



North Sea Oil Production

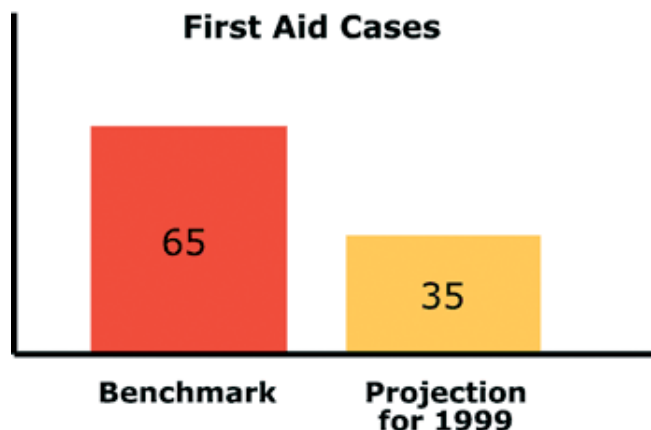
COMMERCIAL CASE STUDY No 3

Like many organisations with excellent safety cultures the Oil producers operating in the North Sea have been looking to overcome the notorious plateau effect. Indeed, a cross industry 'Step Change' was introduced where everyone in the industry committed to halving their accident rate in a two year period.

There is widespread acceptance that this is a particularly difficult if not impossible goal given the problems posed by the continuingly poor price of oil and the impact on morale of the inevitable job insecurities (and redundancies) that have been caused. Attending workforce involvement symposiums or Step Change initiative workshops has been a study in despair and sometimes outright anger.

Against this backdrop two companies elected to pioneer a full behavioural programme before it became the norm. These were Amerada Hess (Scott Platform) and, soon afterwards, Shell Exploration and Production (Cormorant Alpha Platform). In stark contrast they hold forth at stands at these conferences with pride at the programmes they are running. More importantly, they have either hit this step target or are well on the way to hitting it.

Figure One shows data from Shell's Cormorant Alpha platform. (Though these reflect absolute levels of first aid cases levels adjusted for man hours are similar if not better). However, all concerned with the platform are sensitive to the point of superstition about "boasting too soon" and will only take the word provisional for any such graphs when years of data are available. We have been allowed to display them at conferences only with the expression "so far so good... we are not saying we've done it, we're saying it's looking good at the moment...". (For example, IIR conference on "Employee Led Safety Programmes" 28th April, Mayfair Conference Centre, London).



In 2000 there was a similar fall in first aid cases - but more significantly 2000 was LTI free for the first time in the life of the Platform.

What's really promising is that, if anything, reporting of minor incidents is likely to increase within a climate of improved safety consciousness. Anecdotal evidence supports the hard data. Medic Eddie Isaacs commented "it's interesting to note far fewer men are coming in with bits of grit blown in their eyes around the side of their safety specs!"

Other Shell sites are also up and running with great promise - though no meaningful data is yet available. Amerada Hess's Scott platform reports that "behavioural scores are well up for all categories, accidents and first aid cases are significantly down and everything is going well". A full evaluation of progress is due to be made at the end of August prior to a board presentation and scores will be reported here once they've given the OK.

Obviously, it might be argued that these results are both positive but vague - always likely to arouse suspicion. We're not going to upset clients by 'risking fate' before they're entirely comfortable or by presenting figures when we haven't had chance to thoroughly confirm the validity of the data. If the reader is really interested, however, they can ring up and ask to speak to someone on the Steering Committee. Oil men tell you what they think!

Though we're really pleased to report positive results even in the face of difficult circumstances, some specific problems have been experienced. These are briefly discussed below for reader's consideration:-

Morale (as above). Working in the North Sea is traditionally high reward/low security and this has been even more so recently. Experienced oil men have commented that they are 'amazed any operative-run intervention is still running under the circumstances - let alone flourishing'. The reason is simple - it is theirs. They decided whether or not to implement it at all, chose which provider to use, and decide how it's run on a day to day basis. It is, therefore, not 'another safety initiative' it is their safety process. A vital distinction.

The hard work and dedication of the Steering Committee cannot be praised too highly. At workshops others say 'it sounds great but no-one would volunteer on our platform, morale is far too low'. Ours have suffered the same pressures but there are queues to join the Steering Committees - and this has only been achieved by their hard work, persistence and sheer enthusiasm. (We can't take the credit - essentially we just did the training and got back on the helicopter). To misquote New Labour it's about setting up a process that allows "ownership, ownership, ownership".

For example, some colleagues remain sceptical but instead of simply arguing over coffee that "It's not bollocks!... and I'm not the management lackey!" a "take a friend out" scheme was suggested where observers take out a mate (the more sceptical the better) to show them that it really is "no name, no blame" in practice.

Communication. Clearly this ever present difficulty at any site is a major headache for all behavioural initiatives on the North Sea. (Shifts only see each other briefly at the heliport if at all). It has been interesting to note that competitors (now working on their own platforms) have approached at conferences to ask "how did you overcome the communication between shifts issue"? The answer is with great difficulty - using structured meetings more frequently than on-shore and maximising the use of computer files and networks which are necessarily more complicated to operate and to up-date than on-shore. Even then we've found that once a quarter meetings are required in offices in Aberdeen. These are very expensive to hold as half the Steering Committee are on their weeks off and the other half need to be flown off their platform to attend. This costs a lot of money even in oil company terms - but those who made the decision to "invest in doing this properly to give it every chance" are feeling that it's well worth it.

In-House Training. Even though the Platforms in question haven't shied away from spending what they've needed to - money is tight. Training new Observers needs to be done off-Shore and that's expensive if you're flying trainers out and taking people off their jobs for two days at a time (manning is lean and cover is needed). As the Steering Committee have developed the tacit knowledge required they've been able to go through the "Train the Trainer" course - and have cut down the initial two day training course into 2 hour slots run over a series of evenings (Talk about a captive audience...!)

What this means is that soon, however, all personnel on site won't just know about the intervention through feedback charts, newsletters, awareness leaflets, awareness presentations and goal setting sessions. Instead it is possible that the whole sight can receive full training in the philosophy, practicalities and methodology of the behavioural approach (i.e. not just trained to be 'behaviourally aware' - but to take an active part in a full behavioural intervention as fully trained Observers). This is a perfect way to build even further on the excellent results to date. Initial feedback is that this process (commenced in Summer '99) is "going really well". One Steering Committee member even elected to undertake one more off-shore trip (having secured a job at head office) to "see the thing launched myself after all the work I put in".

Because of the success of this work we have recently undertaken a large project with a new client where a behavioural roll-out to all platforms will be directly integrated to a bench-mark audit system and a revamped accident investigation system. The fully co-ordinated behavioural approach will allow a far more accurate prediction of risk and far faster and more pro-active cross-platform learning.

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