



PROCOL is part of the building industry and is committed to improving health, safety and well-being on building sites. It has 65 employees, (mainly men) organised in work teams of three who are working on the development of preventive strategies in the building industry.

Implementing successful OHS strategies

The company technical director has responsibility for OHS. He believes that the most effective method of improving health and safety is to empower workers to make changes. He also sees his own role as that of facilitator not leader. The success of a group approach such as this is dependent on adequate and on-going training. Good communication is also vital either through formal meetings or in an informal manner i.e. daily discussions with the workforce.

the technical director a snapshot of the health and safety culture in the company while creating an environment in which critical issues can be highlighted and employees' concerns put forward. This process also underlines the differences between workers' and experts' risk/needs perceptions. Ideas for possible technological and organisational improvements are also discussed in staff meetings. Meetings provide a useful opportunity for discussing health practices and for identifying gaps in training that need to be addressed. It is important that workers are trained so that they can make an informed contribution to improving health and environmental and safety management.

Self-directed work teams

PROCOL steers clear of a rigid hierarchical structure and allows workers to operate with a significant degree of autonomy. Employees are divided into 17 teams of three people, each with a specific job to do. The teams are supported by four foremen. Teams are informed daily about the job to be done and then they are on their own. New workers are trained by experienced ones.

The advantages of this approach is that everyone in the organisation is working towards better health and safety. It is a process that involves participation from all echelons of the company, continuous improvement is encouraged and the action plan put together corresponds to the needs of both management and workers.

Workers are encouraged to voice their opinions on the health and safety situation at work. This gives

There are problems involved in bringing about improved health and safety, however. The nature of the industry means that job sites



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change regularly and work conditions are largely dependent on clients' willingness to co-operate. The kind of participative process described above is also very time consuming for both the facilitator and employees, which might affect its sustainability.

Creating a worker friendly environment

Workers are entitled to make their own decisions about work scheduling, improving working procedures and co-ordinating with other groups. This approach has been supported by extensive training efforts including co-operative and communication skills. Both formal and informal training is carried out.

Taking positive strides

The model has been running since May 2000. It came about at the instigation of the managing director who created opportunities in the company for the assessment of every operational procedure within the business, those who work in it (from the managing director down) and health and safety. This process is based on the conviction that health and safety is everybody's responsibility and demands commitment, involvement and action.

Seeing improvements

Working on a building site is a physically demanding job; the work is hard, there are potential risks inherent in it and employees work outside in all weathers.

The work teams have addressed safety in various building sites, for instance, by placing safety nets at different heights in case of falls. Security belts and special gloves are also used.

Each team is responsible for its own project so a sense of ownership develops. Employees are proud that they work efficiently and produce top quality results that compare very favourably to other highly regarded companies within the industry.

An excellent team spirit has developed and there is tremendous motivation to get the job done and to do it as well as possible. The teams are always looking at ways in which quality and efficiency can be improved upon. The fact that workers are given such autonomy means that they are capable of reacting well in situations where an immediate, practical response is needed.

Social welfare activities

Provision of extra facilities for workers has improved the situation on-site. A room is set aside for workers to rest, meet up with colleagues and have a coffee. Shower facilities are also provided. As a token of appreciation, a Christmas lunch is laid on for all staff and gifts distributed.

Workers' health is monitored annually by an external service responsible for occupational health and risk reduction as well as health education activities such as tobacco and alcohol education programmes, nutrition, exercise and information campaigns on flu and tetanus vaccination.

Looking at the results

As yet there has been no quantitative evaluation but anecdotal evidence suggests that considerable improvements have been made. The quality of work has improved, jobs are completed faster, staff turnover has decreased along with sickness and absenteeism. In line with an overall improvement in performance, skills have been upgraded too.