

The role of risk culture in the prevention of occupational hazards at SONATRACH TRC Bejaia

دور ثقافة المخاطر في الوقاية من المخاطر المهنية بشركة
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Abstract: Health and safety issues continue to occupy a prominent place in organizations. Despite the remarkable progress in terms of legislation and working environments, complaints relating to the deterioration of the living environment, the absence of well-being and fulfillment at work seem to be on the rise and increasingly managers facing the renewed challenges of implementing preventive approaches.

Our research within SONATRACH aims to try to explore the various aspects of the mobilization of risk culture in informal interactions at work, in this sense, it is a question of understanding the contribution of the secondary socialization of workers in their acquisition of a preventive and safety culture contributing to shaping collective behavior in the face of professional risks.

Key words: Occupational hazards, Risk culture, Organizational socialization, Collective attitudes, Risk taking.

مقدمة: ملخص: لا تزال قضايا الصحة والسلامة تحتل مكانة بارزة في المنظمات. على الرغم من التقدم الملحوظ من حيث التشريعات وبيئات العمل، يبدو أن الشكاوى المتعلقة بتدهور البيئة المعيشية، وغياب الرفاهية والرخاء في العمل آخذة في الارتفاع ويواجه المديرون بشكل متزايد التحديات المتجددة لتطبيق الأساليب الوقائية. في الوقت الحالي، المنظمات مدعوة إلى توحيد جهودها مع العديد من الجهات الفاعلة التي تواجه العديد من القضايا التي يفرضها تحول العمل وأدواته فرقه.

على عكس مسلمات المفهوم الفني-النفعي المتمثل في جعل الوقاية من المخاطر عملية معيارية وآلية، يهدف بحثنا داخل مؤسسة سوناطراك إلى محاولة استكشاف الجوانب المختلفة لتجسد ثقافة المخاطر في التفاعلات الغير الرسمية في العمل، وبهذا، فهي مسألة فهم مساهمة التنشئة الاجتماعية الثانوية للعمال في اكتساب ثقافة وقائية وسلامية تساهم في تشكيل السلوك الجماعي في مواجهة المخاطر المهنية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المخاطر المهنية، ثقافة المخاطر، التنشئة التنظيمية، السلوك الجماعي، المخاطرة في العمل.

INTRODUCTION

1. Preamble

The literature shows that risk prevention at work bases on the collective dimension (Frigul & Thébaud-Mony, 2008) which links directly to socialization through and at work and which shapes collective attitudes towards risks. The understanding of collective responses to professional risks presupposes mastery of the notion of risk in its entirety, then; the social markers of risk culture (Peretti-Watel, 2005) provide more clarity concerning the variables that can determine shared representations of risk, namely: gender, age, superstitious beliefs, life history, and socio-professional trajectory. In this sense, Tierney (2010) believes that *“Risk analysis as such is a social behavior like any other, influenced by social and cultural norms and expectations”* (p. 112). [Our translation]

Risk culture is a concept used in the field of security and risk management (Klinke & Renn, 2002). It refers to the way individuals and organizations perceive, evaluate and manage the risks associated with their activities.

Risk culture includes the attitudes, behaviors, beliefs and values of individuals and organizations regarding risk management (Reason, 1990). It also involves risk recognition, communication and collaboration between stakeholders, as well as the implementation of prevention and response strategies in the event of a risky situation (Lupton, 2013).

A strong risk culture is characterized by increased risk awareness, shared responsibility for risk management (Hopkins, 2017), open and transparent communication about risks, regular risk assessment and implementation of preventive measures to minimize or eliminate risks.

On the other hand, a weak risk culture can lead to excessive risk taking, minimization of potential risks, and resistance to implementing preventive measures or ineffective response in the event of an emergency.

In organizations, promoting a strong risk culture is essential to

ensure the safety of employees, customers and the environment, as well as to ensure the continuity of operations and the sustainability of the organization (Antonsen, 2019).

In sociology, Giddens (1991) developed the notion of risk culture, which refers to “*a fundamental cultural aspect of modernity, through which awareness of the risks involved, becomes a means of colonizing the future*” (p. 244) [Our translation]. In this sense, the contemporary society seems oriented towards the future, its members enjoy of a great autonomy, which allows taking charge of themselves within society. These members perpetually project themselves towards the future while remaining attentive to the risks and opportunities that this conceals, and to do this, the opinion of experts has become more than ever of major interest.

