCA model

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The key features of an OSHMS, following the structure, in figure 1 are:

- good leadership, starting from the top of the organisation
- a policy statement, setting out the values and intentions of the organisation regarding OSH
- planning, including the allocation of responsibilities and a vision of how good OSH will be achieved
- risk profiling and assessment, to determine the types and range of risks faced by the organisation and to determine suitable controls
- the implementation of controls by putting the OSHMS into operation
- measuring performance, both in proactive terms and investigating incidents
- management reviews of performance, to determine any further action or amendment of the OSHMS
- learning lessons and implementing improvements in the management of OSH.

In existing models, PDCA provided a structure into which the various elements of the management system could be fitted. IOSH proposes a new, alternative method, where PDCA constitutes a methodology that is applicable to all parts of the system, rather than a structure.

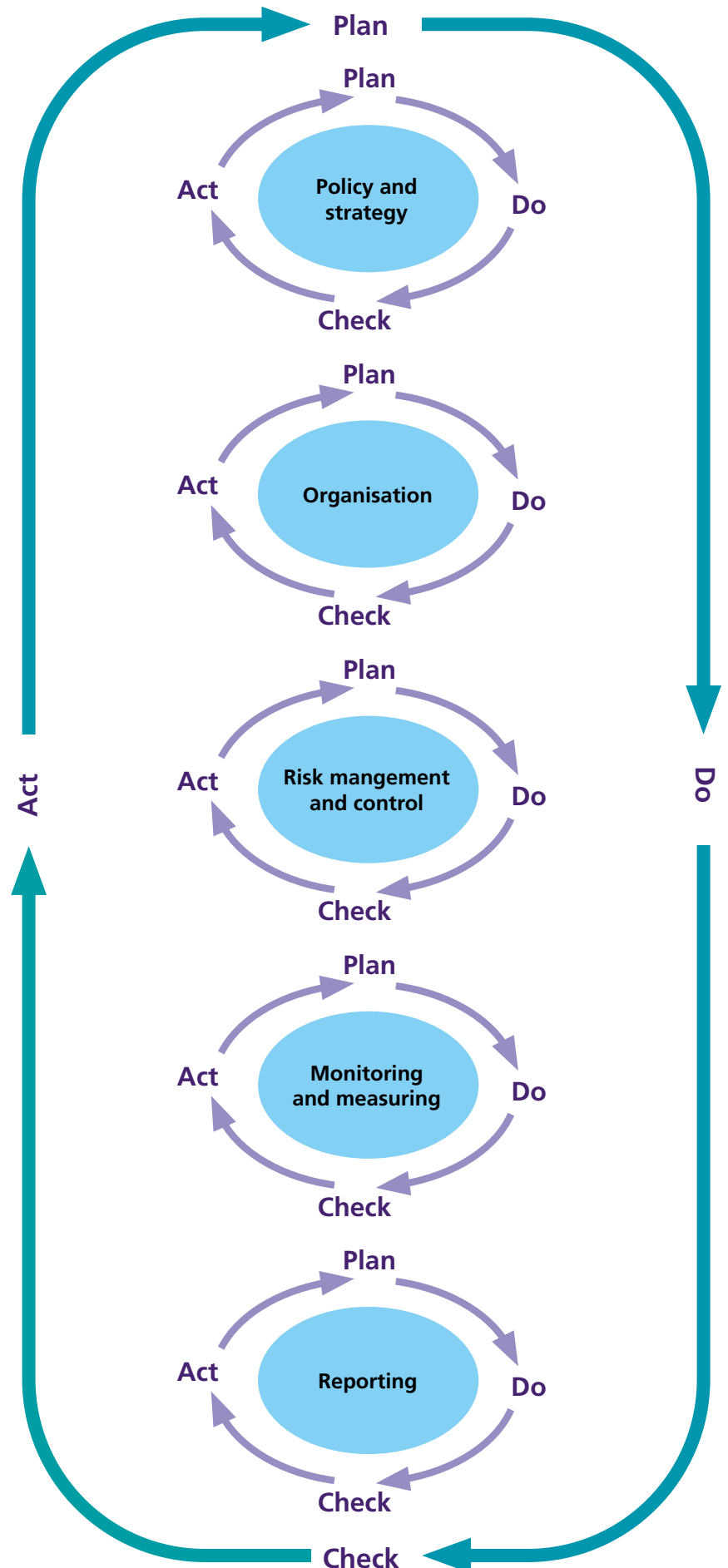


Figure 2: IOSH's 'Plan, Do, Check, Act' model

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The allocation of specific duties should make clear who is responsible for each part of the OSHMS. This is depicted in Figure 3.

