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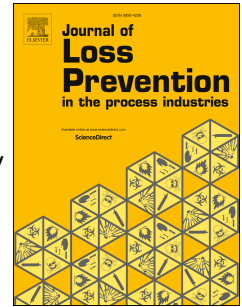
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Breaking the clay layer: The role of middle management in the management of safety

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Abstract

Although there is a tendency to concentrate studies on senior management, achieving safety objectives closely links middle managers with a wide variety of crucial tasks in organizations. This study was carried out to understand the under-estimated role of middle management in safety. For this purpose, a qualitative research was adopted and a middle manager was selected purposefully to record his professional trajectory over the period of a month with an MP3 recorder to capture the whole picture of the current conditions of the company. The recordings captured the behaviour of middle managers, the interactions between them and other entities within and outside of the organisation in dynamic and real-time conditions. ATLAS.ti software, the principle of activity theory, and the elements of the management roles were applied to analyse the daily practices of middle managers. Applying this method, the researchers tracked the actions or reactions of at least 32 other actors. The results reveal that middle managers perform multiple roles within the set of different actions they take, of which, informational roles have the highest frequency. Access to information places middle managers in a unique position where they can use information as an input to play major decisional roles. In addition, arguing (11.57%), wondering (9.90%), and complaining (9.35%), had the highest portions respectively among 45 different actions which were applied by middle managers as they played their leadership, monitoring and spokesperson roles. The authors conclude that middle managers can play crucial and multiple roles in safety management as well. Accessibility to information in short time intervals and more informational sources about process parameters and failures in equipment enhance the identification of safety risks, consequently, they can make more precise decisions in safety issues. They function as informal safety auditors and provide 'soft' alarm systems in safety management. Finally, they are actively involved in the control of the safety of the actual production process.

Keywords: Middle management, safety management, role, action.

1. Introduction

To achieve safety management objectives, which are primarily the protection of personnel, environment and assets, requires not only the active participation of experts and management in HSE (Health Safety and Environment) departments, the departments mainly responsible for safety management in organisations, it also depends on other actors such as operators, general employees, engineers, and managers. Safety management is a process including four stages that, based on ISO 31000,2009, consist of risk assessment, risk treatment, monitoring and review, and finally documents the risk management process.

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