IMPACT OF OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH PRACTICES ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AT MUMIAS SUGAR COMPANY

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ABSTRACT

Human Resource Management (HRM) policies and Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) practices remain a critical subject in the fields of human resource management, industrial relations, and organizational. There is growing consensus by previous studies that strict adherence to OSH practices yields excellent job performance in any given organization. This study sought to comprehensively establish the impact of OSH practices on employee performance in Mumias Sugar Company. Employee performance in Mumias Sugar Company has been on the decline despite the company’s effort to adhere to these legislations coupled with presumably a well configured HRM policy. The study sought to articulate the problem by addressing three objectives as follows: (i) To examine the impact of OSH on employee outputs at MSC, (ii) To evaluate occupational health hazards that affect employee performance at MSC, and (iii) To determine a compliance framework that best integrates OSH and HRM polices at all levels in the company. The researcher used systematic random sampling and sampled every fourth member on the payroll. Data was collected using Questionnaires, Key Informant Interviews (KIIIs) and Observation. Analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 for quantitative inferences; while KIIIs and observational data was synthesized qualitatively. Findings indicate that OSH practices have impacted positively on employee performance in MSC as indicated by 70.7% of employees who felt satisfied by management’s efforts to adhere to set standards and legislation. However, occupational health hazards have affected job performance in MSC as portrayed by 51.5% of the respondents. This was majorly attributed to high levels of ignorance on occupational hazards at work place. There is weak relationship between OSH practices and HRM polices at all levels in MSC. Effective
integration of OSH practices with HRM policies is therefore requisite. Ultimately, the findings of the study shall inform the formulation and continued improvement of the company’s competitive strategy and overall job performance. In order to sustain performance of employees, and thus that of the organization, there is need to appreciate the value of employee safety and health management through best OSH practices.

**Key Words:** Human Resource Management, Employee performance and occupational health

**Introduction**

In times past, employers were not concerned with the health and safety of their employees at work. An employee was not provided with safety and health equipment and s/he risked getting hurt at work anytime s/he goes about his/her duties. An injured employee in countries like U.S.A. for example had to litigate to obtain compensation which in most cases was not successful and the cost of doing so even prevented employees from going to court. However, the International Labour Organization (ILO) made some recommendations in 1959 which provided that “occupational health services” should be established in or near a place of employment for the purpose of protecting the workers against any health hazards arising out of work or conditions in which it is carried on, contributing towards workers physical and mental adjustment, and contributing to the establishment and maintenance of the highest possible degree of physical and mental well being of the workers. In organizations, occupational accidents may arise from three dimensions: the task to be done, for instance malfunctioning machines, lack of protective equipment like working conditions which arise from inadequate lighting, fatigue that comes out of excessive working hours and the employee himself/herself.

The employer has responsibility to protect the employees from all health hazards that may pose threat to their safety and health (ILO, 1959). Safety hazards are those aspects of the work environment that have the potential of immediate and sometimes violent harm to an employee; for example loss of hearing, eyesight or body parts, sprains, brushes, bruises, broken bones, burns and electric shock. MSC has an established and working safety, health and environment section under the safety, health and environment manager working harmoniously with other departments. The Company has developed and written a safety and health manual which sets the guidelines on safety and health standards to be observed. Periodically safety and health audits are normally conducted within the stipulated time, and as required by the Act.

Health and Safety climate (or culture) is a short-hand term used for describing the set of people's shared beliefs, norms, attitudes and expectations within a given organization that relates to minimizing the exposure of employees, managers, suppliers and members of the public to dangerous conditions (Alder et al., 2000). Health and Safety management is considered as an all-embracing task. Occupational health and safety department specialists play an integral role in job design and work re-organization. Safety promotion is emphasized both in production methods...
and techniques used and in the specific health qualities of end products. Elected representatives of the employees, who constitute, according to the law, the employees' Health and safety Committee, monitor and contribute in the application of best practice in health and safety promotion (Shearn, 2004).

There exists a growing body of evidence that improved OSH practices can have a positive impact on levels of job performance and overall productivity. Productivity is directly associated with the benefits that arise from good OSH management. It makes sense, therefore, to take the best care of employees, not just to comply with legislation, but also to inspire greater commitment, efficiency and productivity (Mossink and Licher, 1998). “The product of individual and group values, attitudes, perceptions, competencies and patterns of behaviour that determine the commitment to, and the style and proficiency of, an organisation’s health and safety management.” “Organisations with a positive safety culture are characterized by communications founded on mutual trust, by shared perceptions of the importance of safety and by confidence in the efficacy of preventative measures.”

