

# **Conceptual Framework of Health and Safety Management Practices Affecting Safety Performance of Malaysian Bumiputera SMEs**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to identify safety performance practices affecting safety performance of Bumiputera SMEs and to develop a conceptual framework explaining the relationship of health and safety management among Bumiputera small and medium enterprise (SME) entrepreneurs in Malaysia. The study brings understanding on health and safety management and broader safety performance issues within Malaysia context by analysing the comprehensive literature. SMEs are in dire needs to implement health and safety management properly as it is estimated around 60% of workplace accidents that occurred are accounted to SME. Bumiputera SMEs can rely on health and safety management practices such as entrepreneur's commitment, safety training, worker's involvement in safety, safety communication, safety rules and procedures, and safety promotion policies to increase safety performance in the organization. A safety management system reflects the organization's commitment to safety which will result in improved safety performance; thus, it is worth investigating. This study reveals that there is a need for further research to discover new

insights on health and safety management and enhance safety performance among Bumiputera SME entrepreneurs in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Health and Safety Management, Bumiputera, SME, Safety Performance

### **Introduction**

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are in dire needs to implement health and safety management properly as it is estimated around 60% of workplace accidents that occurred are accounted to SME (DOSH, 2018). The major obstacle is Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) laws is not covered SME in totally. This has resulted in poor awareness implementing OHS in SME. The provision of Malaysian's OHS laws concerning prevention programs and joint health and safety committees, however, apply differently to small firms with 40 employees or less. The safety management models developed for larger corporations have proved to be ineffective in smaller firms (Surienty, 2018). Are SMEs clear on what safety management standards they need to comply with and to what extent is compliance with standards needed? Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) has put efforts on overcoming such issues by developing of guidelines, conduct programs and campaigning of in SMEs. After DOSH conduct some study with 154 workshops with SME and 2,610 inspections, the obstacles to implement OSH in SME are summarized as follows:

- i. Lack of knowledge on OSH
- ii. No person is appointed to manage OSH.
- iii. Poor commitment from employer / owner
- iv. Dilemma commitment and profit (DOSH, 2018)

According to the figures published by National SME Development Council (2018), small medium-size enterprises (SMEs) with less than 150 employees made up 99.2% of all firms to 1st quarter of 2019 and accounted for an average of 59% of jobs in all sectors and contributing 32% to total GDP (SME Annual Report, 2018). 37.4% or 241,281 of the total 645,136 SMEs were owned by Bumiputera and 90.7% or 218,930 of Bumiputera SMEs are micro enterprises (Malaysia, 2015). In the Tenth Malaysia Plan 2011-2015 (10MP) and the Eleventh Malaysia Plan 2016-2020 (11MP), Malaysian government has aimed to expand the Bumiputera Commercial and Industrial Community (BCIC) or Bumiputera Economic Community (BEC) to the regions through integrating Malaysia into the global supply chain to create large scale of networks (Malaysia, 2010, 2015) Efforts to develop the Bumiputera agenda are now continued under the aspiration of the Shared Prosperity Vision (SPV, 2030) to address inequality, structure the economy and build Malaysia to face a more challenging era in the next ten years Sinar Harian (2020). In line with the exertions, the government has prepared 500 million ringgits (US\$116 million) in funding to assist Bumiputera entrepreneurs (ASEAN Briefing, 2020).

Despite the implementation of many government policies aimed at supporting Bumiputera community, Bumiputera SMEs have received very little attention from occupational health and safety (OHS) researchers in Malaysia. In spite of great strides in improving OHS during the past century, an estimated 317 million nonfatal occupational injuries and 321,000 occupational fatalities occur globally each year, that is, 151 workers sustain a work-related accident every 15 seconds (Kim & Kang, 2013). Still, researchers have paid less attention to the demand of statistical evidence, which reflected obstruction improvement occupational health and safety management in the SME industry (Ramos, Afonso & Rodrigues, 2020).

Hence, this study is conducted in the context of the Malaysian Bumiputera SMEs' health and safety management practices particularly to management level role towards safety performance. It helps to establish the influence of safety management practices and safety performance of Bumiputera SMEs. The aim of this paper is to identify safety performance practices affecting safety performance of Bumiputera SMEs and to develop a conceptual framework explaining their relationships.

