

ARTICLE

Occupational health and safety certification - the experience of organisations

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Accredia – INAIL – AICQ survey on organisations

The issue of workplace health and safety (H&S) cannot be separated from the awareness of an organisation of risk factors and good management practices. Preventive actions and the instruments used make the public welfare policy effective at a national level. Through management systems organisations possess a tool for incorporating H&S objectives and policies in their management and production activities.

The implementation of a H&S management system, especially if certified, means that the organisation can identify analytically and within its internal staff structure, the responsibilities, procedures, processes and resources for its corporate policies whilst respecting all the applicable standards. The results are surprisingly positive throughout the entire production process.

In collaboration with INAIL (the national occupational H&S entity) and AICQ (the national association for quality) Accredia carried out a survey of organisations with accredited certification to ascertain the reasons for which they chose certification, the effect of certification on their corporate processes and on workplace risk levels. The questions were aimed at understanding their perceptions of the effectiveness of the H&S system and enabling a systemic improvement to their management system.

The results of the survey provide useful indications for planning new actions as well as the dissemination of H&S models so as to continually improve workplace H&S standards.

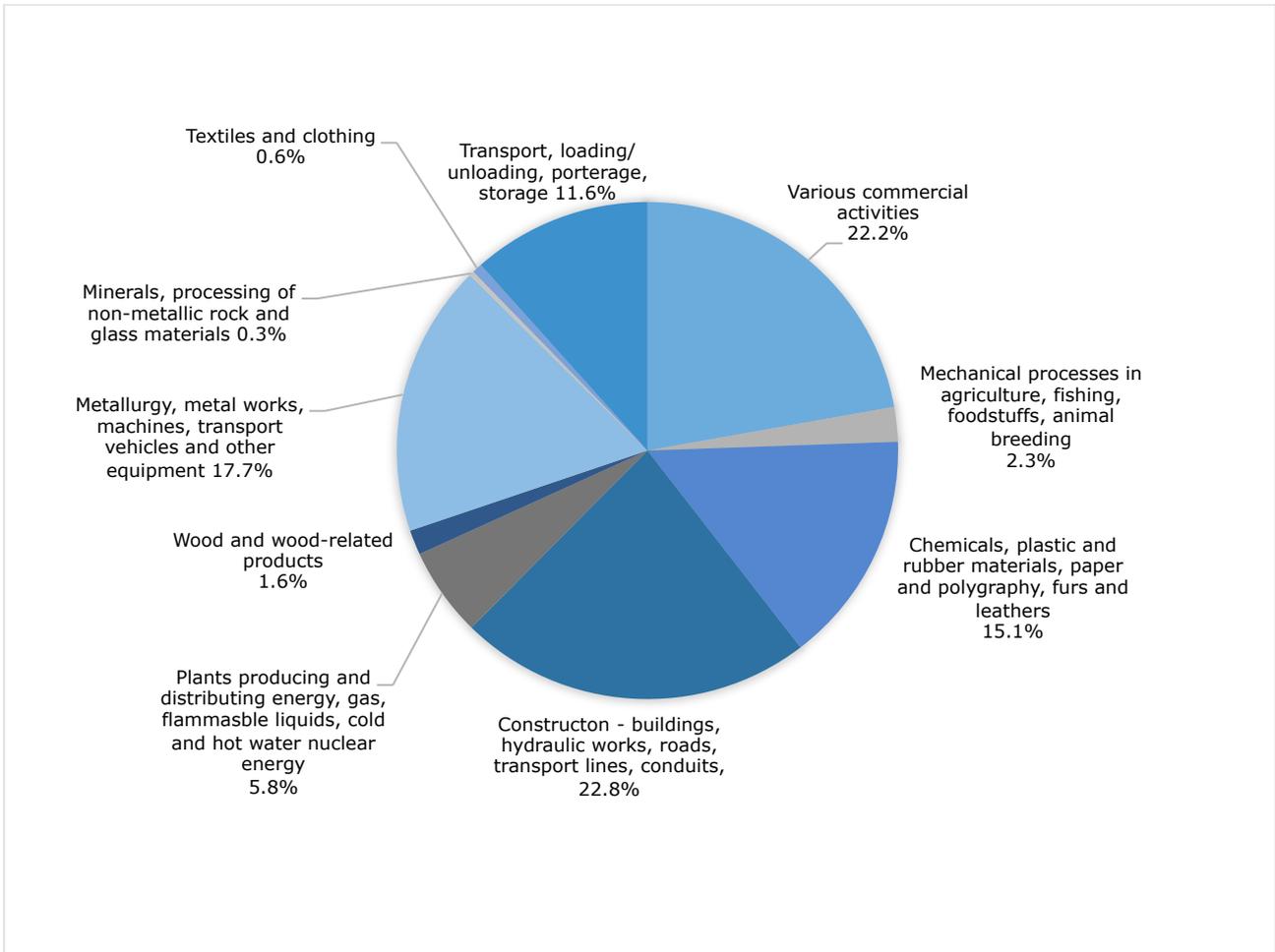
The survey consisted of 17 multiple choice questions and it was addressed both to the H&S manager and the top management of companies with a management system certified against the standard BS OHSAS 18001 for occupational H&S.

