International Journal of Science and Research Archive

eISSN: 2582-8185

Cross Ref DOI: 10.30574/ijsra

Journal homepage: https://ijsra.net/

(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

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Safety culture and its influence on mining safety performance

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International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2025, 16(02), 552-559

Publication history: Received on 04 May 2025; revised on 10 August 2025; accepted on 12 August 2025

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.30574/ijsra.2025.16.2.1823

Abstract

This paper thoroughly explores the intricate relationship between safety culture and safety performance within the mining industry. Leveraging data collected from 35 mining companies over a two - year period, statistical analyses using SPSS and R are employed to dissect the impact of various components of safety culture on accident rates and other safety - related outcomes. The study reveals that a robust safety culture, characterized by strong management commitment, high employee engagement, and effective safety communication, is significantly associated with lower accident rates and enhanced overall safety performance. These findings offer valuable guidance for mining companies seeking to cultivate a safety - centric culture and improve their safety management strategies.

Keywords: Safety Culture; Mining Safety; Management Commitment; Employee Engagement; Safety Communication; Accident Rates

1. Introduction

Safety culture is a fundamental aspect of any industry, but it holds particular significance in the mining sector, where the working environment is inherently hazardous. A positive safety culture encompasses shared values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that prioritize safety at all levels of an organization. It influences how employees perceive and respond to safety risks, how management enforces safety policies, and how safety information is communicated and acted upon. While the importance of safety culture in mining is widely recognized, there is a need for more empirical research to understand precisely how its different components impact safety performance. This paper aims to fill this gap by conducting a comprehensive statistical analysis of the relationship between safety culture and safety performance in mining.

2. Literature Review

Previous research has established a strong link between safety culture and safety performance in various industries, including mining. Zohar (2010) conducted a metal - analysis across multiple sectors and found that organizations with a positive safety culture had significantly lower accident rates. In the mining context, studies by Lee et al. (2015) showed that management commitment to safety was a key driver of safety culture, and it positively influenced employees' compliance with safety procedures. Other research has highlighted the role of employee engagement, such as their willingness to participate in safety initiatives and report hazards, in enhancing safety performance (Cooper, 2016). However, most of these studies have focused on individual components of safety culture in isolation or have used qualitative research methods. There is a lack of quantitative research that comprehensively analyzes how multiple aspects of safety culture interact to affect safety performance in the mining industry. This study aims to provide a more in - depth and data - driven understanding of this relationship.

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3. Data Collection

3.1. Data Sources

Data was collected from 35 mining companies operating in different regions and mining sectors, including coal, gold, and metal mining. The data collection period spanned two years, from 2021 - 2022. The following data collection methods were employed:

- Surveys: Employee surveys were distributed to a random sample of miners, supervisors, and safety managers within each company. The surveys consisted of a series of Likert - scale questions designed to measure different dimensions of safety culture, such as management commitment, employee engagement, and safety communication. A total of 1,500 surveys were distributed, with a response rate of 80%.
- Company Safety Records: Information on accident rates, near - miss incidents, and safety compliance metrics (such as the number of safety violations and their severity) was collected from each company's safety records.
- Interviews: Semi - structured interviews were conducted with senior management from each company to gain insights into their safety management strategies, their perception of the company's safety culture, and any initiatives they had implemented to improve safety performance. A total of 70 interviews were conducted.

3.2. Variable Definition

3.2.1. Dependent Variables

- Accident Rate: Calculated as the number of accidents per 100 employees per year. This serves as a primary indicator of safety performance, reflecting the frequency of incidents that result in injuries or property damage.
- Near - Miss Incident Rate: Determined as the number of near - miss incidents per 100 employees per year. Near - misses are valuable indicators of potential hazards and can provide insights into areas where safety improvements are needed.
- Safety Compliance Score: A composite score based on the number and severity of safety violations detected during regular safety inspections. Higher scores indicate better compliance with safety regulations and procedures.

3.2.2. Independent Variables

- Management Commitment: Measured through survey questions related to management's prioritization of safety, allocation of resources for safety, and their personal adherence to safety procedures. Responses were aggregated to create an overall management commitment score for each company.
- Employee Engagement: Assessed using survey items that gauged employees' involvement in safety committees, their willingness to report hazards, and their perception of being able to contribute to safety improvements.
- Safety Communication: Evaluated based on survey questions about the clarity and effectiveness of safety - related communication channels, the frequency of safety discussions, and the ease of accessing safety information.

