

Organizational Health/Safety And Employees' Performance For Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The study centred on organizational health/safety and employees' performance for sustainable development. Human resource managers play a key role in ensuring that there exist safe work environments, which will enhance the performance of workers in the work place. The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of organizational health and safety on employees' performance for sustainable development. The methodology used by the study is mainly the analysis of secondary data which was derived from relevant literatures and journals and internet. The study contends that sound organizational health and friendly safety environment will promote positive attitude to work while poor organizational health and safety will bring about negative behavior to work such as absenteeism, intent to leave the organization and poor commitment to organizational goal. The study therefore recommends that management should ensure a safe work environment which will increase positive attitude to work. The study also recommends that government should strengthen its regulations and legislations on organizational health and safety in the industries and work places. These measures will contribute immensely towards enhancing sustainable development in Nigeria and beyond.

Keywords: Employee, Management, Performance, Organizational health, Safety

INTRODUCTION

Employers of labour owe their workers a duty of protection from the hazards that occur on daily basis at the work place. Human resources manager play a key role in ensuring that there exists a safe work environment. Thus there is the provision of safe and health work systems in all organizations. Health and safety play an important role in ensuring maximum performance of workers in organizations, because employees will not give their optimum best in an unsecured environment. Health and safety regulations and regulators provide an important base for enhancing employee health and safety. The legislations, especially the workmen compensation act, specify the minimum health and safety standards, expected in an organization. All employees are expected to work in environments where risks to their health and safety are adequately controlled and at minimal level. A safe and healthy workplace not only protects workers from injury and illness, it can also lower injury/illness cost, reduce absenteeism and turnover, increase productivity and quality and raise employee morale in other words, safety is good for business both for internal and external business environment.

The overall performances of workers in organization are a function of health and safety of the organization. Oxenburgh et al. (2004) contend that health and safety of all employees is closely linked to the company's productivity in all work places. The health and safety executive (2006) explains that genuine productivity gains can be realized by those businesses that invest in high performance health and safety practices. Furthermore, the health and safety executive (2006) also recognized that there is need to exhibit positive attitude by many organizations, if they are to move on from simply attaining minimum legal compliance toward implementing the best practices of organizational health and safety, which will enhance sustainable development in Nigeria. The workers and the employers will benefit tremendously. It is against this background that this study examines the organizational health/safety and its impact on employees' performance towards sustainable development in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Organizational health entails overall health condition in the work place. It is concerned with health in its relation to work or working environment (Muchemedzi and Charamba 2006). Organizational health deals with the prevention of ill-health arising from working conditions. Health and safety in organization is concerned with protecting employees – and other people affected by what the company produces and do against the hazards arising from their employment or their links with the company. Safety programmes deals with prevention of accidents and with minimizing the resulting loss and damage to people and property. They relate more to systems of work than the working environment, but both health and safety programmes are concerned with protection against hazards, and their aims and methods are clearly inter linked (Armstrong, 2009).

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and World Health Organization (WHO) committee on occupation health posit that: occupational health should aim at the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social wellbeing of workers in all occupations, the prevention amongst workers of departures from health caused by their working conditions, the protection of workers in their employment from risks factors adverse to health, the placing and maintenance of the workers in an occupational environment

adapted to his physiological and psychological capabilities, the adaptation of work to man and of each man to his job.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Not only must complex organization see to it that employee's rights are not violated, but it must also provide a safe and healthy working environment. Mondy and Noe (1996) define safety as "protecting employees from injuries caused by work-related accidents" and health as keeping "employees free from physical or emotional illness" (P 432). In order to prevent injury or illness, the occupational safety and health administration (OSHA) was created in 1970. Through workplace inspections, citations and penalties, and on-site consultations, OSHA seeks to enhance safety and health and to decrease accident, which lead to decreased productivity and increased operating costs (Armstrong 2006). Human resources Management involves several processes which if put together they are supposed to achieve the above mentioned functions. Thus when effectively integrated, they provide significant economic benefit to the organizations and society at large. Human resource managers play a key role in ensuring that there exists a safe work environment. Thus there is the provision of safety and healthy work systems in all organizations. This is of utmost importance to the employee, the organization and even the larger society (Baridam 2002).

