



Breaking down silos

A cross-functional playbook
for procurement and HSE



Introduction:

The hidden cost of organisational silos

In today's complex operational environments, cross-functional collaboration is no longer a nice-to-have – it's essential. Yet in many organisations, particularly those managing outsourced workforces, risk-heavy projects and/or regulatory compliance, critical departments like health, safety and environment (HSE) and procurement still operate in silos. These departments may share suppliers, contracts and performance responsibilities, but they often have distinct objectives, metrics and workflows. These misaligned interests lead to inefficiencies, friction and blind spots that impact both safety and performance.

Silos are not inherently malicious or intentional. They're the predictable result of organisational growth, role specialisation and a natural tendency to focus on the goals and pressures closest to home. But when departments like HSE and procurement optimise for their own goals without aligning with each other – or with the organisation's broader objectives – the consequences ripple across operations, supply chain performance and employee well-being.

At best, silos create delays and duplicate work. At worst, they introduce risk into high-stakes environments: missed safety requirements during onboarding, noncompliant workers on site and reactive risk management when issues arise.

Breaking down these silos is not a matter of technology alone; it requires deliberate change management. It starts with understanding why silos form and persist, what risks they create, and how to systematically reduce their impact through leadership, strategy and culture. Only then can tools and systems like Avetta's platform play their role in reinforcing alignment and visibility across teams.

This whitepaper explores how organisations can reduce friction between HSE and procurement, foster a culture of shared accountability and build operational resilience through cross-functional alignment. Finally, it explores how Avetta can help bridge the gap – not by replacing change management, but by supporting it in every phase of the supplier lifecycle.

Section one:

Why silos exist & why they persist

The term 'silo' comes from the agricultural world: a tall, closed, vertical structure used to store grain. In business, organisational silos are similarly self-contained and insular. They hold valuable information and expertise, but often keep it sealed off from others. Communication tends to move vertically within the silo, between staff and leadership in the same department, rather than horizontally across teams. The result is a fragmented organisation where different functions operate in parallel, often duplicating effort, overlooking risk or missing opportunities to collaborate.

Silos arise for practical reasons, but left unchecked they can become barriers to coordination, risk management, innovation and enterprise-level performance.

Types of organisational silos

Not all silos look the same. They can be structural, behavioural or even cultural. Here are some common types:

- **Functional silos:** Departments like HSE, procurement, operations, finance or legal that operate independently and prioritise their own objectives.
- **Information silos:** Systems or tools that trap data within one group, such as a procurement system that is inaccessible to the safety team.
- **Process silos:** Workflows that aren't designed to cross team boundaries, leading to inconsistent handoffs or duplicated effort.
- **Geographic silos:** Geographically distributed teams that operate with different norms, tools or leadership, often resulting in misalignment.
- **Cultural silos:** Teams that have developed distinct values, language or operating styles, making cross-functional collaboration harder.

How and why silos form

Silos tend to emerge as companies grow and specialise. When a business is small, collaboration happens naturally – often in the same room. But as organisations scale, functions formalise. Teams are built to focus on specific domains like safety, sourcing or compliance. They adopt their own terminology, metrics and tools. Each group becomes an expert in its own area but is less aware of how its work connects with others.

Several forces drive this siloing effect:

- **Differing goals and KPIs:** If procurement is measured on cost reduction and HSE on incident prevention, collaboration can feel like a trade-off instead of a shared goal.
- **Lack of shared accountability:** Teams succeed or fail based on their own metrics, not enterprise-wide outcomes.
- **Leadership alignment gaps:** Executives may prioritise their own departmental initiatives without reinforcing the bigger picture.
- **Tool and system fragmentation:** When each team uses its own platform, information becomes harder to share and collaboration is less natural.
- **Physical and organisational distance:** In large or global organisations, proximity matters. Teams in different locations often operate with different expectations, timelines and visibility.
- **Competition over resources:** As organisations grow, there is only so much budget, personnel, tools, incentives and recognition to go around. Add to that a human inclination toward ‘us versus them’ dynamics, and it’s easy to see how silos persist.

These dynamics reinforce each other over time, making silos harder to dismantle once they’ve formed.

