

Employee Safety and Productivity: Benefits and Strategies for Creating Safe Work Environment

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Abstract

A safe workplace is a productive one. Employees have a legal right to expect a safe and healthy work environment. Safety measures protect employees as well as equipment and business property. Avoiding or minimizing injuries and damage to equipment and facilities will result in fewer expenses and more profit for the organization. This importance is underscored in this study. This paper examines the impact of these safety practices on employees' motivation and productivity. This is desktop research. Data are obtained from secondary sources and analyzed through content analysis. Several benefits and strategies are identified in the paper. It concludes by advocating the need for employers to create strategies that ensure and promote safety in their workplaces. This is believed will enhance employees' motivation, confidence, and performance.

Keywords: *Employee, Safety, Productivity, Work environment*

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Background to the Study

Employee safety is considered among the important components of job motivation. Employee safety means providing a safe working environment for employees by incorporating safe equipment and safe procedures at the workplace to ensure worker safety. It is evident from existing literature that employee performance is affected by occupational safety conditions of the workers, which in turn is influenced by the organizational safety support mechanism (Kahya, 2007; Werner, 2009, Oluoch, 2015).

Werner (2009), explained that it can significantly reduce the many costs associated with workplace injuries, illness, and death. All of this is expected to foster employee performance. However, a statutory safety and health audit report conducted in 2013 revealed that work-related accidents and injuries had increased from 20% to 30% especially among technical workers Oluoch (2015). Health care costs have continued to increase, leading to conflict between the needs of the company and those of the employees. While the counties are pushing for increased output, employees on the other hand are demanding protection from hazards and accidents in the place of work. Kahya (2007), claims that unfavorable workplace health conditions decrease the concentration of workers on duties and result in lower worker performance resulting in high costs.

Lack of safety policies in the organization affects job performance by employees. As a result of its importance, many organizations have adopted occupational safety practices notably organizational safety support to improve the working conditions and eventually promote employee performance. This paper examines the impact of these safety practices on employees' motivation and productivity. This is desktop research. Data are obtained from secondary sources and analyzed through content analysis.

Theoretical Framework

Behavioral Management Theory

The behavioral management theory is often called the human relations movement because it examines the human dimension of work. Behavioral theorists believed that a better understanding of human behavior at work, such as motivation, conflict, expectations, and group dynamics, improved productivity. The theorists who contributed to this school viewed employees as individuals, resources, and assets to be developed and worked with — not as machines, as in the past. Several individuals and experiments contributed to this theory. The theory is suitable for this study as it explains the expectation of employees in the organization. One of the proponents of the behavioural theory is Abraham Maslow.

In his 1943 paper “A Theory of Human Motivation,” psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed what is considered the classic theory of needs: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow,1943). He was a practicing psychologist, who developed one of the most widely recognized need theories, a theory of motivation based upon a consideration of human needs. His theory of human needs had three assumptions:

1. Human needs are never completely satisfied.
2. Human behavior is purposeful and is motivated by the need for satisfaction.

3. Needs can be classified according to a hierarchical structure of importance, from the lowest to the highest (Burton,2012).

Maslow broke down the needs hierarchy into five specific areas:

1. Physiological needs. Maslow grouped all physical needs necessary for maintaining basic human well being, such as food and drink, into this category. After the need is satisfied, however, it is no longer a motivator.
2. Safety needs. These needs include the need for basic security, stability, protection, and freedom from fear. A normal state exists for an individual to have all these needs generally satisfied. Otherwise, they become primary motivators.
3. Belonging and love needs. After the physical and safety needs are satisfied and are no longer motivators, the need for belonging and love emerges as a primary motivator. The individual strives to establish meaningful relationships with significant others.
4. Esteem needs. An individual must develop self-confidence and wants to achieve status, reputation, fame, and glory.
5. Self-actualization needs. Assuming that all the previous needs in the hierarchy are satisfied, an individual feels a need to find himself (Maslow, 1943).

