

Effective Safety and Health Management Policy for Improved Performance of Organizations in Africa

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Abstract

Improving performance in organization may be demonstrated by way of intensifying effort towards increasing output level and quality. To accomplish this goal means efforts of employees are required in task performance. Effective execution of such essential employee responsibility, to a great extent, depends on the level of safety in the workplace. Management policy, especially in the developing economies is yet to properly address the issue of employee health and safety. This has resulted in frequent accidents and hazards, leading to high costs in the areas of hospital bills, salaries for hospitalized workers and compensations. Increased labor turnover, absenteeism, strained management-labor relationships, operational inefficiency, and ultimately decreasing performance become noticeable in such organizations. To satisfy workers' safety needs and motivate them, *ceteris paribus*, management must maintain effective health and safety program, and be committed to its success in all ramifications.

Keywords: Health, Safety, Organization, Performance, Africa

1. Introduction

Formal organizations are consciously directed toward attainment of set goals. Goal accomplishment is a function of the coordinated and interactive effort of organizational resources (human, material, financial, informational, etc).

The realization of human resource as the most important of all the assets, in contemporary management, may be based on its inevitable role in the manipulation of all other organizational assets or resources for productivity.

Management perception of human importance in the organizational setting has been exhibited through deliberate strategic decisions directed at the attraction of desired labor, to the verge of exit. One of such strategic decisions can be epitomized by effort to provide safe work environment.

Therefore, this paper intends to determine the correlation between effective health and safety management policy and organizational performance in Africa.

2. Theoretical foundation

Safety constitutes one of the essential human needs, as postulated by Abraham Maslow in his theory of needs hierarchy. Feeling safe at work ranks as a very important factor in job satisfaction (Kreitner, 2007). In attempt to satisfy this need certain organizations incorporate into their policy thrusts, guaranteeing workers' safe work execution under a climate capable of enhancing the physical, mental, and emotional conditions. Organizational policy of this nature is often categorized under health and safety.

Under work environment, Hall and Goodale (1986) describe employee health as the absence of illness or disease resulting from the interaction of employee and the work environment.

In general term, health means a state of complete physical, emotional, mental, and social ability of an individual to cope with his environment, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (Hippocrate, 1981). Health is the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life, promoting physical and mental health, sanitation and personal hygiene, control of infections and organization of health services (Lucas, 2001).

On the other hand, safety means freedom from the occurrence or risk of injury or loss (Aswathappa, 2004). He described industrial or employee safety as the protection of workers from the danger of industrial accidents. Safety can as well be referred to as the absence of injuries due to the interaction of the employee and the work environment (Lucas, 2001). In a general perspective, safety means a condition of being safe from undergoing or causing hurt, injuries or loss. Hence, safety policies may encompass activities directed at either reducing or

complete removal of hazardous conditions capable of causing bodily injuries. Organizational safety policy, according to Aswathappa (2004), specifies the company's safety goals and designates the responsibilities and authority for their achievement. According to him, such policy statement must emphatically declare four fundamental points- (i) the safety of employees and the public: (ii) safety taking precedence over expediency: (iii) every effort made to involve all managers, supervisors and employees in the development and implementation of safety procedures: (iv) safety legislation to be complied with.

Organizational health and safety in the context of this paper is concerned with the health and safety of workers, which Annah (2004) described as part and parcel of human security and as a basic human right.

According to ILO (2005), organizational health and safety focuses on the development of specific measures and programmes, aimed at protecting employees in the course of performing their duties to maximize productivity and improve the overall organizational performance.

2.1 Organizations and Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA)

Substantial efforts have been made by various unions, employers and employees, as well as governments especially in American and European continents toward promoting occupational safety and health in organizations, so as to accomplish effective and efficient task performance.

The widespread concern about employee safety and health in United States led to the passage in 1970 of the most comprehensive law regarding worker safety. This act is known as the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 but is frequently referred to simply by its initials: OSHA. At the time OSHA was passed, approximately 15,000 work-related deaths occurred in the United States every year (Denisi & Griffin, 2005).

OSHA authorized the U.S government to create and enforce various standards regarding occupational safety and health.

Some samples of general industry safety and health regulations from OSHA include the following:

For drinking water;

- Portable water shall be provided in all places of employment
- The nozzle of a drinking fountain shall be set at such an angle that the jet of water will not splash back down the nozzle and that the nozzle end must be protected by a guard.
- Portable drinking water dispensers shall be designed and serviced to ensure sanitary conditions.