Why communication tools aren't enough

Many organisations assume that modern communication platforms will solve their silo problems. But real-time messaging and video tools don't inherently create alignment – they just enable faster communication within existing structures. In fact, these tools can deepen separation by giving each team its own space to operate independently. Without a shared framework for collaboration, even the best technology cannot overcome strategic and behavioural barriers.

True collaboration requires more than access; it requires intentional design. That includes shared goals, cross-functional processes and a culture that rewards collective success rather than isolated wins. Without that foundation, silos persist, and efforts to connect teams often stall at the surface level.

Section two:

The role of leadership & culture in breaking down silos

Organisational silos don't form or break down by accident. Leadership decisions and cultural norms shape how departments behave, communicate and prioritise. In high-functioning organisations, leaders create clarity around shared goals, and the culture encourages collaboration across teams. But when leadership is misaligned or culture defaults to competition, silos take root and reinforce themselves at every level.

Leadership: setting the tone and priorities

Leaders play a critical role in how teams view their responsibilities. When executives promote a shared strategic vision, departments are more likely to align around common goals. When that vision is lacking – or when each leader emphasises departmental success over enterprise-wide outcomes – teams naturally focus inwards.

Mid-level managers are key carriers of this vision. Their interpretation of leadership direction filters directly into how frontline teams work. If managers are rewarded based solely on department-specific KPIs, they are likely to pass those incentives down, driving isolation and competition.

Leaders also control resources. When budgets, headcount and tools are allocated without coordination, it creates friction. One team may lack inspectors while another has surplus staffing. A safety department may be ready to roll out a new initiative, only to discover procurement hasn't prioritised the vendor contract. Without cross-functional alignment at the top, downstream execution breaks down.

Organisational culture: reinforcing behaviours and boundaries

Culture is reflected not in aspirational statements, but in daily decisions and interactions. In organisations where departments rarely interact, teams develop their own language, values and assumptions. Over time, this becomes a self-reinforcing loop: people trust their own group, view others as outsiders and make decisions based on partial understanding.

In some cases, culture breeds subtle competition between departments. Procurement may view safety as a bottleneck to progress. Safety may see procurement as insensitive to risk. These narratives persist because each team is incentivised differently and rarely sits down together to understand each other's realities.

Culture also determines whether teams see cross-functional work as a burden or a norm. In more mature organisations, collaboration is expected and supported. In less mature ones, departments default to their own tools, processes and timelines, even when integration would improve outcomes.



Section three:

Why procurement & HSE are especially vulnerable to silos

While silos exist across many departments, health, safety and environment and procurement teams are particularly prone to becoming misaligned. Both operate under intense operational demands. Both manage significant risk. But they approach those challenges from very different vantage points – with different metrics, priorities and processes.

Contrasting goals, processes and KPIs

Procurement is typically tasked with:

- managing costs
- ensuring vendor quality
- optimising timelines

The team's success is measured through efficiency, adherence to contract terms and price competitiveness. HSE, by contrast, is charged with:

- reducing risk
- preventing incidents
- promoting a culture of safety and compliance

Performance here is measured through leading and lagging indicators: incident rates, audit scores, training completion and more.

Because their KPIs differ fundamentally, these departments frequently operate in parallel, not in concert. HSE may push for a higher standard in contractor safety or require specialised training that delays onboarding. Procurement, meanwhile, may push to accelerate hiring or secure lower-cost vendors, sometimes unaware of the risk implications. Without deliberate coordination, each team can see the other as a blocker, resulting in disconnected decisions – even when working with the same supplier or project.

Process incompatibility and communication barriers

In many organisations, procurement and HSE aren't looped into the same initiatives from the start. Procurement may be driving a vendor selection or system rollout, while HSE is brought in only after contracts are finalised. This disconnect leads to rework, missed risk signals and delayed interventions.

Even their tools reflect this split. Procurement might use sourcing platforms or ERPs, while HSE might use incident reporting tools or compliance dashboards. Without a shared system, information gets fragmented. One team may flag a risk that the other never sees.

Cultural distance and uneven organisational power

Organisational culture and maturity often shape how departments are viewed across the company, which impacts who gets funded, staffed and prioritised. For instance, HSE is often a smaller department, sometimes perceived as a cost centre or compliance function rather than a strategic partner. Procurement, by contrast, may be positioned closer to the organisation's financial core, especially in large or more mature enterprises.