Safety culture can encourage proactive accident prevention, and research has shown companies do recognise that an important component in creating and maintaining a safe environment is through culture change (Fitzgerald, 2005). In changing an organisation’s culture, it is important that leadership on safety issues is visible in the consistent behaviours of senior management, that active measurement of safety performance and reinforcement of positive behaviours are in place, and that there is a periodic review of the safety culture and the implementation of safety improvement plans (Fitzgerald, 2005). Companies with a strong safety culture inherent in their organisation will be most likely to be willing to look at ways of improving and maintaining a healthy working environment and, as a result, to link OSH and economic performance.

**Statement of the Problem**

There is no doubt that the human resource that an organization has is one of its versatile resources. A safe work environment strengthens and supports individual safety behaviors, and this further affects behavior due to the influence workers have on one another. Furthermore, safety climate is correlated with employees’ compliance to safe work practices as well as workplace exposure incidents (Gershon, et al., 2000). Therefore, an effective and efficient use of the human resource will translate into the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the organization. Though many organizations accept this to be true, they fail to realize that as part of their human resource management practices, there is the need for management to ensure that personnel in the organization work in safe and healthy environment that will promote their optimum utilization. It should be emphasized that accidents are costly both to the affected worker and the organization. Therefore, every effort should be made by management and employees in order to avoid them from happening at the work place as the employees are exposed to varied kinds of hazards. Therefore, failure to institute adequate health and safety
measures in place by management to protect employees from these hazards and risks will lead to avoidable deaths and ultimately lead to loss of staff. Inadequate training on acceptance and compliance to safety and health measures also hinder its effectiveness. In fact, safety and health in the organization have to be everybody’s concern. Despite all these concerns, MSC still faces many challenges with regard to the implementation of the Act.

Literature Review

Evolution of Occupational Health and Safety

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, employers ran their businesses as they saw fit to make profit. Employee safety and health were not their concern. In fact, in official terms these things were nobody’s concern. In the U.S.A. injured employees had to litigate to obtain compensation for their injuries. The cost of doing so effectively prevented employees from going to court. Besides, employees were rarely successful since, under common law, if the employee knew of the hazards the job entailed or if the injuries were brought about as a result of the negligence of the employee or a co-worker, the employer was not liable. From these origins, there has emerged an approach and practice with regard to health, safety and welfare issues. The national safety council had been established in 1913 in the U.S. after safety conscious managers and engineers spearheaded its founding (major disasters led to changes in thinking). Significantly in 1959, ILO provided that occupational health services should be established in or near a place of employment for the employee welfare (ILO, 1959).

Health and Safety Hazards in the Workplace

There are many workplace hazards in the modern environment. Many people are still associating safety hazards to industries dealing in chemicals but there are many hazards in manufacturing sector. MSC is a manufacturing sector and the hazards there include; when using machines and equipment like chainsaws, forklifts, ladders, electric poles and transformers. Furthermore there is slipping, tripping, Noise, Vibration, Ionising Radiation, Non-ionising Radiation, x-rays gamma rays mutation, Light, Extreme hot and cold temperatures, High and low Pressures, inappropriate machine guarding, equipment malfunctions or breakdown. In many cases employers do not provide sufficient safety wear which can help minimize the impact of accidents. There is also psychological stress and violence in the workplace resulting from threatening behaviour and harassment.

Importance of Employee Health and Safety

Health and safety is important in a workplace for legal, moral and psychological reasons (Trisha Jackson, 1999). Employees have a legal right to work in a safe and healthy environment. A healthy and safe workplace can have a strong positive effect on the psychological contract
Having employees with a safe psychological mind is very important for the performance of organisations. This affects the productivity, quality of work and efficiency of the employees (Rousseau, 1995). A safe workplace, reduces accidents, improves employee relations and facilitates employee commitment to quality work. OSH management is fundamental as occupational accidents and diseases are still too frequent at the moment. The ILO (Alli, 2001) estimated that there are worldwide more than 250 million work-related accidents each year and over 160 million workers fall ill annually because of workplace hazards and exposures.