311 question forms were analysed for the same number of companies and classified on the basis of the INAIL accident and injury categories.

Typology of organisation with H&S certification

The sectors of construction and metallurgy are the ones with the greatest number of organisations certified against the standard BS OHSAS 18001 for occupational H&S (fig. 1).

Figure 1 – Distribution of H&S certified companies according to the INAIL accident and injury categories

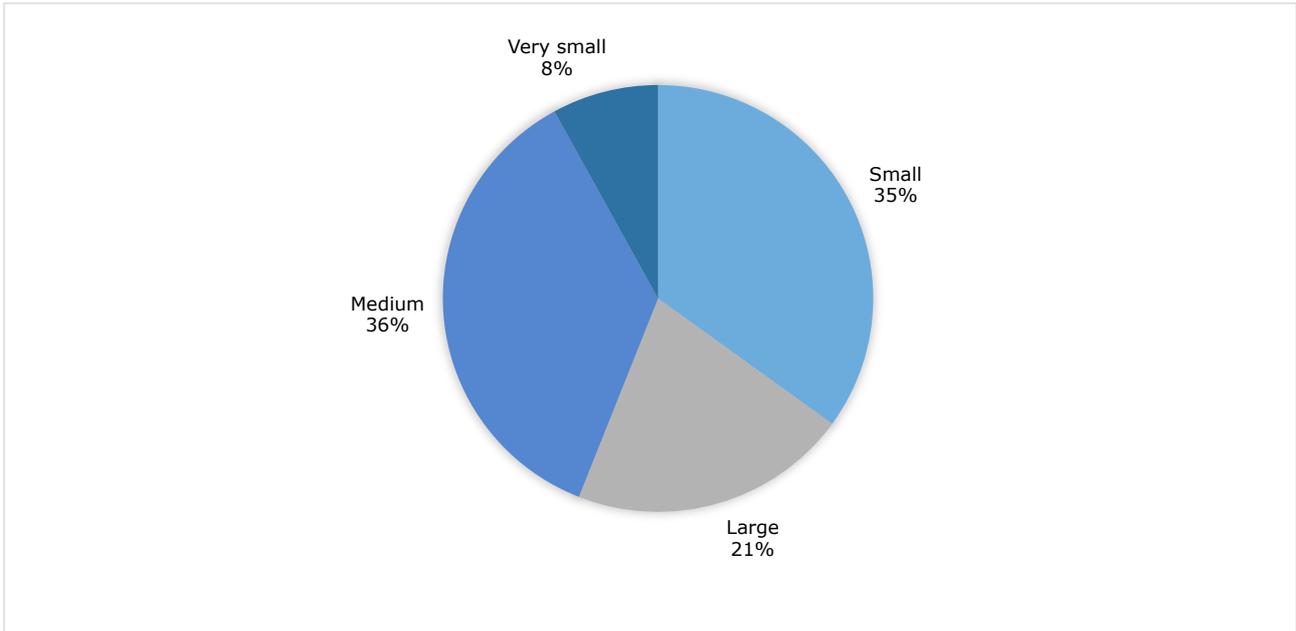


Source: Accredia – INAIL – AICQ survey

Of the total of 238 organisations of the sample it was possible to examine the activities on the basis of their insurance policies. On the basis of this data, and referring to the INAIL fees, it was possible to make a classification of organisations in three classes of risk: high, medium and low. The sample contains 49% at low risk, 31% medium and 20% high.

Distribution according to size shows a significant quantity of large organisations (21%) as against about 70% of small and medium enterprises (fig. 2).