Organizations owe their employees a duty of protection from the hazards that occur on a daily basis at the work place. Health and safety regulations and regulators provide an important base for enhancing employee health and safety. The legislations, especially the workmen compensation act, specify the minimum health and safety standards expected of the organization. What is occupational health and safety? The International Labour Organization (ILO) and World Health Organization (WHO) committee on occupational health at its twelfth session in 1995 posit that: "occupation health should aim at the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well being of workers in all occupations, the prevention among workers of departures from health caused by their working conditions, the protection of workers in their employment from risks factors adverse to health, the placing and maintenance of the workers in an occupational environment adapted to his physiological and psychological capabilities, the adaptation of work to man and of each man to his job" ILO/WHO Resolution (1995). The position above clearly provides a framework for appreciation the reason for occupation health and safety measures in an organization.

REASONS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

The major reasons for establishing an efficient system of organizational health and safety measures at the work place as noted by Robbins and Judge (2007) include:

Avoidance of the risk of injury

An employee should not be faced with the risk of injury at the work place due to an exposure to health hazards. Occupational health and safety measures promote health and safety standards and procedures in an organization. These measures recognize the health hazards facing employees, measure health and safety risk, set suitable safety controls and give recommendations for avoiding accidents to the management and employees in an organization. In addition, attempts are also made to put to use personal protective equipment.

The management also seeks to design strategies for dealing with 'human error' at the working place and plant related hazards. In most firms, considerable amount of money and effort is invested in job safety and risk analysis.

Cost considerations

Organizations also incur various costs as a result of an accident involving an employee at the work place. These costs are in the form of legal fees, fines, compensatory damages, investigation time, lost of production, loss of good will from the work force and from consumers and the wider community. There is also the associated cost of medical treatment for the employee which is often the case. We also have other indirect cost associated with work-related accidents. These costs includes overtime payments necessary to make up for lost of production, cost of retaining a replacement employee to make up for lost production, costs associated with time spent on recruiting, selecting and training a new employee and cost associated with lost revenues.

Legal Considerations

The organization may also have to contend with legal actions in the form of civil or criminal proceedings. The legal action could be costly and time consuming to the organization.

Improvement in Productivity

Health and safety standards improve productivity at the work place. When these standards are in place, workers remain healthy, and lost man hours are prevented. Designing and maintaining a safe work environment can improve productivity by reducing the time lost due to work-related accidents as well as avoiding the costs present in work-related accidents and illness.

Facilitate Employee Commitment

Maintaining a healthy and safe work environment assist to facilities employee commitment. It also assists in ensuring good, behavioural tendencies at the work place and a higher level of commitment towards achieving the group goals.

Sustain Improved Industrial Relations

In situations where employers of labour maintain health and safety standards, it could change employee behaviour and ensure less militancy during the process of collective bargaining. Thus health and safety standards improve industrial relations which will have a far reaching effect towards enhancing sustainable development in Nigeria.

Goals of Organizational Health and Safety

The basic goals of all organizational health and safety programmes at the work place include:

- i. Ensuring a safe work environment.
- ii. It also protects co-workers, family members, employers, customers, suppliers, nearby communities and other members of the public who have contact with the work place environment.

- iii. The programme seek to ensure effective interactions and relationship between these health and safety programmes and other influencing subjects like labour laws, public policy industrial relations, safety originating occupational medicine and hygiene, toxicology, environmental law etc. for example, occupational health and safety ensure that the basic legal requirements relating to occupational health and safety are met. One of such legislations is the work men's Compensation Act (1995).

