PHSC plc

PHSC insight paper:

Seeing the Whole Risk

Connecting your risks to strengthen decisions and recognise opportunities

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Seeing the Whole Risk

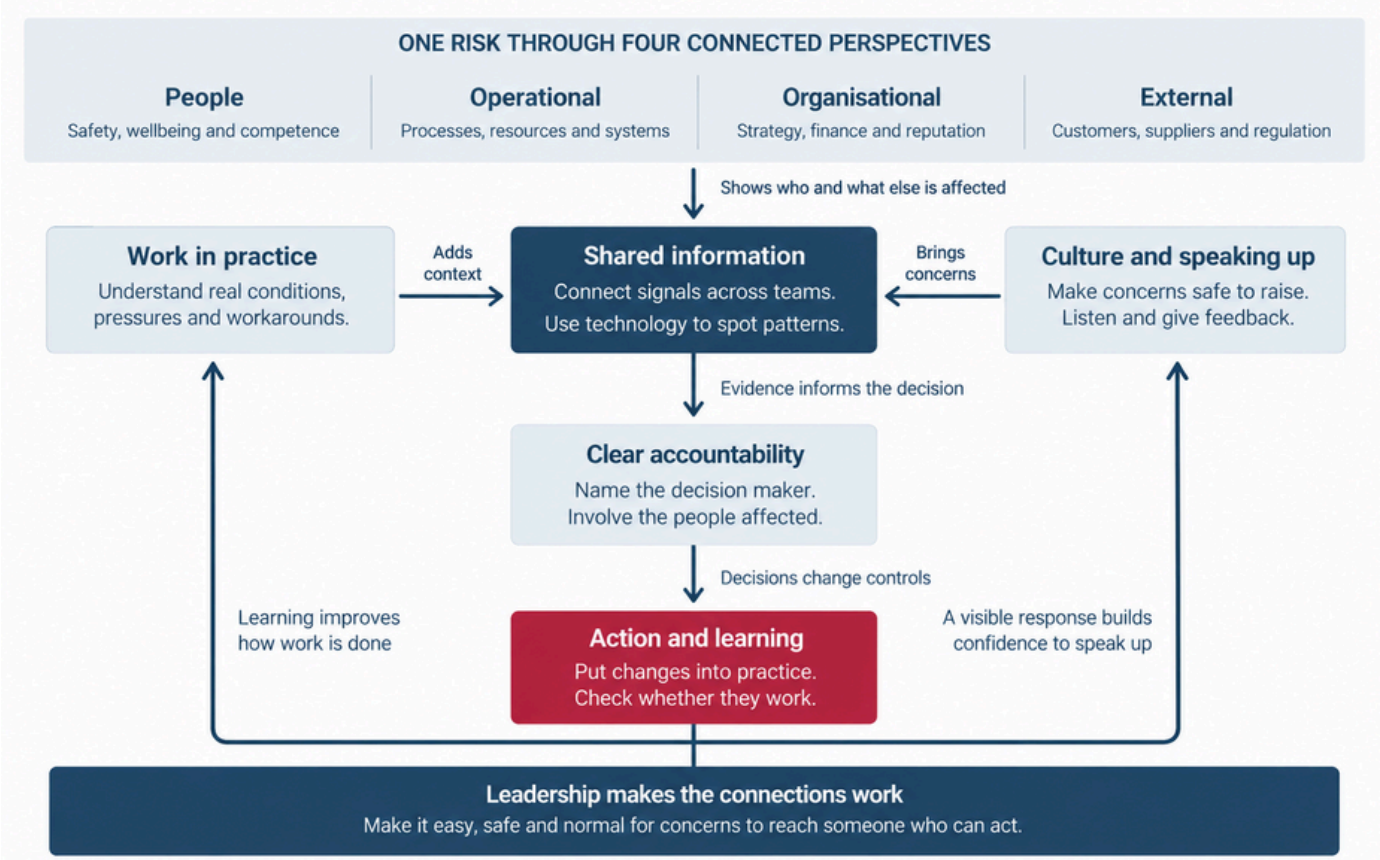
An organisation can understand its individual risks well and still miss how they affect one another. Safety, security and ISO management systems each provide valuable assurance. The wider picture depends on whether the knowledge held within those disciplines comes together when decisions are made.

This matters because a decision can improve performance in one part of a business while increasing pressure elsewhere. Separate reports may each be accurate, yet leave the consequences of those connections unexplored. Confidence in individual controls can then exceed understanding of the organisation's overall exposure.

One risk through four connected perspectives

People, operational, organisational and external risks offer four perspectives on the same business reality. These are the four pillars underpinning IIRSM's Organisational Risk Map, which Rosie Russell, IIRSM Co-President, drew on in her conference presentation. Considering them together brings the effects of a decision into view, including benefits that a narrower assessment might miss. It also challenges the assumption that a risk belongs entirely to the function responsible for reporting it.

The diagram below brings these connections together. Information gains meaning from the conditions in which people work. Culture influences what is shared, while leadership determines whether that knowledge informs action and learning. Each affects how much of the whole risk the organisation can see



Separate reports can each be accurate while leaving the organisation's overall exposure unclear. Confidence becomes better founded when leaders understand how controls depend on one another and where a decision in one part of the business creates consequences elsewhere.

Information and judgement across the business

The difficulty in seeing connected risk is partly organisational. Specialist teams develop their own language, priorities and reporting cycles. This helps them manage their responsibilities, but can make information harder to interpret outside their function. A concern that appears manageable in one report may carry a different significance alongside pressures recognised by another team.

