

HEALTH AND SAFETY (H&S) AND RELIGION: IS THERE A LINK?

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Values are an integral part of H&S culture. Values reflect, among other, ethics, moral standards and principles. Religious beliefs influence values through morality. The value, 'People are the most important resource' will engender the Islamic 'Tawhidic' principles of justice and equity, dignity of labour and removal of hardship. Such a clause will also avert 'picking and choosing', and engender and reinforce a vision of 'accident free' workplaces.

The belief that one is one's 'brother's keeper' is not only a religious perspective, but a basic premise of worker participation in H&S and concern for a peer's wellbeing. The 'golden rule' 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you, which is encapsulated in all religions, reinforces the 'brother's keeper' perspective.

Respect and concern for the environment is related to both H&S, and most religions, in particular Buddhism. The purpose of H&S is ultimately, sustainability of any organisation and the environment. Buddhism, in particular, stresses the need to sustain the environment, reflecting a further link. Similarly, most religions advocate the minimisation of waste – H&S is also directed towards loss prevention.

This paper reports on a literature and descriptive survey conducted among a sample frame of 'H&S best practice' general contractors (GCs). The descriptive survey, which entailed response in terms of the degree of concurrence relative to 21 statements, determined that there is a link between H&S and religion.

KEYWORDS

Health and safety, religion, culture

Literature Survey

Introduction

Research conducted in South Africa investigated, inter alia, the extent to which general contractors (GCs) agreed/disagreed with the statement: 'Belief in and practice of a religion eg. Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, positively affects a person's approach to, each of occupational H&S, labour productivity, and quality (Smallwood, 2000). Given the possible range of responses and the need to determine the level of concurrence an importance index (II) with a minimum value of 0, and a maximum value of 4.0, was computed to enable facilitate assessment and ranking. Given that the resultant II of 2.18 was above the midpoint value of 2.0, belief in and practice of a religion can be deemed to positively affect a person's approach to occupational H&S. It is notable that the II values for labour productivity and quality were 2.24 and 2.31 respectively.

The findings emanating from the aforementioned study and a survey of the literature, which at best can be described as perfunctory, provided the catalyst for an expanded study to determine the link between H&S and religion.

Religion, thought, feeling and behaviour

Loewenthal (2000) contends religion relates to behaviour via morality:

Religion → Morality → Behaviour

Morality involves ethical standards of behaviour, the evaluation of intentions and behaviour as right or wrong, good or bad. Moral standards can be rooted in religious tradition, and moral laws can be seen as having a divine origin.

Loewenthal (2000) also cites Eysenck's theory relative to personality and religion. Eysenck suggested that there are fundamental dimensions of personality:

- Extraversion – involving both sociability and impulsivity;
- Neuroticism – involving anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and tension, and
- Psychoticism – involving lack of impulse control, and
- Social desirability – assessed by the so-called 'lie scale'.

Recent work relative to personality does not include psychoticism.

Eysenck invoked the concept of conditionality, and found evidence that religious beliefs were 'tender-minded' rather than 'tough-minded'. His reasoning led to the suggestion that individuals low on extraversion – introverts – were more conditionable, and more likely to hold religious and moral attitudes. His theses also suggested that those low on psychoticism and those high on neuroticism would be more likely to hold religious beliefs. Although subsequent studies have generally not supported Eysenck's theses, a study by Lewis and Joseph did determine that low psychoticism is more strongly associated with religiosity. However, Loewenthal (2000) suggests Eysenck's theories relative to religion, personality and morality could still remain on the agenda for investigation.

The Golden Rule

Eckhardt (2001) says the 'golden rule', which establishes a moral level of care for others that we are responsible to provide, is a common theme in most, if not all, of the world's major religions:

- Buddhist: hurt not others in ways that you would find hurtful;
- Christian: all things whatsoever he would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them;
- Confucian: do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you;
- Hindu: this is the sum of the duty; do naught unto others which if done to thee would cause thee pain;
- Islamic: no one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself;
- Jain: in happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self;
- Sikh: as thou deemest thyself, so deem others;
- Taoist: regard your neighbours gain as your own gain, and your neighbour's loss as your own loss, and
- Zoroastrian: that nature alone is good which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not good for itself.

Work is a deed of spiritual value

According to Sadeq and Ahmad (1999), work is a deed of spiritual value, which requires that Allah approve actions and behaviours. The Islamic 'Tawhidic' principles of justice and equity, dignity of labour, and removal of hardship, all amplify the need for H&S.

Values

Values are defined as: code of behaviour, ethics, standards (moral) and principles (Allen, 1990). Values are important as they influence the vision, goals, mission, assumptions, and to a degree, the perceived purpose of H&S (Krause, 1993). H&S should be a value, as opposed to a priority, as priorities change depending upon prevailing circumstances and priorities (Griffiths, 1995). An example thereof is schedule, which often becomes the priority on projects, to the detriment of H&S.