For fire protection;

- Provision and maintenance of possible fire extinguishers in effective operating condition, and to be given maintenance service at least once a year.
- Combustible material shall be stored over 15 feet but not more than 21 feet.

For portable ladders:

- The maximum length for portable wooden ladders shall be step, 20 feet; single straight ladders, 30 feet; sectional ladders, 60 feet, and so on.
- Non self-supporting ladders shall be erected on a sound base at a 4 to 1 pitch and placed to prevent slippage.
- The top of a ladder used to gain access to a roof top should extend at least 3 feet above the point of contact.

To ensure compliance with OSHA, inspectors from U.S Department of Labor visit places of employment from time to time, to check records of illness and injury cases, and sanction defaulters appropriately.

2.1.1 Controlling accidents at work

Effort of OSHA notwithstanding, Denisi & Griffin (2005) admonished organizations to take several precautions in its effort to create a safer work environment, especially regarding accidents at work. According to them, one important approach is to employ the services of safety engineers to carefully study the workplace, identify and isolate dangerous situations, and recommend solutions for dealing with those situations. Other steps to minimize the rate of accidents at work may include the use of relevant protective clothing and devices such as helmets, ear protectors in environment with loud noise, eye goggles and face masks in welding rooms, hand gloves, boots and other safety shoes, waist support belts, wrist and elbow supports and screen filters, appropriate chairs and desks, etc.

2.1.2 Controlling occupational diseases

If organizations promptly inform their workers about the risks and hazards associated with their jobs, on the basis of such information, workers themselves could be seeking periodic medical attentions and checks and choose to use appropriate equipment and tools. Denisi & Griffin (2005) also prescribe the use of respiratory shields for breathing, pressurized or rubberized body suits, gloves and masks. The use of safety shoes where relevant can also protect employees from disease contraction.

2.2 *The Impact of occupational safety and health on organizations*

Organizations incur high costs due to poor safety and health programmes and efforts. Dorman (2000), cited in EU-OSHA (2009) notes that some of the indirect costs of occupational accidents include:

- Interruption of production immediately after the accident
- Lowering morale of co-workers
- Staff time taken up with investigating and preparing reports on the accident.
- Recruiting and training costs for replacement workers.
- Reduced quality of recruitment pool
- Damage to equipment and materials.
- Reduction in product quality following the accident.
- Reduced productivity of injured workers on light duty.
- Overhead costs of spare capacity maintained to lessen the potential effects of any accidents.

These costs bring negative consequences on organizations, such as deterring its ability to accomplish set goals and diminishing the competitive advantage position of the firm in the marketplace.

2.2.1 Benefits in maintaining effective workplace safety and health programmes

There are several benefits derivable from maintaining effective workplace safety and health programmes by organizations. Some of such benefits include the ones EU-OSHA (2009) taxonomised as direct and indirect benefits, stated as follows.

Direct benefits:

- Reduced insurance premiums
- Reduced litigation costs
- Reduced sick pay costs
- Improved production/productivity rates
- Reduced production and materials damage
- Lower accident costs/production delays

Indirect benefits:

- Reduced absenteeism
- Reduce staff turnover
- Improve corporate image
- Improved chances of winning contracts
- Improved job satisfaction/morale

On the whole, research findings support the existence of significant correlation between effective occupational safety and health policy compliance and sustainable economic growth and development of the organization. In the version of Ogbu (2009), the quality of a work environment has a strong influence on the performance and profitability of firms.

2.3 *Health and Safety at Work*

According to Cole (2002), employer has a common law duty to provide a safe place of work for his or her employees and is liable at common law for accidents encounter by his or her employees in the course of their employment. The duties (regarding health and safety) which employer owes his or her employees basically include the following:

- a. The provision of a safe place of employment.
- b. The provision of safe means of access to work.
- c. The provision of safe systems of working.
- d. The provision of adequate equipment, materials and clothing to enable employees to carry out their work safely.
- e. The provision of competent co-workers
- f. A duty of care to ensure that employees are not subjected to any unreasonable risks in the workplace.

