



Stakeholder participation methods: Scoping study

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Stakeholder participation methods: Scoping study

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The study aimed to identify what additional research is needed to establish what approaches can be used to initiate greater awareness and activity concerning health and safety in those segments of the public that are difficult to access (DAPs). It reviewed approaches that theoretically could be used and those currently used; identifying how effective they are and where there are uncertainties about their impact.

The research priorities outlined include examination of:

- the key characteristics of each DAP since diverse and customised approaches may be needed to achieve and maintain access;
- the relative value of direct personalised approaches for access to socially excluded groups compared with direct general approaches or the use of linked or independent intermediaries;
- how to establish and maintain networks to cascade information to DAPs and collect feedback from them;
- how to inform young men in their workplace about health and safety issues;
- the efficacy of accessing micro-firms through relationship marketing; Web-based, interactive information provision directly and/or linked with other bodies; linked intermediaries; or utilisation of management standards;
- routes of access to participants in the informal economy;
- the relative efficiency of approaches dependent upon content of message and response required.

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STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION METHODS – SCOPING STUDY

OBJECTIVES OF THE SCOPING STUDY

HSE commissioned this scoping study to examine the current state of knowledge about stakeholder participation methods and consider where further research might be fruitfully undertaken. Research has already been initiated to identify and evaluate the effectiveness of mechanisms in general for involving stakeholders in decision-making and policy development. Consequently, it was believed that any further analysis and research would profitably be focused upon the methods that can be used to enhance awareness of, and participation in, effective health and safety practices by sub-sections of the public that have proven in the past to be difficult to inform or engage. This serves the strategic objective of the HSE which is to increase the engagement of others and promote full participation in improving health and safety.

The objective of the Scoping Study was to identify what research would need to be done in order to establish the approaches that could be adopted to initiate in those segments of the public that are currently difficult to access, greater awareness and, ultimately, activity in relation to health and safety.

The Scoping Study was not required to provide an exhaustive literature review on participation methods, this is being done through other studies, instead it sought to establish what data are available on:

- the characteristics of those segments of the public that are difficult to access for health and safety
- the approaches that have been used thus far to access them and, if they have failed, why they failed
- the nature of the data that currently exist on the awareness and activity with regard to health and safety in these *difficult to access publics* (DAPs)

The study explored:

- the range of approaches that theoretically could be used;
- what approaches are used by others (government departments, local authorities, NGOs, community groups, commercial organisations, etc.) to reach and influence DAPs;
- some of the barriers to HSE using specific approaches;
- how effective these approaches are and where there are significant gaps in our knowledge about the impact of approaches that are used.

In all of this it was necessary to bear in mind that DAPs are heterogeneous. Approaches that work with one type of DAP may not work with another. The significance of their heterogeneity is explored below.

Based on this work, this report outlines the research priorities that might be pursued by HSE in this area.

WHAT DOES ACCESS ENTAIL?

Gaining access in this context might entail two significant components:

- ensuring that the target segment of the public is made aware of some message;
- ensuring that the target segment of the public is so engaged by that message that it changes its behaviour (i.e. modifies its participation profile).

While access always implies the first component, the second may sometimes not be necessary. Getting a public to listen (awareness) and getting a public to act (compliance) involve different, if largely complementary, processes.

WHAT ARE DAPs?

Our review of the literature suggests that it would be wrong to believe that certain parts of the public are inevitably or intrinsically difficult to access. There are several key factors that determine whether a segment of the public will be difficult to access:

- *who is trying to access them* - the actual and perceived characteristics of this source such as its power to offer rewards or punishments; its motive for attempting to gain access; and its trustworthiness will markedly affect level of access (whether in terms of awareness or compliance);
- *the nature of the message* - both in terms of its content (the information it provides) and in terms of its structural characteristics (for example, its complexity of language; the medium of its transmission - particularly whether face-to-face or not; the extent to which it is embedded in other larger information provision or entertainment; and, the extent to which it is repeated);
- *the nature of the response required* - for instance, awareness and compliance are substantively different response requirements; similarly, requiring continuance of current behaviour preferences is quite different from requiring adoption of new behaviours.

