Risk Assessment Training - How to Approach and Achieve Success with Your Risk Assessment Training Program

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Introduction

Risk Assessment training should not be done in a vacuum, in other words – preparation, planning and design all need thoughtfulness in order for you training program to be successful. This paper will cover the upfront considerations that I believe will help you achieve success with your risk assessment training program, because it is more than conducting training, it is about introducing risk assessment in to the operations of your organization.

I’ll start with looking at the management structure, so we know what kind of environment we are working within, move on to certain aspects of training and then needs assessments. The needs assessment activities will address the maturity of the organizations risk management program and or OSHM program as well as provide input on where to start with the preliminary training planning and preparation. I’ll finish up with some change management consideration and conclude with a summary section.

Chapter 1

Management Structure

Training must take in to consideration, the management and organizational structure. In a simple model of the management function, it could be said to be comprised of 5 basic elements:

- Plan
- Organize
- Direct
- Control and
- Monitor

Organizational models and choices that are made in determining management structure as well as strategy include, but are not limited to these aspects as well:

- Formal/structured – otherwise – varies by division/objective/local
- Hierarchal – bureaucratic – autonomous – collaborative ~ competitive as well as - the nature of the objectives the firm pursues, all need consideration
- Motivation and reward (intrinsic versus extrinsic)
- Decision making – autocratic / democratic – centralized / decentralized
Why is it important to look into the management structure you might ask - well my interpretation of risk management and OSH management is that they are not management system in and of themselves, but are enhancements to the existing management system. So we must understand the management system we are working with, so we are operating from the same framework. This also means that one size does not fit all, so this paper is more of a guide to help you navigate the process to identify our organizations needs and how you might want to go about planning for the risk assessment training you want to roll out, properly plugged into the existing management system – with consideration for – roles, goals, procedures and very importantly to the mission of the organization.

Chapter 2

Training
There are many reasons organizations provide training to their employees, here are some common ones to consider:

• to foster growth and development
• to aid employees in contributing to the achievement of department goals and the organization’s mission and vision
• to build employee self-confidence and commitment
• to produce a measurable change in performance
• to bring about the desired changes that can solve a variety of problems
• to advance particular skill sets (I believe this is the area we are working within)

Always make sure to ask – is training the answer to meet the need. In this case, in order for risk assessment to be rolled out, a process must be identified and then that process taught to the folks who will be involved in it. For risk management and OSHM we need to establish a specialized vocabulary, introduce concepts that explain the processes that will be used, such as - risk identification, hazard/risk analysis, evaluation, mitigation and determine the effectiveness of control, to mention just a few. But possibly and more importantly, if we are to embark on a journey to embrace risk assessment as a process to improve decision making, we need to get it into a discussion about the fabric of how we think and do – i.e. how decisions are made, in the organization we work in/with. This will require indoctrination, policies and procedures, reporting relationships, accountabilities - all of which will require training. But it won’t happen just through training, it will require change management, so we’ll touch on that a little later.

Create context for employee training ▶ provide information for the employees about why the training they’ll be involved in is necessary. Make certain the employees understand the link between the training, his/her job and the goals of the organization. Further, indicate how rewards will be provided as well as recognition as a result of successful completion and application of the training. Determine how will transfer of learning (how the employees will be using their learning’s back on the job) take shape and how remedial training and turnover considerations will be addressed.

Assure that the training is relevant to the abilities of the employees being trained. This will require both a selection process for those who will be chosen to participate, with minimum competency levels established, as well as training that is targeted for the level of competencies of the attendees. While a spectrum of attendee competencies may exist, the wider the range, the more difficult it will be to engage the participants.

Establish training outcomes that are relevant to the organization and trainees, are measurable and will address the task as defined, needs special focus. With good direction and forethought, comes more effective implementation. The instructional objectives should include: knowledge based outcomes; skill based outcomes and; affective based outcomes. This combination, with thought put in to what the desired state will provide the guidance in the preparation stage that will prove to be well worth the time. Many
training programs are put together without proper planning, and are prone to failure, because they weren’t well conceived.

