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People Risk Special Interest Group

NEWSLETTER NO. 5

May 2006

Continuing our theme of **Frequently Answered (or asked) Questions (FAQs)** under each of the of: **Organisational culture and motivation - Communicating - Training (staff), educating (managers) and incentives.**

There was considerable response from the last *NEWSLETTER* to the issue raised in Question 1, regarding non-reporting. I will deal with developments in detail next time as the leading feature of *NEWSLETTER No 6* to take this point forward. In the meantime, I would like to concentrate on the very basic matter raised by Brian Rowlands in the feature below:

Feature 1 of 2

Information

There is a distinction between information and data. Data is the raw material, the bare facts. Information provides context and interpretation to support analysis and decision making.

The transfer of data into information is a perfect example of pure People Risk (we will ignore a process that is computer aided, even then, someone had to design the programme and someone else chose the software). A single wrongful interpretation during this most basic process could skew the whole meaning of a report. I would be grateful if readers could write in with actual examples (changing the names and places if necessary for confidentiality) of errors that have so occurred for assistance with a topic I wish to introduce later in the year.

Feature 2 of 2

To remind you of the BP Story - the following is a brief summary of the *Financial Times* report:

The leader dealt with the deferment of maintenance and delayed repairs at the Texas plant and then echoed the scenario in Alaska. The features being the explosion in Texas City during 2005 killing 15 people and injuring an estimated 500 at the refinery and then went on the draw in the story of the

biggest ever oil spill (quoted later as 270,000 gallons) at Prudhoe Bay, Alaska - North America's largest oil field.

The article went on to state that a Texas based Consultancy had done a safety audit and much of the problem was put down to corrosion and a BP spokesperson commented that the company had increased its inspection and maintenance programme in line with regulatory requirements and that the situations was now "manageable".

In the last NEWSLETTER, I commented on the apparent position of the Main Board in London (HIGHER HIGH MANAGEMENT) and the Regional Board in the USA (LOWER HIGH MANAGEMENT) and that the scenario of upper operational management would be featured later in the year.

Returning to the article, the journalist does not comment on why BP allegedly did not respond to staff warnings over a four year period – either he/she does not know, or the answer might have reduced the impact of the article, which goes on to state that the BP spokesman said that initiatives were addressing factors such as, leadership, culture, control of work procedures and repositioning of occupied temporary buildings. I will look at the **two** of these perhaps less likely to be associated with people risk:

Control of work procedures – Do these controls themselves impose risks? They must be responsive, especially when projects are large and unwieldy and are subject to delays. They must also allow for effective reporting and monitoring of incidents and near misses – genuine questions and constructive comment raised by such reports must not be regarded as attacks on the concept. Information (see previous question) should flow freely upward to reach to the appropriate level of management.

Repositioning of occupied temporary buildings – the main people risk here lies with the decision maker regarding the original location. Design engineers, architects and others often make assumptions of how users might behave and in what way the building will interact in operation with other units on site. These assumptions are sometimes erroneous.

Perhaps these people did not receive vital information at the time, or were they under too much pressure to make the time to enquire? *Will readers please write in with any examples of this particular context that they could share with the Group.*

(I am indebted to Michael Ocock for some research work in helping to compile this feature).

Newsletter – No. 6

This is scheduled to be issued next month and will conclude non reporting and take forward the concept of design and planning assumptions. In the meantime, *KEEP SENDING THOSE COMMENTS IN.*

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