



Safety climate in OHSAS 18001-certified organisations: Antecedents and consequences of safety behaviour

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ABSTRACT

The occupational health and safety standard OHSAS 18001 has gained considerable acceptance worldwide, and firms from diverse sectors and of varying sizes have implemented it. Despite this, very few studies have analysed safety management or the safety climate in OHSAS 18001-certified organisations. The current work aims to analyse the safety climate in these organisations, identify its dimensions, and propose and test a structural equation model that will help determine the antecedents and consequences of employees' safety behaviour. For this purpose, the authors carry out an empirical study using a sample of 131 OHSAS 18001-certified organisations located in Spain. The results show that management's commitment, and particularly communication, have an effect on safety behaviour and on safety performance, employee satisfaction, and firm competitiveness. These findings are particularly important for management since they provide evidence about the factors that should be encouraged to reduce risks and improve performance in this type of organisation.

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1. Introduction

In recent years the certification of management systems has become fundamental to achieving competitiveness for firms (Vinodkumar and Bhasi, 2011), because firms' long-term success depends on their ability to improve their operations, re-organise themselves, and meet the challenges that the rapidly changing environment throws at them. This is why in the past few decades a large number of standards have been designed to facilitate the international exchange of goods and services and develop cooperation in the spheres of intellectual, scientific, technological and economic activity.

After the success of the standards for quality management (ISO 9001) and environmental management (ISO 14001), and in response to the demand for an occupational health and safety management model that firms can easily integrate with these two standards and that offers them the possibility of evaluating and certifying their management system in this area (Vinodkumar and Bhasi, 2011), the OHSAS (Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series) 18001 standard was created in 1998 when a group of certifying bodies from 15 countries on 3 continents met to

create the first global standard for certifying occupational health and safety systems. The British Standards Institution officially published OHSAS 18001 and it came into effect on 15 April 1999.

Since its publication OHSAS 18001 has gained considerable acceptance worldwide and firms from diverse sectors and of varying sizes have implemented it. The demand has been such that the standard has recently been revised, and its latest incarnation is OHSAS 18001: 2007 "Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems" (OHSAS Project Group, 2007).

The fundamental objective of this standard is to support and promote good practice in the area of occupational health and safety via a systematic and structured management. But certification also has implications for strategy and competitiveness because it enables the organisation to guarantee to interested parties that it has an adequate occupational health and safety management system. The OHSAS specification is applicable to any organisation that wishes to: (a) establish an occupational health and safety management system to eliminate or minimise risk to employees and other interested parties who may be exposed to occupational health and safety risks associated with its activities; (b) implement, maintain and continually improve an occupational health and safety management system; (c) assure itself that the system complies with its stated occupational health and safety policy; and (d) demonstrate compliance with this standard to others. In short, all organisations that wish to implement a formal procedure to reduce the health and safety risks to employees, customers and the general public in their premises can adopt the OHSAS 18001 standard (Vinodkumar and Bhasi, 2011).

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