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Gaurav Mittra
Sharda School of Business Studies, Sharda University, Greater Noida, India

Manmohan Rahul
Sharda School of Business Studies, Sharda University, Greater Noida, India

Gitanjali Mehta
Department of Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Galgotias University, Greater Noida, India

Corresponding Author:
Gaurav Mittra
Sharda School of Business Studies, Sharda University, Greater Noida, India

Social sustainability - A catalyst for employee well-being and safety culture of an organization

Gaurav Mittra, Manmohan Rahul and Gitanjali Mehta

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Abstract
Social sustainability is essential for workplace growth, fostering learning and adaptation. As the work environment greatly impacts employees, it has become a key research focus. Safety practices do not function in isolation but are shaped by internal structures and external influences. These factors collectively impact an organization's financial, social, and environmental performance.
This research explores how social sustainability affects an organization's ability to implement and adapt safety protocols. It examines the relationship between social sustainability and employees' well-being in the context of workplace safety. A major focus is understanding how employees' perceptions of leadership, safety policies, and HR fairness shape their safety-related behavior. Leadership commitment, organizational culture, and inclusive HR practices are critical to fostering a strong safety culture. Employee resistance to safety programs often stems from misalignment between management's approach and workers' perceptions of their roles and safety needs. A positive, trust-based environment enhances engagement and compliance with safety measures. By analyzing these factors, this study highlights the importance of integrating social sustainability into workplace safety initiatives. A socially sustainable approach not only improves safety performance but also strengthens organizational resilience, ensuring long-term success while prioritizing employee well-being.

Keywords: Social sustainability, corporate social responsibility, occupational health and safety, sustainable development, safety practices

Introduction
The purpose of this study is to establish a comprehensive foundation for understanding the complex interactions between social sustainability, safety culture, and Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems (OHSMS) within the ICT industry. As organizations strive to create safe, inclusive, and sustainable work environments, the importance of theoretical frameworks in guiding these efforts has grown. Theoretical frameworks offer insights into the social, psychological, and structural factors that influence workplace behaviours, employee well-being, and safety outcomes. In dynamic and high-stakes sectors like ICT, these frameworks provide the tools necessary to navigate unique challenges and promote a proactive approach to occupational health and safety [1].
The ICT industry is characterized by rapid technological innovation, global teams, and high operational demands, which can introduce significant stressors for employees. Unlike industries where physical safety is the primary focus, the ICT sector often grapples with unique health concerns related to mental health, work-life balance, and job satisfaction. Social sustainability in the ICT industry, therefore, encompasses more than physical safety; it includes psychological wellbeing, equitable treatment, and inclusivity. By fostering a socially sustainable environment, ICT organizations can reduce employee turnover, enhance productivity, and improve overall safety culture [2-3].
This study examines three theoretical frameworks - Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, Social Exchange Theory (SET), and the Organizational Agility Framework - that offer essential perspectives for analysing social sustainability, safety culture, and OHSMS. Each of these frameworks contributes to a deeper understanding of the factors that influence employee behaviours and organizational resilience in the context of safety and social sustainability. The Capability Approach emphasizes the importance of providing individuals with the resources and opportunities to lead fulfilling lives, aligning with the principles of social sustainability.

Social Exchange Theory highlights the role of reciprocal relationships in fostering positive behaviours, which is essential for building a robust safety culture. Lastly, the Organizational Agility Framework underscores the need for adaptability in safety practices, especially in industries with rapidly changing technologies and regulatory landscapes [3]. Through an in-depth review of these frameworks and relevant literature, this study provides a foundation for understanding how social sustainability practices and OHSMS contribute to a positive safety culture. Additionally, empirical studies are reviewed to illustrate how these concepts are applied in various industries, with a particular focus on the ICT sector. By synthesizing these theories and studies, the study aims to present a well-rounded view of the factors that influence safety culture and social sustainability in the workplace, ultimately informing the study's analysis and findings [4, 5].

Methods

Theoretical frameworks provide foundational insights that help explain the interaction between social sustainability, safety culture, and Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) practices within organizations. These frameworks offer lenses through which we can analyse employee behaviours, organizational structures, and cultural dynamics that influence safety and sustainability in highstakes environments like the ICT industry [6-8].

