

The Three Line Whip!

A call for members' attendance. Since this SIG was founded, people have pressed for a London (as compared to Central England) meeting. Now we have one, take up has been disappointing – there are still places for:

Monday, 18th June 2007 –in London

An afternoon meeting has been arranged to take place in London WC2. The speaker will be Richard Cayzer of Thomas International who will give a talk based on "Psychometrics" – staff behaviour, trainability and emotional intelligence.

Please contact Bruce Widdowson, as this will be a great opportunity to meet some of your "E-colleagues" at an event which promises to provide an interesting talk – joining instructions will be issued to delegates ten days or so before the event

The mention of psychometric testing produces a variety of responses – there are those in favour and those who have reservations. This meeting is an opportunity to air those views and enjoy hospitality that our hosts have offered with some of your fellow members who may not have been able to travel to the Midlands for our earlier get togethers – so why not come along and join us?

This month's Features:

1 of 3 – Hospital Dilema

An emotive report on a meeting called by an NHS trust in the East Midlands to allay concerns about hospital. . . .

Appendix 1 attached

2 of 3 - BP in North America – catching up with this ongoing chronicle of disasters

Attention is drawn to the *Financial Times* of 17th January looking at the fundamental issues of Leadership, the following main

Appendix 2 attached

3 of 3 – People Risk – the High Management Scenario

In our first look at High Management and Leadership, the question is raised of communicating and interpreting the wishes of

Appendix 3 attached

Next NEWSLETTER will be out in July. In the meantime, your comments are always welcome.

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Secretary

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Appendix 1 **Hospital Dilema**

An emotive report on a meeting called by an NHS Trust in the East Midlands to allay concerns about hospital parking at the end of last year generated into a heated debate about hygiene and an unexpected patient death which had occurred in highly controversial circumstances. The poor spokeswoman, who was not especially senior nor experienced in this type of work had to deal with a very, very angry audience – and they were all over 50!

This is once again a topical subject, with MRSA and Health and Safety claims in the spotlight. To return to the storyline, a talk was arranged for an “over 50” fitness group in Nottingham, of which your editor is a member. What started out as a “sell” for the City Council’s refusal to allow planning permission for a much needed overspill car park at the City’s *Queens Medical Centre* combined with a pep talk about the virtues of the public transport system, soon changed into a barrage of questions from the floor:

Points were raised about staff who walked to work in their uniforms not changing out of outdoor footwear before going onto the wards in spite of an area of pigeon droppings under an old railway bridge on one of the main pedestrian routes into the hospital; the horror at the admission that cobwebs in places which were not priority, were not necessarily removed – priority being defined as under beds and working surfaces. There was also a strong call for ventilated smoking areas to be provided, partly to avoid the need for people standing outside smoking (there was a reported sighting of a patient on a drip having a smoke) – but of greater importance, if someone who was a smoker had just lost a relative – they had a right to a cigarette!

However, the climax of the meeting was an emotional call from a member of the audience who had recently lost her husband at the hospital. The circumstances were described by the lady as follows:

“The patient was in a ward, described as “intensive care”, where there were two or more beds and some form of restricted visiting – he was recovering from surgery which had not been considered life threatening but had open wounds. There was an Asian gentleman in the next bed that was dying and approx 60 visitors arrived to pay their last respects in accordance with their traditional customs. After consultations with management, the visitors were allowed into the ward two at a time over a period of several hours. Shortly afterwards, the subject patient caught an infection and died. The subsequent enquiry ruled that it could not be proved that the infection was caught from the visitors to the next patient”. After this tearful outpouring, there was a near violent reaction from the meeting, which took some time to come to order with delegates on their feet.

Editorial comment

This is not a factual report of a hospital incident, rather a resume of notes made of the widow’s statement to the meeting. However, from considerable personal experience, I confirm that the Nottingham QMC is a hospital that has suffered many problems over the years, including this particular one, and has a very unfortunate management culture. Apparently, the case was not proved, but the perception by the victim’s family and others is real and understandable.