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The study give credence to social exchange theory, which contends that social behaviour is the result of an exchange process, the purpose of which is to maximize benefits and minimize costs. According to the theory, people weigh the potential benefits and risks of social relationship. When the risks outweigh the rewards, people will terminate or abandon that relationship. The primary assumption of the theory is that individuals interact for profit or the expectation of it. Out of a very basic desire to secure their health and safety at work, employees will evaluate their relationship with their organizations and make informed decisions as to whether to have an emotional, continuous or normative relationship with their organizations. Fulk and Fishbacher (2000) contends that a reciprocal actions is modeled as behavioural response to an action that is perceived as either kind or unkind. The theory opines that the more an action is considered kind or unkind, the more it will be rewarded or punished, respectively. Therefore, when employees perceive that their organization does not care for their health and safety, they will reciprocate by exhibiting negative work behaviours such as absenteeism, intent to leave the organization and poor commitment while cordial health and good safety environment will promote positive attitude to work which will enhance and bring about sustainable development.

METHODOLOGY

The method used was mainly on the analysis of findings from reviewed literatures and journals, which is purely secondary data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the perspective above, it is apparent that the management of health and safety in any organization is influenced by the following factors:

- i. Internal factors consisting of cost consideration, organizational policy, economic consideration, the activities of trade unions and collective agreements.
- ii. External factors- consisting of government regulations and legislation and public opinion.

External Factors

The external factors include:

- a. Government regulations and legislation influence the nature of management of organizational safety and health in the industries and work settings. Such regulations include the Workmen Compensation Act of 1995 etc. There are various other regulations that influence the organizational response to injuries at the workplace, response to physical disability and health challenges.

- b. **Public opinion:** This also affects the organizational response to the health and safety challenges facing workers. The public expect that the firm, especially in high risk sectors, should have in place preventive measures for health and rapid response to manage injuries at the work place.

Internal Factors

i. The activities of labour unions and collective agreements: The unions play a key role in ensuring the maintenance of health and safety standards at the shop floor and in the organization. Most of the union insist on incorporating broad provisions on minimum standards for health and safety in the collective agreements reached with management of the organization. For example, Nigeria Labour Congress in a recent resolution resolved that “work place policy be adopted by all employees, on the need to eliminate workplace discrimination and stigmatization against people leaving with HIV/AIDs (PLWHA) as a catalyst for protecting the right of workers who would volunteer to undergo tests without fear of victimization”. The Nigeria Labour Congress also called for stiffer sanctions for infringements by employers on health and safety standards.

ii. Organizational Policy

Various organizations have different forms of policy on health and safety. The organization’s policy measures depend on the orientation of top management, the nature of the organizational operations and the experience and quality of the management.

CONCLUSION

A safe and health workplace is paramount towards protecting workers from industrial accident, injury and illness. When an organization takes organizational health and safety as a priority policy measure, it will help to lower injury/illness costs; reduce absenteeism, increase turnover, and productivity. It is also imperative for human resource managers to strategize towards effective systems for managing health and safety in the workplace. This will go a long way to create safer, friendly and more productive environment for all classes of employees in an organization. The safety and health of workers in organization will contribute immensely towards sustainable development in the work place as well as in the country at large.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study outlined the following recommendations:

1. Management should ensure a safe work environment which will promote positive attitude to work.
2. Human resource managers should make a careful assessment of the hazards employees face on the job, including how to prevent the hazards and control them adequately.
3. Organizational management are expected to ensure effective interactions and relationship between health and safety programmes and other influencing policies like labour laws and industrial relations.

4. The government should strengthen its regulations and legislation on occupational safety and health in the industries and work settings.
5. High risk sectors should put in place a pro-active prevention measures for health and rapid response measures towards managing injuries at the work place.
6. Staff clinic should be properly equipped in order to cater for employee's health challenges and industrial accident accruable from the workplace.
7. Management are expected to design effective strategies for dealing with human error at the working place and plant related hazards, hence considerable amount of money and effort should be invested in job safety and risk analysis.

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