Amartya Sen's Capability Approach

Origins and Core Principles

Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, introduced in the 1980s, revolutionized the study of human well-being by focusing on what individuals are able to be and do. Rather than solely considering economic metrics like wealth or productivity, the Capability Approach measures well-being through "capabilities"-the genuine freedoms and opportunities available to individuals to lead lives they value. Sen argued that well-being should not be equated with material wealth but with individuals' freedom to pursue meaningful and fulfilling lives. Scholars have expanded upon Sen's work, emphasizing that capabilities such as bodily health, autonomy, and control over one's environment are essential for human flourishing [1, 2].

Application in Workplace Safety and Social Sustainability

In the workplace, the Capability Approach supports the idea that employees should have the resources and opportunities to thrive both personally and professionally. The framework advocates for workplace environments that prioritize fairness, inclusivity, and employee autonomy, all of which contribute to a psychologically safe and socially sustainable environment. By providing resources such as health and wellness programs, skill-building opportunities, and supportive policies, organizations can empower employees to achieve higher well-being levels. This approach supports the idea that workplaces should provide not only fair wages but also a psychologically supportive environment, enabling employees to achieve personal growth and well-being. By emphasizing employee autonomy, inclusivity, and fairness, the Capability Approach aligns closely with social sustainability goals, which focus on creating environments that empower individuals and promote equity [7, 9].

Relevance to ICT and OHS

The Capability Approach is particularly relevant in high-stress sectors like ICT, where mental health challenges, high cognitive demands, and rapid technological changes are common. ICT organizations applying the Capability Approach can support employee well-being by offering resources like mental health programs, flexible work arrangements, and skill development opportunities. Further they can apply this approach by offering resources such as mental health support, ergonomic workspaces, and training programs to build employees' resilience and skills. These resources empower employees to manage their work-life balance, reducing burnout and fostering a proactive safety culture. Research shows that organizations that prioritize autonomy and well-being experience higher levels of employee engagement and compliance with safety practices, thus contributing to a stronger safety culture. For instance, a study found that providing employees with the tools and autonomy to balance work and life demands improves job satisfaction, reducing turnover and burnout in high-stress industries like ICT [9, 10].

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Origins and Core Principles

Social Exchange Theory (SET) explores the dynamics of social interactions, emphasizing that individuals engage in social behaviour based on reciprocal exchanges. According to SET, relationships are maintained through the expectation of mutual benefit, where individuals are motivated to participate when they feel valued and supported. SET posits that trust, loyalty, and commitment are reinforced when individuals perceive fair exchanges, fostering positive behaviours in return. People are more likely to maintain relationships that they find rewarding, while negative exchanges lead to dissatisfaction and withdrawal [9].

Application in Workplace Safety and Social Sustainability

In the workplace, SET suggests that employees are more likely to engage in positive behaviours, such as adhering to safety protocols and participating in safety initiatives, when they feel appreciated and supported by their organization. Organizations can foster this sense of reciprocity by recognizing and rewarding safe behaviours, providing open channels for hazard reporting, and investing in employee well-being. When employees perceive that their organization values their contributions, they are more likely to demonstrate loyalty, commitment, and proactive engagement in safety practices, thereby strengthening the organization's social sustainability. Numerous studies have confirmed that employees who feel respected and valued are more engaged and motivated to contribute to a positive workplace culture, reinforcing safety compliance and proactivity [10].

Relevance to ICT and OHS

SET is particularly relevant to high-stress environments like ICT, where employees often face complex tasks, long hours, and high workloads. Research suggests that fostering a supportive culture can encourage employees to report hazards, comply with safety procedures, and actively engage in safety practices. For example, ICT companies that recognize employees' proactive safety behaviours can build a culture of mutual respect, reinforcing the importance of

safety culture within the organization. Studies show that such recognition increases employee motivation to prioritize both their safety and that of their colleagues, contributing to a positive safety culture [10].

Organizational Agility Framework

Origins and Core Principles

The Organizational Agility Framework emerged from studies on business agility, referring to an organization's ability to adapt rapidly to changes in the external environment, including shifts in market demands, technological advancements, and regulatory requirements. Agility encompasses flexibility, innovation, responsiveness, and resilience, qualities that enable organizations to thrive in complex, volatile settings. Organizations with a high level of agility are better equipped to anticipate and manage emerging risks, making agility a valuable trait in fast-paced industries like ICT [11].

