

Leadership Towards Navigating the Tensions between Safety and Productivity - A Case Study of the Mining Industry in Tanzania

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Introduction

Purpose: This study examines the dynamic interplay (tension) between safety and productivity within organizational contexts in high-risk work environments, emphasizing the crucial role of leadership.

Background: Navigating the tensions between competing priorities such as safety and productivity presents a critical challenge for organizations across various industries. “Leadership credibility” is frequently considered by many scholars as essential for high performance. Yet despite its prominence in contemporary discourse and research, the impact of “leadership credibility” in mediating the tension between safety and productivity is not clearly conceptualized, and a grounded theoretical understanding is lacking.

The research objectives are:

- Examine the Role of Leadership Credibility in synthesizing the Safety and Productivity tension
- Develop an Integrated Leadership Framework for Managing Safety and Productivity Tensions.

Expected Results

Anticipated Contributions to Knowledge:

- Development and refinement of theoretical frameworks related to Leadership credibility, Safety, Productivity and Safety Culture in the high-risk work environment such as the mining industry.

Anticipated Contributions to Practice:

- Development of an Integrated leadership system that would simultaneously deliver safety and productivity.

Theoretical Frameworks

Compliance by leaders to a set of behaviours to deal with trade-off situations between safety and productivity is grounded into two theoretical frameworks (theories):

Paradox theory - the dynamic equilibrium model outlined by Smith and Lewis (2011) provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how safety and productivity can enhance each other;

Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985; 1991) - predicting compliance to specific human behavior. It posits that intentions are precursors to behavior and are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.



Research Questions

- What factors contribute to the paradoxical trade-off between safety and productivity in mining operations in Tanzania?
- How can leadership effectively balance safety and productivity? Specifically, how does leadership credibility effectively mediate the tensions between safety and productivity?

Methodology

Research Design – Grounded theory research with multiple-case study. The unit of analysis is mine site.

Data Collections – 6 mine sites differentiated by the size of operations (large, medium, and small). Documents and in-depth semi-structured interviews of the mines’ top management team members, supervisor, and employees per site.

Data Analysis – First Level Coding (Categorization and Thematic analysis), Second Level Coding (interpretation and synthetization), NVIVO, Within-case and Cross-case analysis.

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