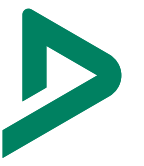


WHITE PAPER

No Secret Formulas: Tailoring EHS Staffing Optimization for Your Organization



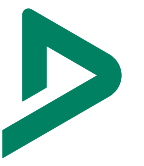
..“determining the ideal level of EHS resources is often more an art than a science.”

Nearly every conference, meeting, or event involving peer organizations inevitably involves a conversation about “How big is your safety team? Who does your environmental team report to? How many industrial hygienists do you have?” And this is almost certainly followed by “How big is your organization?” As EHS professionals, we love to point to benchmarks and to compare metrics. But what we really want, because it seems so simple, is the answer to “What is the right ratio of EHS professionals to employees” and “How does my team compare?”—especially when we can position that data to support our hypothesis of what it takes to deliver best-in-class EHS performance.

Unfortunately, there is no widely accepted ideal or even centerline ratio of EHS professional to organizational employees. Just as there is no “one” organizational structure, no one acceptable risk profile, no common level of EHS maturity, and no one leadership style. While some benchmarking data is available—for a fee—industry-wide research into EHS staffing hasn’t taken hold. This may be

because needs vary so widely given the range of industries and the dynamic nature of organizations. Even within the same organization, one location’s staffing resource needs may vary greatly from the next, and today’s needs may not be the same as next year’s. As one large chemical manufacturer concluded, after conducting a detailed yearlong effort to understand its EHS resource needs, “determining the ideal level of EHS resources is often more of an art than a science.”

We lean more toward science, utilizing a systematic analysis of four key organizational characteristics to frame the need and to enable a well-thought-out, effective approach. These are: what you do, who owns what EHS responsibility, how is your business organized, and what are your overall EHS goals. Considering these factors in the context of your organization will inform your thinking and discussion of what your EHS organization should look like. Let’s consider each one.



What do you do?

As an operating entity, you have inputs, processes, and outputs. It's important to think about the associated hazards and risks and their proximity to individuals who might be affected throughout this life cycle. This positions us to understand the exposure of people in and around your operation, leading to a tally of the EHS activities that need to be addressed, as well as perhaps recognizing some issues not previously identified. In other words, what needs to be done is the first key driver of EHS workload.

To better frame this understanding, think about the following:

- **Tasks.** What are the tasks performed? Consider how they happen, including the conditions, variability, frequency, and criticality of the tasks, as well as how these factors are managed.

- **Materials and equipment.** What are the materials used and the risk characteristics of those materials? Where and how much are workers or automation involved? What are the conditions and reliability of equipment?
- **Workforce.** Who's doing the work? What sort of experience and skill is needed? To what degree are contractors used? Are tasks repetitive? Is the level of supervision high, or are workers expected to work with high independence?

A thorough understanding of what you do provides a corresponding understanding of risks and exposures to incidents, as well as how (if) they are controlled (managed) to an acceptable level. Implementing and sustaining adequate controls is key to operating your business within an acceptable risk envelope. Having adequate and effective resources to do so is table stakes for assuring sound operations within your EHS envelope of acceptable risk.



▶ **The general principle here is that the higher the unmitigated risks and exposures, the more human resources you need to manage them.**

However, keep in mind two factors that may temper those resource needs:

- First is technology, everyone's go-to resource. Technology has a valuable role, but it must be used as intended, with the outputs clearly understood. When this truly happens technology and new AI tools can greatly reduce the information processing and distribution burden of the EHS team.
- Second is the degree to which EHS risk and exposure ownership is internalized by everyone in the organization. When this happens to the maximum everyone has their hands on EHS performance, taking care of routine tasks as part of their core business and operational functions. Read on—this is discussed further under “Who owns what EHS responsibility?” and “What are your EHS goals?”

Who owns what EHS responsibility?

This question considers the environmental, health, and safety aspects across the range of tasks that make up the organization. The general principle here is that to the greater degree EHS aspects are owned at the operational interface

where “hands are on tools,” the more EHS staffing resources are freed to function differently, taking on an advisory role in support of broader portions of the organization.

When non-safety supervisors, and even the individuals or teams responsible for tasks (such as operations, maintenance, engineering, and front-line workers), own more of the responsibility for performing those tasks both safely and according to EHS requirements, the role of EHS personnel morphs. EHS professionals move from “policing” rules to “enabling” removal of barriers that impede performance and innovation in the operation. By leveraging the deep knowledge and pride of workers to perform tasks effectively companies position themselves to create and sustain greater efficiencies and innovation.

For example, the “What do you do?” discussion above could be thought and rethought in ways that fully remove exposure. This in turn negates the need for mid-level controls that previously hindered process efficiency.