Application in Workplace Safety and Social Sustainability

The Organizational Agility Framework is relevant to safety management because it highlights the need for continuous improvement and adaptability in safety practices. In an agile organization, safety protocols are dynamic and responsive, evolving based on feedback, data, and changing work conditions. This adaptability allows organizations to address new hazards, incorporate employee feedback, and implement innovative safety solutions. An agile approach to safety management supports social sustainability by demonstrating an organization's commitment to proactively meeting the needs of its employees [9-11].

Relevance to ICT and OHS

For ICT companies, where rapid technological advancements and diverse work environments are the norm, an agile approach to safety management is essential. Research indicates that agile organizations can better manage OHS by frequently updating protocols in response to emerging risks and regulatory changes. For example, an ICT company adopting artificial intelligence tools may introduce new safety protocols to address data privacy and cybersecurity risks, reflecting an agile approach to evolving challenges. This flexibility helps ICT companies maintain a safe and socially sustainable environment, enhancing both physical and psychological safety. Organizational agility enables ICT firms to update OHS practices frequently, ensuring both physical and psychological safety in a fast-paced environment. This approach enhances resilience and aligns with social sustainability by promoting a work environment that supports continuous learning and adaptation [12].

Result and Discussion

This literature review explores social sustainability, safety culture, and Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems (OHSMS), focusing on their importance within the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector. ICT workplaces have unique demands due to the nature of the work, which often involves long hours, high cognitive loads, and mental health challenges. A holistic understanding of social sustainability and safety culture, tailored to these challenges, is essential for fostering a supportive, inclusive, and psychologically safe work environment [12-13].

Defining Social Sustainability

Social sustainability in organizations refers to the practices, values, and policies focused on enhancing employees' quality of life and well-being beyond just physical safety. It encompasses inclusivity, mental health support, work-life balance, and equity. Unlike traditional safety measures that prioritize physical hazards, social sustainability addresses employees' broader experiences within the organization, aiming to create a workplace where they feel valued, respected, and motivated [12].

For the ICT sector, social sustainability is increasingly relevant as companies recognize the need to address mental health, digital fatigue, and job satisfaction to retain talent and maintain productivity. Microsoft's "Global Diversity and Inclusion" initiative exemplifies this shift, as it not only promotes equity and inclusivity but also supports mental health and well-being through flexible work hours and wellness programs. By fostering a socially sustainable environment, organizations can encourage employees to engage in safe and responsible behaviours, which ultimately contribute to organizational resilience and a positive safety culture [13].

Dimensions of Social Sustainability

The dimensions of social sustainability encompass key elements that support a positive workplace culture, improve employee engagement, and contribute to a safe and responsible workplace. These dimensions include equity, health and well-being, inclusivity, empowerment, and work-life balance [13-15].

Equity and Fairness

Equity and fairness are essential to social sustainability, as they ensure that all employees are treated with respect and given equal opportunities, regardless of their background or role. In ICT, where collaboration among diverse teams is common, equitable practices foster a cohesive environment that values all perspectives. Cisco's "Inclusive Communities" initiative, for example, provides resources and support for underrepresented groups, enhancing employee morale and reinforcing a culture of respect and equity within the organization [14].

Health and Well-being

Supporting mental and physical health is a crucial aspect of social sustainability. ICT companies, where long hours and screen-based work can lead to burnout, are increasingly adopting health and well-being initiatives, such as ergonomic support, mental health counselling, and stress management resources. Google's wellness programs include on-site fitness facilities and mental health resources, which help employees manage stress and maintain their well-being, reducing absenteeism and promoting a healthier work environment.

Inclusivity

Inclusivity is a key dimension of social sustainability that ensures all employees feel valued, regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, or background. For ICT organizations with global teams, inclusivity promotes diverse perspectives and fosters a collaborative work environment. IBM's
"Be Equal" initiative exemplifies this commitment by promoting gender equality and diversity, improving resilience, and enhancing the organization's innovative capacity through diverse viewpoints.