Figure 2 – Distribution of H&S certified organisations according to size



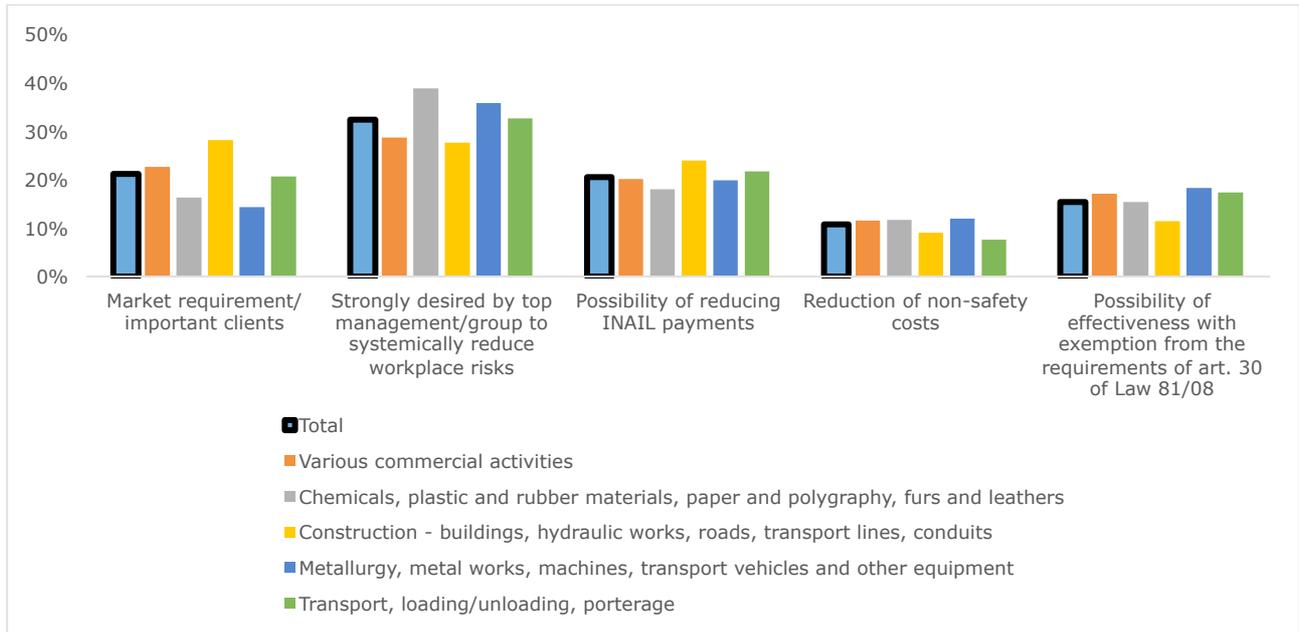
Source: Accredia – INAIL – AICQ survey

Following certification of the management system, 98.4% of organisations saw an improvement in H&S gauged according to injury and professional illnesses (74.6% of respondents), of missed injuries (70.1%), of training hours (63.3%) and of the number of non-conformities handled (55.6%).

Motivations for choosing H&S certification

In most cases the choice is made by the company management (28.1%), whilst in construction and commerce it derives from the market (22.6%) (fig. 3). Corporate image improvement in the eyes of clients and also the respect that certification engenders in the context of the industrial category constitute a significant competitive asset.