**Occupational Health and Safety Policies**

Occupational health and safety can be defined as those policies that are put in place to protect the lives of the employees and ensure that they enjoy good working conditions. Health is one of the rights of all people. The development of services to promote health is part of the battle against the three major scourges of poverty, ignorance and disease, which is still predominant in developing countries (DeGlanville, Schilling, and Wood, 1992). A health and safety policy is a written statement by an employer stating the company's commitment for the protection of the health and safety of employees and to the public. It is an endorsed commitment by management to its employees regarding their health and safety. A health and safety program contains the health and safety elements of an organization, objectives which make it possible for the company to achieve its goal in the protection of its workers at the workplace. The Occupational Health and Safety Act 2007 specifies the minimum requirements for OSH employers are expected to; minimize occupational accidents, diseases and disabilities, promote good health at the work place, promote a good work environment for workers and those in proximity. Employers should carry out their own health and safety risk assessment, in consultation with the occupational health and safety committee, to determine what hazards are present at the workplace.

Once the hazards have been identified, controls for exposure to these hazards should be detailed in the health and safety program in order to; clearly demonstrate management's full commitment to their employee's wellbeing, show employees that safety performance and business performance are compatible, to clearly state the company's safety beliefs, principles, objectives, strategies and processes through all levels of the company, to clearly outline employer and employee accountability and responsibility for workplace health and safety, to comply with the Occupational Health and Safety Act, and to set out safe work practices and procedures to be followed to prevent workplace injuries and illnesses (Glanville, Schilling, and Wood, 1992).

**Management of Health and Safety in Organisations**

In order to manage health and safety of employees, an employer needs to establish and maintain an occupational health and safety program at the workplace, and review it where necessary and revise the occupational health and safety program at least every three years. Health and Safety
policies offer employers an opportunity to be proactive rather than reactive (Eaton, Adrienne and Nocerino, 2000). Precautions to manage health and safety in the workplace could involve activities like; develop training programmes that emphasize health and safety, employers making sure that workers know about hazards in the workplace, and are trained to work in a way that ensures their health and safety, establishing safety and health committees, designing safer systems of work, exhibiting commitment to health and safety, establishing procedures and controls, and monitoring the health and safety policies (Reill P ci, and Holl, 1995).

Ver Meulen (1998) believed that the best way to reduce workers' compensation costs are to ensure all incidents and associated costs are tracked and trended. He argued that there are two aspects to reducing workers' compensation costs; one is loss control. Once an injury occurs, controlling the costs associated with that injury is necessary. The other is loss prevention. This is done through incident and near-miss investigation, taking a look at the root cause of incidents and implementing steps to prevent them from recurring.

**Occupational Safety and Health on Employee Job Performance**

Management of occupational health and safety is vital to solving today's complex problems in Job performance among employees. No single discipline can meet all the needs of workers at the workplace. An effective health and safety program begins with a management commitment to achieve excellence in worker protection consistent with successful completion of work without work stoppage due to OSH concerns. Management is responsible for instilling this commitment at all levels and encouraging workers to accept OSH as an integral part of the work. Enhanced worker protection is a natural result of this type of commitment. Such goals cannot be realized without; establishing accountability for OSH within the team or workforce, orienting the health and safety organization toward collaboration and finding solutions while avoiding confrontation, and relying on management to integrate OSH and line functions for the planning and conduct of work. To be effective, OSH planning must be intrinsic to mission, and health and safety excellence must be a primary mission objective (Eaton, Adrienne, and Nocerino, 2000).

Occupational Safety and Health is a key human resource management (HRM) issue for organizations. Currently, occupational health and safety activities are an essential part of business and according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 1995) it is employers who carry the primary responsibility for health at work. Occupational Safety and Health practice is important for the state’s cost reduction; for employees to work in a safe and healthy work environment; and above all for the employer to prevent accidents and illnesses and the associated costs and to comply with the law. Subsequently, large organisations usually see OSH activities as part of their business.
Research Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is descriptive survey. The study population was obtained from a randomized sample of MSC employees spanning from the lower cadre to the top management. The company has an approximate total of 2087 employees. Basing on the number of staff in MSC, the sample size for this study was 384 respondents. The study used both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was obtained by use of questionnaires. All the data gathered was edited to ensure completeness and accuracy. The data was then analyzed quantitatively and was presented in tables by frequency and percentages and spearman correlation. The researcher manipulated the data using SPSS version 21.