Employee Empowerment

Employee empowerment involves giving employees the resources, training, and autonomy to excel in their roles. Empowered employees are more likely to take ownership of their responsibilities, including adherence to safety protocols. This aligns with Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, emphasizing opportunities for individuals to achieve well-being. At Apple, employees are encouraged to take ownership of projects and make independent decisions, fostering a culture of responsibility that enhances engagement and safety behaviours.

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is crucial for maintaining a productive workforce, especially in the demanding ICT sector. Flexible work policies, such as remote work and flexible hours, help employees balance their personal and professional lives, reducing burnout and promoting well-being. Dell Technologies, for example, offers flexible work options, enhancing job satisfaction and contributing to a sustainable and stable workforce by reducing turnover.

Social Sustainability and Safety Culture

The relationship between social sustainability and safety culture is integral. When organizations prioritize social sustainability, they create an environment where employees feel valued and motivated to engage in safe practices. Studies indicate that socially sustainable workplaces experience lower accident rates and higher safety compliance, as employees are more likely to report hazards and participate in safety programs. This connection between social sustainability and safety culture highlights the importance of a holistic approach to workplace safety, where both physical and psychological needs are addressed.

For instance, Microsoft's "Digital Wellness" program, which encourages employees to manage screen time and take regular breaks, supports both mental well-being and safety culture by reducing digital fatigue, a prevalent issue in ICT. Such initiatives demonstrate how social sustainability practices reinforce a proactive approach to safety, ultimately creating a more resilient workplace [14][15].

Comparative Analysis of Social Sustainability in ICT and Other Sectors

While social sustainability is essential across industries, its implementation varies based on sector-specific demands. In manufacturing and healthcare, for example, social sustainability often emphasizes physical safety and hazard prevention due to the nature of the work. In contrast, ICT organizations prioritize mental health, flexibility, and inclusivity to address the unique demands of knowledge-based work environments.

For instance, healthcare organizations may focus on stress management due to the emotionally taxing nature of the work. In comparison, ICT companies like Microsoft emphasize balancing mental well-being with innovation demands. Microsoft's "Digital Wellness" program, encouraging regular breaks from screen time, highlights how industry-specific needs shape social sustainability practices, promoting resilience and long-term engagement in safety [16].

The Role of Leadership in Promoting Social Sustainability

Leadership plays a pivotal role in promoting social sustainability by setting the tone for an inclusive, supportive culture. Leaders influence organizational values and employees' perceptions of fairness, inclusivity, and well-being. Supportive leadership is especially important in high-paced ICT environments, where rapid innovation can contribute to employee stress. Effective leaders prioritize work-life balance, mental health, and inclusivity, fostering a culture where employees feel empowered to participate in safety initiatives. Research indicates that leadership commitment to social sustainability and safety culture increases employee engagement, reduces burnout, and enhances safety compliance. This is evident in companies like Google, where leadership-driven wellness programs reinforce the organization's commitment to a healthy, sustainable work environment. In ICT organizations, where adaptability and resilience are critical, leadership support can mitigate the stress associated with high-paced work. Leaders who prioritize mental health and inclusivity foster a resilient workforce, reducing the risk of burnout and creating a sustainable, safe workplace [9, 10].

Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems (OHSMS)

OHSMS frameworks, such as ISO 45001, provide structured guidelines for managing safety risks. These systems are essential for creating safe and socially sustainable workplaces, as they emphasize proactive risk management and continuous improvement. In ICT, OHSMS frameworks are adapted to focus on mental health, ergonomic support, and flexible work arrangements, aligning with social sustainability principles (Gunningham & Sinclair, 2012). ICT companies that integrate these elements into their OHSMS demonstrate a commitment to both physical and psychological safety, leading to improved employee engagement, reduced turnover, and a robust safety culture. Studies suggest that when OHSMS frameworks incorporate social sustainability practices, employees feel more valued and engaged, further reinforcing safety compliance [16][17].