Intra-organizational relationships seem to be closely linked to cultures of action (Barbier, 2010) presenting themselves as ways of acting common to all organizational actors and which allow the construction of meaning and meanings of the interaction during the work as well as around all of its contents. In this sense, it seems that the logic of actions and positioning within the organization cannot do without the culture of risk, which turns out to be omnipresent in the organization and participates in its life and its evolution.

The studies focusing on the connection between the concepts of organizational socialization, health and safety at work and the culture of safety and prevention seem rare. In this sense, our study intends to bring together the previously mentioned concepts with the aim of allowing a more in-depth understanding of the potential implications of the culture of safety and prevention in organizations in determining behavior in the face of risks.

2. Methods

The literature admits that studies focusing on risk and health at work favor qualitative methodologies (Moliner & Guimelli, 2015) by

working on homogeneous populations who are similar in their cultural affiliations as well as in their commitments to same social practices.

During our exploratory study among execution agents of SONATRACH TRC Bejaia, we opted for the use of the non-directed interview technique which seems to be very appropriate due to its capacity to encourage the interviewees to interact and to appropriate the statements as best as possible. This technique reflects the dialogic logic and the presence of the other (Moscovici & Hewstone, 1984).

We have designed an interview guide composed of open questions in order to allow maximum feedback from our interviewees. We cite the following questions:

- How did you integrate into your work team?
- Did your company introduce you to its standards, values, rules of conduct? If yes, how?
- How was your introduction to health and safety protection at work?
- Have you learned some practical security procedures from your more senior colleagues? If so, how did it go?

Following the exploratory nature of our study, we conducted around thirteen interviews following snowball sampling. This choice in terms of sampling made to allow us to focus on respondents who are likely to answer our questions beforehand, thus, after having identified the characteristics of our first interviewee, namely: recent recruitment in the company, professional experience and work accident experiences.

After having constituted our corpus of interviews, we applied the method of thematic analysis in order to identify significant ideas and their categorization.

This methodological approach allowed us to identify the factors

involved in shaping the risk culture and in the attitudes determination towards risks within this company. In addition, it allowed us to understand how the acquisition of norms, values and culture relating to health and safety at work contributes to shaping collective behavior in the face of professional risks and prevention strategies in an organizational context.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic content analysis allowed us to determine a set of general themes contained in the responses received, as Paillé and Mucchielli (2008) argue, this approach consists “*to proceed systematically to identification, grouping and, subsidiarity, to discursive examination themes covered in a corpus*” (p. 162) [Our translation].

The major recurring themes are Professional risks, Preventative practices, Collective behavior in the face of risks, Communication around risks at work, thus, the intersection of these themes allowed the emergence of the culture of prevention and safety as common denominator of all answers. Respondents were able to formulate answers close to the indicators of the culture of prevention at work, thus, we identified the answers in sense to take into account what is close to our research theme.

The data from our study shows that SONATRACH workers and specifically its execution agents share a number of common values and norms relating to the prevention and promotion of health at work, this working group seems to be homogenizing in its daily actions by referring to a base of knowledge framed by a common cultural framework.

Respondents claim that there was a gradually introduction to the culture specific to working collective; informal cultural learning takes place in each phase of integration and involves the transmission of a set of rules of conduct and postures in the face of risks. The culture transmitted by colleagues far from being a solid reference in terms of risk prevention, it turns out from the data that workers sometimes construct incorrect lay

knowledge around health, safety and prevention.

The workers affirm that the prevention of risks linked to their activity cannot be an automated process; they find that they encounter a number of organizational constraints such as performance requirements and schedules to respect, and this reveals practices of risk-taking at work to meet the growing workload. The reality on the ground leads work stakeholders to adapt the culture governing their collective by introducing elements of the acceptability of certain practices and certain behaviors going in opposition to the company culture.

The informal negotiation of the order governing the working-group leads to cultural adjustments allowing the implementation and concretization of the will of all members. Thus, culture becomes an integral part of the process of organizational entry and the rules of conduct that it implies seem to take a central place in determining posture in the face of events and behavior in the face of risks.

- **Key Findings :**

- 1. Integration into work teams :**

- Integration processes varied, with a common theme of both formal and informal introductions to colleagues.
- Effective team integration often involved mentorship, support from team leaders, and a sense of belonging.
- Risk culture appeared more robust, as employees were more likely to feel comfortable raising safety concerns within their teams.

- 2. Introduction to health and safety protection:**

- A significant number of interviewees emphasized the importance of comprehensive onboarding procedures that included in-depth

training on health and safety protection.

