

Creating a Culture of Safety

ENGAGING EVERYONE IN YOUR
MSD SOLUTIONS PROGRAM



A Company's Culture is Determined by Its People

Company culture is the foundation of a MSD solutions program, and everyone in an organization has a role to play.

- **Company leaders** set vision, aligning safety with business success
- **Managers** lead by example, build trust, and identify and mitigate hazards
- **Frontline workers** use safety practices, execute work and face workplace hazards

Use this guide to mobilize company-wide participation in your MSD solutions program, with considerations for the unique roles and responsibilities of members at all levels across your organization.

A background image of two chefs in a kitchen, wearing white uniforms and hats, with a green overlay. One chef is holding a large white bowl.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

Identify an MSD Solutions Leadership Sponsor

02

Designate an MSD Solutions Champion

03

Convene an MSD Solutions Team

04

Solicit Company-Wide Input

05

Mobilize Company-Wide Action

06

Evaluate Your Culture of Safety

07

Maintain a People-Focused Approach

Identify an MSD Solutions Leadership Sponsor

Identify a leader in your organization to serve as the executive or leadership sponsor for your MSD solutions program. This individual will provide overall support for your MSD solutions program, remove barriers that are encountered, facilitate the resolution of any issues that arise, and serve as the conduit to the top leadership team in your organization for your MSD solutions program.

Qualities of an MSD Sponsor:

- ☐ Good listener
- ☐ Problem solver
- ☐ Influencer
- ☐ Communicates effectively

Designate an MSD Solutions Champion

Designate and empower a champion within your company to manage and oversee your organization's MSD solution program. You may designate this role to an existing member of your organization or hire for a new position specifically tasked with this responsibility.

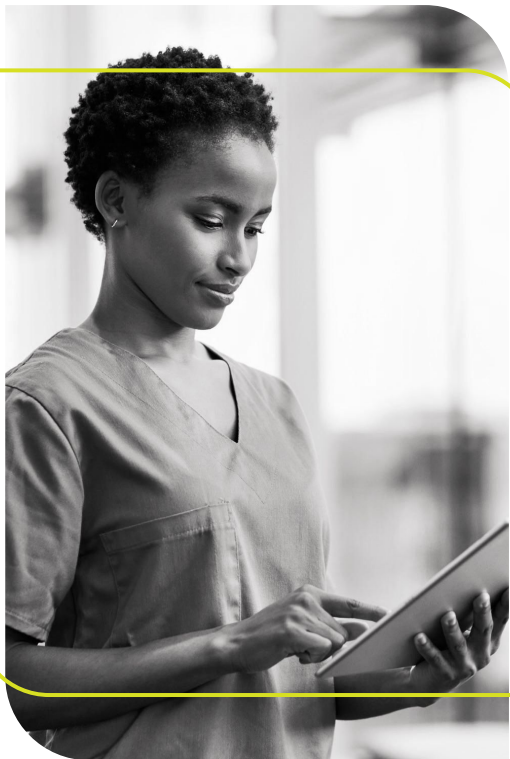
Qualities of an MSD Champion:

- ☐ Conveys authority
- ☐ Expresses empathy
- ☐ Builds trust and rapport
- ☐ Communicates effectively
- ☐ Has capacity to serve

Role of the MSD Solutions Champion

Your MSD solutions champion should be well equipped to:

- Develop a comprehensive MSD solutions program tailored to your company's needs that includes initiatives to address existing MSD risks, prevents the introduction of new MSD risks, and ensures proper care of employees who experience MSDs.
- Collaborate with and coordinate among different internal departments and external stakeholders
- Present to and influence leadership
- Use multiple data sources including workers' compensation data, injury and illness statistics, and employee exposure data to inform hazard assessments
- Conduct workplace assessments to identify and evaluate MSD risks
- Solicit employee and worker input on both risks and solutions.
- Review the latest public health, legal and safety considerations that can inform the development of your company's MSD solutions program
- Review best practice recommendations and ROIs of ergonomic interventions within your industry
- Budget for and invest in evidence-based and innovative solutions
- Monitor and gather evidence for the effectiveness of solutions implemented



Convene an MSD Solutions Team

All organizations should have a structured process for labor (worker) and management collaboration on safety and MSD prevention. Larger organizations should consider an MSD solutions team or task force, charged with identifying, prioritizing, and mitigating (developing solutions for) MSD risks across your company. Some companies may consider multiple teams with responsibility for specific departments.