The Islamic 'Tawhidic' principles of justice and equity, dignity of labour, and removal of hardship, clearly influence the inclusion of H&S as a value.

Inoue (1997) in his book 'Putting Buddhism to Work', cites Schumacher's conclusion that the biggest problem facing humankind is the disappearance of a set of values and attitudes that will prevent economic activity from becoming all consuming. Inoue maintains that not only is it necessary to incorporate economics into a more holistic framework, but that it is necessary to live with more integrity.

Ethical business practice includes compliance with legislation. Given that values embrace ethics, the existence of Occupational Health and Safety legislation amplifies the need for the inclusion of H&S as a value.

Hinze (1997) is emphatic and says that although even a cold, calculating economist can be convinced that there is a financial payback in being healthy and safe, a holistic H&S culture recognises the humanitarian aspects of H&S.

Waste

Accidents can result in fatalities, injuries, disease, damage to materials, plant and equipment, which results in waste. Waste in solid and other forms impacts on the sustainability of the earth.

Sadeq and Ahmad (1999) maintain that Islam seeks to unify the schism between ethics and economics, one of the six issues being the avoidance of undue waste.

Economic issues

The concept of the 'economic man', which entails the taking of decisions based on the calculation of the benefits relative to the costs of an intervention, may result in a decision, which is in conflict with values and the 'Tawhidic' principles (Sadeq and Ahmad, 1999).

Inoue (1997) cites the Buddhist principle of 'enlightenment', the release from 'picking and choosing' ie. the preference for one thing over another, often at the expense of other people.

From a Christian perspective, Neff (1991) maintains that emphasis on the financial 'bottom line' to measure success can result in unreasonable practices, which can result in hardship and suffering, and consequently, lack of justice. In terms of Christianity, justice is important, as it reflects God's character and His concern for his people.

Accountability

The Islamic 'Tawhidic' principles include public accountability. Public accountability implies and requires organizations to protect and ensure the H&S of workers derived from their respective communities. It also implies and requires public safety and the preservation of the environment.

Sustainability

Larkin (1999) describes a 'right livelihood business' as a business where the 'bottom line' is one of principles. Such a business embraces balance and does not waste resources, acknowledging that energy and creativity flow naturally out of well-rounded lifestyles. Larkin maintains the characteristic that best differentiates between a 'right livelihood business' and other businesses is that they are driven by spirituality-based principles. These principles can be communicated in the form of five precepts, inter alia, commitment to cultivating compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals, and commitment to cultivating loving kindness and learning ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals.

Research

Sample frame and Methodology

The sample frame consisted of 26 GCs, who had achieved placings in the Building Industries Federation South Africa (BIFSA) national Health and Safety (H&S) competition and, or BIFSA 4 or 5-Star H&S gradings on one or more of their projects, for the years 1995 to 2000.

A single-question questionnaire consisting of 21 sub-questions was mailed to the GCs. 17 GCs responded, which represents a response rate of 65.4.

Given that respondents were required to respond in terms of the extent to which they agree / disagree, it was necessary to compute an importance index (II) with a minimum value of 0, and a maximum value of 4, to determine concurrence, and to rank the various statements. The II is calculated using the formula:

$$\frac{4n_1 + 3n_2 + 2n_3 + 1n_4 + 0n_5}{(n_1 + n_2 + n_3 + n_4 + n_5)}$$

where n_1 = Strongly agree
 n_2 = Agree
 n_3 = Neutral
 n_4 = Disagree
 n_5 = Strongly disagree and unsure

Findings

Table 1 indicates the extent to which respondents concurred relative to 21 statements. It is notable that the II values for all the statements are above the midpoint value of 2.0, which indicates that concurrence can be deemed to exist. It is significant that 15 of the 21 II values are 3.0, which indicates that respondents ‘strongly agree’ / ‘agree’ with the statements.

The top four ranked statements, ‘A price cannot be put on a person’s life’, ‘People are an organisation’s most important resource’, ‘People have a body, mind and a soul’, and ‘Values are important for H&S’ predominate in terms of the level of concurrence.

The first ranking of ‘A price cannot be put on a person’s life’ has important implications for risk management, which requires the computation of the financial impact of risk: probability x financial impact. The aforementioned, along with ‘People are an organisation’s most important resource’ and ‘People have a body, mind, and soul’ amplify the humanitarian aspect of H&S. The relevance of values to H&S are reinforced by the joint third ranking of ‘Values are important for H&S’, the seventh and eighth ranking of ‘Values influence a person’s concern for another person’s well being’ and ‘H&S should be a value and not a priority’ respectively.

