

CERTIFYING THE INTANGIBLE

Rethinking OSH Standardization and Conformity Assessment for Psychosocial and Organisational Risk

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Document-Centric



Weak Verification



Worker Voice Underused



Org Drivers Invisible



False Assurance

1. Background

European OSH standardization systems excel at **measurable technical hazards**: machinery safety, chemical exposure, PPE, engineering controls. ISO 45001 strengthened management systems, yet contemporary harm increasingly originates from:

- Excessive workload & work intensification
- Algorithmic & digital management
- Fragmented/outourced labour models
- Poor psychosocial working conditions

Current certification frameworks remain **document-centric** and technically oriented — mismatched to modern risks.

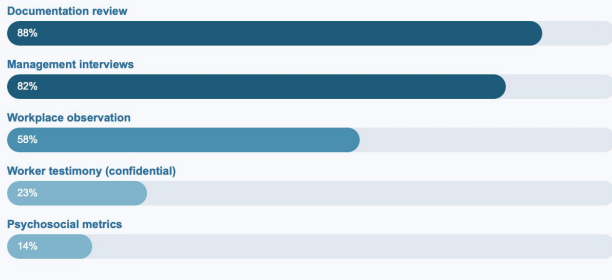
2. Research Objective

To examine whether existing OSH standardization and conformity assessment approaches provide **credible assurance** for psychosocial and organisational risk control.

3. Methodology

- Document Review**: 45+ certification audit reports across manufacturing, logistics, healthcare
- Stakeholder Interviews**: 22 lead auditors, 15 OSH practitioners, 8 certification body reps
- Comparative Analysis**: Audit methodologies, evidence collection, worker participation
- Framework Evaluation**: Gap analysis against CEN and HOF approaches

Current Audit Evidence Sources (%)



4. Key Findings

Finding 1: Document-Driven Certification

Audit outcomes driven by policy availability — not operational realities. Worker perception and frontline conditions largely ignored.

Finding 2: Weak Psychosocial Verification

Generic risk scoring, no measurable control evaluation. Verification of *procedures*, not effectiveness.

Finding 3: Worker Voice Underutilised

Confidential worker engagement in <25% of audits. Heavy reliance on management representation of culture.

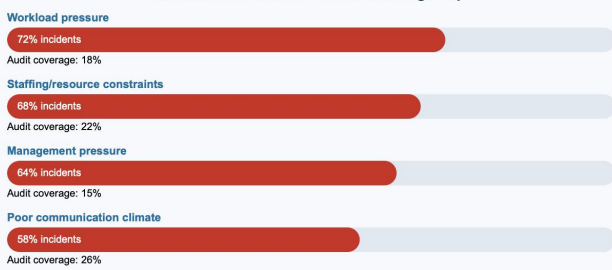
Finding 4: Organisational Drivers Invisible

Resource constraints, staffing pressure, culture issues visible in incident investigations — absent from certification audits.

Finding 5: False Assurance Risk Confirmed

Certified organisations maintained status despite high fatigue, psychosocial complaints, poor reporting culture.

Incident Root Causes vs Audit Coverage Gap



False Assurance Risk Assessment



Summary of Findings & Implications

Key Finding	Core Implication	Risk Level
Document-centric audits	Certification ≠ operational safety	High
Weak psychosocial verification	Procedural compliance fallacy	Critical
Worker voice underutilised	Lost primary data source	High
Organisational drivers invisible	Fragmented assurance system	High
False assurance risk confirmed	Certification may mislead stakeholders	Critical

5. Implications for Standardization

Integrate Human & Organisational Factors (HOF)

Organisational behaviour, communication systems, psychosocial conditions into audit frameworks.

Triangulated Audit Evidence

Documentation + observation + worker testimony.

Outcome-Based Indicators

Absence trends, turnover, reporting behaviour, workload metrics, climate measures.

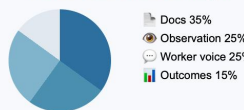
Enhanced Auditor Competence

From procedural compliance to organisational risk interpretation.

Proposed Evolution: Current → Future

Current Model (Technical Verification)	Proposed Model (Organisational Assurance)
Document review & policy existence	Triangulated evidence (documents + observation + testimony)
Auditor judgement only	Structured worker feedback integrated
Technical compliance focus	HOF integration
Single visit snapshot	Longitudinal & outcome-based indicators
Certification = compliance	Certification = effective control

Future Audit Evidence Target



6. Conclusion

Current OSH standardization systems remain highly effective for certifying technical compliance. However, this research demonstrates that organisational and psychosocial risks — increasingly central to workplace harm — remain insufficiently assessed within existing conformity assessment frameworks.

The future credibility of OSH certification depends on the ability of standardization systems to evaluate not only whether procedures exist, but whether organisations are genuinely safe in practice.

What current OSH systems struggle to test, audit, and certify is increasingly what determines worker harm.

The future credibility of OSH certification depends on its ability to assess what cannot be easily measured.

KEYWORDS: Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) • Psychosocial Risk • Conformity Assessment • Standardization • Organisational Risk • Human & Organisational Factors (HOF)

Methodology: Comparative audit report analysis (n=45) | Semi-structured interviews (n=45) | Investigation root-cause review | Gap analysis against CEN/ISO frameworks
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