Part of the employer's social responsibilities toward employees, of necessity, should encompass industrial workers being given opportunities to participate in periodic workshops, seminars and lectures to sharpen their awareness on safety precautions (Ayodele & Olubayo-Fatiregun, 2010). Having recognized the beneficial role of health and safety at work, Damon & Nadia (2008) quoted in Eklof (2008) opined that "like it or not, organizations have a duty to provide health and safety training...". In the dictum of Fitzgerald (2005), quoted in EU-OSHA (2009), "regardless of the ways organizations monitor Occupational Safety and Health (OSHA), safety and health must be viewed as an essential and achievable part of any business, and one that needs to be monitored.

2.4 Building an Effective Health and Safety Management System

A health and safety management system involves the introduction of processes designed to decrease the incidence of injury and illness in the employer's operation (Alberta, 2006). The successful implementation of this system requires management commitment to the system, effective allocation of resources, and a high level of employee participation.

The components of effective health and safety management system are briefly explained below:

- a. Management leadership and organizational commitment.

For this system to be effective, management must show leadership and commitment to the program. To achieve this, management should put the organization's expectation around health and safety into writing by developing a health and safety policy. Employees who forms part of the health and safety committee, should be involved in writing the policy, and to be signed by senior operating officer, to indicate the commitment of management.

- b. Roles and responsibilities

Clearly defined and well communicated health and safety roles and responsibilities for all levels of the organizations will create an expectation of a standard level of performance and accountability among employees, contractors, and visitors. All levels must be aware of their individual roles and responsibilities under both state law and company standards.

- c. Management Commitment

For a health and safety management system to be effective, management at all levels, should demonstrate their support of the health and safety program. This may be demonstrated through management, participation in health and safety leadership training meetings, facility inspections incident investigations etc.

- d. Employee Participation

It is important for workers to be involved in the development of the system in order to create ownership as well as help a better fit with the culture of the organization.

- e. Hazard Identification and Assessment Process

Employers are required to assess a work site for existing and potential hazards before work begins. Hazard assessment data could be used to determine what worker-training needs to be done, and to build the content of employee orientations and job training hazard assessment data could be used as the basis for inspection checklists. In the case of incident investigation, hazard assessment and control data can be used to help determine if a system failure was the cause of an incident.

- f. Determine Controls

Address identified hazards by assigning methods of control to eliminate or reduce the hazard. The most effective controls can be determined based on legal requirements, manufacturers' specifications, company rules, industry best practices, and worker inputs.

- g. Hazard Control

Once the hazard assessments are completed, the next step in the development of health and safety management system is the implementation of control measures to eliminate or reduce the risk of harm to workers. In this case, employers should take all reasonable steps to eliminate or control identified hazards in order to make the workplace safer.

h. Enforcement of controls

To enforce control methods, develop a constructive enforcement policy, and communicate the consequences to employees and the steps that will be taken if noncompliance occurs.

i. Emergency response plan

A serious emergency (Such as explosion, fire, or flood) could seriously affect the operation of a business and put the health, safety, and livelihood of many employees in jeopardy. The best health and safety management system cannot protect your company from all natural or unexpected disasters; however, having a good emergency response plan (ERP) in place can reduce the severity and risk of loss. Knowing what to do and who to contact can save lives and reduce costs if disaster should strike.

3. Discussion of Possible Implications of Effective Health and Safety Management/Policy in the Performance of Organizations in Africa

There is significant correlation between the effective health and safety management and improved organizational performance. The various performance-related implications of maintaining effective health and safety policies and system are explained below.

Effective organizational health and safety management can help to boost workers' morale and enable them have confidence in the management of the organization. Since workers are the worse inflicted people due to their direct involvement in hazard-prone activities, management by way of providing safer work environment would improve employees' work-behavior and trust in the management.

The organizational health and safety management that provides for the employees' involvement in the system development, can create an opportunity for workers' input in important affairs of the organization, hence according them high sense of belonging and commitment. Supportive of this fact is the opinion of Akpan (2010), that employee's participation in decision making fosters corporate citizenship (belongingness), cordial management-employees relations and high level of commitment to goal attainment.

Management effort in providing safe work environment through maintenance of effective health and safety system, goes a long way in satisfying workers safety needs, and capable of motivating them. The motivational value of safety /security needs have since been identified in Abraham Maslow needs hierarchy theory (Robbins & Judges, 2007).

Maintaining effective health and safety management system and policy in organization can tremendously reduce the occurrence and level of health and safety hazards, as well as costs associated with them. Such firms would not incur much hospital bills and salaries for the hospitalized workers, or compensation to families of employees involved in work place accident or health hazards. It is important to note that incurring much of such bills and expenses can subject an organization to negative economic and profitability condition, hence decreasing its competitive advantage position in the marketplace.

