

# Defining a “Safety Center of Excellence”

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## ABSTRACT

The “Center of Excellence” concept, applicable within many venues of professional practice, is applicable in the practice of safety engineering. Nine individually distinct elements of organization and of practice are identifiable within a safety engineering organization. Each of the elements has a well differentiated function and a discrete role. Synergistically, the elements act to further the purposes of the whole. An integrated sense of organizational purpose is vital to success, with each of the elements focused to bring the rendering of service to the customer into prominence. For each of the nine elements, metrics are identifiable by which to gauge success. Maintaining currency with the field, avoiding an “in-group” sense of professional hubris, and fostering advances in the technical aspects of practice are vital to achieving excellence.

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of a Safety Center of Excellence is not new. Such centers are found in many organizations around the world. Occasionally a new one is established or the scope of an existing one is altered. As these changes occur there is need for a roadmap to guide a safety engineering organization toward establishing and maintaining excellence. This paper addresses nine elements that characterize a Safety Center of Excellence and describes each of them. It is not difficult to establish a “center” for something. Sometimes this is merely a self proclamation of little note. To claim a center of excellence however conveys a connotation well beyond minimal capability. It is all too easy to proclaim excellence, leaving the discerning reader to wonder, “Well, what about the organization is ‘excellent’?” This paper focuses on defining the elements that combine to bring “excellence” to a safety center.

In conducting the research that led to writing this paper, the authors examined many reference texts hoping to find that other authors may already have expounded on the attributes that lead to excellence in safety center performance. Revered classics (e.g., Ref. 1) were found more to expound on the bare mechanics of accident prevention than on the principles that underlie achieving excellence. Some of the more recent works come closer to the desired goal by showing methods of evaluating the worth of selected safety program results (e.g., Ref. 2). Reference 3 comes still closer by showing examples of pitfalls that can entrap the safety practitioner or his organization and distract from the quest for excellence. (This last reference does the practice of safety a much needed service by reducing the long honored “Heinrich Principle” to the level of a beguiling urban legend.) None of the references found, however, deal directly with an exposition of the key elements that are the *sine qua non* of the center of excellence concept.



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