

## Successful Health and Safety Management - HSG 65 Revisited

Towards the end of the summer of 1991 I was putting the finishing touches to the draft of an HSE guidance document which would become the first edition of 'Successful Health and Safety Management', subsequently numbered HSG 65 in the HSE Guidance Book series of publications.

I had been working on the document over a couple of years after transferring to work in the Accident Prevention Advisory Unit, (APAU). Originally part of the Factory Inspectorate the APAU had, since the 1960's, had been devoted to promoting the practice of managing health and safety. Its purpose included making 'central interventions' to large multi-site companies as means of encouraging a coordinated approach across all the company factories both to promote consistency of approach and improve health and safety management.

Although much good work had been done and several useful publications produced<sup>1234</sup> there was still no overall description of what good health and safety management looked like. HSG 65 aimed to set out the 'big picture' describing the scope and nature of good health and safety management and how this could be integrated into management practice. The core idea was to provide a framework illustrating how health and safety could be managed as a process rather than just a series good practices.

My thinking was influenced primarily by the ideas and system thinking from my early business school training, but also by the emerging safety management systems such as work of Frank Bird and the International Safety rating System (ISRS), and quality management systems. The document also aimed to 'sell' the advantages of good health and safety management as well as setting out some of the key knowledge underpinning good practice.

The 'POPMAR' model grew out of a desire to align the guidance with the legal requirements of HSW 74 section 2(3) reflecting the requirement for a policy, organisation and arrangements. From a regulatory perspective the aim was to set out the reasonable expectations of the law which could be used to guide compliance and also be used a framework for inspection.

Not all the material in HSG 65 was new but there were definitely some blank pages to fill when it came to thinking about planning. I also recollect some difficult moments trying to create a single, simple cohesive framework. I remember struggling over how to integrate event investigation into a structure which, by its nature demanded far more than management by exception. The idea of active and reactive monitoring as two ways of seeking to learn from experience eventually struck me – it's obvious with hindsight!

The passage from draft to publication was not easy. Feedback from colleagues who commented on the early drafts were not all positive and some struggled with a management approach outside their experience and comfort zone. The final draft did not have universal support across HSE at senior management level and in the very first print run the foreword was signed by the Chief Inspectors of Factories.

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<sup>1</sup> Success and Failure in Accident Prevention, 1976

<sup>2</sup> Effective Policies for Health and Safety, 1980

<sup>3</sup> Managing Safety, 1981

<sup>4</sup> Monitoring Safety, 1985

As a consequence of the internal challenges at one stage I was losing confidence in the value that the publication may have. The late Frank Lindsay, the then head of the APAU, encouraged me by saying that in his view it would shape thinking for the next 10 years. I was not so sure. In the end, we were both wrong! HSG 65 captured the moment and became an HSE 'best-seller'. It also stimulated a growth in the systems and structured approaches to health and safety management which I believe, overall, has been beneficial both at home and abroad; though as we know, competence and behaviour remain essential to make any approach a reality.

The publication also had value internally within HSE. I spent many years using the HSG65 framework as a means of training HSE inspectors in a structured approach to assessing health and safety management.

Looking back I am reminded of those who contributed to its success. Dr Norman Byrom was closely involved in helping me to shape the ideas. He offered sound challenge and encouragement. I am also particularly grateful to Frank Lindsay whose insightful leadership saw the value in the work and gave the support, time and freedom to pursue the project.

Twenty five years on would I wonder whether, starting afresh we would end up in a similar place? Revisions of HSG 65 have appropriately focused more on both leadership and management, though I think that more can still be said about the corporate governance of health and safety. For example what would be the attributes of a good boardroom process for the effective governance of health and safety? Perhaps this is something to keep me busy in retirement – hence this site!