

| <b>Health and Safety Executive Board Paper</b> |            | <b>HSE/05/019</b>        |            |
|--|------------|--------------------------|------------|
| <b>Meeting Date:</b>                           | 4 May 2005 | <b>Open Gov. Status:</b> | Fully Open |
| <b>Type of Paper:</b>                          | Draft      | <b>Paper File Ref:</b>   |            |
| <b>Exemptions:</b>                             | None       |                          |            |

## **HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE**

**The HSE Board**

**Cascade Briefing**

**A Paper by Jackie Jones**

**Advisor(s):**

**Cleared by Colin Douglas on 27 April 2005**

### **Issue**

1. This paper sets out the results and recommendations of the review of Cascade Briefing. The review, carried out by COI, took place during February 2005 and was overseen by Communications Directorate, Internal Communications team.
2. The Board is invited to agree the proposed changes to Cascade Briefing, which are in direct response to the feedback received from a representative sample of staff from across the organisation.

### **Timing**

3. Urgent agreement to the following recommendations is sought, so that work may continue on the development of an improved and re-branded Cascade Briefing, with a view to launching it within the earliest, most practicable timeframe.

### **Recommendations**

4. Purpose and function of Cascade Briefing

Board members are asked to:

- Restate and endorse both the purpose of Cascade Briefing, which is to generate two-way discussion, in teams, on major corporate issues; and the role of senior managers in communicating corporate messages in their local context, encouraging discussion and feeding back. The restatement of purpose needs to clarify what it is and what it is designed to do. It also needs to be supported by clear governance, management and implementation principles. All direct reports will be required to report back on progress and on feedback.
- Cascade Briefing should be re-branded, including a change of name, which will more accurately reflect the two-way nature of the communication.
- Re-launch Cascade Briefing with a special hard copy 'introduction' sent to all staff, which includes:
  - i. A restatement of the purpose and the important role of Cascade Briefing, clearly identifying it's position within the broader range of internal communication products.
  - ii. Highlights from the review, together with an outline of the changes that are being put in place as a result of staff feedback.
  - iii. A forward topic plan to identify important issues that will need their input.
- Re-launch in the summer as soon as is practicable – aiming for July.
- Ensure that senior managers attend sessions wherever possible, to endorse team involvement, demonstrate commitment to the process and most importantly, hear staff views and feedback.
- Decide upon the frequency of the briefing, and then to ensure that the timetable is adhered to, as this will enhance the effectiveness as a communications tool. Too many, will result in a loss of status and risk being buried in the general flow of communications. It is for this reason that it is recommended that briefings should be delivered on a quarterly rather than a monthly basis. This will also allow more time for local tailoring, preparation and feedback.

## 5. Topic Selection and Message Development

- The topics and key messages, which should be aligned to the Business plan and overarching communications strategy, should be determined and agreed by the Board;
- That the forward programme of topics will therefore, be set on an annual basis, ideally at the commencement of the work year and reviewed each quarter. Suggested topics for this year are listed at Annex 1.
- The number of core discussion topics should be restricted to a maximum of two per issue.
- Provide the context around topics selection – ensuring that the link between strategy/approach and action is clear and unambiguous. Whenever possible, practical and relevant examples should be used to help staff make the connection between the topic under discussion and their own areas of work.
- Where possible and practicable, the list of topics for discussion should include some ‘works in progress’ so that ideas and suggestions are sought to help form the final decision, thereby involving staff in the decision making process.
- Introduce a ‘Your Questions Answered’ element that addresses the top 2 or 3 (business-focused) issues from the previous briefing. It should detail what action the Board intends to take and when action can be expected. If no action is intended, then an explanation of why this is the case would be appropriate. It should also identify who has responsibility for ensuring that the necessary action has been taken.

## 6. Support Materials

The ‘new’ product should consist of a detailed ‘facilitator’ briefing pack including:

- The background and context for the topic, and the core messages that people need to understand and take away with them;
- A facilitator’s script including a set of ‘prompt questions’, which should be action orientated.
- A clear explanation of the overall feedback process, together with advice and best practice on facilitation, capturing and reporting feedback.