When starting your MSD solutions program, begin by considering the stakeholders who should be at the table. Ask yourself:

- ☐ Who is impacted by the issues you are trying to solve?
- ☐ Who are the experts (internal and external)?
- ☐ Who are the decision makers?
- ☐ Who communicates organizational changes?
- ☐ Who is responsible for implementing changes?
- ☐ Who is responsible for ensuring adherence to safety protocols?

Define the Core Team

Convene a core MSD solutions team consisting of 6-12 diverse members representing different departments, functions, shifts, and organizational levels within your company. Charge the team with identifying, prioritizing, and mitigating (developing solutions for) MSD risks across your company. Establish a regular rhythm for meeting that allows for participation of all team members.

MSD Solutions Champion

Charge your champion to convene and lead meetings and set agendas. Your champion should understand and share information about MSD risks and best-practice solutions with the team, and facilitate a team approach to decision making.

Workers

Worker involvement is essential. Workers have the most complete understanding of how work is done and the associated MSD risks. Invite workers from different departments, job categories, and shifts to participate on the team.

Managers

Include managers over teams with varying responsibilities who can speak to broader operational challenges experienced by your organization.

Front Line Supervisors

Include front line supervisors from the areas or jobs with the greatest MSD risks. Front line supervisors play an important role in the successful implementation of MSD solutions as they are ideally positioned to coach workers on the consistent use of MSD solutions.

Invite Additional Stakeholders

A MSD Solutions team's make up will vary across companies. Your team may include members from a few or all of the following stakeholders. Consider if any of these stakeholders should be a part of your core, ongoing MSD solutions team. Invite additional ex-officio members to consult on an as-needed basis.

Safety Professionals

Engage safety professionals who specialize in ergonomic solutions and risk management.

Healthcare Professionals

Solicit consultation from healthcare professionals who specialize in MSD injuries. Establish collaborative protocols for job inspections, incorporating safety recommendations and creating return-to-work plans.

Human Resources

Include members who are responsible for writing and enforcing company policy, resolving employee complaints, assisting with accommodations and allocating company benefits.

Engineering Team

The expertise of your engineering team may be leveraged when generating solutions to reduce or minimize MSD risks.

Maintenance Workers

Like engineers, the expertise of your maintenance workers may be very helpful when generating solutions to reduce or minimize MSD risks.

Employee Resource Groups

Employee resource groups, or affinity groups are well positioned to represent the unique needs of the workers they represent.

Solicit Employee Input

Your company's MSD champion and/or MSD solutions team should make decisions that reflect the needs and priorities of employees from across your organization. Implement a plan to regularly collect and respond to input from workers on existing job risks, solicit ideas for risk mitigation, and request feedback on any solutions previously implemented. You can distribute company wide surveys, engage focus groups and set up 1:1 conversations. Or, you can use a combination of these strategies.

Foster a culture of transparent communication by sharing findings back with your employees. You can share results via:

- ☐ Company email
- ☐ Dedicated website
- ☐ Team meetings
- ☐ Town halls
- ☐ Bulletin boards

Option 1: Survey Your Employees

Use employee questionnaires and discomfort surveys to gain a basic understanding of the MSD risk in your operations and evaluate the broader climate of worker well-being. It is best to work with a survey or research professional to ensure proper methodology and interpretation of results. Use initial findings to identify areas for further assessment.

Choose the tools that are appropriate for your work environments and tasks. A few of the many MSD and worker well-being assessment tools available are provided below. Reach out to the NSC team for additional screening or assessment tools, or support with your selections.

