

Research Article

Could Occupational Safety and Health Systems Improve Employees' Performance in Arab Nations?

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Abstract: According to the International Labor Organization's estimates of 2017, 160 million people in the world are suffering from work-related illnesses, and that 270 million work-related accidents occur every year across the world. Industries in Arab nations have some room for improvement in the implementation of occupational safety and health measures and inefficiency related to occupational safety and health. This study focusses on review of the most relevant literature in the application of occupational safety and health systems in improving employee's performance. The study recommended several recommendations that would help in the implementation of occupational safety and health systems and improve the performance of employees in companies, such as providing of training courses for employees; establishing a specialized department for occupational safety and health; providing specialized supervisors to follow the occupational safety and health procedures within the company; providing a safe, stimulating and risk-free work environment; adopting occupational safety and health regulations within international and local standards.

Keywords: Occupational safety and health, employee performance, working conditions, work accidents, staff training.

Introduction

Occupational safety and health system is one of the most important factor that affect the performance of employees in companies, either positively by improving performance, feeling comfortable and safe, or by negative exposure to many injuries and occupational diseases as a result of non-compliance with the regulations. International Labor Organization (ILO) has established international conventions and legislation that limit occupational risks and health injuries resulting from the work environment. According to the legislation, attention should be given to the human resource, performance and awareness of employees. This is not only in the field of business administration, but also in many areas such as engineering and education. The application of occupational safety and health systems is of particular importance in several fields. The most important of these are the performance of employees and production efficiency, as well as the reduction of occupational accidents and injuries and occupational hazards in general (Lin Mill, 2001).

Occupational safety and health is an area that is concerned with protecting the human resource against the risks of occupational accidents and diseases, protecting material resources from harm, and the impact of occupational accidents and diseases on productive efficiency in industrial establishments (Bukhumkhum & Hanan, 2009). Therefore, it is highly important to provide a healthy and safe working environment for workers to reduce the tendency of exposure to risks and their effects, whether in the near term during the period of work, or in the long term after retirement from work

(Khandoudah, 2006). Hence, this study aims to examine the role of occupational safety and health systems in improving the performance of the employees.

Improving Employee's Performance through Occupational Safety and Health Systems

Several studies dealt with the topic of occupational safety and health and the performance of employees, but a more comprehensive conclusion is still needed to provide useful information regarding this issue. Cudjoe's Ghana (2011) study found that occupational safety and health practices are insufficient, and that occupational safety and health practices have positive impact on job performance. Almudyfar (2006) determined the effectiveness of occupational safety systems applied by the scientific departments in the Girls' College at Naif Arab University. The study found that there are inadequate professional security and safety procedures in addition to the lack of awareness of safety and occupational safety systems used in the study. A study conducted by Shikdar & Sawaqed (2003) identified the factors that affect employees' performance and occupational safety and health in the various industries in Brattain. The study showed that environment and noise despite the personal protective equipment used are amongst the factors that affect performance of employees. The study also found that managers received complaints from workers regarding back pain, headache and upper body pain. On the other hand, the management did not have sufficient information about the

humanitarian factors experienced by the staff and that there was a lack of skills and training amongst the workers.

Similar to the aforementioned study, Alhabil and Ayash (2012) evaluated the effectiveness of the occupational safety and health measures in the scientific laboratories in the Palestinian universities. The findings indicated that employees did not receive adequate training about how to use the means and tools of occupational safety. Masheali (2011) also identified the role of occupational safety programs in the performance of workers in small and medium enterprises in Algeria. The study found that occupational safety and health system plays a significant role in professional development and conditions and work environment. A study conducted by Kanten (2013) examined the relationship between working conditions, safety environment, safety behavior, accidents and work injuries factories of Turkey. The study revealed that there is a relationship between safety environment and safety behaviors, and between safety and working conditions. The findings also showed that employees who have suffered occupational injuries differ in their perception and awareness of the climate and behavior of safety and working conditions from those who have not been exposed to accidents and occupational injuries.

In addition, Muzahira et al. (2009) determined the extent of the commitment of garment manufacturers in Jordan in applying occupational safety and health measures and the impact of these procedures on occupational injuries and diseases. The findings showed that there is poor implementation of occupational safety and health measures and inefficiency related to occupational safety and health in legislation and regulatory bodies. Salem's (2009) focused on the employee's satisfaction with the availability of occupational safety and health in the industrial establishments in Palestine. The findings showed that there are statistically significant differences according to the sex variable for males in the extent to which occupational safety and health measures are applied, and for the benefit of unmarried persons with respect to workers' satisfaction with the application of occupational safety and health measures.

Another study conducted by Musaa (2007) focused on occupational accidents and diseases particularly their effects on productive efficiency in the industrial establishments in Algeria. The findings showed that most of the occupational accidents and diseases are due to machines and equipment, and that the most affected age groups are 40-50 years old. These phenomena can reduce the performance and efficiency of productive workers, which will lead to increase in the cost of production. Zacharatos et al. (2005) determined the relationship between the occupational safety and work performance in 138 companies in Canada. The study found that there is a strong correlation between occupational safety and performance employees, and that confidence in management and safety awareness are amongst the major factors that mediate the relationship between occupational safety and employee's performance.