- Contacts for facilitators, (who are likely to be team leaders/managers in charge of the team of recipients of the cascade), whom they can approach in advance of the meeting, for further information.
- Issue facilitators with a forward topic plan so that they have sufficient time to consider and prepare.
- Provide a brief, which considers the needs of the audience rather than those of the facilitator. (The brief should be made available to all staff in advance via email so that they come to the sessions ready, prepared and better able to participate).

## 7. Delivery and Feedback

It is hugely important to provide evidence of feedback being listened to and acted upon. (One way to do this might be through the minutes). The Board will acknowledge the feedback and demonstrate how much it is valued by acting upon it. It is also proposed that:

- The briefings should be timed so that they can be included on the agenda for the SCS conferences; and that Board members should deliver the remaining briefings to their direct reports either face to face, or via videoconference.
- The Board should take a report after each cascade, (at the end of the feedback period), discuss and agree how to respond, and also, review the forward schedule of topics.
- Following redesign, the feedback process should be tested out, (possibly on the Pulse Panel or those staff involved in the COI review), prior to full implementation.
- Key issues/action should be covered either within a 'Your Feedback' section in both the brief and facilitator guide, and/or become a core discussion topic for a future issues.
- A clearly identified, designated site on the intranet is set up specifically for feedback.
- Training needs are identified and addressed, especially facilitation skills training. This training should include a session on how to handle difficult or sensitive messages.

- More use should be made of HSE's trained and experienced facilitators to provide mentoring for those facilitators who need further help
- Guidelines on how to ensure the involvement of part-time and field-based staff in the process should be developed and included in the Facilitators' pack.

## **Background**

8. The 2004 Staff Survey clearly identified that there was work to be done to improve the effectiveness of internal communications across the organisation. As team meetings scored highly as the preferred mechanism for receiving information, it was decided to adopt this approach as a means of disseminating key messages. Cascade Briefing was developed and launched via e-mail in June 2004.

9. The intention had been to introduce a helpful and user-friendly tool for managers that would facilitate the regular and effective cascade of consistent information about current organisational goals and priorities; and to encourage open, two-way dialogue and action across the organisation. It was felt that it would also help militate against the 'grapevine' that exists across the organisation.

10. However, Cascade Briefing was implemented against a backdrop of business and cultural change leading to increased levels of dissatisfaction and unrest among some staff. Although this has strengthened the case for an effective, consistent cross-organisational briefing process, it has also created a difficult environment in which to embed and review Cascade Briefing.

11. It has become clear that Cascade Briefing has not proved to be as effective as was hoped. Feedback from the Pulse Panel and Communication Partners has indicated that it has lost its value and impact.

12. The Review (objectives)

The review explored opportunities for improvement in four key aspects of Cascade Briefing and aimed to identify practical and effective steps to enhance and sustain Cascade Briefing, ensuring that:

- Staff, managers and leaders alike consider it as an indispensable, highly valued communication tool and a means of keeping in touch with key corporate issues, thereby building support and commitment across the organisation.
- The overall process is both manageable and effective, editorial contributions are appropriate, and delivery is timely and meaningful (i.e. editorial process, logistics, session duration, quality of support materials).
- Key messages are appropriately interpreted and delivered in the right spirit at the local level.
- Dialogue and feedback is being encouraged, reviewed promptly, and any consequential actions are made visible to staff (especially in the front line), as soon as is practicable. (This includes facilitator competency, levels of debate, and the management of feedback).

### 13. Main findings of the review of Cascade Briefing:

- There is a lack of clarity about the purpose and objectives of Cascade Briefing. This impacts on how the process is managed and delivered at the local level and, most importantly, the consequent quality and value of the feedback that is generated. This is causing disaffection amongst staff. The perceived lack of support and commitment by senior managers/leaders together with the belief that as this does not directly contribute to achieving targets sends a highly negative message that the Board and senior managers are not serious about engaging with staff. The lack of tangible action in response to feedback has dissuaded many staff from participating actively in the process.
- The majority of staff are aware of Cascade Briefings but there is some uncertainty about where they have come across them and what they are for.
- Delivery channels – predominately pre-circulated via email and then delivered through team briefings, however more often than not they are delivered alongside other information but are liable to drop off the agenda due to lack of interest, time or perceived importance.

