

WORFORCE AND HSE
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THE CHALLENGE OF STAFF HIRING AND HSE TRAINING

HSE Standards

During the past decades, when the oil price was at high level, the Oil and Gas industry faced a strong demand of skilled and trained personnel to execute the investments projects in new process facilities throughout the world.

Since the implementation of the Safety OHSAS 18001 and Environment ISO 14001 standards, all major Contractors and Oil and Gas companies have nowadays HSE Management Systems including requirements for specific Safety and Environment (SE) training for the personnel. This training is referring to all aspects of S&E and is provided to all employees, regardless of their hierarchical position in the Company.

Although a specific requirements standard covering the Occupational Health is yet to come (ISO 45001 - Occupational health and safety - <https://www.iso.org/iso-45001-occupational-health-and-safety.html>), the occupational health is perceived as an important part of the industrial activities. Specific training is delivered to the employees, mostly based on local specific requirements.

HSE Practices

Oil and Gas Industry is encompassing a large spectrum of activities, going from exploration to selling the final products to the customers. The objective of this article is to provide feedback on HSE hiring and training for the Construction and Services in the Oil and Gas industry. Both domains have large numbers of employees but there are differences between them imposed by the dynamics of each domain: Services (eg. Exploration, Drilling, Drilling Mud, Inspections etc.) are usually going with long term employment of the personnel while Construction is mostly project-based with personnel brought onboard on a certain schedule and then released at Project completion.

Generally speaking, in order to have access to the market, all companies nowadays seek for QHSE Management Systems certifications because without the certificates for ISO 9001, OHSAS 18001 and ISO 14001 their access to contracts is limited by the conditions set by the Management Systems of the potential Clients. Therefore, the HSE Management Systems are implemented, the certifications are obtained and the training requirements are defined and a system is put in place to ensure the HSE training is delivered. The whole purpose of this approach is not for the sake of actually having a good and continuously improving HSE Management System or for ensuring the workforce has the necessary competences to perform the industrial activity in a safe manner but rather for being awarded the work contracts.

Even with HSE management systems implemented and certified, statistics show that people still get hurt, the environment is harmed and the health is negatively affected. Why and how are questions of interest and by looking to the process of hiring and training from the inside of certified organizations, some conclusions can be drawn based on the site actual situation.

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All companies have personnel organizational structure, with job descriptions developed in such way as to cover the full spectrum of activities provided by the organization. Together with these job descriptions come also the specific HSE training each position shall receive. Training matrices are established, deadlines are set, and a system is usually put in place to ensure the HSE training is delivered; where does the difference come from and why failures are still present?

HSE in Services Companies

By taking into consideration the need to train, the need to produce and the need/desire to avoid any HSE related failure, the service companies have the advantage of a lower time pressure on the employees for achieving their work. In such a situation, when the production deadlines are not impacting the work so strongly, hiring is based more on the potential of individuals to be trained to the standard level of HSE knowledge and on the skills required by the employer. Usually, people are trained, their level of acquired knowledge and skills assessed. In case an individual is not capable to raise to the expectation, he can either be exposed to more training or, in extreme cases, be asked to leave the organization.

Such companies, hiring individuals with specific skills and experience that fit their needs, come always with well-planned training programs, achievable time tables for delivering the HSE training and they offer also a good infrastructure for the training process such as training rooms, dedicated professional trainers and serious/professional training materials.

Nowadays, with Internet, there are individual training programs that can be accessed online and the employees become more mobile and less dependent on a classical classroom training system. Motivating elements are also used by such employers: very often, an employee can be promoted or get a raise only after achieving the HSE training targets, being part of a team with a solid HSE culture increases the employees' value on the market and, last but not least, the employee works safely, is healthy and his activity is not harming the environment.

HSE in Construction Companies

The construction activities in Oil and Gas shows a different image; a project starts with a mobilization curve that has to be followed, under the pressure of demonstrating the necessary steps are taken in time to ensure the expected progress of the works. The amount of workforce deployed in such projects is often at the level of thousands and the construction companies must ensure economic swings from a project to another, having no reason to keep employees when they are not necessary. Therefore, when the moment comes to build up the project team, employees have to be found relatively fast and what matters most is rather increasing the numbers than recruiting quality.

Another aspect of interest is the construction project's budget, where the pressure of achieving the profit target is influencing from the beginning the recruitment and subsequent HSE training; cheap workforce, with lower skills and HSE training are often preferred to the expensive workforce that comes with solid skills and very good HSE knowledge. This is why the HSE training process put in place after the hiring of the workforce becomes essential for the employees in acquiring the necessary level of HSE knowledge and conscience.

As mentioned earlier, even these construction companies have nowadays an HSE Management System implemented and containing specific HSE training requirements for all categories of

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employees. Training facilities are usually provided but quite often the workforce is not released from its base activities and allowed to get the necessary training since the pressure of the scheduled progress is a lot higher than an eventual audit showing the training targets not being achieved. Also, even though “Safety First” has become the motto for most companies, it can be seen, in fact, that the immediate benefit (achieved construction progress and reduced budget for personnel hiring and training) pushes the HSE aspects of the project’s activities towards the tail end of the management’s interest for spending.

Conclusion

The two Oil and Gas domains of services and construction involve each specific budgets to be spent, resources such as specialized personnel in recruiting and training, specialized facilities to be made available. Hiring and HSE training processes are time and money consuming and, from the HSE end result perspective, the final outcome is nothing (bad) to happen.

It is very clear that these, combined with the particular mentality of a progress driven management, can result in an inefficient or “existing on paper” HSE Management and Training systems, poor quality of the recruited resources and management’s lack of will to enforce rules to ensure hiring of good personnel and deliverance of the necessary HSE knowledge. This mix of conditions explains the difference between companies with a solid HSE culture and good HSE performance and those companies allegedly having similar systems in place to ensure performance but recording large numbers of safety and/or environmental accidents and occupational health failures.

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