



South Cumbria &  
North Lancashire Branch

## Joint meeting 11<sup>th</sup> April 2019



South Cumbria Occupational  
Health & Safety Group

**Topic:** *Safety ownership: carrot or stick?*

**Speaker:** David Mason, Director, *Inspire Safety*

**Venue:** The Netherwood Hotel, Grange-over-Sands, Cumbria LA11 6ET

After a short AGM Jim Tongue, Chairman, *South Cumbria & North Lancashire IOSH Branch*, welcomed members to the Branch's joint March meeting with *SCOHS*. He then introduced Dave Mason, a popular speaker, who always challenges members to reassess effective ways of motivating employees to develop a positive workplace culture.

Dave introduced himself by explaining that he had a wide range of safety management experience including being Health & Safety Director at *Travis Perkins* prior to taking on his role as Director at *Inspire Safety*. During this time, he has tried several different approaches to encourage, Directors, managers and employees to take 'ownership' of their workplace safety culture. He has concluded that it is always important to make individuals feel that their opinions will be considered when decisions about workplace safety procedures are made.

Dave suggested that in order to develop an effective workplace culture it is necessary to understand that everyone in the workplace has individual values based their upbringing, friendship groups and workplace experiences. This means that managers and safety professionals need a broad understanding of theories about how group cultures evolve such as those put forward by Maslow, Herzberg, Hefstede and Hawthorne.

He then explained that before introducing workplace initiatives aimed at changing workplace culture it was important to have a clear idea about the purpose of the initiative and to focus on a key, achievable aim such as:

- Improving compliance with workplace safe systems of work and H & S legislation
- Reducing accidents
- Encouraging managers and workers to develop a positive workplace culture.
- Achieving a healthier workforce

He then considered the merits of traditional ways of improving workplace safety cultures. These included revising Safety Management Systems, training programmes, audits, poster campaigns, inspections, near miss reporting, regular Safety Committee initiatives and incentive schemes as well as the requirement to produce traceable performance measurements.

This led to a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of reward versus punishment and the need to ensure that if rewards were used as a workplace incentive that the way that they were awarded must be seen to be fair. Dave said that if a reward system is being used it was important that everyone involved understood what was being rewarded, who was eligible for the reward and how the winner was decided. He also asked members to consider whether, or not it was appropriate to award a pay supplement for workers who volunteered to undertake additional safety responsibilities such as becoming trained first aiders or fire wardens.

Dave suggested that workplace initiatives that aimed to improve a workplace's health and safety culture needed to have a clear strategy with a realistic approach about what was achievable. He said that the most effective way to do this was to involve everyone in the process: Directors, managers, safety representatives, workforce team leaders and to ensure that risk assessments were genuinely team focussed.

He also stressed the importance of well-run and appropriate training at all levels so that competency and confidence were the foundation stones of the whole workforce, from the top to bottom.

Dave then considered the importance of effective communication. He said that it was important to take an interest in what everyone was doing and to ask them if they had any ideas about how their job could be done more safely and efficiently – too often safety measures are put in place that are impractical because they were devised by people who did not have relevant work experience. He said that behavioural change can only be sustained if managers and safety professionals observe what is really happening, rather than by assuming that agreed safe systems of work are routinely followed by employees. Safety professionals and managers need to talk to workers, in a way that allows them to make constructive suggestions, about why they are using different procedures and about how they think that the methodology for their job could be improved.

Dave then cautioned that it was also imperative that clear breaches of workplace safety management systems were investigated openly and thoroughly so that safety management systems can be improved and so that everyone understands that safe systems of work serve an important function – they help prevent serious accidents and injuries. He recommended using a Just Culture model, such as the James Reason Model, to ensure that adverse workplace incidents are dealt with fairly. The model's starting point asks the question: was the incident deliberate with the intention of causing loss, damage and/or injury? If so, the associated flow chart summarises the stages that lead to appropriate disciplinary action. If the incident was not caused by a deliberate action, the model asks other questions such as: was the person informed and trained in procedures? Would someone else have done the same thing in similar circumstances? Does the person have a history of contravening procedures? Each question having a section of the flow chart showing how the answers to these questions should be dealt with. Dave explained that this step-by-step process was based on fact rather than opinion and should lead to an appropriate and fair resolution of the problem.

Dave observed that building a positive workplace health and safety culture is much harder, and takes much longer, than building a compliance culture. There is no 'quick fix'. Employers cannot ignore their legal obligations and the easiest way of meeting these is to develop a framework of rules and processes that they can use to demonstrate that they have complied with the law. Safety professionals play a key part in this process - their relationship with their employer will determine whether, or not they are expected to act as workplace safety 'police' or whether they are encouraged to develop a positive workplace culture where employees can report 'near misses' in a 'no blame culture' that seeks to amend risk assessments and safety management systems before a serious incident occurs.

Gary McAteer, Vice Chairman, then gave Dave a small token of members' thanks and appreciation for his thought-provoking presentation that allowed members to engage in worthwhile discussions and to exchange ideas.

Gary then encouraged attendees to network with one another and Dave, over tea or coffee and biscuits.

You can contact Dave via: <https://dmasml.com/>

Related *HSE* web site links:

Human factors: behavioural safety approaches:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/humanfactors/topics/behaviouralintor.htm>

Introduction to human factors: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/humanfactors/introduction.htm>

Human factors: managing human failures:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/humanfactors/topics/humanfail.htm>