SAFETY CLIMATE IN THE SRI LANKAN APPAREL INDUSTRY: IDENTIFYING GAPS AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

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DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own work and this thesis/dissertation does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a Degree or Diploma in any other University or Institute of higher learning and to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where the acknowledgement is made in the text. I retain the right to use this content in whole or part in future works (such as articles or books).

……. …….

J A R H Wijerathna Date

The above candidate has carried out research for the ~~PhD/MPhil~~/Masters thesis/dissertation under my supervision. I confirm that the declaration made above by the student is true and correct.

……. …….

Signature of the Supervisor Date

Name of the supervisor: Nandun Madusanka

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ABSTRACT

A significant portion of Sri Lanka workforce is employed in the apparel sector, yet there remains considerable potential to enhance safety standards within the industry. One major limitation to improving health and safety practices in workplace is the lack of detailed studies focused on the safety climate in apparel sector in Sri Lanka. This study mainly aims to assess workplace safety climates and identify gaps & effective strategies to strengthen the safety culture within the apparel industry in Sri Lanka.

There are two phases in this study. Phase 01 involved a quantitative questionnaire survey administered to floor level employees across three ABC apparel companies, with a total of 90 participants; 30 from each company. The survey was structured around 12 key factors identified through literature review as affecting factors to safety climate: General Safety Overview, Management Commitment, Management Communication, Supportive Work Environment, Safety Rules and Procedures, Supervisory Environment, Appreciation of Personal Risk, Employee Involvement, Work Site Risks, Employee Competence, Work Pressure, and Safe Behavior. Phase 02 consisted of qualitative semi structured interviews with 15 managerial staff: five from each company. These open-ended interviews explored reasons for high or low safety climate factors and gathered comments on future improvement strategies.

The findings revealed significant differences in safety climates across the three cases. Case A exhibited strong and consistent safety practices, Case B showed moderate safety performance with some gaps, while Case C highlights significant areas in need of improvement.

The safety climate has been negatively impacted by several reasons i.e. High production targets, Language barriers, Limited budget allocations due to economic constraints, safety communication ineffectiveness with no strong platform to engage employees, Competency gaps in management, supervisory, and safety officer levels, absence of structured safety training, lack of recognition programs for safe behavior, etc. As a summary, these gaps in communication, training, leadership commitment, and employee involvement significantly lower the organization's safety climate ratings.

A proper enhancement of industrial safety climate requires strategies combining employee competency development, management commitment with visible leadership involvement and strong communication strategies. Apart from that OHS management system such as ISO 45001 and rewarding & recognitions programs are other key strategies involving improving the safety climate.

Keywords: safety climate, employee involvement, work pressure, management commitment, management communication, safety rules & procedures

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CDC	: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
GM	: General Manager
HR	: Human Resources
ISO	: International Organization for Standardization
KPI	: Key Performance Indicators
MOC	: Management of Change
NIOSH	: The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health
OSH	: Occupational Safety and Health
OHS	: Occupational Health and Safety
PA	: Public Address System
SD	: Standard Deviation