4. Data Preparation

4.1. Data Cleaning in SPSS

The survey data was initially imported into SPSS. Missing values were identified using the Analyze > Missing Values Analysis function. For variables with less than 10% missing values, such as some of the safety culture survey items, the mean value was used for imputation. In cases where variables had a higher proportion of missing values, entire cases were removed. Outliers in the accident rate and near - miss incident rate variables were detected using boxplots in SPSS. Some extreme values were investigated, and in a few instances, they were found to be due to data entry errors and were corrected.

4.2. Data Transformation in R

In R, the Likert - scale data from the surveys was recoded to numerical values for analysis. The safety compliance score was standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1 using the scale function. Additionally, factor analysis was performed in R using the fact extra and psych packages to reduce the dimensionality of the safety culture variables and identify underlying factors. This helped to simplify the data and ensure that the variables were not highly correlated with each other, which could cause issues in the regression analysis.

5. Statistical Analysis

5.1. Descriptive Statistics in SPSS

Descriptive statistics for all variables were calculated in SPSS using the Analyze > Descriptive Statistics > Descriptives option. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Accident Rate	3.8	1.6	0.5	7.2
Near - Miss Incident Rate	12.5	4.5	3.0	25.0
Safety Compliance Score	0.0	1.0	-2.3	2.1
Management Commitment Score	3.5	0.8	1.5	5.0
Employee Engagement Score	3.2	0.7	1.0	4.8
Safety Communication Score	3.0	0.6	1.2	4.5

The average accident rate across all companies was 3.8 accidents per 100 employees per year, with a standard deviation of 1.6. The average near - miss incident rate was 12.5 incidents per 100 employees per year. The safety compliance score had a mean of 0 (after standardization), indicating that, on average, companies were around the baseline level of compliance. The management commitment, employee engagement, and safety communication scores had means of 3.5, 3.2, and 3.0 respectively, on a 5 - point Likert scale, suggesting a moderate level of these safety culture components.

5.2. Correlation Analysis in SPSS

A bivariate correlation analysis was conducted in SPSS to explore the relationships between the safety culture variables and the safety performance variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated using the Analyze > Correlate > Bivariate option. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Correlation Matrix

Variable	Accident Rate	Near - Miss Incident Rate	Safety Compliance Score	Management Commitment Score	Employee Engagement Score	Safety Communication Score
Accident Rate	1.00	-0.55*	-0.60*	-0.65*	-0.58*	-0.52*
Near - Miss Incident Rate	-0.55*	1.00	0.45**	0.50**	0.48**	0.42*
Safety Compliance Score	-0.60*	0.45**	1.00	0.65***	0.60***	0.55***
Management Commitment Score	-0.65*	0.50**	0.65***	1.00	0.75***	0.70***
Employee Engagement Score	-0.58*	0.48**	0.60***	0.75***	1.00	0.80***
Safety Communication Score	-0.52*	0.42*	0.55***	0.70***	0.80***	1.00

*Note: ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, p < 0.05

The results showed significant negative correlations between all the safety culture variables (management commitment, employee engagement, and safety communication) and the accident rate. Higher scores in these safety culture dimensions were associated with lower accident rates. There were also significant positive correlations between the safety culture variables and the safety compliance score, indicating that stronger safety culture was related to better compliance with safety regulations. The correlations between the safety culture variables and the near - miss incident rate were also significant, although relatively weaker in some cases.

5.3. Regression Analysis in SPSS

A multiple linear regression analysis was performed in SPSS to determine the unique contribution of each safety culture variable to the prediction of safety performance variables. Three separate regression models were run, with accident rate, near - miss incident rate, and safety compliance score as the dependent variables respectively. The Analyze > Regression > Linear option was used, with the safety culture variables (management commitment, employee engagement, and safety communication) as the independent variables. The results of the regression analysis for the accident rate model are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Multiple Regression Results for Accident Rate

Variable	Beta (β)	Standard Error	t - value	p - value
Management Commitment Score	-0.35	0.09	**-3.89***	<0.001
Employee Engagement Score	-0.25	0.08	**-3.13***	0.002
Safety Communication Score	-0.20	0.07	**-2.86***	0.005

$R^2 = 0.68$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.65$

The overall model for predicting accident rate was significant ($F(3, 31) = 22.5$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 68% of the variance in accident rate (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.65$). Management commitment had the largest significant negative beta coefficient ($\beta = -0.35$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that a one - unit increase in management commitment score was associated with a 0.35 - unit decrease in accident rate, holding other variables constant. Employee engagement ($\beta = -0.25$, $p < 0.01$) and safety communication ($\beta = -0.20$, $p < 0.01$) also had significant negative impacts on accident rate.

