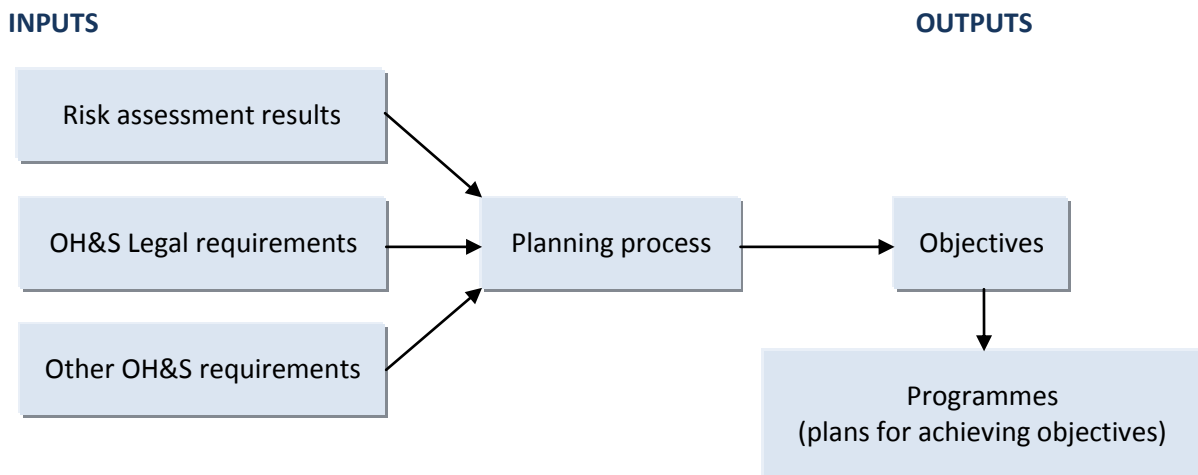


## The importance of planning in health and safety

Planning in health and safety is a process well specified in BS OHSAS 18001 and it is summarised in the diagram below.

**Figure 1 – The BS OHSAS 18001 planning process**



However, it is our experience that health and safety professionals rarely follow this well specified process. If they plan at all, it is usually in response to immediate health and safety concerns and how to deal with them. In other words, planning is reactive in response to problems arising, rather than proactive in the long term interests of the organisation.

It can be argued that the need for reactive planning means that there is no time for proactive planning. However, in our view, it is the lack of proactive planning that produces the need for reactive planning and what follows is a description of the sorts of problems we have encountered with each of the elements in the diagram above.

### Risk assessment

We have found that organisations do not make effective use of risk assessment for a number of reasons including the following.

The definition of risk is unclear so that people are basing their assessments on different views of what constitutes likelihood and severity.

The motivation for risk assessment is to satisfy legal requirements, not to reduce the organisation's risks.

The people who have to carry out the risk assessments do not have the time or the competence to do them properly.

Results of risk assessments do not get used and suggested risk control measures do not get implemented.



These problems are of course inter-related – the lack of a clear definition of risk makes it difficult to define competence in risk assessment, and the lack of competence means that results are poor, making them less likely to be implemented.

## Legal requirements

Our experience here is that although compliance with health and safety legislation is included in almost all organisations' health and safety policies, few organisations have a clear idea of what health and safety legislation applies to them, and we have yet to come across an organisation that measures its compliance with health and safety legislation.

## Other health and safety requirements

Our experience here is that the majority of health and safety professionals have not even considered incorporating other health and safety requirements in their safety management system. Examples of 'other requirements' are:

- trade association schemes such as Considerate Contractor,
- a trade certification scheme such as CHAS,
- general schemes such as Investors In People,
- UKAS accredited schemes such as 9001
- self declared standards above minimum legal requirements which a lot of organisations adopt.

The failure to take into account other health and safety requirements results in a variety of problems including:

- the requirements being dealt with by people who are not competent to do so,
- the requirements being overlooked completely, or
- duplication of work with health and safety personnel and non-health and safety personnel dealing with the same requirements.

## Planning process

Typically, there is no planning process. The most straightforward planning process is described in the next two sections.

## Objectives

In BS OHSAS 18001 the aim of setting objectives is to ensure continual improvement. While it is often necessary in the short term to set objectives that are intended to get things back to where they should be, this is a symptom of the reactive planning described earlier.

Setting objectives, therefore, involves establishing where we are now and using brainstorming or some other creative thinking process to come up with ways to improve. Sadly, in our experience, brainstorming is not usually needed in the early stages because the initial objectives are straightforward:

- establish how well we are carrying out risk assessments,
- identify the full range of health and safety legislation with which we have to comply,



establish how well we are complying with this legislation,  
establish what, if any, other health and safety requirements apply, and  
establish how well we are complying with these requirements.

## Programmes

The details of the programmes will, of course, depend on the nature of the objectives but they should all be set out in the form of standards, that is, who should do what, when and with what result. Vague statements like 'risk assessments will be reviewed annually' and 'the organisation will comply with all relevant legislation' are completely inadequate. More appropriate are:

All first line managers will review their risk assessments annually and make revisions as necessary.

All first line managers will keep up to date with the health and safety legal requirements that apply to their area of responsibility.

All first line managers will ensure that all relevant health and safety legal requirements are complied with at all times.

## Conclusion

We see a lot of reactive planning – at its worst it's panic planning. What we do not see is planning as set out in BS OHSAS 18001. Usually organisations have unrecognised fundamental problems with their risk assessment procedure and we can help with these if you want to set a proactive objective of improving your organisation's risk assessment.

In addition, organisations usually have a poor idea of the details of the health and safety legal legislation that applied to them or how well they are complying with this legislation. We can also help with this – our Legal Register service will keep you up to date with the legislation that applies to you, and our CHASE Legal Modules service will enable you to measure how well you are complying.

Please get in touch if you think we can help with any aspect of your health and safety planning.



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