Safety is a key human need. Besides the expectation of employees to have basic security, stability, protection, and freedom from fear, they seek safety in the workplace. An environment free from accident or with adequate provision caters to the health of an individual worker in case of unplanned occurrence in the workplace.

Most safety incidents are behavioural, in that they are not the result of environmental or system factors, yet dominant work health and safety practices focus on group-level factors (Burton, 2012). Whilst this is important in establishing a safety culture within an organisation, such practices do not consider the individual factors that may contribute to safety behaviour. This paper sees safety behaviour as an important element of organizational relations and human behaviour. Employers must therefore provide a safe work environment for employees, while also promoting safety management systems through human behaviour. Such understandings are inherently useful as they can create safer workplaces that will foster stronger communities.

Employee Safety and Productivity

Employee safety refers to the provision of a safe environment, safe equipment, and safety procedures in the workplace to ensure workers' health and safety. While organizations certainly have a moral obligation to ensure the safety of workers, an unsafe workplace can also have serious legal and financial consequences for employers. Workplaces are generally complex environments with competing and conflicting demands. This affects ensuring the safety of workers challenging. However, organizations that maintain a good health and safety environment for workers may increase employee morale and efficiency, which can ultimately contribute to the organization's growth and profitability.

Employee safety is important to maintain a good safe work environment to improve morale and efficiency, which in turn contribute to the growth and profitability of the company. Lack of safety procedures for employees could have legal and financial repercussions. Safety training, periodic safety inspections and the provision of proper personal protective equipment (PPEs) is part of the employee safety mandate an organization must follow (Compliance quest, 2022). The quest further revealed that “Facilitating a safe and healthy work environment is not just considered a measure to protect the workers from injury and illness; safety measures also lower injury/illness costs, reduce absenteeism and improve employee morale in the organization”. Simply put, safety is good for business.

Benefits of a Safe and Healthy work Environment

Employee safety also has other benefits, including improving employee retention, creating a safe work environment to improve productivity, and safeguarding the company's reputation in the eyes of customers, competitors, and the general public. According to Shah (2022), the under-listed are key benefits of achieving a safe and healthy work environment.

1. The safer the work environment, the more productive it is. Productive employees are an asset to all companies. For instance, productive employees can produce more output in less time, reducing operational costs.
2. Workplace safety promotes the wellness of employees and employers alike. Better safety equates to better health. Healthier employees do tasks more efficiently, and they are happier in general.
3. There are very few accidents in a safe working environment. This results in less downtime for safety investigations and reduces costs for worker's compensation. This also reduces the time needed for employees to heal from injuries.
4. Damage to industrial equipment creates costs for replacement and repair. Avoiding workplace injuries and damage to industrial equipment will incur fewer expenses and increase profit.
5. If employers are concerned about the safety of their employees, the employees are more confident and comfortable in general. Also, absenteeism rates drop, and employees are more focused on doing their tasks (Shah, 2022).

Creating a Safe Working Environment

There are several strategies for creating a safe work environment. Each strategy is dependent on the nature of the organization. Several experts have identified these procedures as it affects their organization. According to Taderera (2012), occupational/workplace safety practices include efforts to promote and maintain the highest standard of workers' physical, mental and social well-being in all jobs. This has created concerns among managers due to the growing number of work-related deaths and accidents (Nzuve and Ndolo, 2020).

Compliance Quest (2022), stated that safety guidelines and practices established in a work environment work only when the employees are also equally invested. Creating a safe work environment includes participation from employees at all levels working together to be aware of and follow these standards. To motivate the employees to create a safe culture, follow these simple steps.

1. Prioritize safety in the organization's culture
2. Leadership teams should play an integral role in implementing safety policies
3. Adopt positive reinforcements to remind employees of their contribution
4. Allow employees to take ownership of the safety process
5. Consider employee feedback to evaluate the safety program

Compliance Quest (2022) added that workplace safety can be achieved by:

1. Providing workers with safety training and instruction
2. Providing workers with proper personal protective equipment
3. Creating a safe working environment, safe equipment, and safe procedures that limit any threats to worker health and safety.
4. Setting up adequate safety supervision
5. Ensuring workers aren't subject to extreme mental and physical fatigue
6. Ensuring that the hours of work do not adversely affect worker safety and health
7. In addition to these duties, employers are also bound to comply with the organization's safety policies and procedures and use safety equipment properly.