Consequently, it is counterproductive to think that certain social categories (e.g. the disabled; the unemployed; the ethnic minorities; etc.) should be indelibly characterised as difficult to access. Some segments of the public will be difficult to access by specific sources, transmitting particular messages that require certain types of response. The process that makes a segment of the public difficult to access is complex and it is possible to intervene in it so as to reduce the barriers to access.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT DAPs FOR HSE?

Given its remit and strategic objectives, HSE is currently determined to improve its access to segments of the public that are considered disadvantaged or socially excluded. Social exclusion is recognised to be a contested concept (Burchardt, Le Grand and Piachaud, 1999). It is often argued to be a generic term which hides diversity (e.g. in relation to ethnicity, Bhopal and Donaldson, 1998; in relation to disability, Gerrish, 2000; or in relation to ageing, Modan, Kovar and Weeks, 1998) and distracts from recognising the diversity required in approaches to access.

Empirically, however, the main indicators of social exclusion currently used are: low income, low wealth (i.e. capital or savings), lacking paid employment (includes unemployed and the retired), absence of political engagement, and social isolation. Few individuals in the UK are excluded on all these indicators in any one time period and it has been argued that there is no distinct group of socially excluded people. It is consequently necessary to consider how access to specific sub-groups of socially excluded or disadvantaged people might be achieved.

The HSE recognises that it is less effective than it might be in gaining access to and encouraging participation from certain parts of the public:

- ethnic minorities;
- employees of micro businesses (those with less than 10 workers) and those in the informal (or "black") economy;
- people with some form of disability (e.g. physical or learning disabilities);
- women (it is, of course, a hotly debated issue as to whether women can be said to comprise a socially disadvantaged group: Jackson, 1999);
- younger men (16-24 year olds) in the workplace.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE HETEROGENEITY WITHIN HSE TARGET DAPs

A major obstacle to identifying how to improve access lies in the fact that, even within each DAP that HSE wishes to target, there is enormous diversity and heterogeneity. In reality, there is no such target public as "the ethnic minorities" - there are many different racial, cultural and religious groups that comprise the so-called ethnic minorities of the UK. Of course, the need to introduce a more fine-grained approach to defining the target DAP is even more evident when one considers women or younger men as the focal categories. In fact, from the literature review conducted for this scoping study, it was considered inappropriate to try to summarise research on accessing women. Gender *in itself* is not a major determiner of the effectiveness of modes of access. It may be that only by greater specificity in definition of each of the target DAPs will it be feasible to determine the strategies that are most likely to improve access. It can be anticipated that no single strategy will be generally effective.

Since there has been no clear delineation to date of the characteristics of the diverse constituencies that comprise the DAPs of interest to HSE, *a prime element of research required in this area will be the systematic specification of the key components of each DAP.*

POTENTIAL ACCESS APPROACHES TO DISADVANTAGED OR SOCIAL EXCLUDED GROUPS

It was acknowledged above that the viability of any particular access method will be dependent not only on the target public but also upon the content of the message and the type of response required. However, here we will summarise the range of potential access approaches without detailed reference to the content of the message or the type of response required for which they might be optimum. There is insufficient existing data to make a commentary on optimum approaches for particular contents or responses feasible. *A prime element of research required in this area will be the examination of the relative efficiency of different approaches to access dependent upon content of message and response required.*

Access methods may be broadly classified into:

- the direct;
- the mediated.

Direct Approaches

The direct approaches entail communication of some sort between the organisation wishing to gain access and the individual targeted. This communication may be personalised or it may be general.

The personalised approach seeks out specific individuals (i.e. named people). It may entail the use of letters, leaflets, telephone contacts, or face-to-face contacts. Direct approaches that seek out specific individuals must first identify them. There has been some research that has shown how to identify individuals who are members of particular groups or social categories. The most frequently used involves classifying people on socio-economic grounds according to the area in which they live (using Small Area Statistics associated with post codes) and then using the Electoral Register to name individuals. Another method now used if the object is to target members of a particular ethnic group is to select from the Electoral Register (Hughes, Fenton and Hine, 1995) or from the Family Health Services Agency lists individuals who have names that are typical of that group (Harland et al, 1997).