- Interviewees perceived organizations that prioritized clear communication of safety measures and promoted awareness from the very beginning as having a strong safety culture.
- Proper induction into health and safety was closely associated with a positive risk culture, fostering a proactive approach to risk identification and mitigation.

3. Learning of security procedures:

- The methods for learning security procedures varied from formal training sessions to on-the-job learning.
- Consistency in the communication of security procedures and regular training updates were indicative of a stronger risk culture.
- Employees who felt well informed about security procedures were more likely to take ownership of safety measures and act responsibly.

The integration process into work teams played a pivotal role in shaping the risk culture within SONATRACH Company. It was evident that the integration process varied among employees, but a common theme emerged - the combination of formal and informal introductions to colleagues. This approach not only helped newcomers adapt to their roles but also fostered a sense of belonging and camaraderie within the teams. Effective team integration often involved mentorship and support from team leaders, which contributed to a more robust risk culture.

One of the notable outcomes of this effective integration was that employees felt more comfortable raising safety concerns within their teams. This is a crucial aspect of cultivating a strong risk culture, as open communication and willingness to address safety issues are essential for risk identification and mitigation. Thus, the integration process, when done effectively, can significantly enhance the overall risk culture in the

organization.

The second key finding highlighted the importance of comprehensive onboarding procedures that included in-depth training on health and safety protection. Organizations that prioritize clear communication of safety measures and promote awareness from the very beginning were perceived as having a strong safety culture by interviewees. This underscores the significance of early education regarding health and safety measures in shaping an organization's risk culture.

Proper induction into health and safety was closely associated with a positive risk culture. Employees who receive thorough training are more likely to adopt a proactive approach to risk identification and mitigation. They are not only aware of safety measures but also understand the reasons behind them, which motivates them to adhere to safety protocols and actively participate in risk management efforts.

The third key finding focused on the methods for learning security procedures. These methods varied from formal training sessions to on-the-job learning. What stood out as a characteristic of a stronger risk culture was consistency in the communication of security procedures and regular training updates.

Employees who felt well informed about security procedures were more likely to take ownership of safety measures and act responsibly. This underscores the idea that ongoing education and updates regarding security procedures are crucial for maintaining a strong risk culture. Moreover, when employees have a clear understanding of security measures, they are more likely to integrate them into their daily work routines and contribute to the overall safety of the organization.

In conclusion, our research at SONATRACH Company in Bejaia city has unearthed valuable insights into the interplay between integration into work teams, introduction to health and safety protection, and learning of security procedures in shaping the organization's risk culture. These

key findings highlight the importance of fostering a sense of belonging, comprehensive onboarding procedures, and consistent communication of safety measures to cultivate a robust risk culture within the organization. These insights can serve as a foundation for improving risk management strategies and safety measures in the workplace, ultimately contributing to a safer and more efficient work environment.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the role of risk culture is undeniably pivotal in the prevention of occupational hazards within organizations. This article has shed light on the profound impact that an organization's risk culture has on the safety and well-being of its workforce. By fostering a culture that prioritizes safety, emphasizes proactive risk identification, and promotes open communication, organizations can significantly reduce the occurrence of occupational hazards.

Furthermore, the case studies and research findings discussed in this article underscore the real-world implications of a strong risk culture. Organizations that invest in creating a culture of safety not only protect their employees from harm but also benefit from improved productivity, reduced costs, and enhanced reputation.

It is crucial for businesses to recognize that risk culture is not a static concept but a dynamic and evolving aspect of their operations. Continuous assessment, education, and adaptation are key to ensuring that safety remains a top priority. The role of leadership cannot be understated in this regard, as leaders set the tone for the entire organization and have a direct influence on risk culture.

In a world where occupational hazards can have severe consequences, fostering a robust risk culture is not just a choice; it is a moral and strategic imperative. Organizations that embrace this concept are not only protecting their employees but also ensuring their own longevity and success in an increasingly competitive and demanding business landscape. The prevention of occupational hazards begins with a

culture of risk awareness, responsibility, and a commitment to the safety and well-being of all employees.

This contribution is far from exhaustively tracing the contours of the concept of risk culture and security but is intended as a modest contribution to an expanding field of research, that of risk culture in organizations. Multidisciplinary research perspectives are possible in order to answer the perpetual questions on the place of man in work and on the complexity surrounding their relationships within organizations, relationships which allow action and which therefore allow risk to exist again.

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