EHS Maturity in Healthcare: How Does the Industry Compare?

The Road to EHS Maturity in the Healthcare Industry

The Global EHS Readiness Index (GERI) provides insights from over 1000 Global Health and Safety Leaders. This benchmarking report provides a comparison of EHS maturity in the Healthcare Industry versus all industries in the study.

Healthcare workers face a number of serious and often unique EHS hazards. These include biological hazards, potential chemical and drug exposures, gas exposures, respiratory hazards, ergonomic hazards from lifting and repetitive tasks, laser hazards, workplace violence, hazards associated with laboratories, radioactive material and x-ray hazards, and numerous psychosocial hazards.
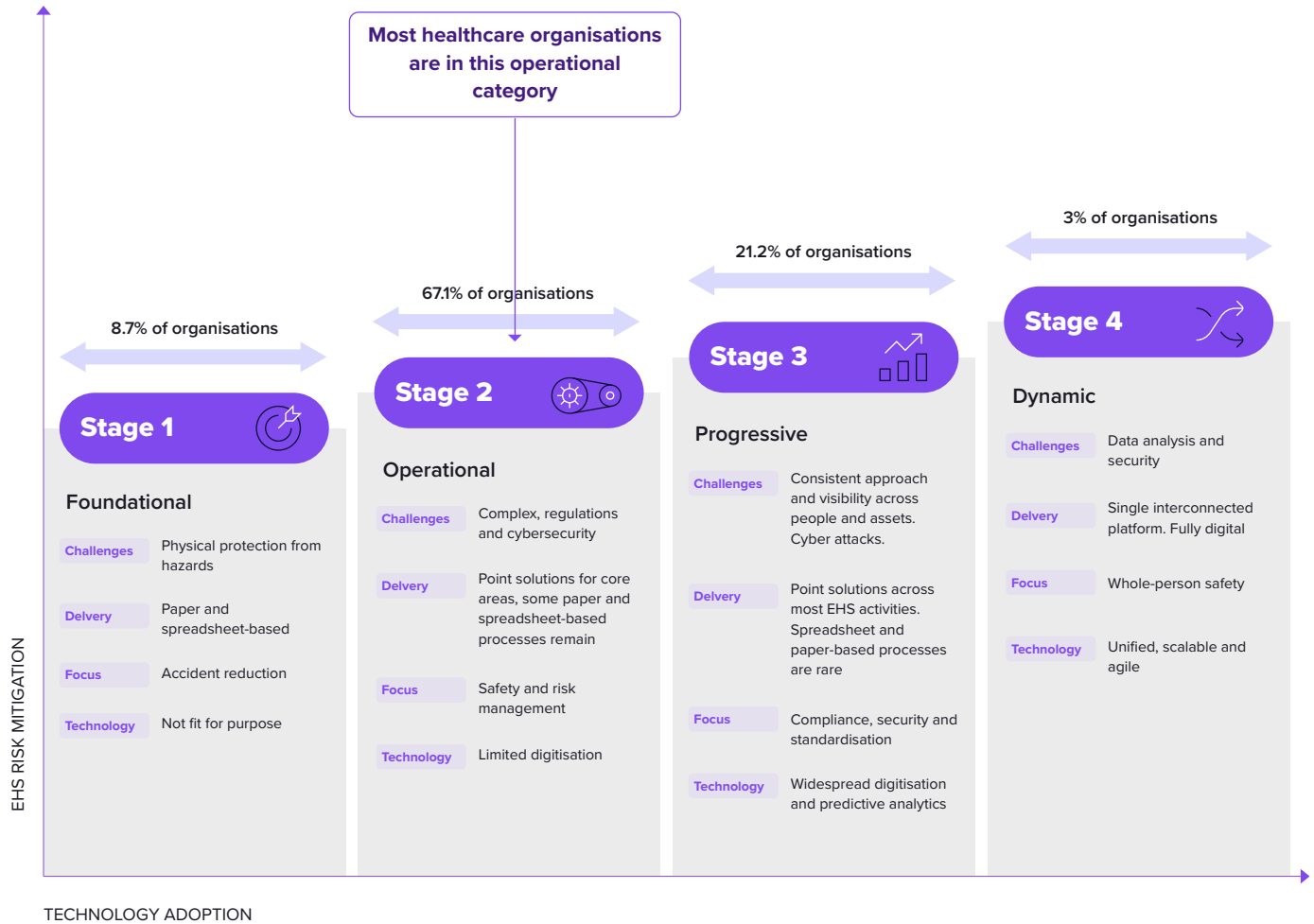
The recent HSI and Focus Network Global EHS Readiness Index (GERI) highlights gaps in EHS posture in the sector and offers guidance on how to optimise EHS outcomes. Technology plays a key role in managing EHS risk in healthcare.