The general approach seeks to contact individuals directly but not in a manner that requires them to be personally identified. So, for example, an open letter delivered to all residents of a particular housing estate might constitute a general but direct approach. Similarly, leaflets distributed by the organisation wishing to gain access to all users of a Citizens Advice Bureau or all those collecting benefit from a particular Post Office communication through the mass media would fall into this category. For accessing disadvantaged groups, this type of localised approach has been recommended. The argument is that disadvantaged groups are "geographically focused" (Winchester and White, 1988), for example in certain inner city areas, and strategies that seek access according to location will contact individuals who fall into one or more of the marginalised groups resident in that area.

The use of advertising through the mass media is also a form of direct general approach. There is no empirical evidence concerning the effectiveness of such advertising by HSE with DAPs. Evaluations of impact of such government-authored advertising campaigns reveal great variability in their effectiveness for DAPs. Impact is highly dependent upon the content and structure of the message used.

The personalised direct approach has regularly been found to be more effective both in stimulating assimilation of information and in motivating changes in behaviour (e.g. participation) than the general direct approach. Being identified by name appears to reduce the willingness to dismiss or ignore messages. It may be particularly important for members of groups who believe that their opinions are normally disregarded by those in authority.

The value of direct personalised approaches is however limited if the target recipient has either poor fluency in the language used or poor literacy (Okazaki and Sue, 1995). Since some of the DAPs of interest to HSE may have these characteristics, this is important. Most methods for overcoming poor literacy skills or limited fluency require mediated access.

Research is required to examine the relative value of direct personalised approaches to access in the context of HSE's objectives.

Mediated Approaches

Mediated approaches entail the organisation that wishes to gain access doing so either through or in collaboration with one or more other parties.

Ever since the seminal work of Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) it has been recognised that the public rarely gain information that then influences their behaviour direct from an official or public source. It is mediated through "opinion leaders" (Brosius and Weimann, 1996; Weimann and Brosius, 1994; Weimann, 1991). This is the so-called two-step flow of information where certain individuals, the opinion leaders, identify emerging issues in the mass media and elsewhere and then diffuse these to others via their personal networks. Nowadays, it is thought that opinion leaders operate to set the public agenda, to focus attention and legitimate concern (Burt, 1999; Shaw et al, 1999; Yin, 1999; Geller et al, 1996; Zhu et al, 1993).

In order to access publics that are difficult to reach, it is valuable to use such opinion leaders: in local communities, in trade associations, in the media, and so on. The question for HSE is how to do this in a reliable and cost-effective way. There are two obvious ways to do this: using linked intermediaries and otherwise independent intermediaries. *There is a need for systematic research which evaluates these and other two-step flow methods of information provision.*

Independent intermediaries: Mediated approaches through independent intermediaries have been the generally preferred route for accessing disadvantaged or socially excluded groups. The typical mediator is some service provider or representative. So, for instance, Bond (1999) showed how low income families could be accessed through their primary health care team. Cowley and Billings (1999) proved that health visitors could be used. Imrie (1999) showed that disabled people could be accessed through pressure groups that had emerged to represent them. Humphrey (1998) argued that access could be achieved effectively by routing through sub-groups within large organisations, for instance through the "self-organised groups" for women, black members, disabled members, and lesbian and gay members within the public sector unions NALGO and UNISON. Community groups, churches and voluntary associations can be used in similar ways. Women's groups, mother and toddler groups, etc., are frequently used when access specifically to women is required.

This approach to accessing DAPs, if used by HSE, would essentially entail the "cascading" of information. Cascading through mediators only works effectively if:

- they are willing to co-operate;
- they pass on the message and return any response accurately.

There is evidence to suggest that these two conditions are met most readily when:

- the organisation trying to gain access has a good understanding of the cultural expectations of the mediator (Nevid and Maria, 1999);
- the organisation trying to gain access shows respect for the mediator organisation and its clientele (Crane and Carswell, 1992);

- the partnership between organisations is planned and is expected to be long-lived. Kitchin (2000) with reference to disabled people suggests that the target group should be involved as consultants and partners in the development of the contact strategy. Rodgers (1999) suggested much the same with regard to people with learning difficulties.