Comparative Frameworks in OHSMS

OHSMS frameworks vary across industries based on sector-specific risks. In manufacturing, OHSMS focus primarily on physical safety controls to address hazardous environments, whereas ICT companies adapt these frameworks to address mental health and ergonomic risks, which are more prevalent in desk-bound roles. This adaptability illustrates the flexibility of OHSMS in supporting social sustainability across sectors. In the ICT sector, integrating elements like mental health support, open communication channels, and flexible work policies into OHSMS creates a more comprehensive safety culture, addressing both physical and psychological risks. This approach is essential for fostering an inclusive and resilient workplace that aligns with the principles of social sustainability [16].

Safety Culture and Organizational Performance

Safety culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, and practices within an organization that prioritize safety at every level, influencing both employee behaviour and organizational policies. A strong safety culture is essential for reducing workplace accidents, enhancing compliance with safety protocols, and ultimately improving organizational performance. In high-stress and dynamic industries like ICT, where mental health and digital fatigue pose significant risks, fostering a robust safety culture is not

only a regulatory or ethical obligation but also a strategic advantage that promotes long-term sustainability and employee engagement [16].

Defining Safety Culture

Safety culture was first conceptualized in high-risk industries, such as nuclear power and aviation, to describe the behaviours and attitudes toward safety within organizations where failure to adhere to safety protocols could have catastrophic consequences. Safety culture is defined as "the shared perceptions among employees regarding the importance of safety," emphasizing that it reflects an organization's commitment to preventing accidents and ensuring a safe environment. Safety culture encompasses a range of practices, including adherence to protocols, open communication about safety issues, and employee engagement in safety training.

In ICT, the concept of safety culture is relatively new compared to traditional industries; however, the need for a robust safety culture has grown with the industry's expansion. The ICT sector's unique risks, including prolonged screen time, sedentary work, high cognitive load, and the pressure of constant technological advancement, necessitate a rethinking of safety culture to include psychological well-being and proactive mental health management. Unlike industries where safety culture focuses on physical hazards, in ICT, it emphasizes creating a supportive and responsive environment that addresses the mental and emotional health of employees [17, 18].

Elements of a Strong Safety Culture

A strong safety culture is underpinned by several core elements that contribute to a proactive approach to safety and well-being. These elements are particularly relevant in ICT, where the work environment demands continuous adaptation and responsiveness [19-21].

Leadership Commitment: Leadership commitment is fundamental to developing a strong safety culture, as leaders set the tone for prioritizing safety across all levels of the organization. Leaders who visibly engage in and support safety initiatives signal the organization's dedication to safety, fostering a culture where employees feel that their wellbeing is valued. For instance, ICT companies with leadership teams that actively promote mental health and work-life balance create an environment where employees are more likely to report safety concerns and adhere to safety protocols.

Employee Engagement and Empowerment: Employee engagement is critical for safety culture, as engaged employees are more likely to participate in safety programs, comply with protocols, and report hazards. In ICT, employee empowerment also means providing autonomy in decision-making, which enables workers to address safety risks proactively. Empowered employees are more likely to take ownership of their own safety and that of their colleagues, thus contributing to a safer workplace.

Open Communication: Open communication channels allow employees to voice safety concerns without fear of retaliation. In ICT, where risks are often less visible than in physical industries, clear communication about mental health, workload management, and ergonomic practices is essential. Organizations that encourage open dialogue about safety and health issues are better positioned to address emerging risks, thereby reinforcing a positive safety culture.

Continuous Training and Development: In fast-evolving industries like ICT, continuous training is vital to keep employees updated on safety protocols, new technologies, and emerging risks. Ongoing training not only reinforces safety standards but also cultivates a culture where employees understand the importance of safety and well-being. Many ICT companies now integrate digital wellness training and ergonomic practices as part of their regular training programs, which helps mitigate risks associated with prolonged screen time and sedentary work.

Accountability and Recognition: Holding individuals accountable for safety behaviours and recognizing proactive safety actions further strengthen safety culture. For example, ICT organizations that reward employees for identifying and mitigating risks demonstrate a commitment to valuing and reinforcing safety-conscious behaviours. Recognition programs create a sense of pride and responsibility in employees, encouraging them to maintain high safety standards.

Impact of Safety Culture on Organizational Performance

A strong safety culture has a profound impact on organizational performance, influencing factors such as productivity, employee retention, and overall organizational resilience. In ICT, where burnout and turnover rates can be high, a positive safety culture can enhance employee satisfaction and reduce the risk of accidents related to digital fatigue and mental stress. Below are some specific ways in which safety culture contributes to improved performance in ICT [20, 21].