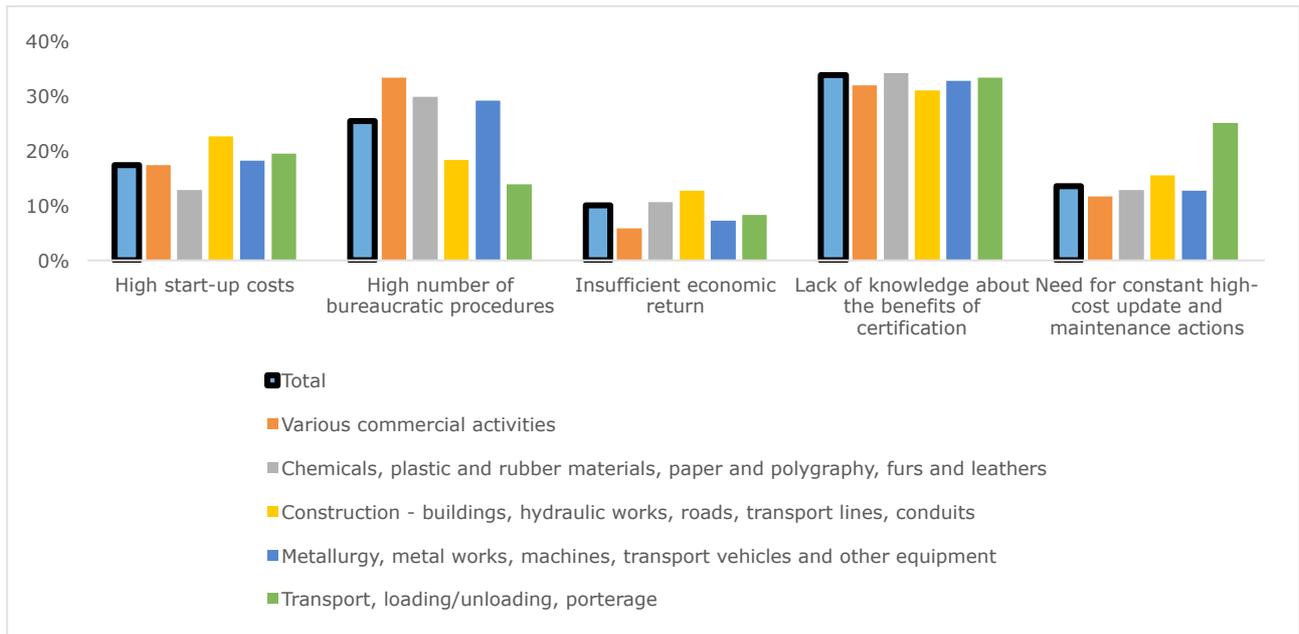
Figure 3 – Motivations for choosing occupational H&S certification (% with respect to the number of respondents)



Source: Accredia – INAIL – AICQ survey

Certified companies revealed a limit to the greater diffusion of the awareness of the benefits of certification (33.8% of respondents) to which must be added, for companies in the construction sector, a high level of start-up costs (fig. 4). Clearly, the reduction of costs, of the duration of audits and of the procedures and documents needed for certification are all factors which could be improved for organisations which can be targeted for increasing recourse to – and therefore the effectiveness of – certification.

Figure 4 – Factors which discourage companies from seeking H&S certification



Source: Accredia – INAIL – AICQ survey

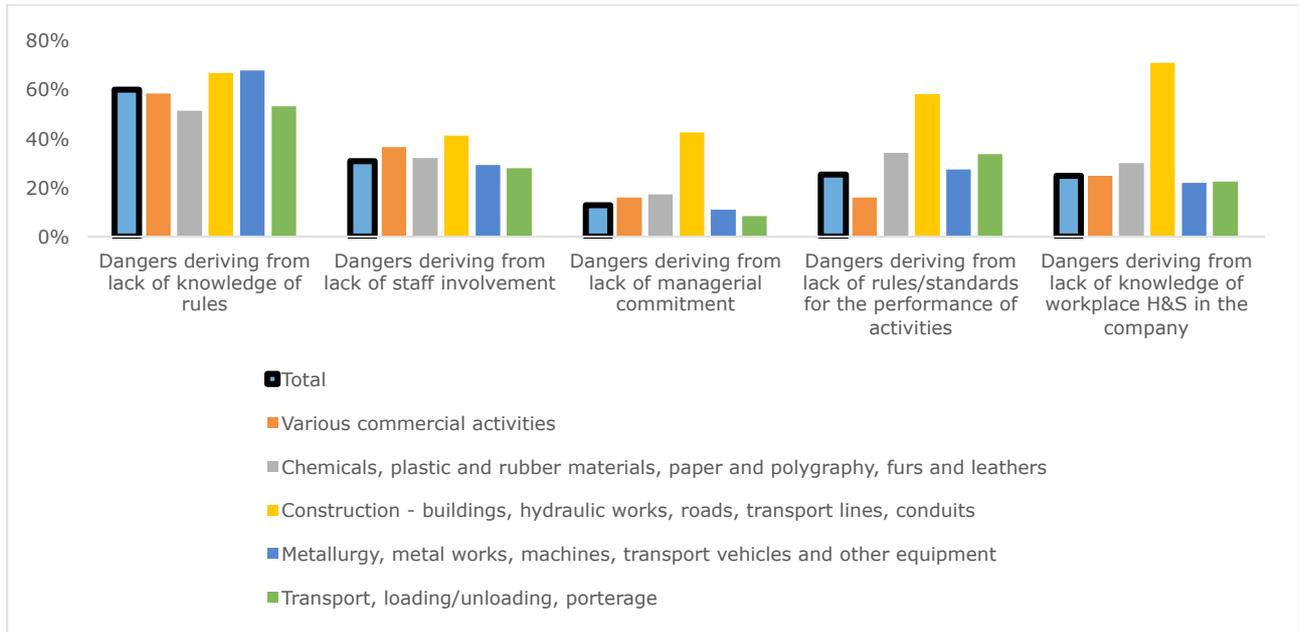
The benefits of a certified H&S management system

Workplace H&S management systems enable organisations to keep workplace risks under control: about 80% of respondents find their management system useful from this point of view. Three out of four also feel that it’s useful for ensuring compliance with legal requirements.

