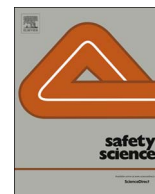




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# Association of risk exposure, organizational identification, and empowerment, with safety participation, intention to quit, and absenteeism

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## A B S T R A C T

Occupational safety is an important topic within organizational psychology research, with exposure to a variety of risks likely to influence a number of psychosocial and physical outcomes. Research has addressed the relationship that organizational safety has with the psychological constructs of organizational identification (OID), and empowerment. This study used work-related risks, OID, and empowerment, as predictors of organizational outcomes: safety participation, reported intention to quit, and absenteeism, on a sample of 205 managerial employees from an Australian transport and logistics organization. Ford and Tetrick's (2011) workplace safety model was extended to examine the moderating effects of perceived supervisor safety practices, and physical and psychosocial safety climates on the relationship between OID, empowerment, and organizational outcomes. While OID and supervisor safety practices (negatively) predicted intention to quit, risk exposure, OID, supervisor safety practices, and safety climate predicted safety participation. However, absenteeism was only predicted by empowerment (impact). The higher an employee's workplace empowerment, combined with the more positively they rated their supervisor's safety practices, predicted increased safety participation in the workplace, highlighting a moderating effect. A revised model described relationships between contextual, organizational safety, and psychological variables. Results provided a foundation for further research into relationships between workplace risks, psychological variables, safety factors, and organizational outcomes.

## 1. Introduction

Increasing regulatory and market pressure drives managers to invest greater resources for enhancing employee safety and organizational connections. Little research has investigated organizational identification (OID), empowerment, and safety climate concurrently (Ford and Tetrick, 2011). Yet, as a heavily researched organizational construct (Lee et al., 2015; Riketta, 2005), OID could help to account for variance in some safety-related variables. This study tested a model of organizational risks, OID, and psychological empowerment with three organizational outcomes. Empowerment and OID have been associated with enhanced well-being, and increased staff retention (Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Spreitzer, 1995). High levels of intention to quit and absenteeism have been outcomes both for high hazard organizations, and for organizations reporting low employee OID and empowerment (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998; Riketta, 2005; Seibert et al., 2011). Also important to organizations is safety climate, generally represented as employee perceptions of safety procedures, and practices (Zohar, 2008). These psychological and safety variables can be important for organizational

reputation, as well as employee behavior and customer perceptions.

Despite managers' overall responsibility for, and influence upon, many workplace safety and risk issues, most research exploring variables related to these issues has used shop floor rather than management samples. Seeking to understand more about a management perspective on broader aspects of organizational safety and risk, this study gathered data from a middle management sample in a large transport and logistics organization. As well as parts of its workforce encountering many traditional physical hazards, such as would be expected from exposure to heavy machinery, frequent vehicle movements, and a range of typical workplace hazards, this tightly-coupled organization was exposed to a number of other potential risks (Gao et al., 2017). Possibly resulting from initially minor system errors, these included transport delays, a degraded network, as well as associated potential legal and financial consequences. These features, which made for a frequently stressful working environment, meant that the organization had to display many high-reliability characteristics. Some of the complexities of managing risk within such an organization have been described by Ding et al. (2017).

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### 1.1. Hypothesized model

This study extended Ford and Tetrick's (2011) workplace safety model, in which the influence of occupational hazards on safety participation was fully mediated by OID and empowerment. While a number of workplace safety models exist (Beus et al., 2016), this model was selected because of its unique combination of organizational, contextual, and safety-specific variables hypothesized to be associated with both safety and individual-level outcomes. Potentially many factors relate to safety outcomes. The study sought to clarify the relationship between two additional outcomes and OID/empowerment due to the volume of research highlighting them as important to organizational effectiveness. Employee absences and stress or dissatisfaction – as potential precursors to quitting or “presenteeism” – might inter alia, impact safety through additional workload on other employees or result in missed safety-critical functions, which could degrade systems that potentially impact safety. In organizations that must continually run to tight schedules, like the one surveyed in this study, these factors could adversely affect reliability as well as safety.

To further clarify how risk exposure, OID, and empowerment can predict safety participation, reported intention to quit, and absenteeism, the current study incorporated physical and psychosocial safety climate as moderators, due to their found influence on employee attitudes and behaviors (Clarke, 2006a; Mark et al., 2007). Exploring these variables within a transport and logistics sample is important, as the effectiveness of organizations in this sector is predicated on positive safety climates and employee safety behaviors (Glendon and Evans, 2007). Findings on the relationship between risks, attitudes, and safety could enhance management effectiveness by reducing turnover and absenteeism, and improving safety behaviors.

