The concept of managing risk management essay

For an organisation or company to comply with its duties and responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSWA), and other subsequent legislation, the responsibility for the management of health and safety in the organisation cannot solely be delegated to the health and safety officer/advisor. The responsibility rests with the employer " It shall be the duty of every employer to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of all his employees" HWSA general duties s. 2(1). This strict requirement places fairly and squarely the duty on the employer, subject to the defence of reasonable practicable. (HSE, 1974).

The Robens committee (1972) concluded that there was one single cause above all others for the accidents and ill health at work and this was apathy, which ran through the whole of industry from the board to shop floor. The HSWA requires considerable more management involvement and a greater awareness of responsibility. This has brought an increased concern for the health and safety of employees and others. The legislation demands the installation and maintenance of safe systems intended to ensure that accidents do not occur and health and safety is not compromised. (Holland, 2000, p. 2.).

For most companies the running of the business and managing health and safety were two completely separate activities and managers looked on health and safety as a necessary evil as long as production or services were not affected. In many organisations senior management still do not see health and safety as a management function.

In the past, accidents have come about because of poor management

systems. The Herald of Free Enterprise is a famous example where communication had broken down, commercial requirements took precedence and lessons from previous incidents had not been learnt. The Management of Health, Safety and Welfare at Work regulations imposed on employer's responsibilities in the form of a broad general duty to identify and set up systems to respond to the risks that could be associated with the running of that organisation. It asked questions like, what level of risk is acceptable, who is responsible for identifying and determining the level of risk and to what extent should the risk be shared by the employers and work force and any other stakeholders. This revitalised health and safety within organisations but there was still resistance by some senior management to take ownership of health and safety. The Clapham Junction and Ladbrooke Grove rail disasters bear witness to this.

The management of health and safety within an organisation is more successfully and effectively managed, if it is integrated into the general management structure of the organisation. The skills that are employed by management to ensure that the organisation is efficiently delivering high quality services and products can also be utilised, to address the health and safety needs of employees and others. This approach helps embed health and safety in the minds of senior management and raises the profile of health and safety within the organisation, which should cascade down through the work force, creating a health and safety culture throughout the organisation. This ensures that the health and safety of the employees and others, the protection of the environment, and the quality of the

service/products for the customer are inherently interlinked and therefore more likely to be maintained.

HS(G) 65 (1997) gives advice on developing health and safety management systems using five steps which are, setting clear and effective safety policy arrangements; organising staff resources to implement the safety policy; planning and setting appropriate safety standards to assess risks; reviewing safety performance, regular auditing to determine that compliance is being achieved.

The first stage is the decision to involve the workforce (policy). The organisations safety policy is prepared by referring to HSWA section 2(3) which requires an organisation that employs more than five persons to have a written statement of their health and safety policy. The policy must contain a statement of intent outlining the organisations health and safety management philosophy, the names of the persons responsible in the organisation for health and safety and systems, and procedures that are required to control risks to employees and others. The employees must have ' ownership' of the health and safety policy for it to be effectively implemented, and the HS (G) 65 offers a number of methods by which this can be achieved.

Examples of ways in which to do this include developing a mission statement by co writing it with employees or by a safety charter that identifies specific values. A safety policy is that it is only a statement of intent and unless it is designed, implemented and reviewed by involving the workforce there may be no real benefit. If however the workforce is involved then the safety policy

then becomes an active document that over time will evolve, absorbing changes in working practices, industry, technology and legislation (HSE, 2006).

Once the decision to involve the workforce has taken place, roles and responsibilities must be defined (organising) and it is very important to establish these in the early stages to ensure a clear reporting structure. By the use of controls, which require the allocating of responsibilities and securing commitment, co-operation can be gained in all levels of the company's hierarchy; staff from the chief executives to the shop floor workers, know where they fit into the system. A system of communication, verbal, written and visible can be put in place to effectively disseminate information throughout the organisation. Having competent employees who can undertake their tasks safely and efficiently, which can be achieved and maintained through recruitment, training and advisory support. General risk assessments will have to be completed by line managers, who will require training in conducting risk assessments to establish their competency. These risk assessments and more specific assessments conducted with the help of the health and safety advisor, will be used to identify hazards and to formulate control measures that can eliminate or reduce the risks as reasonably practicable.

This ensures information is properly shared out among the whole team. Methods in which that this can be done are through having regular team meetings, use of notice boards, newsletter publications and regular informal chats with the general workforce (HSE, 2006).

After roles and responsibilities have been established, different options and the effective design of initiatives (planning) have to be carried out. This can be done a number of ways. Safety Committees are extremely useful arenas, allowing the different perspectives of workers in different areas of the business to be included e. g. trade union representatives, safety professionals, managers and worker representatives. Reporting schemes are also useful as they help raise awareness within the workforce. One of the downsides to reporting schemes are that often under reporting of accidents and dangerous occurrences takes place mainly because of the fear of being blamed and made the scapegoat. Away days and social events are also useful as they can be excellent team building tools and encourage worker participation away from the stresses of everyday work situations. Other initiatives include working parties, risk assessments and incentives schemes (HSE, 2006).