Effective health and safety system can foster better employment relations and reduce labor-management conflict. Management commitment in providing very safe workplace and procedure serve as indication of employer's concern to employees' safety, to enable them reach their highest potentials in the organization. This condition can help to reduce union grievances due to high exposure of workers to occupational hazards and accidents.

Organizations with effective health and safety policy tend to have good corporate image, capable of attracting potential investors and customers. Such condition can also help in attracting and maintaining competent and safety-conscious workforce, therefore, helping to boost competitive position of the organization, by way of contribution to increased performance, quality output and efficiency. In the version of Antonelli, Baker, McMahon & Wright (2006), health and safety initiative can yield financial benefits by way of reduction in absence rates, business interruption, labor-turnover, productivity, quality, etc.

Tardiness and absenteeism could be minimized in a firm with effective health and safety management system, as workplace hazards and accident could be drastically reduced. Based on that, adequate attention would be on effective performance so that organization can meet up with customers' orders, in terms of time, quantity and quality products or services.

4. Recommendations

There are many organizations with many workers in their employ, yet maintaining little or haphazard attention to health and safety program. They may see such program as a wasteful venture without considering the negative cost implications of such perception. Researchers reveal greater percentage of organizational success based on the maintenance of effective health and safety management system. Therefore, to enable management reduce hazards, accidents and effect of disasters in the work place, in order to reduce costs associated with unsafe work environment in Africa, the following recommendations were made.

Management should develop effective health and safety policy and ensure its effective implementation within the organization.

Occupational health and safety organ or unit should be established, with specific responsibilities, built into the firm's organizational structure, with competent leadership.

Management should incorporate selected workers in the development of health and safety program for the firm, to enhance their commitments in the implementation of health and safety policy, as well as compliance with the relevant safety and health standards and procedures.

Staff training and induction program should contain reasonable volume of organizational health and safety standards, rules, procedures, responsibilities, liabilities, and sanctions.

Management should carry out adequate job analysis, to help in identifying job related hazards, which should be communicated to workers during training, induction, orientation, seminar or workshop.

Both managers and employees should be made to know specific health and safety responsibilities and goals, which could be built into job descriptions and contracts, and made accessible to all the stakeholders of the organization.

Workers who meet the health and safety standards and practice of the firm should be rewarded, in order to encourage, maintain and reinforce such behavior throughout the staff working period in the organization.

Organization's readiness to observe safety standards and comply with state legislation bordering on organizational health and safety should be emphasized as one of the basic requirement for business registration or incorporation.

Organizations should promptly inform workers about health hazards associated with the jobs they are assigned to perform. This will help them to take appropriate actions in maintaining their health, through medical consultations and care. Such information will also enable workers to take adequate precautionary measures by using appropriate equipment and protective facilities at work.

Governments within African continent should periodically review organizational health and safety polices and legislation in order to keep pace with technological changes in the work setting. Relevant agency should be constituted and empowered to monitor and conduct regular checks on the level of company's work-site safety programmes compliance.

According to Professional Health and Safety Consultants (2009), the health and safety roles and responsibilities of senior managers need to be clearly outlined, and their performance should be measured and evaluated to ensure they have the necessary competencies to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively.

Governments in African countries should be encouraged through International Labor Laws and International Labor Organization (ILO) to adopt comprehensive occupational safety and health acts, incorporated in their national legal framework, to make it enforceable. If possible, such acts or laws could be developed at international level and made applicable to all United Nations member countries, in order to ensure uniformity in concepts, application and conformity evaluation technique.

5. Conclusion

Performance goal is often upheld by most organizations. To accomplish this goal remains the sole responsibility of workers, and as being directed by management. The management in certain organizations tends to direct more attention and resources toward maintenance of machines, equipment, and materials to the detriment of human resources, who are responsible for the manipulation of other resources, for the organization to achieve its set goals.

One of the areas often neglected by management, especially in the third world countries is the provision of safe work environment for workers. In Nigeria, as is the case in almost all other African countries, there is no organized regulatory agency charged with the responsibility of conducting regular monitoring and checks in

organizations to ascertain compliance with occupational and safety rules and procedures. Over the years, this has been the reason behind wanton degree of workplace accidents and occupational diseases in organizations.

Effective health and safety management have been discovered to have positive correlation with increased organizational performance and profitability, as the costs associated with the absence of it could be highly minimized.

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