



PARTNERS IN SAFETY AT CORUS HTD

1. Organisations involved

Corus Htd.

2. Description of the case

2.1. Introduction

The largest Netherlands plant of steel company Corus is located in IJmuiden. Although the company had previously taken steps to improve occupational safety within the maintenance and service department, the level of occupational accident-related absenteeism did not fall significantly. To try to get absentee rates down, in 2003 the plant launched a project called 'Partners in Safety', with the support of the 'Versterking Arbeidsveiligheid' (Increasing Occupational Safety) programme set up by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.¹ The objective was to change the culture as regards safety and leadership through interventions in the labour process and the organisational structure. Thanks to this project the number of accidents resulting in sick leave decreased from 97 per million hours worked in 2001 to 7 in 2006.

Corus (formerly Hoogovens) is an Anglo/Dutch company and the largest steel company in Europe. It is a subsidiary of the Tata Group. The Corus Group has production plants in 17 countries, employing a total of 48,000 employees (2005). The largest Corus company in The Netherlands is the integrated steel company in IJmuiden. The Corus IJmuiden site is the largest continuous industrial site in the Netherlands and is located in the municipalities of Heemskerk, Beverwijk and Velsen. The safety action plan described in this case study was implemented in Corus's (HTD) maintenance and service department in IJmuiden.

Between 2001 and 2004, the number of (near) accidents without absenteeism at Corus HTD decreased from 97 to 63 a year. This trend levelled off in 2004, although the number of cases rose for certain departments. The effect of a previous project on occupational safety was apparently insufficiently strong and durable. During this same period a branch of Corus in Delfzijl managed to achieve an impressive reduction in the number of accidents resulting in sick leave. The success of the Delfzijl project was associated with huge commitment from workers, executives and the management team alike.

2.2. Aims

The objective of the 'Partners in Safety' project set up by Corus HTD (IJmuiden) was to build and install a real, durable 'safety culture'. To this end the company used the experience gained from the successful project in Delfzijl.

2.3. What was done, and how?

The project manager of the Delfzijl project was asked to translate the Delfzijl approach to the situation in IJmuiden in April of 2003. Preparations were finalised in November 2004: three improvement teams had adapted the basic concept as used in Delfzijl. Employees from all levels and departments within Corus were involved in this process. In January 2005 the project was further developed in the largest business unit in IJmuiden: the maintenance and service department (HTD Maintenance).

The project had the following characteristics:

¹ <http://www.arbonieuwestijl.nl/8/Arbeidsveiligheid.html>

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1. The safety approach tied in with the most important values in Corus HTD's mission and vision. In the case of this project Respect, Care, Involvement and Dialogue, for example, were important values.
2. These values were the foundation on which the standards were based, which were then translated into Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). What was remarkable about this approach was that efforts were deemed to be more important than the final outcome in the assessment. The underlying philosophy was that investment and attention would determine the final outcome. This resulted in a highly proactive approach. Corus was mainly trying to prevent accidents, partly because efforts made to prevent these accidents played a greater part in determining the reward for departments and management than the actual number of accidents.
3. The KPI scores were used in every department to determine the level of awareness and the practice of occupational safety among staff. Line management was able to compare results with the agreed target standards.

During meetings (Time-outs for safety) the top 200 executives were challenged to start up a dialogue with employees about occupational safety. They were mainly asked to listen to people, to ask a lot of questions and to explain as much as they could. The executives were shown a film to give them a more detailed grasp of the issues. The meeting brought about a change in many executives' views on the issue.

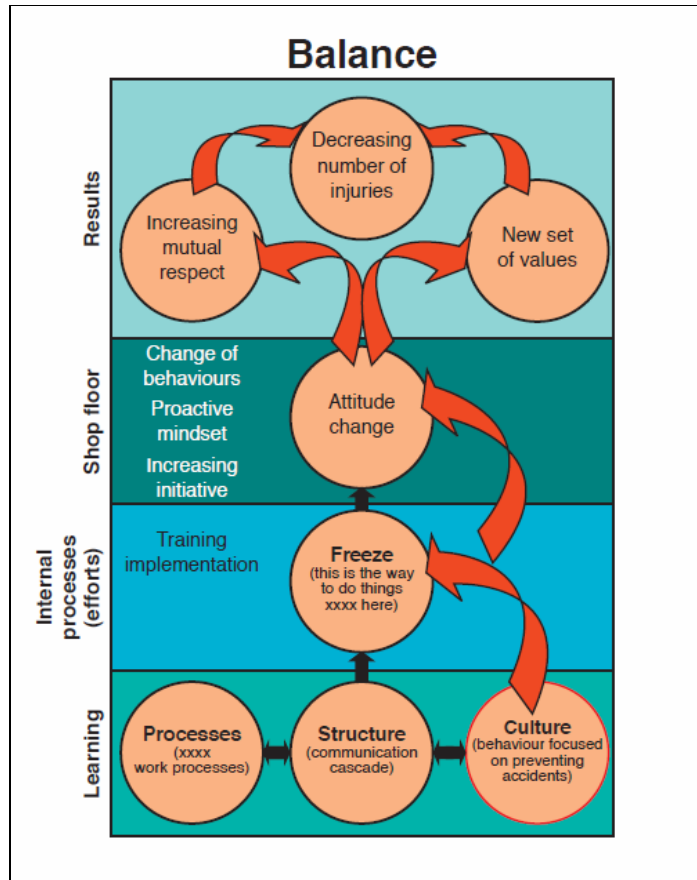
Corus developed a training programme for the 200 executives. Topics included: accident investigations, task risk analysis, how do I approach someone, observation techniques, working with safety themes, etc. A communication structure (communication cascade) was developed, enabling employees to deal with notifications of dangerous situations in a quick, transparent and respectful manner themselves (and, where needed, with the help of managers higher up). The employees now know that notifications are taken seriously. As a result the number of notifications has increased considerably. A number of simple but intelligent communication tools were developed, which facilitate the dialogue between executives and employees concerning safety. One example is the STOP! & GO! Card, which employees have to carry with them at all times. The card contains all the key points of the programme and can be used in any situation as a checklist for safety. If anyone notices an unsafe situation or behaviour, he/she asks for the card, runs through the questions on it and thus institutes a discussion that allows the other party to refocus on safety.