This suggests that HSE should be examining how to establish networks that will cascade information to DAPs and also collect feedback from them. *Research is required to identify how such networks can be established and maintained.*

Linked intermediaries: Access through the workplace is one option for HSE for some DAPs. Where otherwise difficult to access segments of the public are employed by large companies this may be the case. However, SMEs cannot be used in this way. SMEs - particularly the smaller micro firms - are themselves DAPs for HSE. Some issues concerning access to micro-firms are considered below.

It is possible however to use larger companies as conduits for access to DAPs. For instance, it may be most effective to access young men (16-24 years old) through their workplace. Young men are an important target group for HSE because they suffer high rates of injury at work. Various studies have shown that they are more likely to be characterised by a constellation of risk factors related to job injury (i.e. poor job tenure, greater exposure to physical hazards, higher workloads, job boredom, on-the-job substance abuse, and dislike of their workplace, Frone, 1998). There are no empirical studies available that examine how best to access young men in employment or specifically assess how to influence their health and safety behaviour. *There is a requirement for research that examines how to inform young men in the workplace about health and safety issues such that they are more likely to adopt good practice.*

OVERCOMING INERTIAL BARRIERS TO ACCESS

It was noted above that SMEs are themselves difficult to access for government departments and agencies (MAFF, DETR, DTI, and the Environment Agency are all reporting this). Particularly difficult are those firms that employ very small numbers (the micro firm with up to 9 employees). In 1999, in the UK, there were 2.3 million of these micro businesses (i.e. about 60% of all businesses) employing 56.3% of all employees. They represent an important target for access.

The obstacles to achieving access to micro firms have rarely been researched. The focus has been on SMEs more generally. That work has concluded that the sector is very heterogeneous and thus requires a highly differentiated approach to access (e.g. Holliday, 1995; Hillary, 1995; Eden, 1996; Petts et al, 1999). Some progress has been made in developing a coherent picture of SME operations with the establishment of the SME Research Database (published by DTI and the Small Business Research Trust). This includes studies of ethnicity, gender, culture and benchmarking. It focuses more on business performance and practice than business studies which have addressed issues such as health, safety and environment. It includes nothing specific and substantive as yet on SME/government department relationships. It says nothing about micro firms which often have been excluded from research looking at SMEs because of the known difficulties of identifying them let alone accessing and involving them.

There is limited information concerning how micro firms understand the role of HSE and its requirements. There is however survey evidence that suggests that small businesses are ill-informed

and unwilling to act unless threatened by strong external forces such as prosecution or customer demands (Hillary, 1995). Most organisations report difficulty in establishing contact with the small business sector, even those offering free services (Rowe and Hollingsworth, 1996). There is evidence that external advice may not be seen as useful by SMEs (Christie et al, 1995); seeking advice is usually related to compulsion (Curran & Blackburn, 1994) with regulatory compliance requirements in themselves not necessarily sufficient an incentive, and the majority of SMEs do not know where to get advice (Hillary, 1995). It seems that the economic and sub-cultural demands upon micro firms act as a barrier to access: it is inertia rather than a strong positive motivation to resist access that is at work (Ram, 1994; Bryson and Daniels, 1999; Poutziouris and Chittenden, 1996).

The question is: what methods will overcome these inertial barriers to access. It has been suggested that, in the same way that disadvantaged groups may be accessed directly or indirectly, small businesses may be accessed either directly or indirectly. Direct methods that have been suggested include: information provision through IT and relationship marketing. Indirect methods proposed include: contact through linked intermediaries and through independent intermediaries.