Chapter 3

Needs Assessment

A needs assessment will help us align our training outcomes with the organization’s mission.

Risk Management requires a top management mandate for ensuring its ongoing effectiveness as well as strategic and rigorous planning. To succeed, a risk assessment training program necessitates management’s commitment, understanding and support. So a few questions to ask in preparation for training include:

- Does upper management understand the risk management process and the role risk assessment plays in the execution of the discipline? We might call this “risk maturity”. To assess the current maturity of risk management in your organization let’s query:
  - Does management have a clear understanding of risk terminology?
  - Is risk management a process used in board decisions (and in the C Suite)?
  - How long has risk management been integrated into decision making?
  - What expertise has been brought in or hired to address risk management needs?
  - Is risk management part of the internal audit system?
  - Does the company have a risk manager?
  - Does the company have a risk register?
  - What risk management model is currently used?

This is a short list, but will help determine the state of risk management in the organization and determine if further top management buy in and training is needed prior to the implementation of the risk assessment process and role of out risk assessment training.

An alternative to the above initial query, especially if risk assessment training is being done in an OSHM (occupational safety and health management) context only, we might look into similar items with regards to OSHM maturity:

- What is the level of upper management support for OSHM? To assess the current maturity of OSHM in your organization let’s look into a few areas that will help define its maturity level:
  - What level of support does upper management provide to the OSHM program?
  - Is the OSHM program compliance driven or more risk based?
  - What organizational entity does OSHM report up through?
  - How would you describe OSHM in terms of structure:
    - Hierarchical or autonomous?
    - Integrated with environmental (other related disciplines), security or not
    - Seen as a resource or necessity
    - Is there a terminology or vocabulary that is needed specific to the discipline, and it is universally integrated into the culture?
    - Engages all levels of management or not
    - Engages all levels of workers or not
    - Is OSHM audited and if so how and by whom?
    - Does the company have an OSHM manager and or staff & specialists?
    - What OSHM model is currently in use?
Another short list, but it will help us determine the state of OSHM management in the organization and ordain if further management buy in and training is needed prior to the advancement of the risk assessment process and the roll out of risk assessment training.

The above items that address the state of risk management and OSHM will help us in developing the preliminary steps in a training needs assessment. Training that is not tied in to the fabric of the organization will fail over time. Training that enhances, and is designed to support the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization will be sustainable.

*Any item of significance from the above query(s) needs to be addressed before moving forward with the development and implementation of the risk assessment training program. This is so involved, that it would require another essay to address so suffice it to say, any weaknesses identified above is a possible show stopper. It is also so significant that it should make one stop and determine if the organization is ready for this type of project, and if not, determine what needs to take shape before proceeding.*

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So, if the organization is ready, let take a look at what planning is needed from a training perspective. The basis for developing training – specific to risk assessment (we’ll confine ourselves to the OSH risks in a particular facility/job site to keep this step as simple as possible) is to assure that the training program is relevant to the organization, is aligned with management objectives, is integrated at all levels of management and will significantly contribute to organizational effectiveness:

A. **determine training needs** ~ in this case – training groups of interdisciplinary stakeholders in assessing the OSH risks in a single plant/job site, using the risk assessment process espoused by ISO 31010;

B. **identify goals for the training** ~ that will provide the target audience with instructional outcomes that will prepare them to conduct risk assessment activities they deal with on a daily or routine basis;

C. **design learning objectives** ~ that will introduce risk management terminology, risk identification, risk analysis was well as risk evaluation principles and practices, that will provide the target audience with a minimum level of competence to perform risk assessments;

D. **conduct training** ~ delivered by risk assessment practitioners who have the ability to train as well as impart risk assessment concepts and administer practice exercises to participants that develop a minimum level of competence in performing risk assessments;

E. **determine the effectiveness of the training** ~ involving comprehension and demonstration of the practical application of risk assessment skills and processes and;

F. **revising the training program** ~ based on feedback from employees, supervisors, and others, utilizing transfer of learning exercises (practical on the job application of learning outcomes once trainees return to their jobs) with risk assessment homework assignments that are vetted by the trainers or other team of specialist, as well as conducting post training surveys and interviews to gather information on how the program can be improved.

