The challenges of implementing internal audit of psychosocial work environment in certified occupational health and safety management systems

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Content

- Background

- The purpose of my business PhD-project and methods

- Co-operation with CAVI – a Danish research project

- Three articles in peer reviewed journals
  - Article 1: Internal audit of the psychosocial work environment in certified OHSMS: Between standardization and autonomy
Background

► Educated as an social anthropologist

► From 1999-2008 I worked in a municipality with HR and psychosocial work environment

► From 2008 employed by Bureau Veritas – an international organization which make external audits – as an occupational health and safety (OHS) auditor with a focus on developing auditing of psychosocial work environment integrated in OHSMS

► Business PhD-student at Aalborg University, Demark. Supervisor is professor Peter Hasle
The aim of the PhD-project is to explore the options available to develop an audit of the psychosocial work environment integrated in occupational health and management systems.

The objectives will be:

- to examine barriers and opportunities in the current auditing
- test new methods and tools to audit the psychosocial work environment in the future
Co-operation with CAVI – a Danish research project about OHS regulations transformed into OHS programs and OHS activities

Within CAVI, professor Peter Hasle and associate professor Pernille Hohnen are leading the project: “The psychosocial work environment and certified occupational health and safety management systems in the public sector in Denmark”

An article from this project has just been published in Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies: “Hard work in soft regulation. A discussion of the social mechanisms in OHS management standards and possible dilemmas in the regulation of psychosocial work environment”.
Introduction - context

► A growing interest for certified occupational health and safety management (OHSM) systems in Danish municipalities

► The most important OHS risks in municipalities are related to the psychosocial work environment and musculoskeletal disorders (MSD)

► Traditional accident risks and physical hazards known from manufacturing and construction are of relatively less importance
Every workplace shall have an occupational health and safety management system (EU 89 Framework Directive). It obliges employers to evaluate the risks to the health and safety of workers and to implement subsequent preventive measures.

Organizational health risks and psychosocial health effects are explicitly included in the EU Framework Directive.

In Denmark, inspectors address the psychosocial work environment systematically in inspections of workplace.
The OHSAS 18001 standard specifies requirements for an occupational health and safety management system to enable an organization to control its OHS risks and improve its OHS performance.

OHS performance is defined as measureable results of an organization’s management of its OHS risks.

A management system is a set of interrelated elements used to establish policy and objectives and achieve these objectives.

A management system includes organizational structure, planning activities including risk assessment and the setting of objectives, responsibilities, procedures, processes, resources and practices.
OHSAS 18001 standard is based on the methodology known as plan-do-check-act

- **Plan**: establish the objectives and processes necessary to deliver results in accordance with the organization’s OHS policy
- **Do**: implement the processes
- **Check**: monitor and measure processes against OHS policy, objectives, legal and other requirements, and report the results
- **Act**: take actions to continually improve OHS performance
Audit is used to review and evaluate the performance and effectiveness of its OHS management system.

**Internal audit:**

The organization shall ensure that internal audits of the OHS management system are conducted to determine whether the OHS management system

► conforms to planned arrangements for OHS management including the requirements of the OHSAS standard,
► has been properly implemented and maintained,
► and is effective in meeting the organization’s policy and objectives.
Audit – approach and process

Audit has an “evidence-based approach: the rational method for reaching reliable and reproducible audit conclusions in a systematic audit process”

When auditing for compliance, the audit process typically includes:

1. gathering evidence through systematic data collection
2. evaluating the evidence against audit criteria to determine the extent to which the criteria are fulfilled

“Guidelines for auditing management systems, ISO 19011”
Audit evidence, criteria, and findings

► Audit **evidence** is records, statements of facts or other information which are relevant to the audit criteria.

► Audit **criteria** are set of policies, procedures, standards or requirements used as a reference against which audit evidence is compared.

► Audit **findings** are the results of the evaluation of the collected audit evidence against audit criteria.

► Audit findings can indicate either conformity or nonconformity with the audit criteria, or identify an opportunity for improvement and form the essence of the audit feedback.

”Guidelines for auditing management systems, ISO 19011”
How do the Danish municipalities implement the internal audit with respect to control psychosocial risks?
Methods – case studies

- The PhD-project is based on two case studies in two Danish municipalities which are occupational and health management systems certified.

- Data collection consists of written materials, observation and qualitative semi structured interviews.