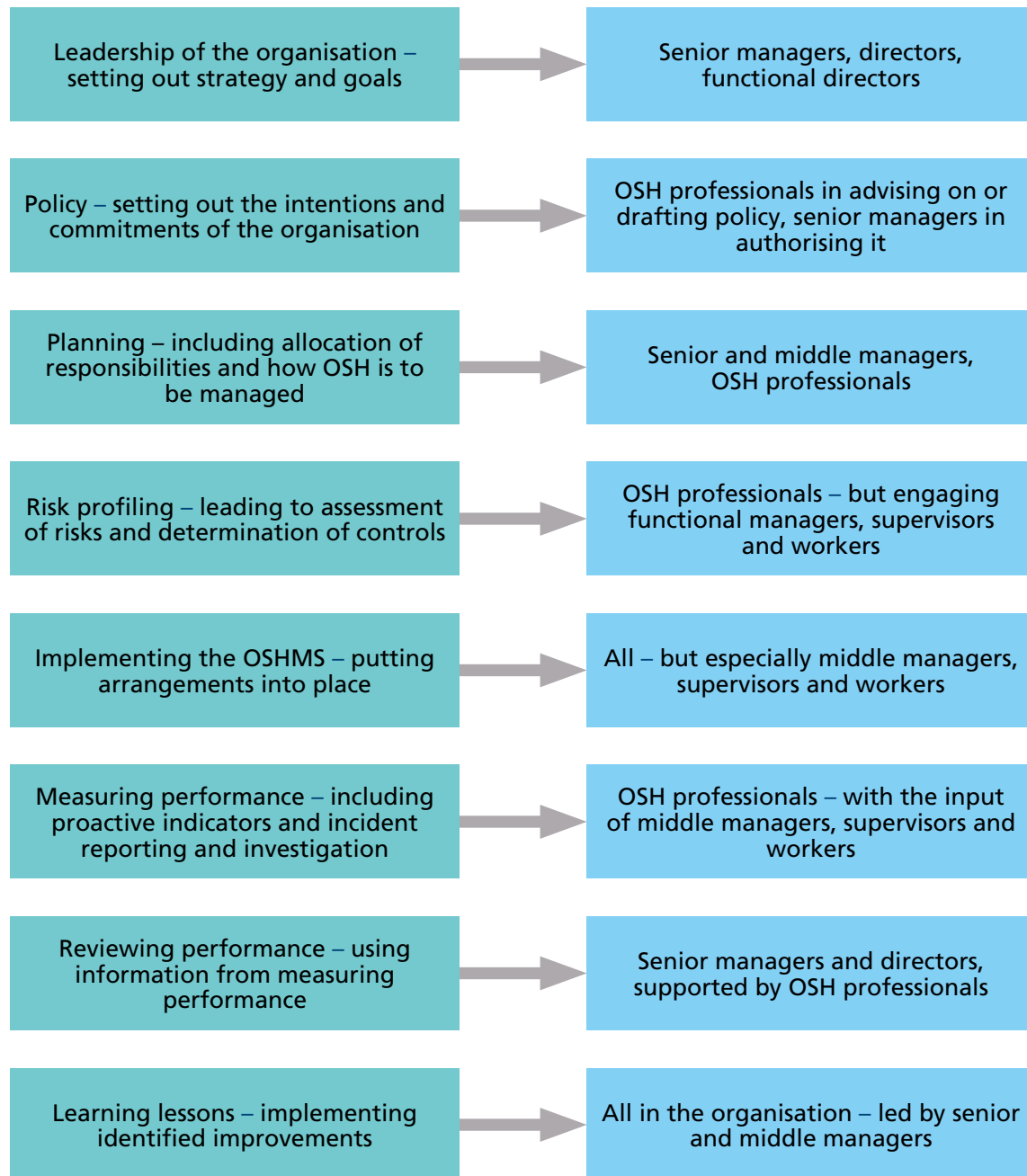


Figure 3: Roles in an occupational safety and health management system

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Failures in carrying out responsibilities, or their neglect, have resulted not only in injury to workers and losses for the organisation but also, in serious cases, the organisation itself ceasing to exist.

Without good leadership, the effective management of OSH will not permeate through the organisation. Senior managers need to demonstrate visible leadership, taking an active part in setting goals for the organisation and facilitating their achievement. They need to lead by example.

Without a clear and credible policy, the organisation will lack direction in the management of OSH. In consultation with managers and workers, OSH professionals need to create aspirational but realistic policies.

Without the effective treatment of risks, the organisation will not understand what it needs to do, and why. Whilst the assessment of risks should be led by OSH professionals, all those involved in working with the risks should contribute to this process. Realistic assessments and workable controls should result from such activities.

If all managers and workers don't play their part in implementing the OSHMS, measuring and learning from success and failure, compliance with OSH requirements will be ad hoc. It will rely on the expertise of some individuals who could be sabotaged in their efforts by the omissions of others.

Managers should direct the implementation of the OSHMS and monitor its effectiveness. Workers should comply with requirements to keep themselves, others and the organisation in general as safe as reasonably practicable. They should also provide feedback to managers on the continued suitability of the OSHMS.

Governance

As an additional means of determining good OSH management, governance can be defined as balancing the interests of an organisation's many stakeholders. For example:

- **managers and workers** – to ensure their protection against risks
- **shareholders** – who will want to know that the organisation is being run in a responsible manner

- **customers** – who will want to know that they are trading with a responsible organisation
- **suppliers** – who will need reassurance on the sustainability of the organisation
- **financiers** – who will have a vested interest in the viability of the organisation
- **government** – who will want to know that the organisation complies with legal requirements
- **the community the organisation is part of** – which will want to know that it is not put at risk.

Governance is concerned with structures and processes that ensure accountability and transparency in reporting mechanisms, responsiveness to internal and external factors, legal compliance, stability, equity and the participation of workers.

Such requirements apply equally to OSH and organisational systems should seek to ensure good practice in this area as well as purely financial considerations. Organisations should address all areas of risk that they face, and OSH compliance and good practice are just two aspects of this.

Further considerations

Good OSH management depends not only on the involvement of managers, but also on worker participation, to utilise the skills and knowledge of the workforce and encourage ownership of the system by all.

Good management of OSH should sit alongside other aspects of an organisation, rather than exist as an add-on to other business practices.

Successes in managing OSH should be recognised and celebrated, whilst efforts should be made to learn from incidents where things went wrong.

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