This paper is presented as follows. First, literature pertaining to safety management and its relationship to safety performance is being discussed. Then, theoretical foundation for an alternative explanation of the primary mechanism is presented: safety management practices influencing safety performance. Next, a conceptual framework based on two underpinning theories is discussed. Finally, the paper ends with implications and conclusion.

## **Literature Review**

### **Safety Performance**

Safety performance influences the safe behaviour of employees at various organizational levels (Zohar & Erev, 2007.) Safety surrounding is one of the core indicators of organizational safety outcomes, i.e.; frequency accidents occur (Huang et al., 2017). Big safety condition problems are progressively related to increased probabilities of experiencing accidents (Ajslev et al., 2017). As agreed by Arezes & Miguel (2008), lower workplace accident rates are linked to improved safety environments. Drawing on studies by Borman & Motowidlo (1993) and Griffin & Neal (2000), this study has conceptualised safety performance as individual work behaviours pertaining to organisational safety, particularly SMEs. Safety performance has been increasingly used in past researches as the principle variable (e.g. Clarke & Ward, 2006; Mullen, Kelloway & Teed, 2011; Griffin & Hu, 2013). Griffin & Neal (2000) asserted two distinct forms of safety behaviours: safety participation and safety compliance. The goal for safety participation is to establish a safety-supportive environment. Whereas the target for safety compliance is to ensure that employees work in a manner that adheres to the organisations' safety procedures and regulations (Griffin & Hu, 2013). Therefore, this study has established that the leadership of Bumiputera SME entrepreneurs plays an imperative role in influencing employees' safety performance, in terms of safety participation and safety compliance.

### **Safety Management Practices**

#### **Entrepreneur's Commitment**

The primary responsibility for a safe workplace lays on the arm of the employer themselves, in the context of this study refer to the entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs' commitment to demonstrate adequate support and resources to safety activities will ensure all employees in the organization are clear about their health and safety responsibilities. As the employees are the greatest assets for the organization, it is good for the entrepreneurs to establish an effective plan for safety management practice to protect their employees. Vinodkumar & Bhasi (2009) revealed that the entrepreneur's commitment positively affected safety behaviours and the safety performance, the employee satisfaction and competitiveness. Organizations with low accident rates value these safety management practice more than those with high accident rates. The researcher also reported that employees, who experienced an occupational accident before, take fewer safety precautions, showed low commitment to the management, did not comply with the occupational safety precautions and exhibited low participation in occupational safety issues (Vinodkumar & Bhasi, 2009). McGonagle et al. (2016) reported that the entrepreneur's commitment is positively

associated with occupational safety motivation of employees, safety participation and compliance with safety rules, but negatively associated with minor injuries.

### **Safety Training**

Safety training is considered the most important safety management practice, which can predict safety knowledge, safety motivation, safety compliance and safety participation. These findings provide valuable guidance for researchers and practitioners to identify mechanisms that can be used to improve workplace safety. In every successful organization, any successful accident prevention plan, and any occupational safety and health plan, the key element is effective safety training. It improves behavioural skills, relevant knowledge and attitudes (Vinodkumar & Bhasi, 2010). Safety training is an important risk prevention and control strategy to ensure that every employee is safe in a good working environment (Cohen et al., 1998). Safety training also provides ways to make accidents more predictable. In order to improve the safety and health of all employees, the organization should develop a systematic, comprehensive safety and health training program for new employees (Fredenburg, 2013). Tinmannsvik & Hovden (2003) found that companies with low accident rates have the characteristics of good safety training for their employees. Therefore, safety training is considered to be a management practice to curb safety issues and enhance safety performance.

### **Worker's Involvement in Safety**

Employee involvement in the safety management process involves upward communication process and decision-making process between individuals or groups within the organization (Vredenburg, 2002), because employees are used to recommendations on safety improvements, especially in the adoption of new technologies and the material was introduced (Butler & Park, 2005). Hayes et al., (1998) and Lee & Dalal (2016) explore the security climate and culture. It is essential for predicting the safety performance of workers in the organization. In addition, in their model, Griffin & Neal (2000) believed that security knowledge and safety motivation is a near-end factor that has a positive relationship with workers safe behaviour. The involvement of employees also was security management, because it can help organizations achieve the following goals which are implementation and organizational improvement of occupational safety and health safety conditions for the benefit of both employees and organizations (Podgórski, 2005).