Research Findings and Discussion

Knowledge of occupational Safety and Health

Findings indicate that most respondents (employees) 48.2% understood occupational health and safety as both employers and employees’ welfare, 46.4% indicated employers, employees and third party welfare, 3.6% employee’ welfare while 1.8% indicated others. This shows that staff understand that health and safety is a comprehensive issue that matter to management, workforce, and considers the security of all other stakeholders as well. Most respondents (employees) 98.2% indicated both employers and employees had a responsibility and a right for OSH, only 1.8% indicated otherwise. 43.6% of the employees indicated wearing protective clothing and equipment was their responsibility and right, 24.8% indicated reporting any contravention of the law by the management, 30.8% indicated the right to refuse unsafe work while only 0.9% indicated other responsibilities and rights. 34.2% of the employees indicated the responsibilities and rights of employers included provision of education, training, health and safety, 23.0% maintaining records on health & safety issues and posting safety notices and legislative information respectively, 19.3% indicated filling government accident reports, 0.6% indicated others.

Kind of occupational health hazard that affect job performance

Work place accidents

Most respondents (managers) 76.9% indicated there were no frequent accidents in the company while 23.1% indicated the accidents were frequent. Respondents who indicated accidents were frequent, 66.7% rated the frequency by weekly while 33.3% rated with other ranking. 68.4% indicated they had never suffered from any accident injury in their work place while only 31.6% indicated they had suffered accidents at the workplace.
Causes of accidents at the workplace

Most respondents (employees) 51.5% indicated ignorance on health and safety matters, 18.2% indicated lack of adequate training on health and safety and not sure respectively, and 12.1% indicated inadequate provision of PPE. Pirani and Reynolds (1976) indicate that accidents result from two broad causes: unsafe work condition (physical and environmental) and unsafe work behavior. Unsafe physical conditions include defective equipment, inadequate machine guards, and lack of protective equipment. Examples of unsafe environmental conditions are noise, radiation, dust, fumes, and stress. Accidents often result from an interaction of unsafe acts. Thus if a particular operation forces a worker to lift a heavy part and twist to set it on a bench, then the operation itself forces the worker to perform the unsafe act. Telling the worker not to lift and twist at the same time will not solve the problem. The unsafe condition itself must be corrected, either by redesigning the flow of material or by providing the worker with a mechanical devise for lifting. Engineering controls attempt to eliminate unsafe work conditions and to neutralize unsafe worker behaviors. Management controls attempt to increase safe behaviors. Engineering controls involve some modification of the work environment; for example, installing a metal cover over the blades of a lawnmower to make it almost impossible for a member of a grounds crew to catch his or her foot in the blade.

Safety measures put in place

Most respondents (employees) 21.5% indicated re-training on safety and health practices, 17.9% indicated safety training as part of orientation on first time at employment, 15.4% indicated proper disposal of waste, 15.0% indicated using of PPE, 14.6% indicated regular monitoring on OSH standards and complying; and prompt reporting of accidents/injuries respectively, while 0.8% indicated other measures.

Benefits of occupational safety and health policies

Most respondents (employees) 24.0%, indicated reduces accidents, 21.5% indicated reduces cost of compensation to injured employees, 18.5% indicated loss or death of staff, 17.0% indicated corporate image of the hospital is enhanced, 16.5% indicated labour turnover is reduced while only 2.5% indicated other benefits.

Effective Safety and Health Programs Reduce work related injuries and illnesses, Improve morale and productivity, and Reduce workers’ compensation costs, OSH can lead to the improved safety culture.

Most respondents (managers) 32.1% indicated salary increments as a factor of motivating employees, 28.6% indicated recognition, 21.4% indicated promotion while 17.9% indicated appraisal.
The impact of OSH on employee performance

The researcher conducted spearman correlation between variables on safety measures in place at workplace and benefits that MSC and its employees derive from effective occupational safety and health policies.

**Table 1: Correlation between safety measures Vs benefits to MSC and employees**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety measure</th>
<th>RA</th>
<th>RCC</th>
<th>DS</th>
<th>RLT</th>
<th>CIH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety training at employment</td>
<td>.430**</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.126</td>
<td>.238</td>
<td>.170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p-Value</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.578</td>
<td>.370</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper waste disposal</td>
<td>.450**</td>
<td>.367**</td>
<td>.483**</td>
<td>.428**</td>
<td>.378**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p-Value</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular monitoring of health and safety standards to ensure compliance</td>
<td>.415**</td>
<td>.321*</td>
<td>.421**</td>
<td>.358**</td>
<td>.230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p-Value</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using PPE</td>
<td>.432**</td>
<td>.243</td>
<td>.365**</td>
<td>.311*</td>
<td>.262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p-Value</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompt reporting of accidents/injuries</td>
<td>.415**</td>
<td>.321*</td>
<td>.421**</td>
<td>.358**</td>
<td>.230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p-Value</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p-Value</td>
<td>.405</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.132</td>
<td>.289</td>
<td>.843</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Key:**
- RA Reduces Accidents
- RCC Reduces cost of compensation to injured employees
- DS Death of staff
- RLT Reduction in labour turnover
- CIH Corporate image of the hospital enhanced

