Reducing Workplace Incidents / Poor Performance by Holding Organisations and Leaders Accountable

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Abstract—**This study investigates the intricate link between workplace operational incidents and administrative errors, emphasizing the critical role of organizational and leadership accountability in mitigating error-enforcing conditions that precipitate incidents and degrade performance. Employing a robust qualitative approach, the research integrates a mixed-methods design encompassing naturalistic observation—both participant and non-participant—and unstructured interviews conducted with over 300 personnel within a Nigerian-based transnational organization. Data were meticulously analyzed using descriptive and deductive reasoning frameworks to elucidate the impact of leadership decisions and organizational practices on the prevalence of workplace errors and related incidents.**

The findings reveal a compelling pattern: more than 80% of workplace incidents, encompassing both physical injuries and psychological harm, originate from administrative errors linked to leadership styles and organizational culture. Key error-enforcing conditions identified include pervasive blame culture, inadequate fatigue management, favouritism, bullying, flawed performance appraisal systems, and a pronounced lack of employee empowerment. Notably, psychological injuries arising from these administrative errors—such as diminished self-esteem, depression, and chronic stress—were found to be more detrimental than physical injuries, exerting profound negative effects on employee motivation, productivity, and overall organisational performance. The study further underscores the frequent misinterpretation of incident causality and highlights the paramount importance of objective evaluation and leadership accountability as mechanisms to reduce incident recurrence effectively.

In conclusion, the research advocates cultivating accountability at all organisational levels, enhancing leadership competencies, and promoting a culture grounded in empathy and objectivity within performance appraisal and incident management processes. Implementation of these measures is projected to foster safer, more productive work environments, thereby driving improved organisational outcomes. The study also calls for integrating accountability principles into corporate governance frameworks. It emphasises the need for transformational learning through causal reasoning to address the root causes of workplace errors and incidents, ultimately contributing to sustainable organisational excellence.

I. INTRODUCTION

Workplace operational incidents and underperformance have long been critical concerns in organisational management, particularly in sectors where safety, productivity, and employee well-being are paramount. Historically, the sources and evaluation of workplace incidents have been inadequately addressed, often leading to misattributed causes and failing to hold the appropriate parties accountable. This has led to ineffective mitigation strategies and the perpetuation of recurring incidents and poor organizational performance.

In the context of this study, an incident is defined as an unwanted, unplanned occurrence within a planned process or activity that results in physical or psychological injury, asset damage, or commercial loss. Errors, which are the root causes of incidents, are categorised into two broad types: those arising from natural phenomena or individual lapses, and those stemming from organisational decisions, leadership styles, and workplace culture.

Key terms include:
Administrative Errors: arising from wrong or delayed decisions, poor leadership actions, or flawed organisational processes.
Error-Enforcing Conditions: Workplace practices, cultures, or situations that increase the likelihood of

errors leading to incidents, such as blame culture, favouritism, bullying, and poor fatigue management.

Psychological Injuries: Internal, often invisible injuries such as depression, low self-esteem, and chronic stress resulting from workplace errors, which may be more detrimental than physical injuries.

Accountability: The obligation of leaders and organizations to take responsibility for decisions and actions that affect workplace performance and safety.

Extensive literature links workplace incidents to leadership and organizational practices. Leadership is recognized as a critical factor influencing employee behavior, motivation, and safety outcomes. Studies highlight that poor leadership styles, such as blame culture and favoritism, contribute significantly to workplace errors and incidents. Fatigue management is identified as a significant factor affecting cognitive function and error rates among workers.

Cause and effect investigation methodologies, especially causal learning, are emphasized as effective tools for uncovering the real causes of workplace incidents beyond superficial fault-finding or blame. Research also underscores the importance of performance appraisal systems, where human and organizational factors influence outcomes that can either motivate or demoralize employees, affecting their productivity and incident susceptibility.

Modern workplace challenges such as workplace slavery, bullying, and discrimination are increasingly recognised as error-enforcing conditions that inflict psychological harm and undermine organisational safety and performance.

Despite the recognition of leadership and organizational factors in workplace incidents, there remains a significant gap in understanding the direct causal relationship between administrative errors and operational incidents, especially in the Nigerian labor context. Existing studies often focus on individual errors or technical causes, neglecting the systemic influence of leadership accountability and organizational culture.

Moreover, psychological injuries resulting from workplace errors are underreported and insufficiently addressed in incident evaluations. There is also a lack of comprehensive frameworks integrating accountability into corporate governance to

systematically reduce error-enforcing conditions and improve overall workplace safety and performance.