Direct Methods

Information Provision Through IT: Small firms are viewed by government as a weak link in the UK's competitive position through the low access to the Internet (Cabinet Office, 1998; 1999). In comparison with other major economies only 15% of micro firms have their own web sites or make frequent use of electronic data exchange (*42% in the US*). For firms with 10-99 employees the figure rises to 39% (50% US) and for firms 100-250 employees the disparity has largely disappeared – 70% of UK firms (72% - US). In May 1999, the Government announced a target to achieve 1.5M SMEs with access to the Internet by 2002, with 25% of government services to be available electronically. The Information Society Initiative led by the DTI is evidence of the drivers to increase internet access. What is evident from the current experience of business support bodies such as Groundwork is that for sole traders and micro firms in particular the internet could provide a ready point of easy and informal access to information and help, accessed in the “comfort of home” as much as the workplace, where the business manager does not have to feel threatened by his or her lack of knowledge.

The Internet is being used already as a tool by some government departments to influence SMEs. The Environment Agency launching (in December 1999) its new NetRegs Internet site for small businesses refers to the "compelling evidence that many smaller businesses are both unaware of their environmental responsibilities and apprehensive about contacting regulators for advice". The internet tool, the first of its type in the UK, is designed to give practical sector-specific tips on water, waste and air issues. It has responded to research which has stressed the demands from small businesses for sector-specific as opposed to generic information and advice as companies have neither the time nor the resources to adapt generic information to their specific requirements (Petts et al, 1999). Examination by the Environment Agency of guides on environmental legislation identified that they generally provide lists of legislation with only a brief overview of what each means. The Environment Agency concluded that perhaps most of the environmental management products which it produced were utilised by only 20-30% of SMEs. The new Internet site attempts to translate relevant legislation into practical guidance in lay terms for a specific sector (www.environment-agency.gov.uk/epns/netregs.html).

The site has commenced with the information for the printing sector selected on the basis of its broad geographical spread, potential environmental risk, there being a range of small and large firms, and the support of the trade association. The full effectiveness of the site awaits evaluation which the Environment Agency intends to do when it has a large enough sample of users to contact (note it

decided not to have a formal registration requirement for the site as this may deter users. Therefore, users are given the option to leave their e-mail address if they wish to be notified of updates).

The use of Web-based information provision for SMEs needs to be examined further by HSE. Whether small companies would use internet sources in relation to health and safety information does not appear to have been addressed directly. It has been difficult to ascertain whether any of the significant number of information sources available on the internet for businesses and small firms in particular have been evaluated in any detail in terms of the nature of users, reasons for use and the extent to which information accessed on web pages is actually obtained and used.

HSE is currently undertaking a major “root and branch” revision of its web pages, with new home page, contacts pages, downloadable research reports and is discussing internally a new strategy for development of its web site including the concept of empowering the customer. Combined with the Environment Agency’s work and also the ethos of the new Small Business Service there would appear to be considerable scope for improving access by small businesses through the use of common principles of marketing information and using the same tools for allowing people to find their way around information.

There are always problems in determining the impact of Web-based information provision. Even if the site is accessed it is difficult to assess whether the information on it is comprehended or used. *Research specifically to explore the value and limitations of developing Web-based, interactive information provision directly and/or linked with other bodies perceived to be accessed and used by SMEs would be timely.*

Relationship Marketing: An alternative to the anonymity of the Web access to information might be on the basis of a confidential telephone hotline, operated by HSE but ensuring anonymity. This idea was supported by representatives of two trade bodies that we approached. This approach could begin to engender a change in the way HSE is viewed by SMEs. It could serve to emphasize the role of HSE as supporter of SMEs not merely as regulator.

In recent years, commercial marketing literature has begun to explore the importance of establishing a relationship between a company and its clients in maintaining loyalty and achieving credibility and influence. This approach labelled “relationship marketing” is worth exploring in the context of improving HSE contacts with SMEs.

Marketing is no longer simply about developing, selling and delivering products. It is now progressively more concerned with the development and maintenance of long-term relationships with customers (Gummesson, 1994). The 1990s represented the era of personalized marketing, in which knowledge of individual customers was used to guide highly focused market strategies. Symptomatic of this approach were membership clubs associated with products, after sales follow ups to test satisfaction, the provision of ancillary advice and support to product users, and loyalty bonuses. The object of the exercise is to add value to the initial purchase. The customer buys not only the product but the relationship too and is likely to return for more products and the maintenance of the relationship (McKenna, 1991; Raval and Gronroos, 1996; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995).