This power imbalance influences how seriously one team takes the other's input and shapes how conflicts are resolved. In less mature organisations, procurement may move forward despite safety objections (or vice versa) simply because their timelines, incentives or leadership backing differ. Cross-departmental perceptions like this can further entrench isolated groups.



Section four:

The cost of siloed operations

Silos don't just create friction – they generate measurable consequences across performance, safety and morale. When departments operate in isolation, organisations miss out on critical context, leading to suboptimal decisions and costly inefficiencies.

Inefficiency and rework

When departments don't coordinate, work is duplicated or delayed. Safety incidents may be logged without procurement's knowledge. Suppliers might be requalified unnecessarily. Poor handoffs and process gaps reduce overall speed and consistency.

Poor decision-making

Without shared context, leaders make decisions based only on their department's goals. Safety may request new tools or headcount without understanding procurement constraints. Procurement may reject a request without visibility into the risks driving it.

Stifled innovation

Silos isolate knowledge and limit cross-functional problem-solving. When teams don't collaborate on shared outcomes, opportunities to rethink contractor onboarding, improve data collection or integrate ESG metrics are lost.

Reduced employee engagement

Isolation breeds mistrust and frustration. Teams may feel misunderstood or deprioritised. When success in one area feels like a setback to another, that zero-sum mindset erodes morale and collaboration.

Section five:

Best practices for alignment & change management

Silos are not dismantled through intention alone. They persist because they are baked into the way people are organised, measured and rewarded. Changing this reality requires more than a new policy or an executive memo; it takes coordinated effort across strategic planning, tactical implementation and sustained reinforcement. The following best practices offer a roadmap for how organisations, particularly procurement and HSE teams, can begin that work.

Strategic best practices

Strategic alignment begins with leadership. Executives must define the vision, set the tone for collaboration and build the structures that allow cross-functional teams to succeed. Just as importantly, they must anticipate and address resistance. Employees tend to resist change when they don't understand the rationale, when the change threatens their autonomy or expertise, or when they fear the unknown. With the right strategy and execution, leadership can alleviate these concerns.

- **Secure executive sponsorship.** Breaking silos starts with clear and visible backing from top leadership. Without it, cross-functional efforts struggle for priority and legitimacy.
- **Establish a unified vision and shared goals.** Procurement and HSE may approach this from different angles, but both aim to deliver safe, efficient and cost-effective operations. Leaders must articulate how departmental goals relate to broader company objectives so teams can stop optimising for themselves and start pulling in the same direction.

- **Clarify the 'why' to build buy-in.** Change is disruptive. Many employees view it as a threat to their routines, influence or success metrics. That's why it's essential to articulate the purpose of cross-functional alignment – not as a burden, but as a way to reduce frustration, improve performance and strengthen the organisation.
- **Empower cross-functional champions.** Change doesn't spread on its own. It's critical to identify and empower credible individuals within procurement and HSE who can bridge perspectives, resolve conflicts and reinforce collaborative behaviours. These change agents serve as translators and advocates throughout the transition, helping departments understand each other's goals and roles.
- **Realign incentives and metrics.** If HSE is rewarded for minimising incidents while procurement is judged on speed and cost, conflict is inevitable. Shared KPIs, such as safe, on-time project delivery, help reduce friction and align decision-making.



Tactical implementation

Strategic intent only goes so far; day-to-day execution must follow. This means changing how teams work, meet and make decisions. Waiting for the perfect moment only prolongs the pain. Organisations are better off 'ripping off the band-aid' – starting the work, learning quickly and iterating forward.

- **Redesign key workflows.** Look at critical cross-functional processes (supplier onboarding, contractor selection, incident response, etc.) and rebuild them with shared accountability in mind. Determine where handoffs occur, where joint decisions are needed and where data must be visible to all.
- **Define roles and accountability.** Many breakdowns come from ambiguity. Assign specific roles for who leads, approves and follows up on each step of a shared process. Ensure HSE and procurement both have seats at the table where it matters.
- **Facilitate collaboration through regular touchpoints.** Weekly coordination meetings, daily stand-ups on active projects and dedicated workshops can help teams build trust and solve problems in real time. These routines also serve as mechanisms for visibility, so risks and roadblocks aren't hidden within departmental walls.
- **Use shared systems to centralise supplier data.** Shared tools that capture supplier qualifications, incident history, performance reviews and ESG metrics give everyone the same view, reducing duplication and disagreement.
- **Start small with pilot initiatives.** Rather than overhaul everything at once, test cross-functional collaboration on one focused effort, such as a new vendor evaluation process or a shared audit protocol. Success builds momentum and reduces resistance.