Incentive schemes are a good way of encouraging worker involvement and are something that the Health and Safety Executive back in their guidance on worker involvement. An example how incentive schemes can be utilised is by using reporting and suggestion schemes and then entering submissions into prize draws. Some of the benefits of incentive schemes dramatically improve accident figures, worker participation in safety management and increase the reporting of near miss incidents. There are some potential pitfalls with incentive schemes and it is argued that they actually encourage under reporting and allow workplace hazards to go unchecked and in some cases are seen as ways of bribing the workforce to work safely (J Dorrell, 2007, p. 27).

Once implemented it is very important that worker involvement becomes an important part of everyday health and safety management. To achieve this both the management and the workforce must demonstrate their commitment. If the workforce can see management taking an active role in getting results then they should respond in a positive way. Through past experience of being on both sides of the fence getting praised by the manager is a big motivator and gives the feeling of being part of something (HSE, 2006).

After the planning stage the next step is to implement practical arrangements (implementing). The measuring of health and safety performance can be achieved by setting benchmarks by which performance can be assessed; line managers can monitor the level of compliance that they and their staff have achieved in the standards they are responsible for. Reactive monitoring through the investigation of any accidents, ill health or near misses will help highlight any underlying causes of failure in the ' safe system of work'.

After implementation, the final stage is to measure performance (review). An important philosophy that can be adopted when encouraging employee participation is to learn from mistakes, as it is very rare that things run smoothly first time. Performance reviews and independent audits are techniques to measure compliance. The health and safety advisor is best placed to carry out the audits, as they compile the organisation's health and safety policy, organise risk assessment training for managers and give expert advice on health and safety issues within the organisation. Reviewing is also a good way of promoting continuous improvement. There are various

ways in which performance can be measured and examples of this are, checking management is being supportive, monitoring specific problem areas and recording any negative outcomes. If the management can prove they are monitoring and reviewing schemes that have been put in place then it is a clear indication to the workforce of continual commitment to employee involvement and shows it wasn't just to meet short term targets and gain accolades like a RoSPA award (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) or regaining investors in people (HSE, 2006).

The five steps are most successfully implemented in an organisation with a good health and safety culture. In 2001 the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Nuclear Installations defined safety culture as," the product of individual and group values, attitudes, perceptions, competencies and patterns of behaviour that determine the commitment to, and the style and proficiency of, an organisation's health and safety management." Without these, organisations are going to risk upsetting the workforce. There needs to be good communications founded on mutual trust, shared safety perceptions and a confidence in the effectiveness of precautionary measures. The commitment of senior management is essential in developing an effective safety culture within an organisation and it is indicated by the amount of resources (time, money, people) and status it allocates to health and safety.

" Worker involvement" is how we describe the ways in which workers take part in making decisions about health and safety where they work (HSE 2006). This can be facilitated by the health and safety professional by doing the following; introducing procedures necessary to maintain a high profile for

health and safety within the organisation by engaging management, workforce and other stakeholders in safety campaigns, helping to maintain good communication, reviewing and reinforcing training needs, checking competency, auditing and monitoring health and safety standards. A more traditional approach of control, where hazards are engineered out of a process or the use of physical controls are employed, which can be an effective way of controlling unsafe behaviour, but relies on the employee and other stakeholders following procedures, codes of practice and methods of work to make them effective. This can sometimes lead to a high chance of failure, because people have the capacity to override engineered controls, so unsafe behaviour or acts can defeat the safe system. The implementation of a strong safety culture with committed management that employ good communications and a visible style of management offers a more effective approach in that it will motivate and change peoples behaviour and attitudes so that defeating controls and other unsafe acts will become unacceptable behaviour to all employees and other stakeholders.

In conclusion HSWA and MHSWR both identify the need for the management of an organisations to conduct risk assessments of their business functions and act on the findings to eliminate, minimise or control the risks identified. The best people to help manage and reduce the risks within a business are the workforce and this can be successfully achieved through a harmonised health and safety culture. HSE guidance for directors identifies responsibility for health and safety, requires the board of directors to accept formally and publicly its collective role in the provision of health and safety within the organisation. They need to promote active involvement and also encourage

workers to be more proactive when it comes to health and safety in the workplace. HS(G) 65 gives guidance on the implementation of management systems that have ownership and control of the organisations health and safety. If workers are more aware of issues and are able to raise them without fear of persecution, but instead know that they will get resolved with managers demonstrating their commitment through time and resources, then long term goals of the business should be achieved. The health and safety professional has a vital role to play in advising, monitoring, training and auditing these systems and promoting health and safety throughout the organisation.