

Workplace Accidents: The Factors

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Abstract

While the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016-2020) has aspired Malaysia to be a developed country by the year 2020, the aspiration does not only focus on high earning nation but also in other dimensions. One of the dimensions would be the quality of living which includes the safety of the nation, and also workplace safety. While Malaysia is experiencing an increasing trend in workplace accident rate, it has triggered the attention of the author to identify the factors that lead to the occurrence of workplace accidents, with the objective to curb workplace accidents in Malaysia.

Keywords: Workplace accidents, workplace safety.

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Introduction

In this era of globalization, almost all of the world's countries are in pursuit of development (Tharaldsen et al., 2010). Globalization had resulted in raising the awareness of many parties to issues surrounding safety (Li et al., 2009), which has made workplace safety issues headline news all over the world (Wameedh et al., 2011). The key problem triggering this research is the number of critical workplace accidents. While Malaysia aspires to become a developed country in line with Eleventh Malaysia plan (2016-2020), the safety of the citizens has always been important as the aspiration not only focus on high income earning, but also the qualities of life (Social Security Organization Malaysia, 2017). To date, overall workplace accidents in Malaysia are experiencing an increasing trend in 2007, with 69980 cases reported as compare with 66618 cases reported in 2016 (SOCISO, 2017).

Factors affecting Workplace Accidents

Accidents can be defined as the unexpected and undesired events that occur due to human activities, directly and indirectly (Hollnagel, 2004). Safety Institute of Australia (2012) proposes that understanding the causation of accidents is the first step in preventing the occurrence of accidents as there is a need to understand a problem before curing it. The evidence shown by Culvenor *et al.* (2007) suggested that there are various types of accident causes, for instance, lack of hazard control, planning, unsafe working conditions, lack of safety training, unsafe equipment, carelessness of employees, and poor workplace layout. In order to identify the factors influencing workplace safety, Wu and Li (2006) in their research proposed safety performance as the measurement of workplace safety.

Safety Performance

As of 2017, there are 69980 cases of workplace accidents reported in Malaysia (SOCISO, 2017). It can be seen that around 200 accidents occurred each working day in Malaysia in year 2017. The critical number of accidents indicates that there is a need to measure safety performance in Malaysia. Several attempts have been made to measure safety performance and results revealed that safety performance consists of two dimensions, safety compliance and safety participation.

(Zohar, 2008; Yang et al., 2010; Martinez-Corcoles et al., 2012; Brondino et al., 2012). Tharaldsen et al. (2010) as well as Kwon and Kim (2013), reported that safety compliance refers to compliance towards rules and regulations.

Hsu et al. (2012) proposed that safety performance can be influenced by employees' perceptions of leaders' commitment in safety, the effectiveness of safety and health training, and the degree of influence the leaders have. In supporting this statement, Wu and Li (2006) further suggest that safety management, and safety training practices can also influence safety performance.

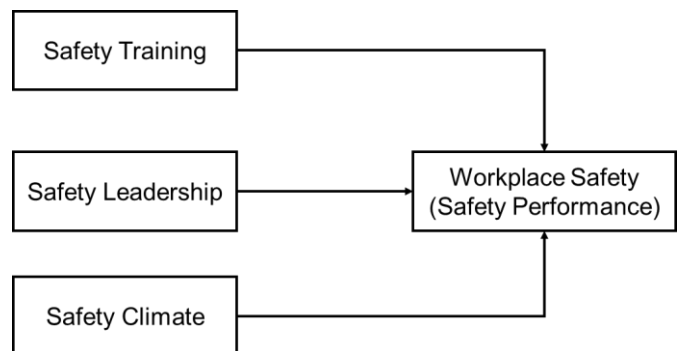


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

Safety Training

Training is a form of investment which involves the promotion of policies and procedures that are beneficial to the employees and is aimed at changing unsafe behavior into safe behavior (Choudhury, 2009; Yang et al., 2010; Wrede, 2009; Mohammad Fam et al., 2012). Safety training practices equip the employees with capabilities needed to handle their tasks safely and competently (Sari, 2009; Antonio et al., 2013). Thus, safety training practice is one of the major practices that serves as a vital and important factor in reducing workplace incidents, the overall objective of which is to increase safety performance. (Wameedh et al., 2011; HSE, 2011; Burke et al., 2011).



