

# SAFETY RULES AND ENTREPRENEUR COMMITMENT: IMPORTANT COMPONENTS FOR SME SAFETY PERFORMANCE

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## Article history

**Received date** : 18-3-2023

**Revised date** : 19-3-2023

**Accepted date** : 10-5-2023

**Published date** : 15-5-2023

## To cite this document:

Mat Zin, S., Abd Manaf, K., Che Mat, R., W. Alias, W. N. I., Tan Abdullah, I. H., Che Cob, C. M. S., & Engku Hassan Ashari, E. H. M. (2023). Safety Rules and Entrepreneur Commitment: Important Components for SME Safety Performance. *International Journal of Accounting, Finance and Business (IJAFB)*, 8(47), 126 - 136.

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**Abstract:** *Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are key drivers of economic growth and employment, and they are the backbone of the economy in Malaysia. Occupational safety and health (OSH) is frequently poorly managed in SMEs, putting workers at greater risk of workplace accidents and illness. The main characteristics of such companies are their weak economic status, lack of investment in health and safety, limited knowledge, awareness, and competence of owners/managers that do not promote OSH. In addition, the lack of safety rules and procedures, and low entrepreneur commitment towards worker safety also contributed to the increasing number in this statistic. The goal of this study is to determine the relationship between safety rules and entrepreneur commitment, and safety performance. To collect data, survey questions from previous studies are adopted and customized. The data are analyzed using SPSS version 27 on a sample of 272 SME entrepreneurs. The study's findings show that safety rules and entrepreneur commitment have a significant impact on safety performance. This enables entrepreneurs and scholars to comprehend and make appropriate decisions that can improve safety performance of Malaysian SMEs.*

**Keywords:** *SME, safety performance, entrepreneur commitment, safety rules and procedures.*

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## Introduction

SMEs play an important role in national economies around the world. They do, however, have higher rates of occupational accidents and diseases, owing primarily to a lack of human and financial resources, a lack of awareness about OSH issues, and difficulties in obtaining external support and training. Aside from the serious ethical concerns raised by human suffering, occupational accidents and diseases have an impact on productivity and economic growth.

For Malaysia, SMEs are the backbone of the country's economy, accounting for 97.2 percent of total business establishments and 7.25 million jobs in 2020. Malaysia has a total of 1,151,339 SMEs (DOSM, 2020). The country has released the Occupational Safety and Health Master Plan 2021-2025 (OSHMP2025), which includes seven strategies. SME, advanced technology, R&D, and new sectors are all highlighted in 51 programs. The primary goal of Strategy 5 is to improve OSH compliance in the SME sector (DOSH, 2021). Due to the importance of SME in the Malaysian economy, the issue of OSH statistics has received a lot of attention in the SME industry. While the cost of ensuring safety is significant, "unsafety" is also costly (Rimington, 1993). For example, reducing accidents, damage, and improving poor health can lead to cost savings and increased availability of people and equipment. This, in turn, can boost efficiency and thus the effectiveness of businesses (Smallman and John, 2001). Moreover, Rahlin, Mustafa & Majid (2016) urged there is a vital need to address safety issues in the SME industry using a statistical approach to demonstrate that the cost of ignoring workplace safety is greater than the cost of ensuring workplace safety.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of entrepreneur commitment and safety rules on safety performance among SME entrepreneurs. Furthermore, a model of SME safety performance is developed by taking these factors into account to provide better guidance to new SME entrepreneurs in achieving the same level of safety success. To accomplish this, the study investigates Heinrich's Domino Theory.

H.W. Heinrich's domino safety theory addresses accident causation in industries effectively. It goes over the various elements that make up occupational health and safety. Heinrich contends that many workplace accidents are often the result of an unsafe working environment and employee negligence. This is correct, as studies have shown that while many employers do their best to provide employees with safeguards, the majority of them do not use them as required (IvyPanda, 2020). This paper is organized as follows. First, in the introduction, research problems and objectives are presented. Then, for each construct, a brief literature review will be explained, followed by pertinent hypotheses. There will be two hypotheses created on the links between the constructs. Following that, the methodology, findings, and data analysis will be provided. Finally, there will be a discussion, contributions and closing statements.