Similar regression analyses for the near - miss incident rate and safety compliance score models showed that all three safety culture variables were significant predictors, with management commitment and employee engagement having relatively stronger effects in both models.

5.4. Structural Equation Modeling in R

To further explore the complex relationships between safety culture components and safety performance, structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted in R using the lava a package. The SEM allowed for the examination of both direct and indirect effects between variables. The results of the SEM showed that management commitment had a direct negative effect on accident rate and also influenced accident rate indirectly through its positive impact on employee engagement and safety communication. Employee engagement and safety communication, in turn, had direct negative effects on accident rate. The model fit indices (such as CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.06) indicated a good fit of the model to the data.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1. Main Findings

The study found a strong and significant relationship between safety culture and safety performance in the mining industry. All three components of safety culture - management commitment, employee engagement, and safety communication - were negatively correlated with accident rates, meaning that higher levels of these components were associated with fewer accidents. Management commitment emerged as the most influential factor in predicting accident rates, highlighting the crucial role that leadership plays in shaping a safety - conscious culture. When management actively prioritizes safety, allocates resources, and leads by example, it sets a positive tone that permeates throughout the organization and encourages employees to follow suit.

Employee engagement also had a substantial impact on safety performance. Engaged employees are more likely to be proactive in identifying and reporting hazards, participating in safety initiatives, and adhering to safety procedures. This increased level of involvement helps to create a safer working environment and reduces the likelihood of accidents.

Safety communication was also found to be an important factor. Effective communication channels ensure that safety information is disseminated clearly and promptly to all employees. This helps to keep everyone informed about potential risks, safety procedures, and any changes in safety policies, enabling them to make informed decisions and take appropriate safety measures.

The positive correlations between safety culture variables and safety compliance score, as well as the relationships with near - miss incident rates, further support the importance of a strong safety culture in overall safety management. A positive safety culture not only reduces the occurrence of accidents but also improves compliance with safety regulations and encourages the reporting of near - misses, which are valuable opportunities for learning and preventing future incidents.

6.2. Practical Implications

For mining companies, these findings suggest several key strategies for improving safety performance. Firstly, senior management should make a clear and visible commitment to safety. This could involve setting clear safety goals, allocating sufficient resources for safety training and equipment, and actively participating in safety initiatives at all levels of the organization. For example, managers could regularly conduct safety inspections, attend safety meetings, and lead by example in following safety procedures.

Secondly, companies should focus on enhancing employee engagement in safety - related activities. This can be achieved through measures such as establishing safety committees with employee representation, providing incentives for employees who contribute to safety improvements, and creating a culture where employees feel comfortable reporting hazards without fear of retaliation.

Finally, improving safety communication is essential. Mining companies should ensure that safety information is communicated clearly, using multiple channels such as safety briefings, posters, and digital platforms. Regular two - way communication between management and employees regarding safety issues should also be encouraged to address concerns and gather feedback.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the data was collected from a sample of 35 mining companies, and the findings may not be generalizable to all mining operations globally. Different regions, mining sectors, and company - specific characteristics may influence the relationship between safety culture and safety performance. Secondly, the study relied mainly on self - reported data from surveys, which may be subject to response biases, such as social desirability bias. Employees may be inclined to provide answers that they think are more favorable or in line with what they perceive as the company's expectations. Thirdly, the study only considered three main components of safety culture, and there may be other factors, such as organizational structure, leadership style, and external regulatory influence, that could impact safety performance and interact with safety culture.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides empirical evidence of the significant influence of safety culture on safety performance in the mining industry. Through statistical analyses using SPSS and R, it has been demonstrated that management commitment, employee engagement, and safety communication are key components of a positive safety culture that can effectively reduce accident rates, improve safety compliance, and enhance overall safety performance. Mining companies can use these findings to develop and implement strategies for cultivating a stronger safety culture, ultimately creating a safer working environment for their employees. Future research should aim to address the limitations of this study, expand the sample size, and consider a broader range of variables to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between safety culture and safety performance in mining.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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