### **Safety Communication**

To ensure employee's work safety practise, there must be a good quality communication in disseminating related safety information (Parker, Axtell & Turner, 2001). Previous research exists in support of the relationship of safety communication with various indicators of safety performance. For example, Fernandez-Muñiz et al. (2012) found that the management commitment on safety practice had positive impact on encouragement and communication. Research done by Hale, Heijer & Koornneef (2003) identified safety communication between managers and employees as one of five desirable management safety practices, which differentiated between low and high accident rate postal delivery offices. There must be two ways communication between employees and management. Employees is to encourage to give their feedback, comments for the improvements safety related Thus, with an efficient communication and feedback system, management can track hazards to prevent accidents and injuries (Vredenburg, 2002).

### **Safety Rules and Procedures**

Lu & Yang, (2011) explain on safety rules and procedures which refer to the degree to which an organization creates a clear mission, responsibilities and goals, sets up standards of behaviour for employees, and establishes safety system to correct workers' safety behaviours. Subramaniam et al. (2016) reported that when safety rules and procedures are implemented well in the organization through regular safety inspections and enforcement of safe working procedures, employees are compelled to work safely. While advice and support from their co-workers are necessary, effective safety procedures and rules appear to be adequate to induce the employees to comply with the safety standards while accomplishing their job. Besides that, the researcher found that in SMEs, the implementation of safety procedures is effective because the small number of employees enables close monitoring of employees' safety behaviour.

### **Safety Promotion Policies**

Safety promotion policies is been define as a process that aims to ensure the presence and maintenance of conditions that are necessary to reach and sustain an optimal level of safety (Welander, Svanstrom,& Ekman, 2004). Vinodkumar & Bhasi (2010) emphasized that safety promotion policies encourage employees to report hazards, generate awareness by way of organizing programs to mark safety week and other related events, and can be implemented by using safe conducts for the purposes of promotion, rewards, and incentive. Vredenburgh (2002) advocated the use of proactive practices in reducing accidents and injuries in organizations. Rewards system was identified as a safety management practice that was significant in predicting accidents and injury rates. This practice indicates the way to achieve the desired aim and it is supposed to be highly visible within the organization so as to be able to elicit safety performance outcomes and possible behaviours from everyone in the organization.

### **Relationship between Safety Management Practices and Safety Performance**

Vinodkumar & Bhasi (2010) assert that safety management practices have direct and indirect relations with the safety performance. Osman,Khalid & AlFqeeh (2019) have explored on the perceptions of employees on safety management practices implemented in their organizations are considered as factors influencing safety behaviour in SMEs. Not only safety management practice improves working conditions, but it also enhance employees' safety motivation, commitment and behaviour which in turn will reduce the accidents in workplace (Lukman Arif, 2015). Specifically, safety management practices promote safety compliance among employees (Subramaniam et al., 2016) and increase safety performance.

### **Theoretical Development**

#### **Heinrich's Domino Theory**

Heinrich's domino theory, the domino theory of accident causation, was developed by H.W. Heinrich in 1930's. There are five dominoes in the model: ancestry and social environment, fault of a person, unsafe act and/or mechanical or physical hazard, accidents, and injury. The theory denotes accidents as predictable consecutive sequences of events. Each causal factor builds on the effects of the others. Moreover, the theory highlights that 88% of occupational accidents are caused by unsafe acts of persons, 10% by unsafe conditions and 2% by the occurrence of natural causes (Abdelhamid & Everett, 2000). Heinrich's domino theory has been updated over the years with greater emphasis placed on management practices as



original causes of accidents (Liska, Goodloe & Sen, 1993). Previously, the theory was rationalised by Bird & Loftus (1976) in order to replicate management's system or relationship in series of accident causes as defined by Heinrich. The scholars underlined that management is accountable for the workers' safety and wellbeing. If unsafe acts were prevented, the contact incidents could be avoided.

### Resource-based View (RBV) Theory

Resource-based View (RBV) theory explains the extent to which a firm may be able to sustain a position of competitive advantage. Barney (1991) mentioned that firms with resources that are rare, valuable, inimitable and non-substitutable, will be able to gain sustainable competitive advantage. The most valuable resource is human capital. Obviously, the RBV serves the health and safety management by focusing on the role of human capital in strategic planning and safety management practices. Furthermore, the RBV encourages safety management practices and their effects on firm resources (Delery, 1998; Wright, Dunford & Snell, 2001).