From table 1, the results indicate that all the correlations were positive though weak. Proper disposal of waste as a safety measure recorded the most significant correlation with benefits to MSC and employees at 0.01 significant levels. From the above, it is clear that an organization cannot achieve its objectives without the workforce; hence the health and safety of the workforce should be a priority.

**Occupational health hazard that affect job performance**

The researcher also sought to examine correlation between occupational health hazards and the impact on employee performance. The results are tabulated in table 4.27 below.
Table 2: occupational health hazards Vs impact on job performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Impact on job performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of adequate training on health and safety</td>
<td>r- Value: 0.162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p- Value: 0.412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non provision of PPE</td>
<td>r- Value: -0.519**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p- Value: 0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignorance on health and safety matters</td>
<td>r- Value: 0.400*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p- Value: 0.035</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From table 2, non provision of PPE had a significant negative correlation with the impact on employee performance. The other correlations were positive though weak. The employer has responsibility to protect the employees from all health hazards that may pose threat to their safety and health (International Labour Organization 1959). Safety hazards are those aspects of the work environment that have the potential of immediate and sometimes violent harm to an employee; for example loss of hearing, eyesight or body parts, arts, sprains, brushes, bruises, broken bones, burns and electric shock.

Occupational diseases are essentially preventable and can be ascribed to faulty working conditions. The control of occupational health hazards decreases the incidence of work-related diseases and accidents and improves the health and morale of the work force, leading to decreased absenteeism and increased worker efficiency. In most cases the moral and economic benefits far outweigh the costs of eliminating occupational hazards.(Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009)

Summary

The level of OSH practices in MSC is poor given the low level of interpersonal relationships. Hazard, safety, hygiene and welfare are hindering the OSH practices at least to certain degree. It came out clearly that to have a comprehensive occupational health and safety it extends beyond the security for employees and employers to third parties or other stakeholders. It came to light that occupational health and safety measures put in place at the MSC are not sufficient. Some of the staff are dissatisfied with the current occupational health and safety measures. Respondents confirmed that, the use of proper protective tools will prevent them from contracting communicable diseases. It was found out that the MSC does not have schedule in terms of specific periods for training staff on occupational health and safety.
Conclusions

OSH practices have impacted positively on employee performance in MSC as indicated by 70.7% of employees who felt satisfied by management’s efforts to adhere to set standards. ILO has set benchmarks and practices that partner states like Kenya are required to meet and team approaches adopted by firms as a way of achieving market competitiveness. Occupational health hazards have affected job performance in MSC as portrayed by 51.5 of the respondents. This was majorly attributed to high levels of ignorance on occupational hazards at work place.

There is weak relationship between OSH practices and HRM polices at all levels in MSC. Effective integration of OSH practices with HRM policies has become a global concern for organizations today. Accidents are costly both to the affected worker and the organization. Therefore, every effort should be made in order to avoid them from happening at the work place.

Recommendations

In order to sustain performance of employees, and thus that of the organization, there is need to appreciate the value of employee safety and health management through best OSH practices. The provision of protective clothing and putting in place safety and health measures is not enough. Management should put in place a regular monitoring team who will go round to check whether the employees really do put on their protective materials given to them before doing their duties and also observe in strict terms safety measures put in place in order to avoid any mishaps and accidents.

There is need to strengthen the relationship between OSH practices and HRM polices at all levels in MSC. Procedures to monitor, measure and record OSH performance on a regular basis should be developed, established and periodically reviewed vis-a-vis HRM policies. Workers should be given enough insight of the risk and dangers inherent in heir work at the work places. Through education some of these accidents could be minimized if not eradicated entirely. Jobs can also be designed in such a way as to remove all inherent potential dangers to make the work safe for employees.

References


Health and Safety Plan (HASP) Guidelines, February 1994