This study aims to investigate the intricate link between workplace operational incidents and administrative errors, emphasizing the role of organizational and leadership accountability in mitigating error-enforcing conditions. Specific objectives include:
- Establishing the prevalence of administrative errors as root causes of workplace incidents.
- Highlighting the impact of psychological injuries compared to physical injuries on employee motivation and productivity.
- Identifying key error-enforcing conditions such as blame culture, poor fatigue management, favoritism, and bullying.
- Demonstrating how holding leaders and organizations accountable can reduce workplace incidents and improve performance.
- Recommending strategies for integrating accountability into corporate governance and promoting transformational learning through causal reasoning.

The research focuses on a Nigerian-based transnational organization, covering the period from 2008 to 2019. It concentrates on workplace incidents caused by leadership and organizational practices, excluding incidents solely due to natural or individual factors. Data collection employs qualitative methods including naturalistic observation and unstructured interviews with over 300 personnel.

Constraints include the single-case study design, limiting generalizability beyond similar organizational contexts. The study also focuses primarily on administrative and leadership errors, with less emphasis on technical or environmental incident causes. Psychological injuries, while emphasized, are inherently challenging to quantify and may be underrepresented due to their invisible nature.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. List of Materials Used in Experiments
- Organizational records and reports from the Nigerian-based transnational company under study.
- Observation checklists tailored for naturalistic participant and non-participant observation.

- Interview guides for unstructured interviews with personnel.
- Audio recording devices (for capturing unstructured interviews).
- Note-taking materials for recording observations and interview responses.

2. Step-by-Step Procedure

2.1 Research Design and Approach
- Adopted a qualitative mixed-methods design integrating naturalistic observation (both participant and non-participant) and unstructured interviews.
- Selected a Nigerian-based transnational organization as a single case study for in-depth analysis.

2.2 Data Collection
- Conducted naturalistic observation by systematically monitoring workplace behaviors, leadership styles, organizational culture, and incident occurrences across various departments within the organization.
- Employed participant observation by engaging in workplace activities to gain insider perspectives, complemented by non-participant observation for objective data gathering.
- Carried out over 300 unstructured interviews with a cross-section of personnel including frontline workers, supervisors, and management to elicit detailed insights into workplace practices and incident causality.
- Recorded observations and interview responses contemporaneously for accuracy.

2.3 Data Management
- Organized collected data into thematic categories related to administrative errors, leadership accountability, error-enforcing conditions, and incident types.
- Ensured confidentiality and anonymity of participants and the organization by withholding identifiable information.

3. Tools and Instruments Used for Data Analysis
- Employed descriptive analysis techniques to break down and clarify component parts of the data.
- Applied deductive reasoning frameworks to test emerging hypotheses and establish causal links between administrative errors and workplace incidents.

- Utilized qualitative data coding methods to identify recurring patterns and themes from observation notes and interview transcripts.
- Triangulated data sources (observations, interviews, and organizational records) to validate findings and enhance reliability.

4. Ensuring Reliability of Experiments
- Triangulation of multiple data collection methods (participant observation, non-participant observation, and unstructured interviews) ensured comprehensive and corroborated data.
- Random sampling of interviewees across different organizational levels minimized bias and enhanced representativeness.
- Cross-validation of observational data with interview responses reinforced consistency.
- Validation of findings by peer review and feedback from ten senior organizational personnel who corroborated the accuracy of observations and interpretations.
- Ethical considerations maintained to ensure unbiased data collection, including voluntary participation and non-attribution of sensitive information.

III.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Data Presentation
The data collected through naturalistic observations and unstructured interviews with over 300 personnel across various organizational levels were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively to identify patterns linking workplace operational incidents to administrative errors. The data were organized thematically and illustrated through summary tables and conceptual diagrams (visuals not embedded here but referenced from the thesis analysis).
Key data points include:
- Over 80% of workplace incidents (both physical and psychological) were traced to administrative errors related to leadership decisions and organizational culture.
- Identified error-enforcing conditions were quantified by frequency of mention and observed impact, including blame culture, poor fatigue management, favoritism, bullying, improper performance appraisal, and lack of empowerment.
- Psychological injuries such as depression, lowered self-esteem, and chronic stress were reported by a

majority of respondents as more impactful than visible physical injuries.
- Incident types were categorized into safety, commercial, security, and psychological, with cross-linkages between these categories highlighted.
- Data triangulation from observation, interviews, and organizational records confirmed consistency across findings.

3.2 Results
3.2.1 Prevalence of Administrative Errors
The analysis revealed that administrative errors are the root cause of a significant majority of workplace incidents. More than 80% of incidents were linked to leadership and organizational practices rather than individual technical faults or natural causes. This supports the hypothesis that workplace incidents are deeply embedded in systemic organizational issues.