Relationship marketing is based on concern, trust, commitment and service. It is the foundation for achieving support and compliance from customers – even difficult customers. There is probably a lesson here for HSE in pursuit of difficult to access publics. The relationship marketing approach would require HSE:

- to be explicit in showing concern for SMEs and to make every effort to understand the expectations of its SME customers;
- to be seen to be fair, helpful and competent in dealings with SMEs;
- to provide a service to SMEs which is reliable and responsive.

One implication of this approach would be that HSE would need to customise its messages for the sector and type of business it wished to address. Earlier studies have shown that businesses pay scant attention to information unless it is narrowly directed at their own concerns. Generic information – for instance, designed to be read by any sector of industry – tends to have low impact. In SMEs there is a strong demand for industry-specific information (Petts et al , 1999) which translates information so that it directly relates to the activities, operating and production methods, potential accident characteristics, etc, of a specific type of business. As identified earlier the Environment Agency is responding to this with its new NetRegs internet service. The business support services offered through bodies such as Groundwork but also the DTI's Environmental Technology Best Practice Programme have proactively built on the importance of conveying messages in the language of the recipient. For SMEs this is the language of profit. This suggests that not only the environment but also health and safety have to be sold not as important issues in their own right but indirectly through messages which show the business benefits.

Such an approach has implications for all of the communication methods and also for the resources of the communicator. However, there is no doubt that it will deal more effectively with the resource deficiencies of small firms in terms of their ability to translate generic information into company-specific requirements. Such translation is clearly resource intensive, it is consequently important to establish the degree of specificity that is required. For instance, it might be thought that the provision of health and safety information to micro firms with a high proportion of ethnic minority employees in their native languages might have significant impact, yet this needs to be evaluated.

Without a better appreciation of what SMEs expect, it will be difficult for HSE to use relationship marketing techniques. There is a requirement for research to explore SME expectations of HSE.

Indirect Methods

Independent Intermediaries: In the same way that independent intermediaries are used with various disadvantaged groups, it may be possible to use them with small businesses. The independent “middle man” is now a recognised means for providing small businesses with information. In the environmental field for example the Energy Technology Support Unit has provided such a role for government.

Organisations that have a specific focus on small businesses and the environment, such as Groundwork, Business Link, and a number of initiatives within universities funded through *the* European Regional Development Fund stress information provision through networks and business clubs where firms can learn best practice from one another. Akin to the "Buddy" system supported by HSE, the rationale is that managers will be more likely to listen to a message if it comes "from someone like them" who can provide practical evidence of the business benefits from the context of a similar business. Information is in essence "badged" in relation to best practice by means of a peer group.

The Business Link service was introduced by government in 1992 to provide a national chain of “one-stop-shops” for the provision of business support services in England. The idea was to provide a single point of entry for SMEs to a wide and integrated range of advice, support and information services. By

the end of 1996 a national network of independent business-support centres existed (260 outlets form 90 partnerships) with a national brand but operated a local level. However, Business Link is to be replaced in April 2000 by the Small Business Service which will have a larger-scale regional network. Importantly, DTI is stressing the new Small Business Service as a catch-all gateway for companies, with demand-led information provision. HSE might be able to use this but it is unclear how to do this optimally and some exploration of alternative methods would be timely.

It has been suggested that without a significant and proactive campaign by government bodies to advertise their advice and information services to companies up-take is not going to improve. However, the opportunities to use other services as a common gateway to information is a potential major development which government departments and agencies could capitalise upon. The Environment Agency has been investigating the potential to use the banks and other providers of financial information to small businesses as a way of communicating. As financial services are known to be one of the few external sources of advice which small firms use (Bryson & Daniels, 1998) and most firms require some form of banking service, the potential to use this as a secondary provider of information in a common format seems potentially valuable. *Research is required to assess whether this could work for health and safety information.*