Figure 1

Evolution of the EHS Function in the Healthcare Industry

Most healthcare organisations are in this operational category

67.1% of organisations

8.7% of organisations

21.2% of organisations

3% of organisations

EHS RISK MITIGATION

TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION

Stage 1

Foundational

Challenges	Physical protection from hazards
Delivery	Paper and spreadsheet-based
Focus	Accident reduction
Technology	Not fit for purpose

Stage 2

Operational

Challenges	Complex, regulations and cybersecurity
Delivery	Point solutions for core areas, some paper and spreadsheet-based processes remain
Focus	Safety and risk management
Technology	Limited digitisation

Stage 3

Progressive

Challenges	Consistent approach and visibility across people and assets. Cyber attacks.
Delivery	Point solutions across most EHS activities. Spreadsheet and paper-based processes are rare
Focus	Compliance, security and standardisation
Technology	Widespread digitisation and predictive analytics

Stage 4

Dynamic

Challenges	Data analysis and security
Delivery	Single interconnected platform. Fully digital
Focus	Whole-person safety
Technology	Unified, scalable and agile

The Key Challenges Faced
in the Healthcare Sector

The GERI report identified some common challenges within Healthcare which are outlined in detail below.

In addition to traditional stressors faced by Healthcare professionals, external events and pressures are adding new challenges. For example, the pandemic not only posed greater health risks for healthcare workers, it also increased risks assoiciated with violent and abusive behaviour plus additional workload.

Indeed, a Stericycle study showed that 64% of healthcare providers say they have experienced patients behaving poorly or inappropriately with 69% of administrators reporting experiencing the same. According to the Head of Health and Safety at a Healthcare Provider with 5000+ employees, "We are constantly being given more to do, more tasks, more patients, more charting, but with less and less staff. It has led to me feeling exhausted, stressed, and burned out."

Budget constraints and increased demands on the sector are making it difficult for the industry to adequately address psychosocial risk.

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Leading EHS implementation challenges faced by healthcare organisations include:

Complexity and lack of integration

The complexity of healthcare ecosystems makes it extremely difficult to apply EHS and ESG policies consistently. EHS visibility and consistent EHS policy implementation is increasingly important in the sector.

Cybersecurity issues

The healthcare sector is one of the leading targets for cyber attackers. According to the Ponemon Institute, it has the highest data breach cost of an industry, averaging US10.10 million per incident. It is particularly attractive for ransomware attackers given the critical nature of many healthcare systems. Often, healthcare providers will pay high ransoms rapidly to save lives.

Adoption

Psychosocial factors have become a much bigger risk in the healthcare sector, since the pandemic. Stress associated with long shifts and burnout make mental health issues more likely to occur. This is exacerbated by inappropriate and aggressive patient behavior. Stericycle's report reveals that 53% of healthcare providers have experienced patients becoming more combative over the past year.

