OSH at Trinidad and Tobago’s Fingertips: Learning from First-World OSH Website Approaches

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ABSTRACT

As Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) embraces the digital age, one field in which the country must advance is Occupational Safety and Health (OSH). This paper seeks to identify how T&T’s Occupational Safety and Health Agency (TTOSHA) addresses e-government (e-gov) through its website, how its approach compares to those used by leading OSH bodies in two first-world countries, the USA (US) and the UK, and how the T&T approach may be improved. The OSH e-gov practices of the US OSHA, UK HSE, and TTOSHA websites are presented. Through a content analysis and comparison exercise, e-gov shortcomings of the TTOSHA site are noted and recommendations for improvement are proposed. The paper’s potential benefits include improved accessibility and utility of the TTOSHA site through improved matching of site content to international practice, broader ranges of resource topics and media types, improved responsiveness and connectivity with stakeholders, and better focus on OSH performance through the dissemination of searchable OSH statistics and performance reports.

KEYWORDS
Benchmarking, Best Practice, E-Government, Health and Safety at Work, Occupational Health and Safety, Occupational Safety and Health, T&T, Trinidad and Tobago

INTRODUCTION

Background

In Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) as in many other countries, the current generation is recognised as an electronic generation or digital generation (Shih & Allen, 2006), with smartphones, laptops, tablets, and other electronic technology readily at hand. Many persons now constantly stay in touch through social and other media, creating and sharing documents, pictures, audio and video clips, blogging, chatting, tweeting, texting, emailing, accessing news and sharing even the most mundane experiences. Capitalising on the connectivity of these generations is an ideal way to build their awareness, appreciation, and competence and to encourage sharing of attitudes and access to content with the wider community.

Unfortunately, even where populations have the desire and ability to electronically connect with information, there may be insufficient avenues through which they can do so. E-government is one such avenue that promises to advance connectivity not just to individuals, but to the entire population of a country. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA] (2014), it has been recognised that lower socioeconomic groups often do not have ICT ability and access, and therefore cannot sufficiently “access and use ICT to promote wellbeing and prosperity” (p. 9). Developing nations must aggressively work to bridge their ICT gaps (Ndou, 2004), i.e. updating
and leveraging ICT technologies and applications, or there is likely to be a widening economic divide between themselves and the first world, which continues to forge ahead with ICT enhancements.

In this age of technological ubiquity, there is undoubtedly a place for e-gov in every field of governance. T&T has recognised that rapid and meaningful progress can be made through e-gov implementation and enhancement, but e-gov systems remain insufficiently implemented in many areas. One critical field that is insufficiently addressed is Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), perhaps because OSH remains somewhat obscure as more obvious and central e-gov systems are conceptualised and rolled out. OSH has been recognised (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2009) as a critical field of practice for developing companies. As T&T seeks to diversify its economy (Nathai-Balkissoon & Pun, 2011) and relies more on its small and medium industries, government actions to mandate decent work (ILO, 2014) will become even more important. It therefore follows that OSH e-gov would be a powerful tool for enablement of T&T’s progress as a nation, potentially serving a wide range of stakeholder groups, in much the same way that UNDESA (2014) recognised that e-gov is serving Brazil in social safety (p. 159), the US in food safety (p. 148), and Trinidad itself in fisherman safety (p. 39).

The e-gov systems of T&T have begun to expand to include OSH matters, but these systems must be developed with greater breadth, depth, and consideration of various user profiles and needs, in order to be truly effective. Through this paper, the authors use content analysis to describe what exists on two first-world country websites and suggest how some initiatives implemented there may be adapted in T&T’s case.

This paper therefore aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How is OSH e-government enabled via the primary OSH websites of the USA (US) and the UK, two of the world’s leading OSH and e-government nations?
2. How does T&T’s primary OSH website compare to those considered from the two developed countries?
3. How should the T&T OSH e-government programme be enhanced to benefit stakeholders?

This paper has begun with a brief discussion of OSH and e-gov in the context of T&T. The intent of the paper has also been set out. In the next section, a brief literature review of e-gov and OSH e-gov are presented, identifying key stakeholder groups that may be served and some modes of communication in e-gov systems. The method used for the study is then presented. The fourth section addresses how the US Occupational Safety and Health Agency (US OSHA), UK Health and Safety Executive (UK HSE) and T&T Occupational Safety and Health Agency (TTOSHA) websites support OSH e-government. This is followed by a discussion of some of the TTOSHA site’s shortcomings, when compared to the US OSHA and UK HSE sites.

Recommendations are put forward in hopes of enabling OSH information availability and accessibility for T&T’s stakeholder groups. A concluding section summarises the contributions and potential benefits of the paper, notes some of its limitations, and makes suggestions for future work in the field.

LITERATURE REVIEW

E-Government

There are many definitions of e-government, with several referring to the use of internet and communication technology (ICT) to build connectivity between a government and its stakeholders. The World Bank (2011) provides the following explanation of the term:
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