Integration with other management systems – especially for construction, chemical and environmental sector companies – is a major efficiency driver in terms of their safety performance (fig. 5).

The adoption of a management system also revealed a general lack of awareness of the rules as well as low staff involvement, in particular in the case of high risk and construction companies which tend to see potential danger also in non-awareness of the internal management system (50 out of 71, or 70.4% of sector respondents).

Figure 5 – Dangers identified by the certified H&S (% with respect to the number of respondents)



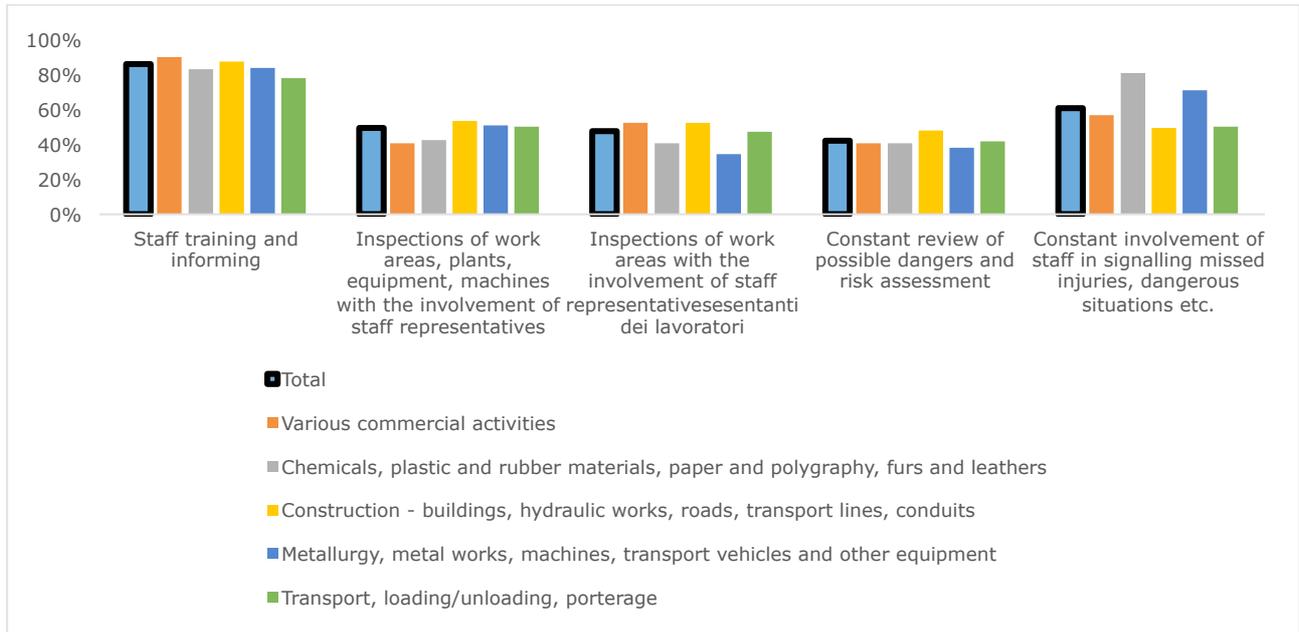
Source: Accredia – INAIL – AICQ survey

The involvement of staff in H&S matters is probably one of the most important systemic effects that the H&S certification – through an improvement in internal communication – can have, especially in companies with a low risk classification. This is probably due to the fact that their start-point in terms of H&S awareness is low, and the benefits related to a growth in this awareness become more evident.

In addition, a management system is a tool for giving out responsibilities and management level roles, thus improving internal organisation. Therefore, on the one hand, H&S certification improves safety governance, and on the other, by means of staff involvement, it increases competences regarding safety matters. This leads to greater corporate awareness and effectiveness of accident prevention measures.

