

Lay representations of occupational health and safety and their implications for human resource management

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Abstract

This study investigated lay representations of Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) and considers the implications for Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and policy development. A qualitative methodology was adopted to investigate retail service sector employee understanding and perceptions of OH&S. A total of 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of frontline employees and management in the Australian retail service sector. The key findings of this study highlight that greater attention was paid to physical risks and hazards in this organisation than psychosocial factors. The insight to these perceptions and representations provide an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of current OH&S initiatives. The implications for HRM operations extend to recruitment and selection and training and development. The organisation may need to attract and retain candidates with experience and working knowledge of OH&S in order to improve responsiveness to, and prevention of, workplace accidents and incidents that risk physical and psychological injury. Training and development of staff in the organisation may require 'revamping' so that it is designed to adequately identify, acknowledge and address physical and psychosocial risks and hazards. Close alignment of HRM functions, strategies and policy to improve OH&S outcomes and organisational performance are advocated for organisational survival and success in the current global climate of economic uncertainty and change.

Field of Research: Human Resource Management and Occupational Health and Safety

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