Environmental sustainability

The healthcare sector is exposed to toxic and dangerous substances, and it creates contaminated waste. Environmental issues are central to health and safety in the sector. Biological and chemical risks are particularly high in the healthcare industry. Staff are regularly exposed to biological risks including pathogens and infectious agents as well as chemicals such as disinfectants.
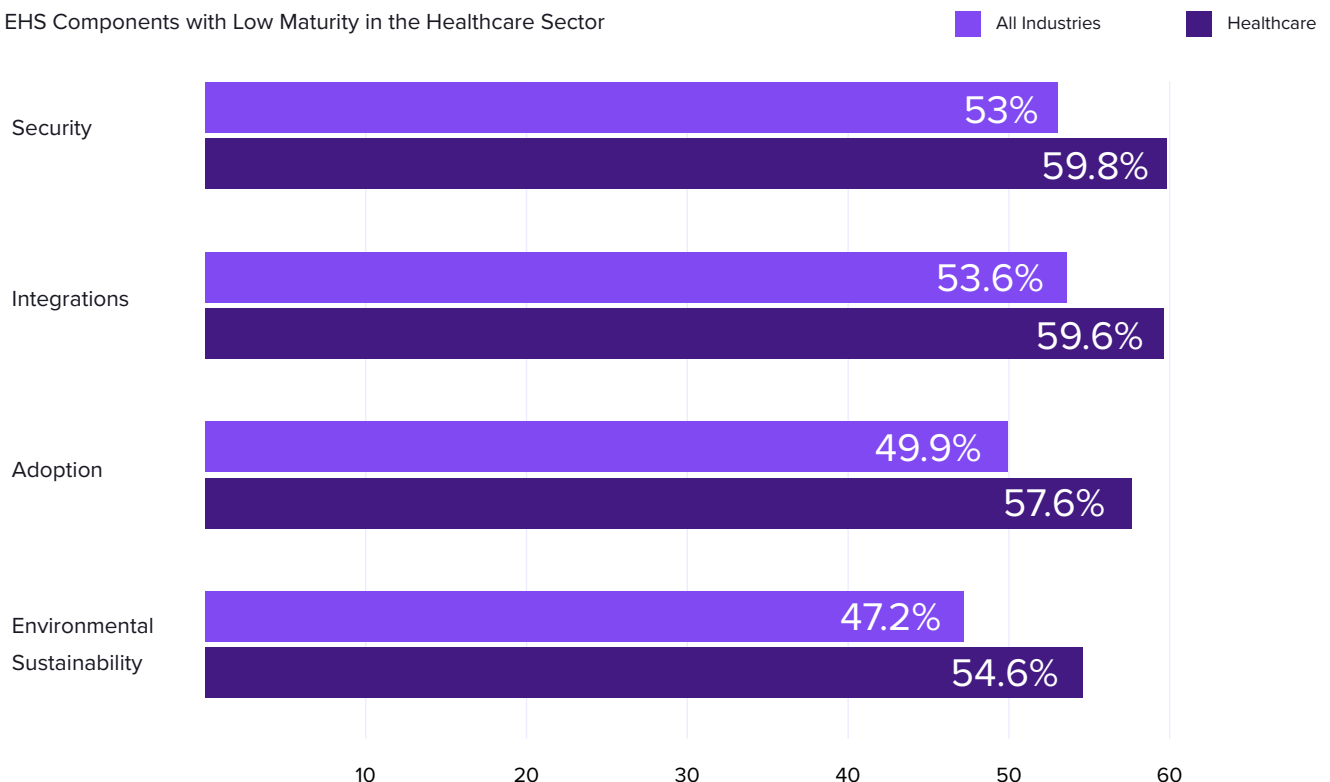
EHS Maturity in Healthcare:
Areas of Focus

Focus Network's recent Global EHS Readiness Index (GERI) report reveals mean maturity scores by attribute for the healthcare sector, in percentages, where 100% is the highest score. Respondents were asked a series of questions relating to each component of the EHS function. Responses to these questions were then used to determine maturity for each component. For example, an organisation that indicates it cannot detect mental health incidents is given a very low score for psychosocial and mental health maturity. Another example is an organisation that indicates it has a centralised compliance management system in place, which contributes to a higher maturity score for compliance obligations. Maturity levels for each component are then aggregated to give an overall mean EHS maturity score.

The healthcare sector is comparatively mature from an EHS perspective, relative to other industries. It is defined as progressive from an EHS perspective. Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting the EHS areas that require the most focus.

Figure 2 shows EHS components for the healthcare sector that are the least mature. These reveal the biggest gaps in EHS posture for healthcare organisations. It is these areas that require particular attention. It also illustrates the mean percentage score across all industries. Notably the sector is more mature than the mean for all industries in all EHS component areas.

Figure 2

EHS Components with Low Maturity in the Healthcare Sector

Legend: All Industries, Healthcare

- Security: 53% (All Industries), 59.8% (Healthcare)
- Integrations: 53.6% (All Industries), 59.6% (Healthcare)
- Adoption: 49.9% (All Industries), 57.6% (Healthcare)
- Environmental Sustainability: 47.2% (All Industries), 54.6% (Healthcare)

Adaptable, Frictionless and Interoperable EHS Technology is Needed for the Healthcare Sector

Given the increasing challenges, EHS leaders in the healthcare sector need to seek ways to collate data and increase visibility across all EHS functions. This means that companies need to:

Understand their level of EHS technology maturity. They need to identify what they need to do to ensure that progressively develop their EHS posture.

Have a consistent and unified view of all activities in their ecosystems. All documentation and data should be found in one place. Management and individual workers need visibility of all EHS processes and their implementation. The GERI study reveals that only 8% of healthcare EHS leaders have comprehensive EHS systems that give visibility across all EHS processes.

Ensure workforce adoption. Healthcare workers are often overwhelmed with administrative requirements and associated technologies. Any additional or new technologies must be usable and relevant. Nearly 50% of EHS leaders in the healthcare sector cite successful adoption of EHS processes as a major implementation challenge, according to the recent GERI study.

Ensure that technology is adaptable and future-proof. The healthcare sector is undergoing radical change. EHS solutions will need to keep pace with this change and ensure that solutions can be re-configured and improved continuously.

