1.4 Develop and justify strategic communication approaches for senior stakeholders.

OSH TREE
TRAINING & CONSULTANCY

Introduction

Strategic communication is a critical component of effective Occupational Health, Safety, Environment, and Sustainability (OHSES) leadership. While technical expertise is essential, the ability to communicate strategic priorities to boards of directors, executive leaders, investors, regulators, and other senior stakeholders determines whether OHSES initiatives receive the support, funding, and commitment needed for successful implementation.

Senior stakeholders are primarily concerned with business performance, risk management, legal compliance, financial sustainability, reputation, and long-term value creation. Therefore, OHSES professionals must present information in a strategic and business-focused manner rather than relying solely on technical or operational details.

Effective strategic communication enables organisations to align OHSES objectives with corporate strategy, secure executive commitment, and promote informed decision-making. **This section examines four key communication approaches:**

1. Development of executive-level business cases for OHSES initiatives.
2. Communication strategies tailored to board and senior leadership audiences.
3. Presentation and justification of strategic OHSES proposals.
4. Transparent reporting of OHSES performance and strategic priorities.

OSH TREE
TRAINING & CONSULTANCY

1. Development of Executive-Level Business Cases for OHSES Initiatives

What is a Business Case?
A business case is a structured document or presentation that justifies investment in a project or initiative by demonstrating its strategic value, expected benefits, costs, risks, and return on investment.

For OHSES professionals, a business case explains why an organisation should invest in safety, environmental protection, or sustainability improvements.
Senior executives rarely approve projects based only on compliance or moral arguments. They expect evidence showing how the proposal supports organisational objectives and creates value.

Components of an Executive-Level Business Case

An effective OHSES business case should include:

1. Problem Statement

Clearly define the issue.

Example:

- Increasing workplace injuries.
- High environmental emissions.
- Frequent equipment failures.
- Regulatory non-compliance.



2. Strategic Importance

Explain how the issue affects business objectives.

For example:

- Financial losses.
- Reputational damage.
- Operational disruption.
- Regulatory penalties.
- Employee wellbeing.

Components of an Executive-Level Business Case

3. Proposed Solution

Describe the recommended initiative.

Examples:

- Automated safety monitoring.
- New environmental controls.
- Behaviour-based safety programme.
- Leadership training.
- Digital permit-to-work system.



4. Cost-Benefit Analysis

Estimate:

- Implementation costs.
- Expected savings.
- Productivity improvements.
- Risk reduction.
- Return on investment (ROI).

Example:

Investment of $500,000 may reduce annual incident costs by $1.2 million.

Components of an Executive-Level Business Case

5. Risks of Inaction

Explain consequences if no action is taken.

These may include:

- Legal prosecution.
- Increased injuries.
- Insurance cost increases.
- Business interruption.
- Reputational damage.

6. Expected Outcomes

State measurable benefits.

Examples:

- 30% reduction in injuries.
- Improved ESG performance.
- ISO 45001 certification.
- Lower carbon emissions.
- Higher employee engagement.

Components of an Executive-Level Business Case

Critical Evaluation

Advantages

- Supports evidence-based decisions.
- Demonstrates financial value.
- Improves executive support.
- Aligns OHSES with business strategy.
- Facilitates resource allocation.

Limitations

- Future benefits may be difficult to quantify.
- Intangible benefits (e.g., reputation) are hard to measure.
- Cost estimates may be uncertain.
- Executive priorities may change.

A strong business case combines financial evidence with strategic and ethical considerations.



2. Communication Strategies Tailored to Board and Senior Leadership Audiences

Understanding Senior Stakeholders
Different audiences require different communication styles.
Board members and executives generally focus on:

- Strategic risks.
- Business performance.
- Financial outcomes.
- Regulatory compliance.
- Organisational resilience.
- Investor expectations.
- Reputation.
- Sustainability commitments.

Technical details should therefore be translated into business language.



Characteristics of Effective Executive Communication

Communication should be:

- Clear.
- Concise.
- Evidence-based.
- Strategic.
- Outcome-focused.
- Solution-oriented.

Senior leaders typically prefer summaries supported by key data rather than lengthy technical explanations.



Effective Executive Communication

Instead of saying: "There were 65 near misses this quarter."

Communicate: "The increase in near misses indicates emerging operational risks that could lead to significant financial losses unless preventive controls are strengthened."

The second statement connects operational data to business risk.



Communication Methods

Common methods include:

- Board reports.
- Executive dashboards.
- Strategic presentations.
- Risk briefings.
- Sustainability reports.
- KPI scorecards.
- Annual reports.
- Committee meetings.

Visual dashboards often improve understanding by presenting trends clearly.



Critical Evaluation

Benefits

- Improves executive engagement.
- Supports informed decisions.
- Strengthens leadership commitment.
- Enhances strategic alignment.
- Facilitates resource approval.

Challenges

- Oversimplification may omit important technical details.
- Different stakeholders have different priorities.
- Poor presentation can reduce credibility.
- Information overload may reduce effectiveness.

Successful communication balances simplicity with accuracy.



OSH TREE
TRAINING & CONSULTANCY

3. Presentation and Justification of Strategic OHSES Proposals

Purpose of Strategic Proposals
Strategic proposals recommend actions requiring senior leadership approval.