- Cascade Briefings will only be delivered effectively if the manager has the necessary communication skills, regards the message as important, and effectively engages the audience(s). Competency levels vary hugely. ‘Good’ facilitators are seen to be capable of stimulating constructive discussion and handling negativity whilst remaining objective.
- Content and layout - information needs to be delivered in language that is relevant and captures people’s interest, and we must ensure that it does not contain too many different messages and links, which may devalue the key points.
- The perceived lack of action as a result of the feedback, (i.e. no updates on the feedback), has damaged credibility and resulted in some cynicism setting in. This issue has played a significant part in the devaluing of Cascade Briefing.
- Confusion and difficulties with the feedback process, together with the lack of a monitoring mechanism means that this does not provide a true reflection of all staff views and opinions.

### **Argument**

14. If we are to succeed in achieving a greater awareness, understanding and buy-in by staff into delivering the strategy and new ways of working (the concept of a “one HSE”) then we must be more effective in communicating key messages and in acting upon the feedback. This is especially important in the present operating environment and given the possible range of organisational changes that we may face as a result of external factors (post Lyons, Gershon and more recently the Hampton review).

### **Consultation**

15. Detailed feedback on Cascade Briefing was sought via telephone and through face-to-face interviews with a cross section of members of the SCS, (8 in total). Small workshops led by COI involving a representative sample of staff from across the bands and disciplines were conducted in Bootle, Rose Court and Birmingham. The Pulse Panel was also asked for their views.

## **Presentation**

16. The Internal Communications team have included the launch of the improved and re-branded briefing in the internal communications work plan. Staff were advised of the review and recipients of the recent Cascade Briefing were reminded that the present system would change. The greatest challenge will be to ensure that all participants, (those delivering and those receiving), are clear about the purpose and the process.

## **Costs and Benefits**

17. The organisation will benefit greatly from having better informed, more involved staff who are able to relate to the organisational strategy and targets. Engaging in a dialogue with staff on important topics, being seen to be listening and acting upon feedback should make staff feel more valued by the Board and senior managers. It is a very tangible way of demonstrating living HSE's values.

## **Financial/Resource Implications for HSE**

18. The changes will necessitate in more time being given to team meetings by both staff and senior managers, albeit that this will be on a quarterly rather than monthly basis. Acting upon feedback will also require additional time being spent by the Board in considering, discussing and agreeing action.

19. It is not possible at this stage to determine the costs for the provision of suitable training for facilitators/managers as this will be entirely dependent upon individuals' training needs.

## **Environmental Implications**

20. N/A

## **Other Implications**

21. This is not simply a matter of altering the process, as the successful implementation of these changes relies heavily upon the role that the Board and senior managers play in its delivery. If senior managers have not been fully engaged, trained and supported to carry out their role effectively, then regardless of any

improvement in the mechanics of the process, the outcomes are unlikely to improve overall performance, motivation and buy in.

**Action**

22. The Internal Communications team have included both the review and re-launch of the improved and re-branded Cascade Briefing in their work plan. Work will commence on an implementation plan once the Board has considered and agreed the recommendations outlined in this paper.

**Possible topics for future discussion**

- a) Implementing the Hampton report – striking the right balance between inspection and advice.
- b) HSE's contribution to the bigger picture in terms of the wider Government agenda
- c) Vision and approach of the new Chief Executive
- d) Outcome of the Workplace Health Direct pilots
- e) Preparation and outcomes from HSC/E's appearance before the PM's Panel for Regulatory Accountability.
- f) Progress with achievement of RHS targets.
- g) Actions arising out of the Staff Survey
- h) Health and Safety in HSE
- i) Business improvement - EDRM/COIN/HRSTP/UWR
- j) HSE statement on public safety