



ESTABLISHING A PROACTIVE SAFETY CULTURE THROUGH THE LEADERSHIP ACTIONS OF SENIOR MANAGERS.

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ABSTRACT:

The focus of safety leadership skills and development have been mainly centered on supervisors and managers, while the senior managers appears to have been sidelined when safety research materials are reviewed in detail. While there are emerging studies from other sectors, the studies from energy sector or specifically from the oil and gas industry, are currently scarce. The objective of this qualitative-style paper is to present a preliminary overview based on a selected scope literature review from printed and online resources from year 1972 through year 2016 of both scientific studies and major accident inquiries. The questions that formed the content of this paper are as follows: Does safety need to be managed any differently to other business aspects such as productivity, reliability and efficiency? Is there a particular style of leadership for senior managers that influences the level of safety in their organization (e.g. transformational leadership)? What are the particular characteristics displayed by senior managers who achieve great safety performance in their organizations? Further research will need to be carried out to identify what are the specific actions required to support and further progress the development of a robust safety culture specifically in major hazard industries.

KEY WORDS: Senior manager safety leadership, transformational safety leadership, proactive safety culture.

I. INTRODUCTION

The abundance of literature and publications that are currently available serves as evidence to the interest and focus of senior level leaders and top managers in relation to organizational effectiveness. This situation is evident both at the sharp-end or practitioner level as well as in the academic or theoretical literature. Various authors have described and researched the distinctive temperament of leadership at senior level when compared to leadership at different levels of the organization as described by Zaccaro [1], Hunt [2] and Katz [3].

The heightened awareness currently being experienced towards corporate social responsibility has also driven the public scrutiny, in light of recently highlighted irregular business practices such as Enron and Lehman Brothers. This has resulted in businesses considering their activities in a broader context such as how the leadership of the organization affects the culture and operational practices.

An observation worthy of note was that despite this evident broad-spectrum interest in the role of senior leadership, it is estimated that only a mere 2% to 5% of the general literature for leadership are directed at the senior leadership (Zaccaro 2001). This situation is further compounded when one takes into account that this

statistic is not taking into account the literature on safety specific leadership.

II. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative meta-analysis approach of reviewing literature related to senior managers safety leadership in the oil and gas industry was adopted towards developing this paper. Both printed and electronic material that was accessible and related to the senior manager safety leadership published from year 1984 through to year 2016 were reviewed. The review materials were in the form of book chapters, conference papers, journal submission, scholarly and industry articles as well as incident reports. The selection criteria for reviewed materials was for the degree of relatedness to the senior managers' safety leadership in the oil and gas industry. Theoretical comparison and field observation were adopted in producing the observations and conclusions.

III. THE CONSTANT STRIVE FOR SAFETY, RELIABILITY AND EFFICIENCY.

Does safety need to be managed any differently in relation to process reliability and work efficiency? Is there a distinction between the three facets of output (safety, reliability and efficiency)? Is it even possible to operate in a safe yet reliable and productive (effective) environment as the normal

operating condition? Production has traditionally been glorified as being the highest priority and is associated with making things happen in tandem with high output, while safety management is about low numbers (of accidents and incidents) and preventing things from happening. It can prove to be a challenge having to consistently and empirically demonstrate contribution to something that did not happen- as in the case of safety performance and statistics.

Conventional thinking dictates that when it comes to production versus safety, then productivity is always gained at the expense of safety. To a certain degree, if all operations were to be carried out solely “safely” then productivity would almost certainly be negatively impacted. There are now

IV. LEADERS AND ORGANIZATIONAL SAFETY

Top level leadership has been referred to as “Senior” leadership by Heller [5] and Kimmel [6], “Executive” leadership by Barnard and Carlson (1951), as well as “Strategic” leadership by Hambrick (1989) and Philips (1992) in various publications. Although offering different leadership theories from varied conceptual perspective, the terms stated above are essentially interchangeable and connotes a similar view. There is still ongoing debate as to which theories would be best suited for application at the top-level of an organization.

The studies examined in constructing this paper have mostly been focused on the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) position or a few organizations as opposed to focusing on the Senior Management Team or the senior managers in general. CEO charisma was found to be related to organizational performance in terms of equity returns and profit margin according to Waldman et al. [7]. Tosi et al. [8] however, established that there was no direct overall relationship between CEO charisma and organizational performance, from a shareholder or asset return perspective. It was however found that there was a correlation under conditions of perceived environmental uncertainty. There was also no correlation between CEO charisma and organizational performance as reported by Agle [9], although it must be taken into account that they used a different measure of charisma compared to the studies mentioned above. The two studies on senior management that have examined the application of the full-range model transformational and transactional instead of just focusing the charisma component are from Zhu et al. [10] and Elenkov et al. [11] Transactional leaders behaves in a way closely associated with monitor and reward. Transformational leaders behave in a way that inspires vision and genuine motivation for the workforce. Subjective assessment on

offset views supported by studies that prove this conventional thinking may have its flaws. Matilla et.al (2001) describes characteristic of general effective supervision being similar in nature to characteristic for effective safety supervision. Salminen and Saari (1995) have also recorded measures that increase productivity and safety in tandem. In their review of occupational safety and quality in industries, Clarke et al. [4] concluded that the literature trends increasingly support the use of integrated safety and quality management in industry. This literature reflects the position of safety professionals and safety regulators as well as reinforcing the need for safety management systems to be integrated into regular or quality management systems within an organization.

organizational outcome have been cited by Elenkov et al. (2005) as well as Zhu et al. (2005) and strong impact on motivation have been found by these two studies. Although not entirely conclusive, these results indicate there is room for further research and investigation of the matter.