Think of it as moving from a conformance/compliance oversight role to a partnering model. Typically, in the advisory partner role, fewer EHS personnel would be required due to efficiencies gained in cross-sharing at scale and less re-work through point-of-work implementation.

Note that the EHS team requires some different skill sets in these evolving models, so you'll need to consider that as part of managing the change.

A caution: Watch out for instances where an organization says their EHS team is advisory, but in practice responsibility for EHS at the operational interface is not fully implemented. In this case the workload of both the EHS team and the task work-teams may increase, leading to performance inefficiency and a need for even more EHS personnel.





How are you organized?

What is the breadth and depth of your organization and how does that translate into the operating philosophy? Consider: Are you a single location or a global operation? Do you have a consistent product and production process or are there many products, perhaps varying seasonally? Are you vertically integrated or do you have a dynamic supply chain? These considerations contribute to the regulatory and cultural complexity of your organization and raise issues regarding where you need what sorts of EHS resources.

Another consideration is how your business as a whole is organized. Is it very flat or are there multiple layers of reporting? Flat organizations tend to distribute higher autonomy to the businesses. Organizing EHS in line with the overall organizational philosophy has the benefit of aligning reporting expectations, organizational culture, and control of actions. The caution here is that certain EHS skills are quite

specialized, and the need at any location might be transitory (e.g., industrial hygiene or air emissions permitting) and best filled at a higher level across part or all of the organization.

Also consider the business's conformance profile—in other words, the scope of requirements you must meet. For example, the number and type of regulations applicable to nuclear operations are quite different from those applying to manufacturing facilities. "What you do" at any given facility will influence the regulatory jurisdiction and requirements. In addition, if an organization or facility also subscribes to voluntary standards, such as ISO, API, etc., complexity may further increase.

Keep in mind that certain of these organizing principles may specify EHS credentials for those fulfilling certain conformance tasks. Where such requirements exist, they will directly affect staffing and organizing decisions.

The general takeaway here is that the span, hierarchy, and conformance profile of the organization provides a variety of influences on EHS team needs. Take those into consideration, but more importantly map them to an EHS governance system that both facilitates the smooth and coordinated operation of the EHS team and assures visibility into, and integration and alignment with, the business operations.

Finally, what are your EHS goals?

Achieving EHS goals really comes down to where you want to go and how fast you want to get there. (Or perhaps you are already where you want to be.) Directed change requires effort, and to be successful such effort requires the right mix of knowledge, skill, and capacity. Resources are often a limiting factor in driving organizational change. The skill mix and number of those resources can change substantially and often lag behind the need.

At lower-performing levels, compliance may be a challenge responded to with considerable oversight and corresponding high staffing—especially in response to highly negative events.

▶ **As an organization advances its maturity, and leadership owns and values EHS, the function of EHS resources will often change toward more specialized skills around coaching, strategic planning, and innovation.**

These specialized individuals will often be offset by a reduced need for intense staffing devoted to compliance oversight.

The general principle here is that when thinking along an EHS maturity continuum, staffing resource needs will change in capacity and ability at each phase.

- The least mature will see EHS as an obstruction to business and have very few, and potentially poorly paid, EHS individuals on staff.
- As an organization establishes and leans into goals that progress from EHS compliance to higher-level EHS performance, it is likely to create the need for additional EHS capacity, hence greater staffing internally, often with specialty contract support.

- Finally, organizations at best-in-class or world-class EHS performance value EHS responsibility at every level. Here the EHS team is an expert strategic partner, enabling leaders throughout the organization to drive excellence from inside their core business functions. With EHS responsibility owned throughout the organization, EHS resources may again decline, but tend to consist of highly knowledgeable individuals equally comfortable in both EHS and business aspects.

Bottom Line: Your EHS staffing optimization is just that, yours

Every business is on a journey, every business is dynamic. Effective EHS teams are also dynamic and must continuously align with their business and the business environment. Whether needs are fulfilled in-house or through outside services (short and intermediate term) it is critical to anchor on the characteristics of the needs necessary to maintaining this alignment. And keep in mind that while it's useful to hear and see what others are doing, your organization has its own unique mix of internal and external influences on your EHS performance. Take some time and consider the four organizational characteristics discussed, and how they might influence your EHS staffing. Use these characteristics to frame your EHS resource needs for achieving your vision and to optimize your journey to excellence.





¹ "In search of benchmarks," ISHN, June 1, 2006. <https://www.ishn.com/articles/86020-in-search-of-benchmarks>

² Samantha Connell, Todd Hogue, and Laurence Pearlman, "Rightsizing an EHS Workforce: How Many Professionals Are Needed in Your Organization," The Synergist, May 2022. <https://synergist.aiha.org/202205-rightsizing-ehs-workforce>



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