In a quite different guise, the concept of communicating indirectly by personally relevant example is also evident where government departments have used popular TV and radio programmes as channels for information (e.g. the Archers by MAFF). The mass media could be a very effective means of promoting specific messages when campaigns are running (e.g. in relation to safety on farms), however, given the difficulty of ensuring message uptake the media may only ever be a secondary communication method alongside other more formal communication methods. Nevertheless, it has been suggested by representatives of trade associations that HSE should proactively use popular TV and radio programmes as a means of communication. Research (Breakwell and Barnett, 2000) has shown that popular media representations of health hazards are associated with increased awareness and concern even in publics that have no reason to be especially interested in the hazard. It seems that having the information provided in the context of a TV soap, etc., results in them paying attention to information that they would otherwise selectively dismiss. HSE might wish to explore how the popular media could be used to inform otherwise disinterested publics about health and safety issues. This approach would possibly not be addressed to the business manager so much as to the employee. The capacity of the employee to act as a direct catalyst for change in work place practices is little understood. There is, however, research suggesting that if top-down and bottom-up pressure for change can be triggered simultaneously the rate of change can be very rapid. The safety culture literature would support this in the context of health and safety practices. It is therefore worth considering the indirect methods of communication with the workforce.

The supply chain has been suggested as a further source of influence upon small firms. In fact, work with SMEs in Wales (Bayliss et al, 1997) found that with the exception of written material, the top six sources of environmental help were all organisations with whom they were obliged to have some form of relationship (for example, waste management contractors). Suppliers and customers were an insignificant source of advice, findings that do not fit with suggestions that supply chains should be used to channel information to and influence the practices of small businesses (Thoburn and Takashima, 1993). Supply chains may become important in specific sectors (e.g. automotive - Petts et al, 1999). Although it has been suggested that supply chains are likely to become more important as pressure points, many small firms have very local markets with a wide range of customers as opposed to a single large and influential customer.

Research is required to examine how supply chains and sub-contractual arrangements might be used to open access to micro firms. It would seem important to establish how micro firms currently gain their health and safety information and what sources would be likely to be attractive to them in the future. This should include examination of how small businesses of different sizes and management arrangements differ in health and safety information acquisition and use. The link between awareness and translation into effective practice also requires more detailed understanding as it is evident that identification of appropriate methods of communication has to be related to the objectives of communication. If the objective is merely to ensure that people are aware of legislative requirements appropriate methods would differ from where communication to ensure management practice change is the objective.

HSE may be in a position to access micro firms through other indirect methods. One such approach would be *the use of management standards*. Management standards such as ISO 9000 (Quality Standard) and 14001 (Environmental Management), extended by OHSAS 18001 in May 1999, that link health and safety, environmental management and the quality standard are potentially a means to encourage firms to identify health and safety issues affecting the company, to introduce management and working practices to optimise compliance and to maintain information acquisition. However, small firms are known to have a much poorer take-up of management standards than large firms (e.g. Chittenden et al, 1997). The costs of operating a management system and the formality of a management system approach to quality may clash with the culture of the informally and personally managed small firm. The minority of small firms who register or use ISO 9000 do so largely to signal information about their firm in the market place. However, the effect of the supply chain on the take-up of management systems, particularly ISO 14001 has been viewed as significant. Many major companies (e.g. Rolls Royce) are now looking to reduce their supply chains and are outsourcing production. This could put more pressure on companies to prove best practice if they are to remain competitive. The new standards could have a significant impact on performance through the supply chain.

In relation to both ISO 9000 and also ISO 14001 there has been recognition that for businesses already applying a high standard of quality through informal methods should not have to apply formal systems where these are not needed. The DTI is now promoting a more informal - 5-step process - by which firms could be accountable but not necessarily accredited in relation to their environmental management system. It may be that an equivalent in relation to health and safety might be useful.

The value of management standards (formal and informal) to enhancing access to micro firms should be explored.