Even though there is in existence a small study compilation on the relationship between top-level managers and their leadership style, correlated to financial performance, productivity and innovation, but very few studies have referenced the influence of top-level manager’s leadership against safety performance. This absence is somewhat surprising considering the attention being paid towards the influence of top-level manager’s leadership on safety performance. This attention is coming from safety practitioners, academic literature on safety [12] and increasingly of late by Public Enquiries and accident investigations (Baker 2007, Hopkins 2000, Cullen 2000). Table 1 provides highlights of comments directed at senior management on their performance from a number of high profile investigations and enquiries.

| Incident | Comment on senior management |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Piper Alpha fire (UK) | “The quality of safety management by operators is fundamental to offshore safety. No amount of detailed regulations for safety improvements could make up for deficiencies in the way safety is managed by the operators.” (Cullen, 1990,p.301) |
| Landbroke Grove rail crash (UK) | The impression given by the evidence was that senior management were content to wait till proposals had been put up to them, and failed to give and maintain the lead in seeking |

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| | solutions and ensuring response. (Cullen, 2000,p.3) |
| BP Texas City refinery explosion (USA) | “BP has not provided effective leadership or established appropriate operational expectations regarding process safety performance at it’s U.S refineries [and] the panel believes that the lack of effective leadership is systemic, touching all levels of BP’s corporate management having responsibility for BP’s us refineries. (Baker, 2007 p.66) |
| Macondo the Gulf of Mexico oil disaster (USA) | The blowout occurred in large part because the companies diffused knowledge, responsibility for, and ownership of safety among themselves and among groups of people. The people onshore and on the rig had a false sense of security. They did not recognize the need for individual leadership in addressing the multiple anomalies and uncertainties that they observed. Instead, they relied on many ambiguous —dotted line relationships within and between the companies and personnel involved. (Chief Council Report, 2011 p.249) |

Table 1: Incident report extract making comments about senior management.

Flin [13] notes top-level managers in the high ranks of organization as “neglected species”. This is in relation to their impact on safety within the High Risk Organizations and especially so for the impact of their leadership style. This situation is not because there is no interest in the influence of leadership style in organizational safety, but rather because most studies have been limited to middle managers or site-supervisor level. There have been in-depth studies of safety leadership from a transformational and transactional context of leadership behaviors in managers and supervisors as evidenced by Zohar (2003), Barling et.al (2002) and Kelloway et.al (2006).

While there is evidence that the full-range model of transformational and transactional leadership is good for productivity and safety, concerns over the ethics of transformational leadership have also been raised. There are views that claim self-serving leaders could use transformational leadership to deceive and exploit followers. This is linked to the ‘dark side’ of charismatic leadership, which are narcissism, authoritarianism and Machiavellianism as described

by Conger et.al [14]. This position have been attempted to be refined and clarified by different authors in an attempt to return to the root of charismatic and transformational with trust as a core component according to Endrissat et al [15] and Luthans et.al [16]. Trust has been identified as the key mediating variable in different studies on transformational and transactional leadership and safety based on Barling et. al (2002) , Burns et al.(2006) and Conchie et al.(2006). Barling et al.(2002) are of the opinion that transformational leadership exhibit safety as a core value through the expression and demonstration of personal commitment. This action then promotes the trust building process that may well be the “missing piece of the safety puzzle”.

V. SAFETY AND SENIOR LEADERS

As described above, just as general management, systems are important for the management of productivity, so is safety management system crucial for the management of safety performance. Senior manager’s leadership is considered as an essential aspect in the successful implementation of management systems. There are currently not many papers from the industrial sector that explore the to-level manager’s leadership style and it’s interaction with safety management system. The Health Care Sector in Great Britain is currently showing some emerging research on the influence of top leaders as evidenced by Flin et al.[17].

There are a number of literature that examines top-level managers and how their perception of what is important relates to safety measures. One example is Chew [18] who carried out interviews with CEOs and safety professionals and attempted to identify what type of safety activities involving top management was the most effective in reducing injury rates. Among the conclusions was that “visible, physical participation of top management in safety may be particularly effective in increasing safety”. Positive attitude towards safety and health and incident prevention from top-level managers has a positive effect on safety as documented by Rundmo et al. [19] and by Smallman et al. (2001). This positive attitude is also seen by senior managers as having a positive effect on productivity as documented by Huang et al. [20]. However, Findley et al. [21] found that there was a different perception of safety culture coming from different group or staff. The majority of managers and support staff had a perception of strong safety climate while the supervisors and general workforce did not report such a strong safety climate. A study by Ashby et al. [22] looked at the purpose of senior managers taking risk control measures and it was discovered that the main

objective was to be regulatory compliant and avoiding legal liabilities.

Simard et al.[23] carried out a study to specifically look at the influence of senior managers influence on safety. They examined the organizational factors influencing compliance to safety rules that included senior management commitment and leadership. Their findings showed that the senior management leadership factor was not directly related to influence, although it was trending in the right direction. Senior management commitment indirectly affected safety compliance though the involvement of supervisor's participative management.

VI. CONCLUSION

The focus of this paper has been to explore major accident inquiries and scientific studies to ascertain the current state of interest and the theory related to leadership of top-level managers and its impact on managing safety performance in organizations. The findings indicate that safety does not need to be managed any differently to other aspects of business such as reliability and efficiency. There is also evidence that where full-range transformational leadership have been applied, then there is consequent positive influence on the level of productivity and safety. Trust was also noted to have an important impact on safety performance. Further research will be required to examine the relationship between full-range leadership of top-level managers and safety, reliability and efficiency in the oil and gas industry. This would serve towards exploring the concept of Authentic Leadership in relation to Transformational Leadership and safety in the oil and gas industry.

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