Sustainment and reinforcement

Even the best efforts unravel without reinforcement. To avoid reverting to siloed behaviour, organisations must embed collaboration into their culture, processes and metrics.

Sustained improvement also requires feedback loops so teams can identify what's working and adapt.

- **Use plan–do–check–act (PDCA) cycles to drive continuous improvement.** These structured loops help teams plan joint initiatives, implement them, assess outcomes and adjust accordingly. Rather than view change as a one-time effort, PDCA reinforces a learning mindset that spans departments.
- **Celebrate wins and reinforce shared success.** Publicly highlight examples when procurement and HSE work together to reduce risk or improve efficiency. Recognising collaborative achievements helps reshape norms and shows what 'good' looks like.
- **Formalise collaboration expectations.** Include cross-functional contributions in performance reviews, leadership evaluations and team KPIs. Reinforcement doesn't stick unless accountability is embedded.
- **Keep communication flowing.** Ongoing training, internal messaging and storytelling around cross-functional efforts ensure the vision doesn't fade. Even when things go off track, consistent communication can bring people back to a shared purpose.

Breaking down silos is a process, not a project. It starts with intention, takes shape through structure and practice, and endures through feedback and cultural reinforcement. For procurement and HSE, this transformation is more than internal – it directly impacts supplier relationships, risk exposure and operational excellence.

Section six:

How Avetta facilitates cross-functional alignment

While Avetta is not a change management tool in the traditional sense, it plays a crucial role in enabling the collaboration, transparency and accountability required to break down silos between departments like procurement and HSE. By unifying supplier data, streamlining workflows and giving every team access to the same operational insights, Avetta removes many of the structural and logistical barriers that typically reinforce departmental isolation.

The result is not just better coordination; it's the ability for departments to speak the same language of risk, act on shared priorities and drive continuous improvement from a common platform.

Centralised supplier visibility

Avetta provides a shared supplier profile accessible to both procurement and HSE teams. All documentation, compliance status, insurance records and risk indicators are stored in one place, reducing the need for duplicate outreach or fragmented recordkeeping.

Prequalified suppliers in the Avetta network accelerate sourcing by allowing procurement teams to find vendors who already meet safety and compliance requirements, reducing approval loops and avoiding late-stage surprises for HSE.

Streamlined supplier onboarding

The Find Suppliers feature enables strategic sourcing professionals to quickly identify vendors who are already vetted and ready to work, reducing onboarding cycles from months to days. This eliminates the traditional back-and-forth between procurement and HSE over compliance checks, contracts and readiness documentation.

Eliminate the checklist

By starting with prequalified vendors, teams can shorten project timelines while still meeting safety, legal and insurance standards.

Shared oversight of safety and project performance

Through Avetta's Worksite Safety module, field teams can assign suppliers to specific projects and collect HSE documentation and training records as part of the job setup process. This ensures HSE teams, operations leads and procurement all have visibility into contractor readiness and project-specific risks.

After project completion, Avetta's Performance Review tools enable stakeholders to leave structured feedback on vendor performance. Both procurement and HSE can contribute to a shared evaluation, creating a feedback loop that informs future selection and fosters accountability across functions.

Unified risk management

Supplier risk isn't one-dimensional, and Avetta's platform uniquely reflects that. Teams can assess a vendor's financial stability, legal issues, ESG posture, sanctions exposure, cybersecurity risk and more in one interface.

This allows each department to evaluate suppliers through its own lens while still aligning on a unified understanding of risk. A supplier flagged by legal or IT can be seen immediately by procurement or safety, eliminating blind spots and duplication.

Customisable reporting and dashboards

Procurement and HSE can each build dashboards tailored to their specific KPIs, pulling from the same underlying data. For example, safety teams might track incident rates and compliance gaps, while procurement monitors onboarding status and contract adherence.