Linked Intermediaries: HSE may choose to use linked intermediaries to access small businesses – specifically through other arms of government with which the SME must interact. An obvious example might be connections through Customs and Excise concerning VAT. Every quarter, firms with a turnover of greater than an amount (fixed in each budget) receive documentation from Customs and Excise that arranges their VAT payments. This regular contact might provide a route for more general information provision. The number of firms registered in 1997 for VAT was 1.6M. In that year, 182,000 new registrations occurred. Even if only new registrations received additional information, since these are most likely to be micro or small enterprises, it would represent a major systematic avenue for first contacts for HSE with enterprises that might otherwise be invisible to them.

The viability of access through linked intermediaries to micro firms (and other DAPs) needs to be evaluated.

MOTIVATED RESISTANCE TO ACCESS

Since HSE is not just a provider of information but also a regulator, it is possible that some DAPs are motivated to resist access. They are difficult to access not as a result of disadvantage or social exclusion or because of inertia but because they choose to be. Those who are on the verge (or part) of the informal (or hidden) economy may fall into this category. They are especially inaccessible to governmental organisations. Yet the scale of this sector is considerable (though estimates are much debated; Thomas, 1999; Tickamyer and Wood, 1998). HSE has identified participants in the informal economy as an important category that it needs to access.

It seems unlikely that any of the methods considered above would easily overcome motivated resistance to access. Some sociologists, social anthropologists and economists have attempted to gain access to the informal economy for research purposes (Pahl & Wallace, 1985). None have reported marked success. Typically they have used "snowball" approaches. Finding one person active in the informal economy they have used that person to contact others, and so on. These approaches have opened access to very limited networks. Furthermore, they have shown considerable transience in the participation in the informal economy. Individuals who are accessible to researchers move into it for short periods (between more formal periods of paid employment). The nature of the work they get in any one spell in the informal economy will be very diverse: they move from one type of work to another. They have no consistent firm or groups of firms from whom they gain work. Of course, it may be that this picture of transience and unpredictability is characteristic of only a subset of the informal economy - those that allow access researchers access to themselves. There may be a hidden stable informal economy. However, if transience is characteristic of the bulk of this market, there are very evident problems for HSE in achieving access.

It is possible that an effective way for HSE to influence practice in the informal economy is to gain access to participants during those spells when they are active in the formal economy. This has not been examined.

Research is required that examines how participants in the informal economy can be accessed by HSE. Research should examine whether health and safety practices acquired during employment in the formal economy transfer with the personnel involved into the informal economy.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS and RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS

The objective of the Scoping Study was to identify what research would need to be done in order to establish the approaches that could be adopted to initiate in those segments of the public that are currently difficult to access (DAPs), greater awareness and, ultimately, activity in relation to health and safety. A number of areas were found to require further research:

- The review leads to the conclusion that a prime element of research required in this area will be the systematic specification of the key characteristics of the sub-groups that for HSE comprise each DAP since it is anticipated that diverse customised approaches will be need to achieve and maintain access.

- It is suggested that approaches to access could be divided broadly into the direct and indirect methods. Research is required to examine the relative value - in the context of HSE's objectives - of direct personalised approaches for access to disadvantaged or socially excluded groups as compared with direct general approaches or the use of linked or otherwise independent intermediaries.
- Current data on access to disadvantaged and socially excluded groups suggests that HSE should be examining how to establish networks that will cascade information to them and also collect feedback from them. Research is required to identify how such networks can be established and maintained.
- Access to young men that are in employment may be done through their workplace. There is a requirement for research that examines how to inform young men in the workplace about health and safety issues such that they are more likely to adopt good practice.
- In relation to accessing micro-firms a series of questions emerge:
 - What are micro firm expectations of HSE;
 - How can HSE develop and use a relationship marketing strategy;
 - What is the value and limitations of developing Web-based, interactive information provision directly and/or linked with other bodies;
 - What is the viability of access through linked intermediaries to micro firms (for instance, through financial service providers, through supply chains or sub-contractual arrangements, through other government offices such as VAT);
 - What is the value of management standards (formal and informal) for enhancing access.
- Research is required that examines how participants in the informal economy can be accessed by HSE. Research should examine whether health and safety practices acquired during employment in the formal economy transfer with the personnel involved into the informal economy.

An important element of all research required in this area will be the examination of the relative efficiency of different approaches to access dependent upon content of message and response required.

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