## Research Problem

Occupational hazards in micro and small businesses are much higher than in large businesses, as evidenced by studies emphasizing the presence of a significant "size effect" – that is, there is a higher incidence in small businesses than in larger ones (OSHA, 2016). The magnitude of the problem is exemplified by the fact that approximately 2.78 million workers die each year as a result of occupational accidents and diseases, and 374 million workers are affected by non-

fatal occupational accidents each year, implying that over one million workers are injured at work every day (Hämäläinen, Takala & Kiat, 2017).

In addition, SMEs have up to eight times the number of fatal accidents as large corporations, and non-fatal injuries are up to 50 percent more likely (Tremblay & Badri, 2018). Some of these potential hazards have the potential to destroy a company. As a result, it is critical to incorporate safety practices through crisis management (Iqbal et al., 2021). 90% of SMEs justify their lack of OHS management (Caldarescu et al., 2021). There are still gaps between the high percentage of SMEs and the safety performance of the firms.

In SMEs, spatial proximity has a strong impact on social relations since workers and employers work closely together. The employer is frequently involved in the day-to-day operations of the business. As a result, both employees and employers frequently do not see the need for formal requirements, assuming that problems can be resolved through their daily interactions. While this is true in many ways, it also implies that formal procedures and processes are largely absent in most SMEs (OSHA, 2018), specifically safety rules.

Indeed, SMEs have an informal management structure which results in their organizational and work cultures to strongly reflect the entrepreneurs' personalities. If an entrepreneur or management does not support changes and improvements in occupational safety and health, it can be difficult to achieve significant changes - and even more difficult to change the safety culture at the company level (OSHA, 2018). Thus, a study needs to be conducted to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between safety rules alongside with the entrepreneur commitment and SME safety performance.

### **Research Objective**

The research objectives can be summarized as follows:

- i. To determine the relationship between safety rules and SME safety performance.
- ii. To identify the relationship between entrepreneur commitment and SME safety performance.

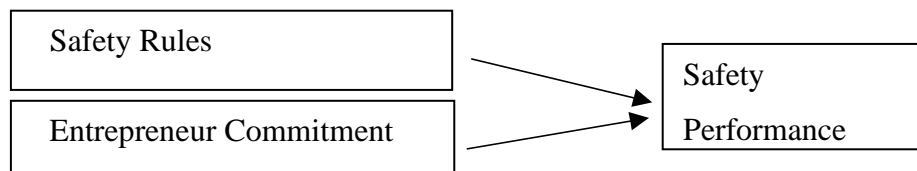
### **Literature Review**

Effective monitoring and evaluation of how employees perform various tasks is an effective way of reducing workplace accidents. The employer's ability to accomplish this feat is heavily reliant on the efforts made to enforce safety rules. It is critical to take disciplinary action against workers who violate the safety regulations in a significant way. Providing a safe working environment, an employer benefits from a healthy and productive workforce. Providentially, health and safety standards are ranked first in terms of worker and employer interest, indicating their importance in the workplace and the extent to which they impact it (Shaban & Abdirahman, 2022). Unfortunately, despite acknowledging the importance of OSH legislation, many businesses are still in the dark about their legal obligations (Shaari, Mahmud & Baig, 2020).

Abdullah et. al., (2022) claimed that safety rules and procedures, as well as safety communication and entrepreneur commitment, all have a significant impact on safety performance. Similarly, Alias et al. (2022) asserted that the key variables determining safety performance are entrepreneur dedication, safety rules and procedures, and safety communication. Health and safety performance should be put into priority because it serves as a link to ensuring client satisfaction (Onubi, Yusof & Hassan, 2022). Ismail (2020) discovered

