

MANAGING YOUR OHS PROGRAM: Engaged Workplaces Are Safer for Workers



Many studies have shown the connection between a strong safety culture and actual workplace safety performance, including number of safety incidents and worker injuries. One key element of safety culture is worker engagement. Gallup recently did a meta-analysis, examining the effect of employee engagement on various aspects of organizations' performance. The study found that cultures in which employees are engaged in their jobs are safer places to work. Here's an overview of the study and what you can learn from it.

THE STUDY

The Gallup study looked at more than 82,000 business/work units with more than 1.8 million employees. The organizations analyzed represented 49 industries located in 73 countries, including Canada. The purpose of the study was to examine the:

- True relationship between employee engagement and performance;
- Consistency or generalizability of the relationship between employee engagement and performance across organizations; and
- Practical meaning of the findings for executives and managers.

The researchers statistically calculated the business-/work unit-level relationship between employee engagement and nine performance outcomes, including safety incidents and absenteeism. They gave a survey, which asked employees to rate on a scale of 1-5, where '5' is extremely satisfied and '1' is extremely dissatisfied, 12 statements such as 'I know what is expected of me at work' and 'At work, my opinion seems to count.'

The study also considered various types of data provided by the organizations. For example, safety data was available for 53 organizations. Safety measures included lost workday/time incident rate, percentage of workdays lost as a result of incidents or workers' comp claims (incidents and costs), number of incidents or incident rates.

THE RESULTS

The study's findings show high generalizability across organizations in the

relationships between employee engagement and customer metrics, profitability, productivity, employee turnover, safety, shrinkage and quality (defects) outcomes. With regard to composite business/work unit performance, business/work units in the top half on employee engagement have a 78% higher success rate in their own organization and a 113% higher success rate across business units in all companies studied. As to safety specifically, business units with engagement scores in the top quartile were found to have 70% fewer safety incidents compared with bottom-quartile units. Those top-quartile performers also had 41% less absenteeism than bottom-quartile performers.

BOTTOM LINE

An unsafe workplace can have far-reaching effects on a company and its employees. The Gallup study confirms that employee engagement consistently affects key performance outcomes'including workplace safety'regardless of the organization's industry or company. Given the potential consequences of a safety incident, leaders can't afford to be haphazard about safety. So *all* companies should do everything possible to develop an engaged workforce that's committed to avoiding safety incidents, which means ensuring that employees are committed to quality work, believe in their company's mission and purpose, and are confident in expressing their opinions. For example, management should encourage employees to watch for safety hazards and should make it easy for them to share their feedback and concerns. In short, the study provides further proof of the theory that doing what's best for employees doesn't have to contradict what's best for the business or organization.

Insider Source

'The Relationship Between Engagement at Work and Organizational Outcomes,'
Harter et al, Gallup, April 2016