2.4. What was achieved?

Corus HTD has succeeded in developing and implementing an active safety approach through the 'Partners in Safety' project. Furthermore, the process required to improve safety has been clearly described in terms of tasks, responsibilities and opportunities for communication. Based on the management tools and the clear work process executives (and employees amongst themselves) can always start up a dialogue with one another about undesirable situations and behaviour. This has improved the safety culture and encouraged staff to take greater responsibility for OSH. As a result the number of accidents has decreased considerably (from 97 a year in 2001 to 7 in 2006). The number of preventive notifications of hazardous situations within the company also rose sharply (from 231 per million hours worked in 2001 to 823 per million hours worked in 2006).

The 'Partners in Safety' project resulted in the development of the HTD Safety Behaviour System (Balance). The Balance model has four levels. By working through these four levels a reduction in accidents can be attained.

Figure 1. The Balance model



Problems faced

An important lesson learned from the 'Partners in Safety' project is that attention must not slacken for a single moment, and people must be motivated constantly to maintain their interest. For example, at one point the project manager was absent, so attendance at the training sessions for the product groups fell significantly.

2.5. Success factors

- Using experience from a project that was proven to be successful. The approach developed in Delfzijl with its impressive results was an excellent reason for the HTD manager to use this as a launch pad for the programme in IJmuiden. The fact that this was a Corus-developed project contributed to acceptance.
- Involvement and visibility of top management level, not only in directing policy but also when it came to implementation (e.g. during board meetings and the distribution of the STOP! & GO! cards).
- Involvement and positive critical attitude on behalf of the works council. The works council was involved from the very beginning and also endorsed less popular measures that are a result of compliance with agreements to improve safety.
- Communication cascade: this is a transparent way of dealing with notifications of unsafe situations. Every notification is dealt with by the department(s) concerned. In the first instance the employees themselves, who are faced with the hazardous situation, try to find ways to solve the problem. If they need the help of management or other departments to do this, then the notification is 'passed on'. The communication cascade always highlights the status of the notification and determines who has to take the next step. Deadlines are

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visible for everyone. A notification is thus taken seriously by management as well as workers.

- A simple communication tool to support the dialogue. Corus developed a number of simple cards that summarise the essence of 'Partners in Safety' with a number of questions. Everyone is given this card, so if they notice unsafe situations or unsafe behaviour they can use it to initiate a discussion about safety.
- The project manager was the key to the project's success. His infectious enthusiasm, inspiration, responsibility and challenging but respectful style helped win everyone's support for the project and approach.
- Link to KPIs. By linking the vision on safety to the company's values and by translating these values into measurable key performance indicators, management developed an information and control tool. As a result, safety became a visible part of management responsibility. This guarantees the continuous improvement of occupational safety.
- Links between safety and personal experience. Unsafe behaviour is now discussed in such a way the consequences of unsafe behaviour are linked to the employees' family and private life. This has eliminated the tendency for certain staff to complain that attention to health and safety is just for 'softies'.

2.6. Further information

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2.7. Transferability

The Corus HTD 'Partners in Safety' concept will certainly be of use for other companies. Key points learned from this approach include:

- It is better to copy a good idea properly than to make up your own bad version. Use good ideas and approaches that have been devised elsewhere (within your own company). At IJmuiden the company had previously used a method devised by an external agency, which generated insufficient results. By translating an approach used at Corus Delfzijl to IJmuiden, the company's own employees managed to achieve a great deal more.
- Choose the right project manager. For projects that are aimed at changing behaviour, it is crucially important to appoint a manager who exemplifies the desired culture and the desired behaviour and who is able to convey this with sufficient enthusiasm.
- Ensure a connection with the company's directing principles. Connecting a project's *modus operandi* with the directing principles, as used by the company's management, makes it more likely to succeed than if a separate reporting structure is developed for the project.
- The personal touch. Express the desired behaviour in ways that employees and executives can relate to personally. Safety will only become a reality if you point out the personal consequences of unsafe behaviour.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment helped introduce the STOP/GO card systems devised by Corus HTD at Mitsubishi Caterpillar Forklift Europe BV (MCFE) in 2006. Each employee has a card listing eight questions about the workplace, tools, instruction/training, etc. Once a day the employee has to ask all the questions to determine whether it is safe to commence work. If this is not the case, the employee has to show a STOP and talk to the foreman about the measures that must be taken to ensure that work is safe. Proposals for improvement are written out and placed on a central noticeboard, and both the foreman and the employee have to sign off the completed measures.

3. References, resources:

- http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/mainstreaming_osh_business