

Less is more: proportionate implementation of ISO 45001

To coin a phrase – less is more. While this was originally the motto adopted by architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in support of minimalist design, in today's world it's more commonly used to refer to something less complex and therefore easier to understand.

We're certainly not suggesting that meeting new quality management standards should be considered a simple endeavor, but it certainly doesn't need to be a complex one. For some organisations however, the prospect might seem like a daunting task.

Earlier this year RoSPA played a vital part in the phenomenal effort that resulted in the launch of ISO 45001. While the wording has been carefully crafted, there's always the possibility that 'selling the message' poses a challenge – so we're taking a moment to rewind and break-down the first principles of the new standard into a simple and less complex format, allowing for proportionate implementation:

[BREAK]

Content

Implementing is a 'doing' word, so organisations need to put the content of ISO 45001 into effect and make it work. The beauty of the standard is while it is global in nature, it also meets local needs and can be interpreted accordingly and proportionately to proactively improve employee safety.

Understanding

Understanding the context of your organisation underpins the process, articulating the circumstances that form the setting for who you are and what you do, and communicated in a way that can be fully understood.

Bringing together what's happening internally with what you 'look like' to your stakeholder network can also be advantageous – a simple mapping exercise to clarify this perhaps? But also bear in mind that organisations are not meant to be profitable at the expense of worker health and safety.

It's also important to align the understanding of the benefits of ISO 45001 across your organisation with an emphasis on leadership at all levels. There's been a significant dialogue around senior management leadership and perhaps much lip service, however the organisational change required by ISO 45001 will not be sustained by this type of approach.

Also bear in mind that while auditors will take a proportionate approach, they will base their decisions on the evidence presented/complied through interview. President & Founder of Global Solutions, Inc. [Kathy Seabrook](#) captured this perfectly when she noted: "If it's not documented anywhere, it's a rumour". If you're developing auditors in-house, also make sure to provide insights into 'how to' interview non OHS specialists.

Sustainability

Implementing [ISO 45001](#) will necessitate change within an organisation and with this, approaches to tackling issues will need to change and those changes will need to be sustainable – where sustainable means are able to be upheld or defended. There's no use trying to implement change that won't provide long term benefits and easily fall to the wayside.

Communication

How do you communicate? Do you ensure gender, language, culture, literacy are not barriers to understanding? How do you accommodate risk perception across the life course of an employee? Perhaps more focus on planning for change, appropriate communications evaluated to evidence worker engagement?

We're not suggesting that for every risk assessment there should be an opportunities assessment, however the latter is hugely beneficial in adding OHS to the wider business development conversation. One topic in particular that's climbing up the agenda is workforce planning, within the context of an ageing global population and the importance of sustainable working lives.

Reflection

Take time to reflect on 'rumour vs reality' as your progress towards ISO 45001. More often than not businesses feel they need to make changes which aren't necessary or relevant to their needs – it's therefore important to consider the proportionality of the changes implemented rather than taking a broad view. As mentioned by [Martin Cottam](#), Lloyd's Register and Chair of BSI S1 committee: *"ISO 45001 is to assist organisations to develop themselves as opposed to meeting the demands of external auditors"*.

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