Another study conducted by Bukhumkhum and Hanan, (2009) examined the impact of occupational safety and health on efficiency in the Henkel Foundation in Algeria. The study that occupational safety and health systems are vital in protecting human resource against the risks of occupational accidents and diseases and protecting material resources from harm in industrial establishments. Alshiryf (2001) also investigated the use of safety methods and their relation to raising the level of performance of workers in industrial establishments in Dammam – Saudi Arabia. The study also showed that occupational safety can properly be improved through programs such as training and extension seminars, training and public awareness. The findings showed that the majority of the industrial establishments (75%) are interested in establishing a department or safety officials.

There is inadequate training for most workers on occupational safety and health, which can affect the workers performance and thereby reduce productivity (Yeow & Sen, 2003). Specifically, Lin and Mills (2001) identified some factors affecting the level of safety in the industrial sector in Australia. The findings indicated that the subject of occupational safety and health is of great concern for fear of prosecution and that the higher the level of safety, the higher the productivity level in the industrial sector. Another findings reported by Adel (2015) showed that there is a positive direct effect of job security program in terms of support and sustainability on employees' performance, and that this has the tendency of boosting productivity.

Discussion

In the previous studies in Arab nations, issues such as job satisfaction, senior management commitment to provide occupational safety and health systems, training of employees, accidents and work injuries, spatial and physical conditions were investigated. For instance, the findings reported by Alhabil and ayash (2012) showed that the commitment of the senior management to formulate a policy of occupational safety and health Palestinian universities is moderate. On average the effectiveness of occupational safety health measures and that the provision of safety rules are moderate. This might be as a result of lack of interest in the application of occupational safety by the senior management of the organizations, as discovered by Masheali (2011). The occupational safety and health practices of the investigated sector were inadequate, and the commitment of the employees was insufficient. This is evident in the work of Almudyfar (2006) and Muzahira et al. (2009). In addition to lack of awareness, there was not much of the safety and occupational safety measures in the work environment (Cudjoe, 2011).

The results showed that the application of occupational safety and health system directly affects the level of performance of employees from both the point of view of the employees and the management in the sector investigated. According to the literature, the most important dimensions of the success of the application of occupational safety and health systems in raising the level of performance of employees is the commitment of

the senior management. This is because the senior management is responsible for provision of the occupational safety and health systems encouraging the employees through achieving job satisfaction (Dessler, 2009). If both the management and the employees are committed, occupational safety and health practices can have a great influence on job performance (Zacharatos et al., 2005).

It should be noted that these previous studies have varied their objectives in relation to occupational safety and health, from the management and the employee perspectives. Most of these objectives were related to the application of rules and regulations, employee training, job satisfaction, spatial and physical working conditions, accidents and work injuries. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is one of the first studies that reviewed the role of occupational safety and health system in improving employee's performance. Occupational safety and health is an important issue not only to the employees, but also the establishments, managers, supervisors, visitors and many others, and all of them can be exposed to the same conditions and psychological pressure in varying degrees (Abdul Ghani, 2001; Al-Kubaisi, 2011).

This study focused on the role of occupational safety and health system in improving the performance of employees in Arab nations. The study has shown that the application of occupational safety and health systems plays a significant role in the performance of workers. However, organizations in Arab nations suffer from issues such as inadequate professional security and safety procedures; lack of awareness of safety and occupational safety systems; complaints from workers regarding back pain, headache and upper body pain; lack of sufficient information about the humanitarian factors experienced by the staff; lack of skills and training on how to use the means and tools of occupational safety amongst the workers.

The employees have suffered occupational injuries resulting from on their perception and lack of awareness of occupational safety and health in their working conditions (Al-Kubaisi, 2005). There is poor implementation of occupational safety and health measures and inefficiency related to occupational safety and health in the organizations. Most of the occupational accidents and diseases are due to machines and equipment. It is also evident from the literature that environment and noise in the personal protective equipment are amongst the factors that affect performance of employees. There is a strong relationship between safety environment and safety behaviors, and between safety and working conditions.

Conclusion

The results of this study revealed the conditions and instructions that are suitable in providing better work environment for the employees, which can contribute to reducing pressures and on the staff to the lowest level. It is necessary to ensure work-related security and achieve psychological satisfaction for the employees to increase performance and productivity (Nemoni, 2015). Factors that

can increase productivity include occupational safety and health management systems. Organizations should give much attention to work-related risks and accidents to improve the performance of their employees through the application of occupational safety and health systems to obtain global standard. This might be the beginning of further studies in the area of occupational safety and health system. Occupational safety can properly be improved through programs such as training and extension seminars, training and public awareness.

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