### 1.2. Risk exposure

Despite increasing focus on safety, annually in Australia some 118,000 people are seriously injured at work (Safe Work Australia, 2015), and around 260 die from work-related injuries (Safe Work Australia, 2016). As well as increasing injury likelihood, risk exposure influences employee attitudes about safety in their organization (Ford and Wiggins, 2012; Henning et al., 2009; Itoh et al., 2004). Conflicting associations between risks and absenteeism have been either positive (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998), or negative (Ose, 2005), or show null effect (Roelen et al., 2006). A study of Netherlands' transportation workers found the hazard-absence relationship to be moderated by supervisor support (Biron and Bamberger, 2012), which is tested in the current study. The study sought to clarify some associations between risk exposure, OID, psychological empowerment, safety participation, reported intention to quit, and absenteeism (Abrams et al., 1998; Alge et al., 2006; Ford and Tetrick, 2011; Harris and Cameron, 2005; Mael and Ashforth, 1992, 1995; Riketta, 2005; van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000).

**H1.** Risk exposure will be associated positively with: (a) safety participation, and negatively with: (b) reported intention to quit, and (c) absenteeism.

### 1.3. Organizational identification

Organizational identification (OID) describes the degree to which individuals define themselves, and seek personal identity, through their employment (Ashforth et al., 2008; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Boros, 2008; Tyler and Blader, 2003). Detrimental effects that both low and high OID can have on employees and organizations have been investigated (Avanziet al., 2012; Smith et al., 2012). Ford and Tetrick (2011) found that employees who identified highly with their organization, and who felt that they had high levels of influence over their work, were more likely to perform safety enhancing behaviors,

including safety participation. Ford and Tetrick highlighted OID as important in creating a positive safety climate. A more generalized effect of OID on both work attitudes and workplace behaviors has also been found (Lee et al., 2015).

OID has been associated with turnover intent, absenteeism, and organizational support (Mael and Ashforth, 1992, 1995; van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000). A negative relationship has been found between OID and intention to quit (Abrams et al., 1998; Harris and Cameron, 2005; Riketta, 2005; Scott and Stephens, 2009). Randsley de Moura et al. (2009) found that OID was an important antecedent of turnover intentions, impacting organizations' turnover costs (Shaw, 2011). Absenteeism effects may be felt through reduced productivity as well as increased workloads and stress for other employees. While some studies have found higher OID to be associated with lower absenteeism (van Dick and Wagner, 2002; van Dick et al., 2005), in a meta-analysis Riketta (2005) found no association between OID and absenteeism.

**H2.** Organizational identification will be associated: (a) positively with safety participation, and negatively with: (b) reported intention to quit, and (c) absenteeism.

### 1.4. Psychological empowerment

Developed from Hackman and Oldham's (1980) motivational theories and Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, subsequent conceptualizations (Maynard et al., 2012) have resulted in a 4-dimensional construct of psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995). Within a workplace context, empowerment has been defined as an intrinsic work role orientation in which individuals feel that they have the capacity to shape their work role and context (Spreitzer, 1995). Four cognitive features shaped by the work environment are: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Ashforth, 1989; Deci et al., 1989; Gist, 1987; Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). As impact describes the extent to which an individual can influence work outcomes (Ashforth, 1989), in the current study, which was concerned with work outcomes, this feature was operationalized. It suggests that if employees feel a sense of control, then they are more committed and intrinsically motivated, resulting in higher empowerment and safety performance (Alge et al., 2006; Ford and Tetrick, 2011; Hechanova-Alampay and Beehr, 2001; Roseman et al., 2017). Employees with low job control have a poor perception of management's safety commitment (Pinion et al., 2017). Important implications include lower work performance, and damage to organizational reputation (Spreitzer, 1995; Staw and Epstein, 2000).

The relationship between empowerment and commitment is strengthened when employees perceive that the organization values their contribution and well-being (Butts et al., 2009; Hechanova-Alampay and Beehr, 2001; Liden et al., 2000). Finding a negative association between empowerment and intention to quit, Seibert et al. (2011) suggested that employees saw empowering work as motivating organizational commitment, thereby increasing loyalty and reducing turnover. Hochwalder and Brucefors (2005) found that employees with higher empowerment reported fewer sick days. Empowerment has also been associated negatively with unsafe behavior and workplace injuries (Hechanova-Alampay and Beehr, 2001). Ford and Tetrick (2011) found empowerment to be associated positively with safety participation and safety performance.

**H3.** Psychological empowerment (impact) will be associated: (a) positively with safety participation, and negatively with: (b) reported intention to quit, and (c) absenteeism.

### 1.5. Supervisor safety practices

Managerial and supervisor support is important for an organization's safety climate (Clarke, 2006a; Ford and Tetrick, 2011). As well as

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