

Eight steps to merging

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Behavior-based safety & ergonomics

Behavior-based safety (BBS) approaches should naturally incorporate ergonomic improvements relating to tools, materials and equipment processes. It's a powerful combination of best practices. BBS focuses on participation, measurement and the use of performance feedback. Ergonomics largely uses engineering principles to improve the employee-work interface.

But if you haven't built ergonomic advances into your BBS efforts, or haven't started a BBS process, where do you begin? For a bit of help, let's take a look at eight steps to integrate behavioral safety and ergonomics.

Assessing and planning

Step one: A climate assessment or employee sensing sessions for ergonomics and a baseline assessment of current ergonomic efforts is a must.

If you're not using ergonomic technologies now available, you're only fooling yourself into thinking that changing behaviors alone will lead to substantial success. Basic engineering and administrative controls must be in place, and recommendations must be made, if a BBS intervention is to be successfully integrated with your own ergonomic efforts.

Look at it this way: If you have serious physical hazards present — and no engineering controls in place — behavioral observations will awaken the negative emotions of what will become a very cynical workforce. So step one becomes a go/no-go decision point for implementation. Do you have the basics in place?

Step two: Key stakeholders throughout your organization need to be made aware of critical findings found in step one assessments in order to advance ergonomics along with BBS as an integrated process.

From here, it's important to develop a strategic action plan for any challenges that may exist.

Before moving forward, managers and other leaders have to determine more fully if they can commit to making the right kinds of ergonomic improvements along with incorporating key components of a robust BBS process.

Step Three: Goals and other measures for your integrated approach must be established early on in the process.

Some goals and objectives can include lagging indicators such as incidence and severity rates and workers' compensation costs. More proactive measures gained from your ergonomic climate work can include improved employee cooperation, supervisory support, and improvements in morale. And of course, your BBS process will systematically measure the rate of safe performance (in percentage terms) before injuries occur. This will lead to appropriate improvement goals group by group.

You can also measure improvements relating to various aspects of worker productivity and quality gained through both ergonomic and BBS enhancements.

Educating and implementing

Step Four: You must educate and orient all employees in the principles and positive aspects of BBS approaches and ergonomics. Each worker must understand that tools and equipment must be properly used to gain the most complete ergonomic advantage possible. Without training, poor postures and work habits can persist even with the best-designed ergonomic tools and equipment.

Leadership seminars for management and working teams should include the presentation of good theory, information that merges theory and application, roles and responsibilities, managing ongoing improvement, and the use of performance data.

Step Five: Your workforce needs to be directly involved in developing observation tools in order to gather data regarding the rate of safe performance.

Tools should be adaptable to peer-to-peer, supervisor to employee, and self-observation. Train your employees to objectively make use of observation tools to gather baseline data and later for one-on-one and group feedback. With today's digital technologies, behavioral definitions completed in narrative form can be enhanced with graphic images. These visuals can assist both your observers and general workforce to better understand the ergonomically oriented actions that need to be

changed.

Step Six: Conduct additional skills training for supervisors and peers who will be doing observations and providing feedback.

These seminars must highlight the use of positive techniques for individual and group coaching sessions. Stress and evaluate the proper use of observation and data management tools. These tools positively reinforce desired actions and bring about positive changes in underlying attitudes.

Step Seven: Kick-off meetings are ready to begin. Much of the groundwork has been laid: assessment, buy-in, planning, education, and baseline data has been gathered. Present this information at your kick-off meeting. And now is the time for leaders to speak about the positive theme — as opposed to punitive measures — that will carry through this integrated process. These same people, among others, must believe in the approach and convey their support for a long-term process that will bring your organization closer to their vision of excellence in safety.

Following up

Step Eight: Throughout the year you need to regularly assess the process you've put in place to ensure alignment with various ergonomic and BBS principles and overall health and safety procedures.

Audit and assess the quality and quantity of performance feedback. This is integral to the success of your BBS efforts.

In terms of ergonomics, assess the efficiency of procurement controls for tools and equipment, training, and medical monitoring. This is very important, especially if written policies exist for these practices.

Regularly assessing your integrated BBS-ergonomics process and keeping it aligned with principles and procedures will make the time and effort you put into merging these best practices very worthwhile!