Studies that focus on investment in human capital and organizational success are known as "best employer studies" (Love & Singh, 2011; Joo & Mclean, 2006). Such studies take a resource-based view of a firm as their theoretical background. The RBV theory is the most-cited theory background in the field of best employer studies. Based on the RBV theory, a firm's ability to achieve its goals depends on specific capabilities that the firm possesses and the its level of success in putting them to use as well as maintaining them (Wernerfelt, 1984). As for this study, the concept of safety management capabilities is used to analyse the safety performance success of the firm.

### The Proposed Theoretical Framework

This study has constructed a conceptual framework based on two underpinning theories: Heinrich's Domino Theory and Resource-based View Theory. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework of safety management practices (Subramaniam et al., 2016; Wachter & Yorio, 2014) and links them to safety performance (Tu, Guldenmund & Van Gelder, 2017; Cagno et al., 2014; Mearns, Whitaker & Flin, 2003). The dependent variable (DV) implies to safety performance while the independent variable (IV) indicates safety management practice consist of entrepreneur's commitment, safety training, worker' involvement in safety, safety communication, safety rules and procedures and safety promotion policies.

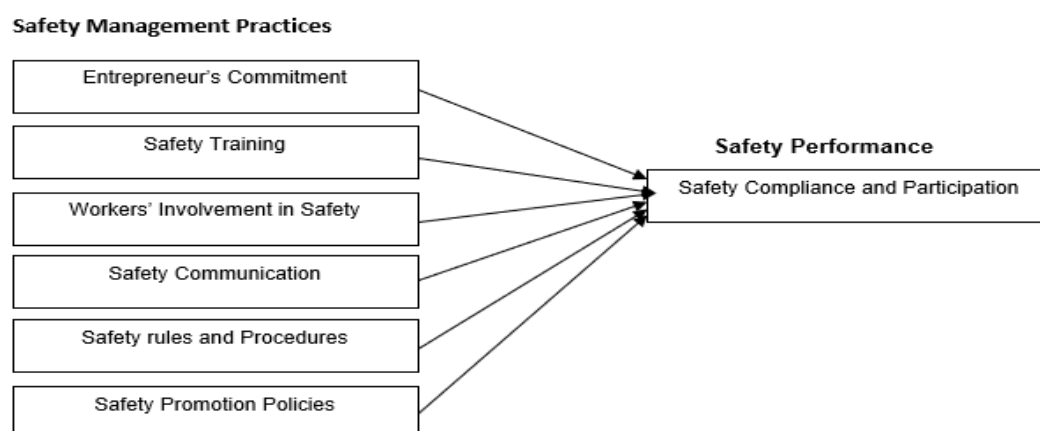


Figure 1.0: Conceptualization of the relationships between safety management practices and safety performance

The following hypotheses are made:

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a positive relationship between entrepreneur's commitment and safety performance.

H<sub>2</sub>: There is a positive relationship between safety training and safety performance.

H<sub>3</sub>: There is a positive relationship between worker's involvement in safety and safety performance.

H<sub>4</sub>: There is a positive relationship between safety communication and safety performance.

H<sub>5</sub>: There is a positive relationship between safety rules and procedures and safety performance.

H<sub>6</sub>: There is a positive relationship between safety promotion policies and safety performance.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The study provides new perspective of the health and safety management in the context of Bumiputera entrepreneurship. As this study happens to be the first focusing on developing Bumiputera entrepreneurs' safety performance, thus, a major contribution of this is the generating of health and safety management practices among Bumiputera SMEs. In consequence, the research outcome may be taken as input for future research, to serve as guide to raise hypotheses to be tested on. Consequently, this study reveals that there is a need for further research to discover new insights on health and safety management and enhance safety performance among Bumiputera SME entrepreneurs in Malaysia.

### **Conclusion**

It is well-documented fact that due to their lack of financial capability and skills; SMEs are lagging in the safety performance. SME workplaces are mostly not safe and safety awareness among entrepreneurs and employees is relatively low. Accidents remain high even though the number is declining. Hence, Bumiputera SME entrepreneurs must take appropriate measures to further decrease the accident rate. The safety performance objective is to create positive health and safety surroundings in which safety is a driving value. The change process starts with the leadership of Bumiputera SME entrepreneurs itself.

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