Better access to data can help reveal these connections. Technology makes it easier to compare information and recognise patterns sooner. Interpretation still requires people who understand what the information means in practice. A recurring warning may indicate a control under strain, while an apparently improving measure may reflect a change in what people report.

This makes disagreement useful. Different interpretations can reveal assumptions that a single specialist perspective would leave unchallenged. Leaders need sufficient understanding of those differences to make a considered choice, with clear accountability for the decision and its effects.

Blue Diamond Garden Centres

Blue Diamond Garden Centres provides a practical illustration. Its programme combined CCTV and identification technology with staff training, conflict management and police cooperation.

It reported shrinkage falling from £1.9 million in 2022 to £1 million in 2025.

The figures cover the wider programme and do not establish the contribution of any one measure. The broader insight is the connection between protection of stock, earlier intervention and colleague safety.



Recognising the wider value of a decision

Seeing those connections also changes the discussion about investment. Benefits can be spread across several parts of a business, leaving each team with only part of the case for change. Bringing them into one assessment can reveal why an improvement matters more widely and where its costs or pressures will fall.

The same understanding helps organisations recognise opportunities with greater confidence. When the effects of a change are considered together, leaders can judge whether a proposed gain is sustainable, what it depends on and whose knowledge is needed before proceeding.

Working conditions shape the risk

Understanding connected risk also means understanding the circumstances in which people work. A procedure assumes that people have the time, equipment, information and competence to follow it. When those conditions change, the document may remain the same while the task becomes more difficult to carry out safely.

Human factors provides a way to examine that relationship. The Health and Safety Executive's approach considers the job, the individual and the organisation together. It broadens the discussion beyond a person's immediate action to the demands and expectations that helped shape it.

Workarounds deserve attention for the same reason. They can reveal where formal arrangements have become difficult to apply. Understanding why an adaptation makes sense to the person doing the work helps identify both the exposure it creates and the conditions that need to improve. It also gives management systems a practical test: how well do they support the work as it is actually done?

Culture influences what becomes visible

The people closest to a task may recognise a problem long before it reaches a management report. Their willingness to raise it depends on what they expect to happen next. An invitation to speak up carries less weight if previous concerns have met silence, blame or no visible response.

Psychological safety allows people to ask questions and challenge decisions while maintaining standards and accountability. It therefore affects the quality of the information available to leaders. An organisation's understanding of risk is limited when people edit out the concerns they believe will be unwelcome.

Culture models and surveys can help explore this. The dss+ Bradley Curve offers a way to discuss how responsibility for safety develops, while HSE's Safety Climate Tool and Anker & Marsh's culture assessments help examine workers' perceptions. Their value lies in the questions they prompt about everyday experience and the improvements that follow.

A score provides a starting point for enquiry. Conversations and observation help explain differences between teams and whether formal expectations match working conditions. The response to those findings matters too: when people can see that their contribution has been considered, they have a reason to keep sharing what they know.

An organisation's view of risk is shaped by what people feel able to say. If concerns are softened, delayed or left unspoken, management receives an incomplete account. The response to unwelcome information therefore affects the quality of the next decision as well as the confidence of the person raising it.

What this means for leadership

Seeing the whole risk places a responsibility on leaders to connect expertise and make the challenge useful. Specialists contribute depth of knowledge. People doing the work contribute an understanding of the conditions in which decisions take effect. Both need to inform the choices the organisation makes.

Whether you are a risk professional, a manager or a chief executive, your job is not to find every risk yourself. It is to build an organisation where the person who already knows finds it easy, safe and normal to tell you, and where that knowledge has a sensible place to go and can inform action.

Questions to take into your business

01

Where might our confidence be incomplete?

Take one significant decision and consider whose perspective shaped it. Would people responsible for its consequences recognise the same picture of risk?

02

Where might our confidence be incomplete?

Consider whether concerns can be discussed across functions and whether people feel able to question an apparently reassuring result.

03

What happens when working reality challenges the plan?

Ask whether the response helps people explain the difficulty and whether learning changes the conditions around the task.

These questions can open a discussion about how the organisation understands its exposure and recognises opportunities. The quality of the answers depends on how readily people can contribute, particularly when their experience challenges the accepted view.

See the whole risk with PHSC

Every organisation has its own combination of pressures, priorities and opportunities. PHSC brings together safety, management systems and security expertise to help you understand how these connect.

Book a free online consultation with PHSC to discuss your unique challenges and opportunities, explore where risks may be connected and how we can help you address them.

https://phsc.plc.uk/contact-us/

Acknowledgements

This PHSC insight paper draws on the expertise and perspectives shared by PHSC specialists, clients and guest speakers at our Seeing the Whole Risk conference on 6 October 2026, including contributions from:

- **Rosie Russell,** Co-President of IIRSM and Director of EHS and Sustainability at MeiraGTx.
- **Nathan Wilson**, Head of Group Security and Total Loss at Blue Diamond Garden Centres.
- **Professor Tim Marsh**, Managing Director of Anker & Marsh.
- **Richard True**, Director of Quality, Health, Safety and Environment at Polypipe Building Services.

Seeing the whole risk is an ongoing responsibility as the business changes. Leaders need to keep asking whose perspective is absent, which assumptions still hold and whether the people doing the work recognise the picture on which decisions are being made.