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**Chapter 4**

**Change Management**

Change management considerations (*after the needs assessment considerations noted in italics above*) should include:
If additional management training is needed to get the level of integration suggested above, conduct that training before proceeding. Let’s look at a few items to consider that will be important to do in a beforehand stage:

- Too often participants are asked to attend training programs and their superiors are not informed about what the expectations are for the participants when they return to their regular duties;
- Then also, participants may not have a good grasp of what the training programs they will be attending are designed to do, and what is expected of them;
- And – up the chain of command, middle managers and executives either have their own concept of what is taking place in their facility, without any effort made to clue them in. They might make things up in the vacuum, so be prepared to fill them in, in a manner that both educates them and obtains their buy in.

With these ideas in mind, a communication scheme needs to be devised to not only to prepare each of these audiences with information about what is taking shape, but to get their cooperation - that what is to take place (in this instance risk assessment) is worthwhile and beneficial to their specific operation or group as well as will benefit the organization. It will also be important to have them understand that it will take the stakeholders/attendees involved - time in training as - well as during initial implementation - which must be taken in to account. There will need to be adjustments in assignments to allow for the training and implementation following the training. At some point, risk assessment will become integrated in to operations, as a means to make better decisions and in the planning for success of production and the delivery of services. This will take time and perseverance.

Another way to look at this project is to see it as “operational strategy” vs. flavor of the month or some kind of intervention. When risk assessment is imbedded into the fabric of the organization, and the basis for balanced decision-making, you’ll have arrived.

Chapter 5

Summary

If the objective of this project is to make your organization stronger, or to enhance the robustness of your OSHM program through risk assessment practices, you will likely be able to get these results with proper management & organizational considerations, planning effectively for the training and using change management to prepare and implement risk assessment in your company. I thought that I would conclude here with reasons why this is a worthwhile endeavor. From the introduction to ISO 3100 Risk Management Standard (adopted in 2011 as ANSI/ASSE Z-690) [1]

“When implemented and maintained in accordance with this standard, the management of risk enables an organization to, for example:

- increase the likelihood of achieving objectives;
- encourage proactive management;
- be aware of the need to identify and treat risk throughout the organization;
- improve the identification of opportunities and threats;
- comply with relevant legal and regulatory requirements and international norms;
- improve mandatory and voluntary reporting;
- improve governance;
- improve stakeholder confidence and trust;
- establish a reliable basis for decision making and planning;
- improve controls;
- effectively allocate and use resources for risk treatment;
- improve operational effectiveness and efficiency;
- enhance health and safety performance, as well as environmental protection;
improve loss prevention and incident management;
minimize losses;
improve organizational learning; and
improve organizational resilience.”

I’ve highlighted those items that are likely to be impacted by risk assessment when implemented within an OSHM system. The entire list is what is likely to take shape when risk assessment is applied in a Risk Management system where the risk management system is mature. I think this list provides a good insight into why we should use and embrace the risk assessment process.

I’d like to finish up with a vision that I have for safety professionals embarking on their journey to embrace risk management and or undertake risk assessment. I believe that safety professionals are the players in organizations with the most familiarity with risk assessment tools which comes from our familiarity and use of: project planning; activity hazard analysis; job safety analysis; hazwopper; what if; root cause analysis; checklists and the like. As risk management matures in American and multinational companies, there will be a need for risk assessment practitioners both in safety and in risk management. So there are opportunities for us to capitalize on the impacts noted in the list of outcomes provided in the ISO 31000 introduction given above. Enjoy the journey.

References:
[1] ISO 31000 - Introduction