Finnish Occupational Safety Card System: Special Training Intervention and its Preliminary Effects

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ABSTRACT

Companies increasingly operate as parts of regional or international networks. This trend in business has resulted in work sites where several employers’ staffs operate simultaneously. To improve mutual occupational safety at shared industrial work sites, a nation-wide procedure called occupational safety card (OSC) training has been developed in Finland. All interested groups have been actively involved in the development of this model. This article describes the process throughout which the OSC model was developed. Research and development (R & D) at a university and within industry started 10 years ago, and was based on both practical and experiential needs and literature. This document presents the first analysis of how the frequency of accidents at work varied during the years of implementation at the work sites of the early adopters of the OSC. This article also contains an evaluation of the effects of OSC implementation on the safety management system.

Keywords: accidents; contractors; intervention; model; occupational safety card system; process industry; safety management; safety training; shared workplace; social responsibility; system development; quality

INTRODUCTION

General Background
Safe, productive work requires consideration of both concrete and intangible issues. The work environment and technological tools must be in good condition. On the other hand, the know-how of individuals and organisations and the work culture are just as important. Occupational health and safety are among essential prerequisites for the welfare of industrialised societies. Harmonisation of occupational health and safety issues in the European Union is also sought in order to enhance internal markets. The European machine directive strives for sufficiently safe and usable tools being manufactured or sold. Many other measures are obligatory at work, too.

Modern companies increasingly operate as parts of national or international networks.
The stability and depth of collaboration with partners varies. At the same time, companies and their customers are increasingly interested in the controllability of all operations within the network. This is important not only from the standpoint of production and the human workforce, but also in terms of both sustainable development and social responsibility. Actually, many of the companies’ strategic issues are dealt with when the role of networking is determined. Nowadays, it is typical for employees from several different companies, entrepreneurs, and independent workers to work simultaneously on plant grounds, especially in large-scale process industry (principal, major company). Previously, this was so only during implementation of larger investments and maintenance shutdowns. The major company’s work environment is more often the one where many employers’ staff must collaboratively “construct” their mutual safety.

Large companies typically have a much greater variety of possibilities to guarantee the expertise of safety engineers and specialists, and to orientate and train chief executives, job-site managers, foremen, and workers, compared to small and medium-sized companies (SMEs). Mottel, Long, & Morrison (1995, p. xiv) describe this feature by writing “Proprietors and supervisors of small commercial establishments, must at many times “wear many hats” only one of which is that of safety oversight.” On the other hand, in a SME, the members of the organisation know each other, and communication links are often direct, informal, and spontaneous (Kjellén, 2000). When a company grows, and when it is in a network of a major company’s supply chain, there is an increased need for formal procedures and channels.

Many synergetic things are nowadays seen to be closely linked. A textbook by Kjellén (2000), among others, uses the concept of SHE (Safety, health and environment). The ILO (International Labour Organisation) has given guidelines on occupational safety and health management systems. The British-based OHSAS 18001 describes occupational health and safety management systems. It is wise to link things so that one can speak about a holistic SHEQ system, as do many modern companies (compare Hutchison, 1997).

It is worth mentioning that the personnel’s role, involvement, competence, and its development, as well as the work environment and ergonomics, should be highly emphasised in Total Quality Management (TQM) principles and/or in practical Quality Management Systems (QMS, especially ISO 9001: 2000, ISO 9004: 2000). Kaplan & Norton (2004) describe how the people, technology, and organisation combine to support the strategy of companies or public and non-profit organisations. The QMS approach encourages organisations to analyse customer requirements, define the processes that contribute to the provision of a product that meets the specified requirements, and keep these processes under control. A QMS can provide the framework for continued improvement to enhance the satisfaction of the customer and other interested parties. It provides confidence to the organisation and its customers that it can provide products that consistently fulfil requirements. (ISO, 2005; ISO, 2002). Almost all product or service companies or organisations need partners, such as suppliers. SHE requirements specified for suppliers play a key role in quality, and in the entire business process.

The reason why Finnish process industry organisations took extra measures with regard to supplying companies was because they predominantly work at the work places of the hosting organisation when supplying services. The ILO (2001, p. 21) gives a good definition: Contractor—A person or organisation providing services to an employer at the employer’s worksite in accordance with agreed specifications, terms and conditions. The shared workplaces are characterised by employees of many employing companies, including all contractors, working at the same principal’s premises (Figure 1). The above organisational feature and challenge has also been emphasised in principal in Finnish OSH legislation since 2003. Accident statistics seemed to support this legislative conclusion. For example, based on...
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