

Adoption of H&S Practices in Shipbreaking Industry of Bangladesh

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DESCRIPTION

Empirical research findings revealed three approaches to adoption of H&S practices prevalent in shipbreaking industry of Bangladesh. Firms are either adopting H&S practices continuously, or discontinuously, or randomly while prioritizing safety, developing infrastructure and equipment, formalizing systemic and operating practices and managing safety skills and safety culture in order to accommodate and commission their shipbreaking operations for reducing injury and death cases.

Further to the research paper titled “Shipbreaking in Bangladesh: Organizational responses, ethics, and varieties of employee safety”, doctoral study conducted by the author revealed an interesting finding on adoption pattern of H&S practices in shipbreaking industry [1]. The distinction has been made between the continuous approach to adoption, discontinuous approach to adoption and random approach to adoption of H&S practices and their consequent H&S while addressing the research question is ‘How do shipbreaking firms adopt workplace safety and what are the effects on safety outcomes’. The study firstly has developed a more nuanced understating about the different approaches to adoption of H&S practices of 7 firms and then linked their adoption to the corresponding H&S performance [2].

Based on the H&S adoption approaches and category of adopters, some firms have highly aligned H&S practices and are having the required level of accommodated and commissioned operations - whilst some firms have moderately or poorly aligned H&S practices and therefore are having less than the required level and consequently H&S outcomes. Different levels of alignment have been derived from different levels of ‘Vertical Fit’ between and within H&S practices of shipbreaking firms [3].

Study has found that continuous adoption of H&S practices has led Firm_1 and Firm_3 to experience a strong vertical fit between and within H&S practices in Firm_1 and Firm_3 due to their highly aligned H&S practices [1]. Reasons behind such high alignment are the consistency and high level of all H&S practices that complement each other practices and consistency. A positive outcome of continuous adoption of H&S practices is evident especially in Firm_1 who has experienced no injury and death cases. Firm_3 has experienced low injury and death cases between 2014 and 2019. On the contrary, random adoption of H&S practices has led Firm_5 & Firm_6 to experience a poor vertical fit. Their poorly aligned H&S practices do not complement each other. H&S outcome of random adoption of H&S practices is evident in the highest number of injury and death cases between 2014 to 2019 [4].

Finally, discontinuous adoption of H&S practices led to medium vertical fit due to moderately aligned H&S practices in Firm_2, Firm_4 and Firm_7. Reason behind such high alignment is that the strength prevalent in some (two) H&S practices of Firm_2, Firm_4 and Firm_7 and the weakness prevalent in other (four) H&S practices of Firm_2, Firm_4 and Firm_7 have complemented each other moderately (neither strongly nor poorly). However, their aligned combination of H&S practices is not symmetrical. Firm_7 has a combination of H&S practices different from that of Firm_4 and Firm_7. Firm_7’s high level of formalization of operational practices and safety culture (strength) has overcome its medium level of infrastructure and equipment and low level of formalization of systemic practices. On the other hand, Firm_2 and Firm_4’s high level of infrastructure and equipment (strength) has overcome its medium level of safety culture. H&S outcome of discontinuous adoption of H&S practices leads to medium number of injury and death cases between 2014 and 2019. Three approaches to adoption of H&S practices and H&S Outcomes are shown in the Table 1.

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Received: 26-Jun-2023, Manuscript No. JER-23-25729; **Editor assigned:** 30-Jun-2023, Pre QC No. JER-23-25729 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 14-Jul-2023, QC No. JER-23-25729; **Revised:** 21-Jul-2023, Manuscript No. JER-23-25729 (R); **Published:** 31-Jul-2023, DOI: 10.35248/2165-7556-23.13.362

Citation: Tanha M (2023) Adoption of H&S Practices in Shipbreaking Industry of Bangladesh. *J Ergonomics*. 13:362.

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H&S Practices	Firm_1	Firm_3	Firm_2	Firm_4	Firm_7	Firm_5	Firm_6
Approach to adoption of H&S practices	Continuous adoption		Discontinuous adoption			Random adoption	
Safety prioritization practices	Very high	High	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Infrastructure & Equipment	Very high	Very high	High	High	Medium	Low	Low
Formalization of Systemic Practices	Very high	High	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Low
Formalization of Operational Practices	Very high	Very high	High	High	High	Medium	Medium
Safety Skills	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
Safety Culture	Very high	High	Medium	Medium	High	Low	Low
Vertical Fit	Good			Medium		Poor	
Major Injury	0	2 (1(2016), 1(2018))	3 (1(2014), 1(2016), 1(2017))	4 (2(2015), 2(2018))	4 (2(2017), 2(2018))	8 (2(2015), 1(2016), 1(2017), 4(2019))	6 (2(2016)1(2017) 3(2018))
Death	0	2 (1(2016), 1(2018))	4 (1(2014), 1(2016), 2(2018))	3 (1(2015), 1(2016), 1 (2017))	4 (1(2014), 1(2016), 1(2017), 1(2018))	5 (2(2014), 1(2018) 2(2019))	4 (1(2014), 1(2015) 1(2016), 1(2019))
H&S performance	High performer			Medium performer		Low/Poor performer	

Table 1: Three approaches to adoption of H&S practices and H&S outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The increasing frequency and intensity of fatal accidents in shipbreaking industry combined with the rapidly changing geopolitical, economic, legal and sociocultural contexts, have increased the complexity of occupational Health & Safety management and demand for new ways of adopting H&S practices. Relying on a ‘domestic’ approach to H&S management seems to be inadequate and as it was demonstrated, the impact of international regulations and push for more advanced practices provided an institutional platform for high performing firms to develop more advanced H&S practices. The impact of international regulations needs further scrutiny. On one hand, the impact can lead for more in-depth adoption of H&S practices, on the other hand, if more firms are required to comply, smaller and less resourceful firm may be essentially driven out of business. Therefore, the socio-economic consequences of such institutional process need further scrutiny.

Three adoption categories and the consequent H&S performance are showing great promises to address H&S issues and can be adopted immediately. Policy makers and practitioners should take the results of this study while formulating and implementing policies in occupational H&S management of highly risky and hazardous industry.

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