that all aspects of safety management practices, including safety rules and management commitment, have a positive relationship with safety performance. Agreed by Ahmad (2018), management commitment and safety rules are among important elements that must be met in order for safety performance to be achieved. It was discovered that management commitment to OSH has a favorable impact on employee happiness, and that employee happiness has a direct, considerable impact on safety performance (Bayram, 2018). Management's commitment to safety must be demonstrated in an observable activity and in their behavior as well as their words (Alam et al., 2020, Abdullah & Abdul Aziz, 2020). According to McGonagle et al. (2016), management commitment is positively associated with workers' motivation for occupational safety, their engagement in safety activities, and their adherence to safety regulations, but adversely associated with minor injuries. In a small company where dangerous work is performed, Seixas et al. (2013) also looked at whether the OSH committee had a positive impact on the management commitment and the improved safety performance. They found that while there was a noticeable improvement in employee participation and safety performance, there was only a marginal improvement in top management commitment. A solid example of an entrepreneur's management commitment to safety is a safety policy statement. Abas et al. (2021) revealed that safety rules and performance monitoring were among the significant aspects influencing safety performance. Other factors are safety training and safety induction. For SMEs, entrepreneurs must be committed to monitoring firm OSH performance. It is proposed that positive safety leadership reduces workplace accidents (Lun & Wahab, 2011).

This study aims to investigate the relationship between safety rules and entrepreneur commitment on safety performance of SMEs. Based on the above justification, this study proposed the research framework as in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Research Framework**

In brief, safety rules and entrepreneur commitment are effective interventions to cultivate the safety performance of SMEs. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H<sub>1</sub>: Safety rules have a positive significant relationship with safety performance.

H<sub>2</sub>: Entrepreneur commitment has a positive significant relationship with safety performance.

## Methodology

### Survey instrument

The questionnaire comprised 20 questions to assess self-rated safety performance of SMEs. This was created based on a review of related literature and theory, and it included questions about management commitment (8 items), safety rules (4 items), and safety performance (8 items). A response scale of 7-Point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree) follows each item. The measurements for all variables are adopted with some modifications from Vinodkumar & Bhasi (2010). To ensure face validity, the contents of this draft

questionnaire were discussed with senior lecturers in business management studies. Following careful consideration of each item, necessary changes were made by simplifying, rewording, removing, and replacing some of them. A pilot survey of 30 entrepreneurs was conducted to gather feedback on the clarity of the items. For the sake of simplicity, some of the negatively worded items were changed to positive. The reliability and correlations were investigated, and items with item-to-total correlations less than 0.4 were removed from the survey instrument.

### Population and Sample

This study's population consists of SME entrepreneurs registered with the Malaysian Cooperative Commission (SKM) in Kelantan. In 2017, SKM Kelantan generated RM1.23 million in revenue. The accomplishment placed Kelantan's cooperative movement in the top five (Bernama, 2019). SKM is classified as a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) by the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives (MEDAC). In fact, MEDAC has carried out a number of economic intervention initiatives to assist SMEs under SKM (Bernama, 2021).

Kelantan has 46,260 (5.1 percent x 907,065) SME entrepreneurs (DOSM, 2020), 918 of whom are SME entrepreneurs registered with Malaysia Co-operative Societies Commission (SKM), Kelantan (Sais, 2020). The research sample consisted of 272 SKM Bumiputera entrepreneurs from Kelantan, which exceeded the minimum sample size of 269 set by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). In fact, a sample size of 30 to 500 is adequate for research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019; Roscoe, 1975).

The study used a stratified sampling method, which divides the population into a number of relevant strata, each of which is represented proportionally within the sample (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Using a proportionate stratified sample method, the population is divided into five business sectors.