- The case studies include observation of external and internal audits and interviews with external and internal auditors, local managers, OHS reps and OHS professionals from the central level of the municipalities.

- Notes are taken from the observations and the interviews are transcribed. The written materials consist mainly of audit reports, audit plans, interview guides, and meeting invitations.
To analyze the implementation of internal audit in relation to the OHSM system to control psychosocial risks we examine the following aspects of planning and conducting an audit:

► Purpose of audit

► Recruitment of auditors

► Selection of audit methods for planning and conducting audit including methods for collecting information on site
One Danish municipality

Municipality DIVERSIFY

- 100,000 inhabitants
- A central unit with OHS professionals responsible for the OHSM system
- A central HR department
- Surveys of well-being every 3 years
- OHS workplace (risk) assessment minimum every 3 years
- OHSM system certified since 2006
- Focus on internal audit of psychosocial work environment in few years
One Danish municipality

Municipality UNIFY

- 200,000 inhabitants
- A central unit with OHS professionals responsible for the OHSM system
- A central HR department
- Surveys of well-being every year
- OHS workplace (risk) assessment minimum every 3 years
- OHSM system certified since 2008
- Focus on internal audit of psychosocial work environment since 2013
Results

► Each workplace in the two municipalities is subject to one internal audit during a period of three years and one external audit during six years

► Most OHS problems were related to psychosocial work environment

► Auditors do pay attention to the psychosocial work environment itself but difficult for them to conclude in conformity or in non-conformity with respect to the intangible psychosocial work environment

► Easy to conclude in conformity or in non-conformity with respect to tangible and observable physical risks
Results: Municipality DIVERSIFY

- Internal auditors were both recruited as OHS professionals and experienced OHS reps and managers
- Internal auditors had freedom to select methodology
- Open and varied audit agenda tailored to the different workplaces and to the individual auditor
- A very short interview guide for well-being and psychosocial work environment with 6 general topics and some sub topics
Results: DIVERSIFY

- Every individual auditor developed his/her own question to the topics
- No pre-defined standards and requirement, except written action plans
- Focus on substance and improvement. No focus on formalities, documentation and conformity/nonconformity
- Mainly collecting evidence through semi structured interview
Results: Municipality UNIFY

- An IT-platform was the foundation for the system with everybody reporting and central follow-ups on whether reports were submitted

- Internal auditors were recruited as OHS professionals

- Internal auditors were supposed to follow the same methodology

- A general and uniform agenda for all workplaces
Results: UNIFY

- Standardized and detailed interview guide, every auditor should follow
- Pre-defined requirements for documentation of all OHS activities
- Focus on substance and documentation, conformity/nonconformity and improvement
- Mainly collecting evidence through semi structured interview and documentation review
Results:

Even though DIVERSIFY and UNIFY were very different in the ways of planning and conducting audit, they both had

► requirements only for documentation of risk assessment and OHS activities – not for the quality of the risk assessment and the OHS activities

► no standards or guidelines for good psychosocial work environment practice

► nonconformities only in relation to lack of documentation of risk assessment and OHS activities

► no nonconformities in relation to the psychosocial work environment itself
Results:

– same for both DIVERSIFY and UNIFY

► Audit findings and conclusion very much dependent on each auditor’s own perception of good psychosocial work environment practice – influenced by every individual auditor’s knowledge and experience

► Large variation in auditor knowledge and experience in relation to psychosocial work environment

► Large variation in knowledge and experience in relation to conducting qualitative semi-structured interview

► After recruitment, few resources for training of auditors in psychosocial work environment
Conclusion

- Implementation of internal audit led to large variation in the two municipalities
- Internal auditors only to a limited extend operated in accordance with standard guidelines for auditing
- Internal auditors generally considered psychosocial work environment a difficult issue
- Large variation in auditor competence
- Difficulties in using the OHSM system to assess and control the psychosocial work environment
So what – practical implications

► One possible solution could be developing a specific audit guidance tool for planning, conducting and reporting auditing of OHSM systems which has the purpose of improving the psychosocial work environment.

► In Denmark the inspectorate is mandated to inspect all workplaces for a very broad range of psychosocial hazards and the tools for inspection of the psychosocial work environment can be used as inspiration.

► Qualifying every internal auditor in the proper use of the developed tool.
Article 2

Auditing psychosocial work environment integrated in OHSM system – a conceptual framework

Article 3

Regulating the psychosocial work environment – what is so special?
Thank you for your attention!

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