Nudge, Push, Force – Strategies für enforcement by inspector with regard to Safety Culture

Mark Hailwood

Landesanstalt für Umwelt, Messungen und Naturschutz Baden-Württemberg, Karlsruhe, Germany

One of the questions which regularly arises, with regard to enforcement by inspectors, is how to achieve particular results when the regulations are not specific in the requirements and an external measure of compliance is not available. This is very much the case when Safety Management Systems (SMS) are considered and even more so for the topic of Safety Culture.

The following proposes a set of strategies which may be adopted. Inspectors need to be aware that there is a clear link between the safety culture and the level of safety performance, and the possible choices which can be made.

Nudge

The idea behind "nudge" is that the inspector uses the power of peer pressure, good practice and networks of excellence to support organisations in improving the level of safety culture.

This approach requires that the inspector is aware of what the signs of a good safety culture look like, for example "Safety Maturity Ladder"

Inspectors also need to be aware of who the good performers are in the relevant industries and which networks exist. The management of inspection authorities may need to become actively involved in these networks or to promote their development.

"Nudge" uses suggestion to give the message, "the best do this in this way – are you amongst the best?"

Inspectors are likely to discover that this strategy works for those who are looking to improve anyway and see the inspector as a partner in process safety and are prepared to look critically at their performance. These companies are likely to have a more mature safety culture

The challenge for inspectors is to achieve a level of understanding of safety culture which allows them to interact successfully with the establishments which they supervise.

Push

Push is an approach which is suited to those organisations which need direction in order that they improve. Such organisations respond to stimulus, but are not necessarily proactive in their culture.

This approach requires that the inspector is aware of the degree with which the safety management system is developed and the level of commitment of senior management to major accident prevention within the organisation. The fundamental systems of major accident prevention need to

be in place and steps need to be taken by the organisation to maintain and assure a high level of safety.

This may be the point at which safety culture assessment is appropriate so that the organisation becomes aware of the need to develop ownership and engagement in major accident prevention amongst all employees.

This approach requires that the inspector is aware of what the signs of a good safety culture look like, for example "Safety Maturity Ladder". In addition the management of the inspection authorities should understand the need that resources are available to provide training and development for their own staff and also amongst industry – this does not mean that the authorities should provide the training, but should be aware of where this may be obtained.

This type of strategy is suited to an inspection programme which is communicated to industry associations so that clear goals can be developed.

Success can only be achieved if the fundamentals of major accident prevention are in place and there is an understanding for the need for continuous improvement.

Force

For those organisations where "Force" is the only strategy option left, then there are likely to be clear deficits in other areas. Inspectors need to assess:

- whether the Safety Management System is adequately developed;

- whether the senior management of the establishment receive regular reports on the performance of the SMS and actively review and take steps to improve performance;

- whether all technical measures are in place to reduce the risks of major accidents as far as is reasonably practicable [all necessary measures].

If the assessment shows that these requirements are not attained, then the deficiencies are likely to be sufficiently well defined to be able to take administrative enforcement measures. Such establishments have a poorly developed safety culture.

It is unlikely that the company will voluntarily enter into programmes to improve the safety culture maturity, however discussions with senior management about the authorities' perception of the establishments behaviour, particularly with respect to the Major Accident Prevention Policy , during inspections could be a useful starting point.

This approach requires that the inspector is aware of what the signs of a good safety culture look like, for example "Safety Maturity Ladder". In addition the management of the inspection authorities should understand the need that resources are available to provide training and development for their own staff.