Because the source of truth is the same, reports are consistent and conversations are grounded in shared facts, not conflicting spreadsheets or anecdotal updates.

Integrated communication channels

Each supplier profile includes the ability to log notes, flag issues and capture audit trails. Instead of relying on ad hoc emails or siloed systems, teams can see what actions were taken, when and by whom, providing historical context for better decision-making.

Departments can also leave comments for one another tied to specific supplier records to streamline cross-functional communication and improve response times.

ERP/API integration

Avetta integrates seamlessly with platforms like SAP Ariba, Oracle, Coupa and others, so teams can access supplier insights from within the systems they already use. This ensures that both procurement and HSE teams can work in their native environments without sacrificing visibility or duplicating effort.

Whether it's onboarding workflows, supplier scoring or compliance documentation, data flows freely, reducing manual entry and enabling more agile, data-driven decisions.

Enabling sustainable change

Avetta supports not just operational efficiency but true cultural transformation. By embedding cross-functional collaboration into daily workflows, the platform helps teams adopt new habits and reinforce shared accountability. Every stakeholder and business unit has visibility into the same information and uses a unified process, ensuring alignment across departments and driving consistent, informed decision-making.

When procurement and HSE share access to supplier information, understand risk through a common lens and evaluate outcomes with unified criteria, silos erode naturally. Avetta becomes more than a piece of technology – it's a catalyst for strategic partnership. All supply chain risks are accounted for, from safety exposures to financial liabilities to sustainability. With full visibility from prime contractors to subcontractors to workers on site, organisations gain end-to-end confidence in supply chain performance and safety.

Conclusion:

From alignment to advantage

Breaking down silos between procurement and HSE is not a one-time effort – it's a fundamental shift in how organisations think, operate and lead. Although these departments may approach the business from different vantage points, their goals are deeply intertwined: protecting people, reducing risk and enabling operational excellence.

For too long, outdated structures, misaligned incentives and fragmented tools have prevented true collaboration. But that's starting to change. Forward-looking organisations are recognising that contractor risk, project delays and supplier noncompliance are not isolated problems; they're symptoms of deeper disconnection.

Change starts with leadership and culture, but it takes root in the systems people use every day. When teams share supplier data, align on risk indicators and co-own performance feedback, collaboration becomes the norm.

Avetta supports this shift by providing a centralised, transparent platform where procurement and HSE can operate with shared visibility, common metrics and synchronised workflows. It's not just about faster onboarding or more efficient reporting. It's about giving both departments the tools to align on risk, act on shared insights and drive continual improvement together.

Ultimately, the future belongs to the organisations that move beyond silos, embrace inter-departmental collaboration and embed a shared mindset and goals into their culture.



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[Schedule a consultation](#)



Appendix: Additional resources

Industry resources

Breaking Down Silos: The Importance of Collaboration in Change Management Teams;

<https://changestrategists.com/breaking-down-silos-the-importance-of-collaboration-in-change-management-teams>

Organizational silos: 4 common issues and how to prevent them;

<https://asana.com/resources/organizational-silos>

Change Management: Overcoming Resistance to Information Silos;

<https://fastercapital.com/content/Change-management--Overcoming-Resistance-to-Information-Silo-Breakdown.html>

3 Types of Silos That Stifle Collaboration – and How to Dismantle Them;

<https://hbr.org/2025/03/3-types-of-silos-that-stifle-collaboration-and-how-to-dismantle-them>

How to Lead Across a Siloed Organization;

<https://hbr.org/2024/01/how-to-lead-across-a-siloed-organization>

Silos in Business: What They Are and How to Break Them Down;

<https://blog.invgate.com/silos-in-business>

Organizational Change Requires Breaking Down Silos;

<https://www.torbenrick.eu/blog/change-management/change-require-breaking-down-silos/>

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Geoffrey Goodman brings over 25 years of experience in technology strategy and systems implementation, guiding global enterprises and mid-market companies through digital transformation. His expertise spans ERP and supply chain optimisation, organisational and operating model design, change management and process improvement. He excels at solving complex challenges around executive communication, value realisation, organisational alignment and integrating business with technology.



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