Safety in a company means risk awareness and risk prevention. For 85.9% of respondents activities regarding informing and training are crucial to their prevention policy and it is no coincidence that for over 90% of companies staff involvement in signaling missed injury and dangerous situations is fundamental (fig. 6).

Figure 6 – Effective tools for accident prevention (% with respect to the number of respondents)



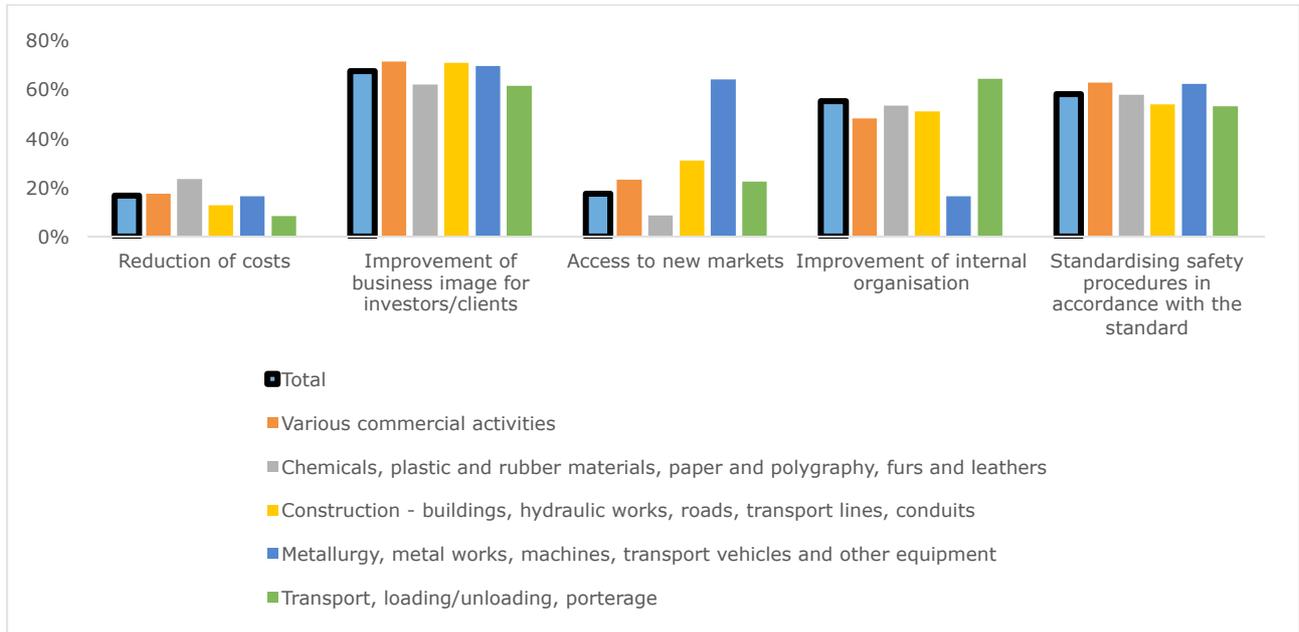
Source: Accredia – INAIL – AICQ survey

For around 90% of companies, management system certification has increased competitiveness, above all owing to an improvement of their image with respect to clients and suppliers (fig. 7). 70.1% reported a positive perception with construction enterprises pointing to new business opportunities. Control authorities also view certification positively: 59.8% of respondents also reported that H&S workplace certification provides evidence of vigilance.

About half the respondents reported a net improvement in the management of external companies, also by means of more efficient management accountability regarding legal conformity. Improvement in dealing with suppliers is particularly important for companies in the metallurgy sector. Obviously, the rise in competitiveness is also the result of a stronger internal organisational situation (55% of respondents) and on the operative level by means of the standardization of safety procedures in compliance with the standard (57.9%).

For companies in the metallurgy sector certification provides a passage into new markets (63.6%).

Figure 7 – Competitiveness drivers for companies with H&S certification (% with respect to the number of respondents)



Source: Accredia – INAIL – AICQ survey

To summarise, perception of H&S management system certification is positive. Organisations highlighted an improvement in their safety performance by means of reorganisation and greater staff involvement and safety competences, benefitting also internal processes because H&S is often integrated with other management systems.

Organisations also signalled stronger competitiveness related to an improved corporate image which changed the perceptions of those with whom it has dealings.

H&S management system certification against the standard OHSAS 18001 provides a general contribution to the fostering of an efficient productive system which protects workers.