Fully leverage data. Data needs to be collected and analysed across the ecosystems to optimise EHS workflows and ensure compliance. Focus needs to be placed on data integrity and data security. Only 12% of healthcare organisations claim to have robust and integrated data capturing and reporting systems, according to the GERI study.
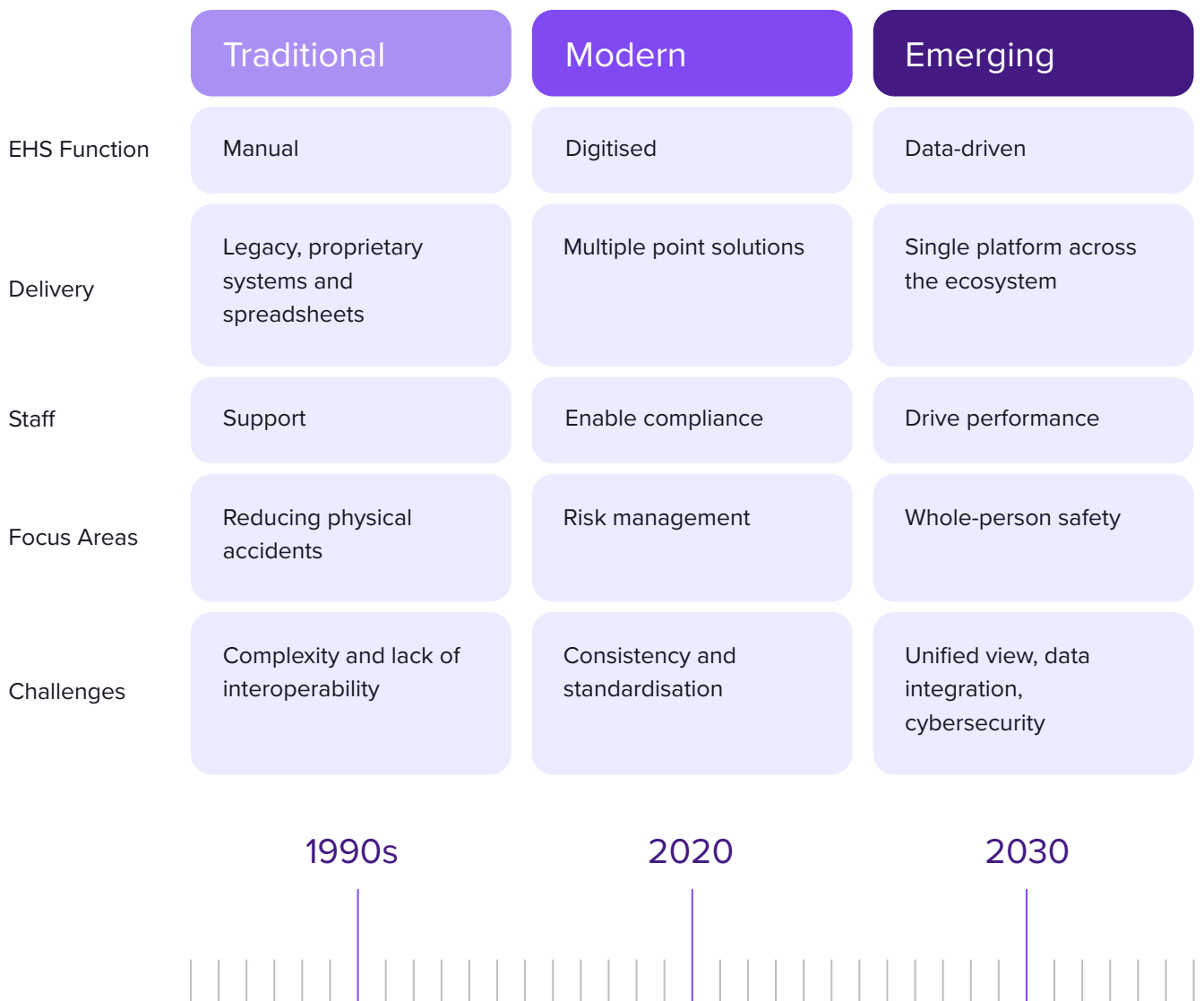
Emerging EHS Trends in the Healthcare Sector

As complexity increases within the Healthcare sector, so does the move to more advanced EHS processes and systems. These trends are summarised below.

Figure 3

The Evolution of the EHS Function in the Healthcare Sector

	Traditional	Modern	Emerging
EHS Function	Manual	Digitised	Data-driven
Delivery	Legacy, proprietary systems and spreadsheets	Multiple point solutions	Single platform across the ecosystem
Staff	Support	Enable compliance	Drive performance
Focus Areas	Reducing physical accidents	Risk management	Whole-person safety
Challenges	Complexity and lack of interoperability	Consistency and standardisation	Unified view, data integration, cybersecurity

1990s	2020	2030

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