MSD Risk Screening Tools

[Nordic Musculoskeletal Questionnaire](#)

[Borg Rating of Perceived Exertion \(RPE\)](#)

[Cornell Musculoskeletal Discomfort Questionnaire](#)

MSD Assessment Tools

[Quick Exposure Check \(QEC\)](#)

[OSHA Ergonomic Assessment Checklist](#)

[Liberty Mutual Manual Material Handling Tables \(SNOOK Tables\)](#)

[Rapid Upper Limb Assessment \(RULA\)](#)

Worker Well-being & Workplace Climate Assessment Tools

[NIOSH Worker Well-Being Questionnaire \(WellBQ\)](#)

[NIOSH Quality of Worklife Questionnaire](#)

[NHWP Health and Safety Climate Survey \(INPUTS™\)](#)

[Dimensions of Corporate Integration](#)

[Workplace Integrated Safety and Health \(WISH\) Assessment](#)

[NSC Employee Perception Surveys](#)



Option 2: Conduct Focus Groups

You can convene designated focus groups by inviting employees from across your organization or you can create opportunities to engage existing groups at your organization.

- ❑ Designate focus groups with invitations to employees across all levels and divisions of the organization
- ❑ Visit an established team meeting
- ❑ Schedule conversations with employee resource groups
- ❑ Convene a town hall meeting

Pro Tip: You can work with these same focus groups to develop or review a collaborative action plan based on results gathered from initial conversations.

A woman in a wheelchair is engaged in a conversation with a man at a table. The woman is smiling and looking at the man, who is also smiling and looking at her. They are both holding papers. The background is a blurred office or meeting room.

Option 3: Engage in Direct Conversations

Your MSD solutions champion and team should regularly meet directly with workers to engage in ongoing check-ins and understand their current work environment. Front line supervisors and managers should have an open channel for communication with the workers.

- ❑ Invite workers to collaborate on walk throughs or site inspections with your MSD solutions champion or team members.
- ❑ Ask workers to share their insights about their jobs. Ask them to describe the most difficult tasks that they must perform and inquire about challenges and barriers they face.
- ❑ Educate managers on the value of observing work and encourage them to establish a regular rhythm of learning from workers about their jobs. Key findings regarding MSD risks from the conversations should be shared with the MSD solutions champion/team.

Mobilize Company-Wide Action

The responsibility for preventing and addressing MSDs should extend beyond your MSD Solutions Champion, MSD Solutions Team, and Safety Team. Instill a sense of stewardship across all levels of the organization to uphold company values and participate in safety protocols, including full adoption and usage of MSD Solutions.



Engage Company Leadership

Leaders set the tone for an organization's safety culture. Company leaders are responsible for:

- Instituting safety as a personal vow and organizational value
- Understanding the business value of preventing and addressing MSDs
- Understanding the risks employees take on to accomplish organizational tasks
- Actively inviting feedback from workers at all levels of the organization
- Modeling adherence to all safety policies, procedures and expectations
- Providing resources, including personnel, time and money to address safety and MSD risks.
- Cultivating a psychologically safe environment where workers feel a sense of inclusion in organizational decisions



Empower Managers and Front Line Supervisors to Uphold Safety and Ergonomics Standards

Managers and front line supervisors are the gatekeepers and conductors of information. They are responsible for representing company values to their team, communicating team needs back to leadership, and ensuring that safety protocols are properly and consistently executed in daily operations. Empower your managers and front line supervisors to:

- Follow all safety and health procedures
- Provide clear and timely updates on safety policies, procedures, goals, and program results
- Coach all workers to consistently and properly use all MSD Solutions
- Enforce safety rules
- Manage a safe work pace
- Ensure workers have necessary resources and materials to successfully and safely perform work
- Listen, involve, and advocate for workers
- Create a psychologically safe environment for workers to express their experiences and opinions about workplace safety



Involve and Include Workers

Your workers have the greatest insights into task processes, daily job hazards, and safety needs. They will also be the ones to implement any new safety or MSD prevention protocols. Involve employees early and often to learn about workplace hazards from their perspective, and to listen to their ideas for mitigating the hazards. Involving the workers in the hazard identification and mitigation processes will also increase worker buy-in for new protocols and MSD solutions.