Examples include:

- New safety management systems.
- Climate adaptation programmes.
- Major capital investments.
- Sustainability initiatives.
- Workforce wellbeing strategies.
- Digital transformation projects.

The proposal should demonstrate why the initiative supports organisational success.

OSH TREE
TRAINING & CONSULTANCY

Structure of a Strategic Proposal

A typical proposal includes:

Executive Summary

- Provides a concise overview.

Current Situation

Describes existing challenges.

Example:

- Rising incident rates.
- Poor audit performance.
- Regulatory concerns.
- Increasing carbon emissions.

Strategic Recommendation

- Explains the proposed solution.

Example:

Implement an integrated digital OHSES management platform.

Business Justification

Shows alignment with:

- Corporate strategy.
- Risk management.
- Sustainability objectives.
- ESG commitments.
- Financial performance.

Financial Analysis

Includes:

- Costs.
- Savings.
- ROI.
- Payback period.

OSH TREE
TRAINING & CONSULTANCY

Implementation Plan

Explains:

- Timeline.
- Responsibilities.
- Resource requirements.
- Success measures.

Persuasive Techniques

OHSES leaders should support proposals using:

- Benchmarking.
- Industry best practice.
- Legal obligations.
- Risk analysis.
- Performance trends.
- Cost-benefit analysis.
- Case studies.
- ESG expectations.

Evidence-based persuasion is more effective than emotional arguments.

Critical Evaluation

Advantages

- Encourages strategic thinking.
- Improves project approval rates.
- Demonstrates leadership capability.
- Supports investment decisions.

Limitations

- Predicting future benefits may be difficult.
- Financial assumptions may change.
- Competing organisational priorities may delay approval.

Proposals should therefore remain flexible and evidence-driven.



4. Transparent Reporting of OHSES Performance and Strategic Priorities

Importance of Transparency

Transparent reporting builds trust among stakeholders by providing accurate and honest information about organisational performance. Transparency demonstrates accountability and strengthens corporate governance.



OHSES Performance Reporting

Typical reports include:

Health and Safety

- Lost Time Injury Frequency Rate (LTIFR).
- Total Recordable Incident Rate (TRIR).
- Fatalities.
- Near misses.
- Safety observations.
- Training completion rates.

OHSES Performance Reporting

Environmental

- Carbon emissions.
- Energy consumption.
- Waste generation.
- Water usage.
- Pollution incidents.
- Recycling rates.



Sustainability

- ESG indicators.
- Climate targets.
- Employee wellbeing.
- Diversity metrics.
- Community engagement.

OHSES Performance Reporting

Reporting Strategic Priorities
Senior stakeholders should understand:

- Current strategic objectives.
- Progress toward targets.
- Emerging risks.
- Improvement initiatives.
- Resource requirements.
- Future priorities.

Reports should explain not only what happened but also why it happened and what actions will follow.



Example

A quarterly Board report includes:

- 15% reduction in workplace injuries.
- Carbon emissions reduced by 10%.
- ISO 45001 surveillance audit successfully completed.
- New climate resilience programme launched.
- Recommendation for additional investment in contractor safety.

This provides leadership with a clear understanding of strategic progress.



Critical Evaluation

Benefits

- Strengthens stakeholder confidence.
- Supports better decision-making.
- Enhances accountability.
- Demonstrates regulatory compliance.
- Improves ESG reporting.

Challenges

- Collecting reliable data may be difficult.
- Poor-quality information can mislead decision-makers.
- Excessive reporting creates information overload.
- Transparency may expose organisational weaknesses.

Nevertheless, honest reporting generally strengthens long-term organisational credibility.



OSH TREE
TRAINING & CONSULTANCY

Practical Scenario

A global manufacturing company experiences an increase in workplace injuries and rising energy costs. The OHSES Director prepares an executive-level business case recommending the introduction of an AI-based safety monitoring system and energy-efficient equipment.

The proposal includes:

- **A clear explanation of current risks.**
- **Cost-benefit analysis showing a projected 35% reduction in incident costs.**
- **Alignment with the organisation's sustainability strategy and ESG commitments.**
- **Expected improvements in operational efficiency and corporate reputation.**

The information is presented through a concise Board presentation supported by dashboards, performance trends, and financial projections. After approval, quarterly reports transparently track progress against key performance indicators, demonstrating reduced incidents, lower emissions, and improved productivity.
This strategic communication approach enables informed decision-making, strengthens executive confidence, and supports long-term organisational success.

OSH TREE
TRAINING & CONSULTANCY



Key Takeaways

- Strategic communication enables OHSES leaders to secure executive support by linking health, safety, environmental, and sustainability initiatives with organisational goals and business value.
- Developing executive-level business cases requires clear problem identification, strategic alignment, cost-benefit analysis, risk evaluation, and measurable outcomes.
- Communication with boards and senior leaders should be concise, evidence-based, and focused on strategic risks, financial implications, and organisational performance rather than technical detail alone.
- Well-structured strategic OHSES proposals increase the likelihood of approval by demonstrating alignment with corporate strategy, ESG priorities, and long-term value creation.
- Transparent reporting of OHSES performance and strategic priorities strengthens accountability, supports informed decision-making, builds stakeholder trust, and drives continual improvement.

OSH TREE
TRAINING & CONSULTANCY

Thank you