Siu et al. (2004) conducted a study on safety performance which argued that the increased risk of workplace incidents is contributed to by insufficient job knowledge, skills, and training practices. In response to this issue, Burke et al., (2007), and also Cheng et al., (2012) proposed that the occurrence of workplace accidents are contributed to by the lack of knowledge and skills while safety training practices fulfil the slack. Recent studies by Burke et al. (2011) and Burke et al. (2006) suggested that the level of employees' engagement in safety training practices relatively reflect the level of safety performance. However, in order to increase the level of safety performance, safety leadership is also required.

Safety Leadership

According to Mullen and Kelloway (2009), safety leadership can be defined as the combination of different leadership styles that share the notion of safety as top priority. Previous studies have investigated the relationship of safety leadership and safety performance and have reported that there is significant influence of safety leadership on safety performance (Lingard et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2010; Zohar, 2002; Rowley, 2009). Rowley (2009) further defined safety leadership as a practice that is used to predict and prevent future incidents that have not as yet happened.

Wu et al. (2008) introduced three dimensions of safety leadership, namely safety coaching, safety caring, and safety controlling. Wiegand (2007) explained that safety coaching refers to the efforts of leaders in managing the safety performance and that these efforts involve interpersonal interaction and communication. Safety caring refers to the level of concern of leaders towards safety issues and involves efforts to ensure the quality of safety in the workplace (Wu et al., 2010). Wu et al. (2008) proposed that safety controlling is the use of power in outlining the safety rules and regulations to be complied with by the employees in order to achieve safe performance.

Safety Climate

Looking back to the emerging history of safety climate, the first serious discussion and analysis of safety climate emerged in 1980 with the research conducted by Zohar (1980). Since then, a considerable amount of literature has been published on safety climate (Arcury et al., 2012; Mohammad Khandan et al., 2011; Cheyne et al., 2003; and Siti Fatimah Bahari and Clarke, 2013). Safety climate is actually a part of safety culture that can be measured. It refers to the manifestation of day-to-day perceptions of the safety culture in terms of belief, values, practices, and policies towards safety in the organization (Huang et al., 2012; Chenhall, 2010; Zohar and Luria, 2010; Yule, 2008; Mearns et al., 2003). Recent studies (Lingard et al., 2012; Li et al., 2009; Burke et al., 2008; Johnson, 2007) found that there is strong evidence that safety climate affects safety performance.

According to a major study conducted by Li et al., (2009), the evidence of the study have shown that as an important indicator, safety climate can reflect safety performance very well. This view is supported by Colley et al. (2013) in that the way employees decode or interpret the policies, practices, and the commitment towards safety is highly related to their perception of the values within the organization. It is believed that the attitudes and perceptions of workers influences their behavior in safety and also influences performance (Shang and Lu, 2009; McCaughey et al., 2013). Therefore, while safety climate is tied to the perception of organizational values, it is highly influenced by the interpretation of safety related issues within the organization.

Discussion

Throughout the review of the literatures, it can be said that workplace safety can be measured through the checking of the safety performance. As an indicator for workplace safety, the factors that influencing or affecting safety performance are vital in the efforts to mitigate workplace safety in Malaysia. In term of factors affecting safety performance, the researches reviewed verified the positive relationship between safety training, safety leadership, as well as safety climate on safety performance. The rationale behind the proposed factors are that safety training equipped the employees with adequate

knowledge and skills to perform their task safely. Turning into safety leadership, the leaders will be able to exert their influences on the employees to be more attentive on workplace safety issues. Whereas, as safety climate is all about the perception of employees on workplace safety prioritize, the more employees perceive safety is a priority in their workplace, the more safe they will perform their job.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper reviewed the previous researches regarding the factors of workplace safety. Suggestible, the major factors influencing workplace safety are safety training, safety leadership, and safety climate that re verified by various researchers in their researches.

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