Reduced Accidents and Health-Related Costs: A strong safety culture reduces the likelihood of workplace accidents and health issues, which can otherwise result in significant costs for the organization. In ICT, health-related issues are often associated with stress, musculoskeletal problems, and mental health concerns. Companies that prioritize safety culture by addressing these risks reduce absenteeism and healthcare costs, allowing them to allocate resources more efficiently.

Enhanced Employee Engagement and Retention: Employees are more likely to stay with an organization that prioritizes their safety and well-being. A positive safety culture fosters trust, loyalty, and engagement, all of which are linked to lower turnover rates. In ICT, where skilled employees are highly sought after, retaining talent by creating a safe and supportive work environment is a strategic advantage. Studies show that organizations with strong safety cultures have higher employee engagement and satisfaction, directly influencing retention.

Increased Productivity and Efficiency: When employees feel safe and supported, they are more likely to be productive and focused. Safety culture reduces distractions related to health concerns and allows employees to concentrate on their work without undue stress. In ICT, where productivity is often tied to cognitive focus and

creativity, a positive safety culture enables employees to perform at their best without compromising their well-being.

Organizational Reputation and Competitive Advantage
A strong safety culture enhances an organization's reputation as a socially responsible employer. In an industry as competitive as ICT, companies with a reputation for prioritizing safety and well-being attract top talent and gain a competitive edge. Organizations that demonstrate a commitment to social sustainability through robust safety practices are more likely to be viewed as ethical and desirable places to work, positively impacting their reputation in the industry.

Safety Culture in ICT: Unique Challenges and Strategies
The ICT sector presents unique challenges in developing and maintaining a safety culture, primarily due to the intangible nature of its risks, such as digital fatigue, mental health strain, and the demands of remote work. ICT employees face risks that are not always as visible or immediately hazardous as those in industries like manufacturing, but the consequences such as burnout, stress-related health issues, and decreased productivity are significant. Addressing these challenges requires tailored strategies that go beyond traditional safety measures [20, 21].

Digital Wellness Programs: ICT companies are increasingly adopting digital wellness programs to address issues related to prolonged screen time and cognitive load. Programs that encourage regular breaks, ergonomic practices, and mental health resources are essential components of safety culture in ICT. For example, Microsoft's "Digital Wellness" initiative includes guidelines for managing screen time and ergonomic support, helping employees maintain their mental and physical well-being.

Flexible Work Policies and Work-Life Balance: Flexibility in work arrangements, including options for remote work and flexible hours, is crucial for reducing stress and promoting work-life balance. In ICT, where project deadlines and long hours can contribute to burnout, flexible policies enable employees to manage their workload more effectively. Dell Technologies, for instance, offers extensive flexible work options, which have been shown to enhance employee satisfaction and productivity by supporting worklife balance.

Proactive Mental Health Support: Recognizing the high mental demands of ICT work, many organizations are incorporating proactive mental health support into their safety culture. Providing access to counselling, stress management workshops, and mental health days demonstrates a commitment to employee well-being. Companies like Google and Adobe have implemented mental health resources as part of their safety culture, acknowledging the critical role mental health plays in organizational performance.

Conclusion
This study contributes to the growing research on how social sustainability influences safety practices in organizations, leading to enhanced employee well-being. The findings provide deeper insights into the relationship between safety practices across different organizational levels and social sustainability. Additionally, they highlight the critical roles of participation and motivation in fostering a secure work environment and shaping safety-related behaviors. The study confirms that when employees perceive their workplace as safe, they are more likely to engage in proactive safety measures, a behavior that can extend beyond the workplace. These findings align with industry perspectives that emphasize the need for organizations to modify work environments and invest in safety systems to encourage active participation in safety practices. However, behavioral changes may take time to reflect in reduced accident rates. Improving the work environment may be more complex and time-intensive than retraining employees. Despite challenges, investing in workplace safety fosters long-term benefits, strengthening an organization's credibility and sustainability. These improvements also create broader social, economic, and environmental impacts, reinforcing the significance of integrating social sustainability into workplace safety initiatives.

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