THIS IS A **PEOPLE EXPOSURE** FIRST, AN OPERATIONAL EXPOSURE SECOND. Behaviour is influenced by beliefs, desires and traditions – regulations often only try to correct symptoms, not the underlying problems. It has long been the British tradition to be highly tolerant of the wishes of others, including minority cultures – this being the case, and with many years experience of this particular problem behind them, why did the *Nottingham QMC* manager not arrange transfer of the dying Asian man to a private and separate room, so that he could receive due dignity with his relations in accordance with his peoples’ traditions?

If they are to be even partly successful, Operational Frameworks and Systems must be based on how all types of people naturally behave. Surely, it is HIGH MANAGEMENT (and that includes Government) where the buck should stop with these issues!

As an aside, I cannot help but recall comment recently on Radio 4, that the present day general hospital hygiene situation has deteriorated so much over recent years that it would benefit from the basic guidelines put forward by Florence Nightingale in 1858!

Appendix 2

BP in North America – the conclusion of this saga of threat risk.

Attention has been drawn to an article in the *Financial Times* of 17th January looking at to the fundamental issue of *Leadership* and the discussing the main measure being taken at BP which included appointment of an “outside expert”:

This is an important and complex matter which provides a lot to learn for those in our field, but we have insufficient space to provide full coverage, so readers who are interested can type *Financial Times* into their Search Engine and then bring up the Website’s own search tool and insert **BP** - there are a number of articles to choose from. In the meantime:

Editorial Comment:

No surprises that many of the findings regarding “ownership” were inconclusive and the article did not say to whom precisely the “outside expert” would be reporting to – hopeful the main board.

What is now of interest to our SIG from this case is mainly two-fold:

1 The lack of “reporting” – this was the very first FAQ that we raised (NEWSLETTER

No. 4, in April 2006).

2 The weakness in *Leadership*. In the same Issue (and again in NEWSLETTER No. 5, May

2006) we commented on High Management, in particular the two levels – in BP’s case,

London and the US. This is an area that the SIG will now move into:

Appendix 3

In our first look at High Management and Leadership the question is raised of communicating and interpreting the wishes of the main board down into practical policy – in other words *true general management*.

Firstly, it is appreciated that there are areas where the “top level” decisions to save money at strategic planning level are flawed; e.g. *Ronan Point*, the pre-fabricated block of flats that partially crumbled like a pack of cards in 1968 when a small domestic gas explosion took place. In this type of scenario, the RM function is to make sure that all possible data is communicated upwards before the decision is taken. However, we will come on to that aspect later.

To kick off our research into higher management people exposures, the culture of implementation of existing scenarios which have already been decided must be looked at, these have to be made to work effectively. The problem in large organisations is often within the various layers of higher or general management and the culture used for executing main board policy. Major decisions have to be made in the harshness of the real world, but should that harshness continue down the line in the implementation process? I would argue, that it should not:

A much discussed case is the *Herald Ferry* Disaster of 1987. Your editor was openly criticized by two delegates at last year’s **irm** Forum for being out of date in citing this case as things have moved on. Have they? Reading the **BP** saga in the *Financial Times* articles – I doubt it.

Returning to the *Herald*, in brief, a ferry originally designed for different duties was used which on the run concerned required trimming with ballast tanks for landing and sailing modes. The main board strategic decision not to buy a new ship was probably justifiable as an expense too far in the real world. What was not justifiable was the lack of operational budget, communication and poor culture relating to fitting out, tactical and operational aspects of the ferry.

NB Two differences here with *Ronan Point* were, firstly, there is no practical control over what tenants of a block of flats do (a *People* exposure), but there is, or should be control of the command structure within a ship’s crew and, secondly, there was no evidence produced that the *Herald* was not a seaworthy vessel *per se*, whereas the basic structure of *Ronan Point* was unsound.

Next issue

Out in July, will include a closer examination of one context of the *Herald* case which will illustrate a weakness that has not been identified much in the past that exists in higher management all too often. In the meantime, I look forward to your comments – and what are the other factors our SIG needs to look at regarding high management over the coming months? Remember it is your Group, each and every one of you; I am only here to serve!