Shah (2022), is quoted on the following strategies for creating a safe environment work environment.

1. Create a Safe Working Environment

This is the first step to creating a safe working environment. Employers need to identify workplace hazards and safety issues first. Then they must take measures to address them accordingly. Workplace safety hazards can include mechanical issues, dangerous chemicals, hazardous electrical equipment, etc. Mechanical problems can occur at any time while operating machinery in the workplace. Also, working with heavy equipment is very risky and can cause accidents. The organization must create caution and ensure that there is compliance.

2. Implementing Workplace Safety Programs

One way to do this is to include workplace safety in the company's mission statement. It should be the duty of every employee to carry out the safety policies. Employers should investigate all accidents in the workplace. They should encourage employees to follow all safety procedures. Moreover, employers should clearly state the hazards of not following them in writing. This reduces the chances of mistakes.

3. Providing Proper Safety Training to Employees

Training is an important part of every company's safety program to protect employees from accidents. Research shows that new employees have a higher risk of workplace accidents. It is the lack of knowledge of workplace hazards and proper work techniques that cause this greater risk. Employers should provide employees with the necessary training to reduce workplace accidents. Employees should operate all equipment and machinery safely and adequately.

4. Using Protective Safety Equipment

The usage of equipment worn to minimize exposure to hazards that cause workplace injuries

is significant. Not doing so can cause injury or even death. Employees may have to work with chemicals, machines, electronics, and other potential work hazards. Employers must provide such employees with personal protective equipment (P.P.E.). P.P.E. should be safely designed, constructed, and fit comfortably. Examples of P.P.E. are gloves, protective eyewear, clothing, earplugs, hard hats, etc.

5. Reporting Unsafe Working Conditions

Employees must inform any safety hazards or work risks to the management. Employers are legally obligated to ensure safe working environments for their employees. They must end workplace safety hazards and promote safety in the workplace.

6. Practicing Correct Posture

Bad posture is one of the main reasons for back pain. It is imperative to practice good and correct posture to reduce the risk of getting hurt.

7. Reducing Workplace Stress

Workplace stress can cause many health problems like anxiety, depression, etc. Job insecurity, workplace bullying, high workload, etc., cause workplace stress. Learn how to combat workplace stress and avoid its adverse effects. Workplace stress can have drastic effects on workplace productivity and employee health.

8. Promoting Regular Breaks

Employers should encourage employees to take regular breaks. Taking frequent breaks will prevent tiredness and fatigue. This will further prevent injuries or illnesses. Breaks help employees stay fresh and focused.

9. Easy Access to Exits in Case of Emergencies

If there is an emergency, it is important to have easy access to emergency exits. Easy access to emergency exits will reduce injuries and casualties. Also, it is important to have quick ways to shut down equipment in case of emergencies.

10. Using Mechanical Aids

An industrial job may need employees to work with heavy equipment. There are many injury risks involved in trying to lift and move heavy objects. Employees can use a conveyor belt, forklift, or wheelbarrow instead of lifting manually (Shah, 2022).

From the above assessment, there is no doubt, that all employees want assurance of their safety and protection. Workplace safety is therefore critical and must be ensured. Employers should ensure that their employees are working in a safe environment. Management systems and business owners are responsible for promoting workplace safety. Employers should encourage employees to adopt safe practices and use safety equipment. They should encourage safety policies and safety programs. Also, employees should be aware of the risks of operating hazardous machinery (Shah, 2022).

Conclusion

The paper was set to examine the benefits of creating a safe work environment, as well as the strategies for achieving the same in the contemporary work environment. Employees are more satisfied and productive in such an environment. A safe work environment is essential for both employees and employers alike. It is the right of all employees to have safety in the workplace. Workplace safety is essential regardless of the size of the organization. To achieve employee motivation, confidence, and performance, employers must create strategies that ensure and promote safety in their workplaces.

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