3.2.2 Error-Enforcing Conditions
The most frequently observed error-enforcing conditions included:
Blame Culture: Present in over 70% of reported incidents, fostering fear and discouraging open communication.
Poor Fatigue Management: Identified in 65% of cases, fatigue was linked to absent-mindedness and reduced cognitive function.
Favouritism and Bullying: Reported in 60% of incidents, these behaviours led to demotivation and psychological harm.
Improper Performance Appraisal: Noted in 55% of cases, appraisal errors contributed to disengagement and lowered morale.
Lack of Empowerment: In 50% of incidents, employees felt unable to intervene in unsafe conditions.

3.2.3 Psychological vs. Physical Injuries
Psychological injuries were reported to have a more profound and lasting impact on employee motivation, productivity, and organizational performance than physical injuries. More than 75% of respondents indicated that psychological harm such as stress, low self-esteem, and depression led to absenteeism, reduced engagement, and increased turnover.

3.2.4 Misinterpretation of Incidents and Accountability
The study found frequent misinterpretation of incident causality, often blaming frontline workers rather than addressing leadership or systemic errors. Objective evaluation and leadership accountability were identified as critical factors in reducing incident recurrence.

3.3 Discussion
The results underscore the critical role of administrative errors and leadership accountability in workplace safety and performance. The high prevalence of incidents linked to leadership and organizational culture aligns with existing literature emphasizing the influence of leadership styles on workplace behavior and safety outcomes.

The identification of blame culture as a dominant error-enforcing condition illustrates how organizational environments that discourage transparency and learning exacerbate incidents. This finding supports the need for a shift towards a just culture where accountability is balanced with support and learning.

Poor fatigue management's significant role is confirmed by research linking fatigue-induced cognitive impairment to increased error rates, highlighting the necessity of effective work-rest scheduling and fatigue mitigation strategies.

Favouritism, bullying, and improper appraisal systems contribute to psychological injuries, which the study confirms are more detrimental than visible physical injuries. This expands the understanding of workplace incidents beyond traditional safety metrics to include mental health and well-being, emphasizing the need for holistic incident management.

Misinterpretation of incidents points to a systemic failure in incident investigation practices, often leading to defensive reasoning and blame rather than causal analysis and learning. The study's advocacy for causal learning methodologies and transformational learning aligns with best practices in organisational safety and performance improvement.

Overall, the findings validate the hypothesis that holding organisations and leaders accountable reduces error-enforcing conditions and workplace incidents. Integrating accountability into corporate governance and promoting empathetic, objective leadership practices emerge as vital strategies for sustainable organisational excellence.

IV. CONCLUSION

Objective

This research aimed to investigate the underlying causes and consequences of workplace incidents and poor performance within organisations, with a focus on the roles of leadership and organisational practices. Employing qualitative and quantitative methods, the study aimed to highlight how error-enforcing conditions—particularly stemming from administrative decisions, blame culture, and leadership styles—contribute to incidents, both physical and psychological, that ultimately result in diminished performance and productivity.

Key Findings

The research established a strong link between workplace incidents and administrative errors, identifying that over 80% of such incidents—whether visible injuries or latent psychological harm—are rooted in poor leadership decisions and organizational practices. Key drivers included wrong performance appraisals, favoritism, discrimination, and a lack of objective recognition and reward systems. The study found that incidents are not limited to physical injuries but also encompass psychological and emotional damages such as low morale, depression, and diminished self-esteem, all of which can severely impact employee motivation and organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, organizations often misattribute root causes, focusing on individual fault rather than systemic issues, thereby perpetuating a cycle of underperformance and incident recurrence.

Implications / Application

The findings underscore the importance of holding organizations and leaders accountable for their roles in shaping workplace culture and outcomes. Creating environments based on accountability—rather than blame—encourages objectivity, motivation, and responsibility at all levels. Practically, this means revising policies to ensure that performance appraisals, reward and recognition schemes, and supervisory practices are grounded in fairness, empathy, and clear communication. Application of these insights can significantly reduce incidents, lower attrition rates, foster a culture of trust, support employee well-being, and ultimately enhance organizational productivity.

Recommendations for the Future

For sustained improvements, organisations should:

- Embed accountability at every level, making both leaders and individual contributors responsible for outcomes, but without fostering blame.
- Continuously train leaders and HR practitioners in objective performance evaluation, emotional intelligence, and fair workplace practices.
- Ensure that new employees, at the point of hiring and during onboarding, understand both their rights and responsibilities concerning workplace safety and mutual accountability.
- Encourage participatory appraisal and feedback processes that empower employees and supervisors alike.
- Address latent organizational issues, such as bullying, workplace slavery, and discrimination, through robust policies and ongoing awareness training.
- Maintain a focus on preventive and supportive measures for both physical and psychological workplace incidents, integrating these into core business strategies.

Future research should examine these dynamics in a wider range of industries and national contexts, as well as investigate the long-term organizational outcomes following the adoption of accountability-based leadership and management practices.

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