



香港管綫
專業學會

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Cohesion - Company Direction and Safety Management

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1. Introduction

Company Direction is one of the key factors to accomplish a success in business without a doubt. It is seldom to have a day without the news about company direction. Similarly, it is also difficult to get rid of the news of construction accidents every day. Are there any chemical reactions between company direction and safety management? Are there any reasons behind for constantly high rate of accidents / incidents? Indeed, accidents / incidents are contrived, evitable and avoidable in most circumstances. The predominant cause is the lack of safety awareness of site workers and operators arisen from the inadequate safety management of the company arisen from the distorted company direction. It is expected that the current situation could be improved after the enactment of "Factories and Industries Undertakings (Safety Management) Ordinance" on 1 April 2002.

Communication and awareness within an organization is critical, however, profit is always overly emphasized instead of understanding the source of profit. From the economic point of view, profit could only be made with the existence of the source, like the principle of "demand and supply". In engineering project, time is of essence. Therefore, the source refers to on-time delivery of project. Only a minor fault in a construction or industrial project could impact seriously on the whole as every section / stage of work interact with each other closely and tightly. The overrun in cost and time could be unexpectedly high should there are any accidents / incidents occur. Furthermore, the loss in other tangible aspects is unpredictable such as company reputation. Therefore, a good construction company should establish and implement an effective, efficient and ethical company direction so as to achieve a good safety management.

In the current bid-price and profit oriented environment, some construction companies overlook the importance of the statutory requirements and workers' safety in order to make a project more profitable or increase the chance to win a tender. Yet, it is basically a competition with luck. The behaviour of these companies is undoubtedly unethical. As a practitioner in the construction industry, I also feel shame for the loss of property and even human life, and the disturbance to the public due to the ignorance of safety management by some companies. From another point of view, I would like to express my sympathy to them for their loss in the competition with luck. The result is obviously a huge sum of liquidated damage or compensation arisen from the delay caused by the accidents / incidents. Their original objective of attaining more profit through neglecting the safety aspects is totally disobeyed.



Although the importance of safety management is easy to be realized, the construction industry is still not conscious of safety management, especially for the subcontractors in different sections. Appropriate training and preventive measures are always disregarded by these subcontractors. Furthermore, they have a perception that safety is the sole responsibility of the main contractor. Some unreasonable arguments are always utilized as their excuses, for instance, they urged safety management is “unnecessary” as they can remain “safe” in the field even without it. The provision of extra safety equipment could lead to wastage of money without any meaning. Instead, they would complain the Safety Supervisor/ Manager (either employed by the company itself or by statutory bodies) for their hypocrisy or cavil. A typical example is the perfunctory inspection conducted by the managers in which only a signature on it without taking any inspection. It is really a commiseration in case there are any accidents, project delays, and property and life losses caused by the above reasons.

2. Key Aspects of Safety Management

In fact, safety management is intrinsically sophisticated, but it is not difficult to achieve. The key aspects of safety management are stated and described as follows:

2.1. Related Statutory Bodies

Apart from the establishment of statutory control and requirements, public education is also critical. Therefore, statutory bodies should pay an important role in arousing the safety awareness of people through different means. For example, an annual award could be presented to those outstanding companies in safety management. In addition, statutory bodies should show their support and spend very endeavour to uplift the standard of safety professionalism. The action taken and actual outcome is the most appropriate indicator to reflect the effectiveness of safety management instead of the quality of paperwork describing the safety policy.

Besides the implementation of policy and award, the competency of safety professionalism is another crucial issue. The experience and competency of safety professionals should be carefully scrutinized before offering them a professional qualification. An oral examination and / or written test are high recommended to provide the employer a platform to examine the competency of applicants on each safety aspect, as well as his ambition.

2.2. Management Staff

Since management is a top-down system, safety management is no more different from other management. A related policy is inevitable to a company, like the blood of a human. Therefore, a systematic and appropriate policy on safety management should be developed. In order to make a profit, one has to invest a capital beforehand. There is a statement advocated that “Huge Profit would not come without investment beforehand”



and this is also the fundamental principle of operating a business. The investment of safety management is absolutely a low-risk, high-return and worthwhile investment.

Investment could be performed through different means and the achievement of Safety Management OHSAS:18001 accreditation is the trend nowadays apart from training and provision of safety and protective equipment. The accreditation would not only significantly improve the reputation of company, but also uplift the sense of belongings of employees through the provision of a safe working condition, and hence result in increase the productivity. We should express our honour to those accredited companies and encourage the others to apply as soon as possible as there are only few companies in the pool of subcontractors with such accreditation.

2.3. Safety Practitioners

In fact, safety professionals are always called with derogatory term a “Safety Guy” by practitioners of other work natures. This is highly discouraging among the safety professionals they are treated as “neither contribute to safety management nor provide an appropriate advice to doubters”.

However, some of the safety professionals are really ignorant or outdated. We should get rid of the former one without any reservation. Concerning the latter one, HKSAR government has amended the ordinance for safety professionals in June 2002 to tackle the shortcomings.

Safety is actually a professional. In many advanced countries, safety professionalism registration has long been implemented, and their social status is of the same importance as other professionals such as engineers, architects and surveyors. In Mainland China, the requirement for registering as safety practitioner is even more stringent as they need to bear the legal responsibility.

However, in Hong Kong, the safety professionalism is still in its early development stage. More endeavour should be paid in order to strive for accelerating its professional development. More suggestions and recommendations should also be provided to encourage the establishment of professional policy so as to build up their own integrity. And finally the disrespectful term “Safety Guy” would be eliminated and disappeared in the industry, and even the community. Instead, all safety practitioners would be called as “Hong Kong Professional Safety Practitioner”. A professional safety practitioner should continuously maintain their competency and strive for improvement. Therefore, current safety practitioners should regularly attend seminars and site meetings to enhance their skills and continuous development.

Besides, there are numerous safety-related professional bodies in Hong Kong, and their roles are somehow confusing and overlapping. It is desirable to launch a conference among these societies in order to achieve a consensus, and hence form a unique safety professionalism association to take up the responsibility of safety professional development and registration. In addition, a unique association is always considered more trustable by the public.



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2.4. Other Practitioners

“Seeking for help from yourself is more effective than from others”. Therefore, the most effective safety measure is to arouse the safety awareness and uplift the safety knowledge of site operators / workers. “To take preventive measures before it becomes too late” is always the dictum of self-safety protection.

Practitioners should follow the guide and requirements that established by the company and statutory bodies, and participate in safety-related activities to enrich their knowledge.

In the coming days, site workers are anticipated to face more challenges as stringent standard would be set in order to further improve the working condition. In addition, a safety practitioner registration system would be announced and implemented by the government in due course. Safety practitioner who would like to secure their jobs should act immediately to enhance the competency and capability.

3. Conclusion

To conclude, company direction and safety management are tightly correlation with special in-between chemical reaction. A company could only be considered as “excellent” should there is a complemented policy on safety management and a mutual encouragement among all safety-related practitioners. In addition, the cooperation between statutory bodies and construction companies is essential to the development of safety profession, especially the public education to promote the awareness on safety.