- Educate employees on how to recognize early warning signs of MSD symptoms and workplace risk hazards
- Establish ongoing feedback systems for employees to report MSD signs and symptoms, job hazards, and improvement suggestions
- Include workers in safety teams, task forces, or other conversations about new safety and ergonomics initiatives to incorporate their perspectives and ideas
- Train employees regularly on new and existing safety protocols
- Solicit feedback on existing protocols and implemented changes and make modifications as necessary
- Recognize workers for following safety protocols, identifying sources of risk, and contributing in innovative solutions

Evaluate Your Culture of Safety

Set goals for workers, managers, and leaders to participate in safety and MSD prevention activities, speak up about job hazards, and contribute to innovative solutions. You can measure your workplace safety culture using [safety perception surveys](#). You may also evaluate your progress by with metrics that:

- Recognize and reinforce employee safety behaviors
- Assess completed training and education requirements on MSD risk recognition, reporting, and prevention for your workforce
- Track leadership safety communications
- Evaluate manager participation and support of safety activities, (walk arounds, safety observations and audits, follow up on worker reports, etc.)
- Track return on investment for new solutions implemented
- Track worker provided reports of near misses, safety suggestions, hazards, etc.
- Assess employee retention and job satisfaction
- Determine the effectiveness of your MSD Solutions Program through the [MSD Solutions Index](#)

**Don't forget to
share results with
your workforce!**

Maintain a People Focused Approach

People are at the core of your organization's safety culture. Foster a culture of open communication and engagement that extends to everyone in your organization.

- Encourage workers to report MSD injuries, early signs and symptoms of MSDs and job risks.
- Reduce fear of reporting by eliminating punitive measures and developing a constructive process of response, focused on improving safety.
- Reward workers for reporting.
- Involve workers in risk identification, prioritization and mitigation.
- Involve workers in incident reviews.
- Collaborate with workers to define corrective action plans and implementation.
- Follow up on corrective actions and sharing learnings with workers.

The HOP Approach

Human and Organizational Performance

(HOP) is a risk-based operating philosophy which recognizes that human error is inevitable, and that an organization's processes and systems (including leadership communication and response) greatly influence employee actions and choices. HOP provides a new way of looking at work, people, and the systems in which people get work done. It emphasizes that people are at the core of your organization's safety culture.

The HOP approach is framed by six key principles:

Everyone makes mistakes.

Error is normal. Everyone, even the best, brightest and hardest working employees make mistakes. Organizational design must anticipate human error and allow people to fail safely.

Workers are masters at adaptive problem solving.

Work procedures and expectations cannot fully anticipate and reflect the dynamic nature of work and the complexity of how work actually gets done. Workers' get work done successfully every day by adapting to the ever-changing nature of work.

Context drives worker actions, choices and decisions.

Context refers to organizational processes, values & incentives, and operational systems. People's actions, choices and decisions are not only influenced, but driven by the context that exists in the moment that they are performing work.

Leadership response to failure matters.

A punitive response by leaders when errors and failures happen will not only limit the communications about the current event, but will also stymie future communications and notifications of events and failures.

Blame fixes nothing.

Blame is the enemy of improvement. Blame silences communications, cuts off access to information, impedes learning and stifles improvement efforts.

Improvement happens through learning.

It is only after learning that true improvement can be achieved. Organizations with a learning culture learn from events as well as normal and unusually successful work. All levels of the organization build learning into their operating rhythms.

Inclusion fosters stewardship.

By involving the voices of your workforce at every step of building and implementing your MSD solutions plan, you can create a sustained culture of safety that permeates the heart of your organization.



References

Adapted from:

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