The joint fifth ranked ‘Optimum H&S reduces waste’ and ‘Accidents result in hardship to the injured’ reinforces the role of H&S in the control and minimisation of injuries, damage and waste. Respect for and the role of H&S in the preservation of the environment are amplified by ninth ranking of the ‘People and the environment (nature) are inter-connected’. The tenth ranking of ‘Non-compliance with legislation is unethical’ indicates that there are ethical issues relative to H&S, in terms of compliance per se, and that socially acceptable norms and practices relative to H&S are enshrined in legislation.

Although ‘Optimum H&S engenders sustainability of the organisation’ and ‘Optimum H&S engenders sustainability of the earth’ achieved rankings of eleventh and fourteenth respectively, their II values being above 3.0 amplifies the ‘holistic’ purpose of H&S. The twelfth ranked ‘Workers should be assigned work which suits their abilities’ is referred to in literature from both a religious and H&S perspective. ‘We as people are our brother’s keeper’ achieved an II value of 3.12, which reinforces the religious perspective of care for our fellow beings.

The fifteenth ranked ‘Exclusive/Primary focus on cost compromises H&S’, which achieved an II value of 3.0, reflects both religious and H&S related contentions in literature.

Although ‘A healthy and safe work place results in justice and equity (fairness)’ achieved a joint ranking of sixteenth, its II value of 2.94 reinforces the relevance of the Islamic principle recorded in literature. Similarly the II values of 2.82, 2.76 and 2.65 relative to ‘A healthy and safe work place results in dignity of labour’, ‘A healthy and safe work place results in avoidance/removal of hardship’, and ‘Work is a deed of spiritual value’ reinforce the relevance of such Islamic principles. The II value of 2.94 of the joint sixteenth ranked ‘Belief in and practice of a religion influences a person’s values’, reflects generic religious literature, and reinforces the indirect influence of religion on H&S through the medium of values.

The II value of 2.88 of eighteenth ranked ‘Management is responsible for workers’ well being’ reflects both legislation and holistic H&S literature.

Statement	Response (%)					II	Rank
	SA	A	N	D	SD		
A price cannot be put on a person’s life	94.1	5.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.94	1
People are an organisation’s most important resource	88.2	11.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.88	2
People have a body, mind and a soul	82.4	17.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.82	3=
Values are important for H&S	82.4	17.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.82	3=
Optimum H&S reduces waste	58.8	41.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.59	5=
Accidents result in hardship to the injured	58.8	41.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.59	5=
Values influence a person’s concern for another person’s well being	52.9	47.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.53	7
H&S should be a value and not a priority	52.9	35.2	5.9	0.0	0.0	3.50	8
People and the environment (nature) are inter-connected	41.2	58.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.41	9
Non-compliance with legislation is unethical	35.3	64.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.35	10
Optimum H&S engenders sustainability of the organisation	35.3	58.8	0.0	5.9	0.0	3.24	11
Workers should be assigned work which suits their abilities	23.4	58.8	11.8	0.0	0.0	3.13	12
We as people are ‘our brother’s keeper’	29.4	53.0	17.6	0.0	0.0	3.12	13
Optimum H&S engenders sustainability of the earth	29.4	52.9	11.8	5.9	0.0	3.06	14
Exclusive/Primary focus on cost compromises H&S	23.5	53.0	23.5	0.0	0.0	3.00	15
Belief in and practice of a religion influences a person’s values	23.5	47.1	29.4	0.0	0.0	2.94	16=
A healthy and safe work place results in justice and equity (fairness)	17.6	64.7	11.8	5.9	0.0	2.94	16=
Management is responsible for workers’ well being	17.6	64.7	5.9	11.8	0.0	2.88	18
A healthy and safe work place results in dignity of labour	11.8	64.7	17.6	5.9	0.0	2.82	19
A healthy and safe work place results in avoidance/removal of hardship	0.0	82.3	11.8	5.9	0.0	2.76	20
Work is a deed of spiritual value	11.8	41.1	47.1	0.0	0.0	2.65	21

Table 1 Degree of concurrence relative to various statements

Conclusions

Literature indicates that there is both an explicit and implied link between H&S and religion. The explicit link manifests itself through the belief by some religions that work is a deed of spiritual value, which requires justice and equity, dignity of labour, and removal of hardship. Other religions stress the importance of sustainability of the environment. The inter-relationship between religion and morality and values, and the resultant influence on behaviour is a further manifestation of the explicit link.

The implied link manifests itself in the underlying principle of all religions, namely the ‘golden rule’, ‘do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you’ – would you like to have your life compromised as a result of inadequate H&S on the part of someone else?

In conclusion, all religions explicitly and imply the need for human life and the environment to be respected and preserved.

Recommendations

The implications of these research findings are profound. However, does an organisation only employ religious people? If so, then how does the organisation determine the degree of belief in and practice of the religion? The aforementioned are hardly feasible. Quo vadis? The most likely route is the promotion of H&S on the basis of the explicit and implied need for H&S by all religions.

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