When compared to the total population, the sample size of each stratum is proportional to the stratum's population size. This means that the sampling fraction is the same in each stratum. The sample size for each stratum is calculated by multiplying its population size by 0.296 (i.e., 272/918) (See Table 1). As a result, the strata's population and sample size are as follows:

**Table 1: Population and Sample Size for SKM Bumiputera SMEs in Kelantan**

Business Sectors	Population	Sample
Commerce and Services	818	242
Manufacturing	47	14
Construction	39	12
Agriculture	10	3
Mining and Quarrying	4	1
Total	918	272

### Collection Procedure

Questionnaires were sent to respondents using the WhatsApp application. The instant message via WhatsApp application on a mobile phone provided a high return rate, low cost, and quick response time (Aziz, Nawawi & Ariff, 2018). WhatsApp Messenger has emerged as one of the world's fastest-growing Mobile Instant Messaging (MIM) platforms (Endeley, 2018). WhatsApp has the ability to contact a large number of people (Fei et al., 2022). It is especially popular in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brazil, and South Africa (Dahir, 2018; Fiesler &



Hallinan, 2018). 272 completed questionnaires were adequate to perform the statistical analysis required for this study.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. The analysis includes descriptive statistical analyses as well as hypotheses testing analyses. Even though the instruments had been validated in previous studies, a pilot test was conducted prior to the actual data collection. Table 2 below exhibits the reliability results for each variable ranging from 0.916 to 0.958, which are considered highly acceptable for research purposes as recommended by Sekaran & Bougie (2013).

**Table 2: Reliability Statistics**

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	No of Items
Safety Performance	0.958	8
Safety Rules	0.940	4
Entrepreneur Commitment	0.915	8

### Results and Data Analysis

272 out of 450 questionnaires were returned via WhatsApp application, representing a high response rate of 60.4%. Fei et al. (2022) found that WhatsApp yielded the highest response rate with 55%. Based on the results obtained, the participants of this study are primary female with a rate of 54% compared to male at 46%. Majority of the respondents (29.8%) fall under the 39 to 48 years of age group. This is followed by 29 to 38 years at 28.3%, 49 to 58 years at 21%, meanwhile 11% of the respondents fall under the 19 to 28 years of age group and the smallest group is 59 to 68 years at 9.9%.

**Table 3: Gender, Age and Education**

Demographic	Frequency	Percent	
<b>Gender</b>	Male	125	46.0
	Female	147	54.0
	Total	272	100.0
<b>Age</b>	19-28 years old	30	11.0
	29-38 years old	77	28.3
	39-48 years old	81	29.8
	49-58 years old	57	21.0
	59-68 years old	27	9.9
<b>Education</b>	PhD	1	0.4
	Master	15	5.5
	Bachelor	57	21.0
	Diploma	74	27.2
	SPM/STPM	100	36.8
	Others	25	9.2
	Total	272	100.0

In addition, the results also show that 36.8% of the respondents are SPM/STPM holders while 27.2% of them are diploma holders. Almost 21% of the respondents have bachelor's degree, followed by master holders at 5.5%. The smallest group is those having PhD qualification such report at 0.4% and other qualifications report at 9.2%.

Meanwhile table 4 explains the term of type of business. In terms of types of business, there are 272 industries involved in this research. This is followed by 208 or 76.5% for the commerce and services industry. Besides that, there are 37 from or 13.6% from manufacturing industries. Meanwhile there are 14 or 5.1% from construction industries. The results also show that there are 12 or 4.4% from agriculture industries and other industries report at 1 or 0.4%.

**Table 4: Types of and Year in Business**

Types of business	Frequency	Percent
Commerce and Services	208	76.5
Manufacturing	37	13.6
Construction	14	5.1
Agriculture	12	4.4
Others	1	0.4
Total	272	100.0
Year in business	Frequency	Percent
1-2	70	25.7
3-5	91	33.5
6-10	49	18.0
11-15	26	9.6
16-20	19	7.0
more than 20	17	6.3
Total	272	100.0

Furthermore, below the type of business have the term of years of business operating. It shows that the three to five year business has the highest frequency there is 33.5% followed by one to five years there is 25.7%. It means that the long period of business of more than 20 years are not aware of safety rules compared to less than 5 years of business operation.

The model summary is represented by Table 5. The *R-value* is 0.892 and the *R<sup>2</sup>-value* is 0.769, which demonstrates a strong linear regression between variables. This value shows that 76.9 percent of the variance in safety performance was explained by the interaction with independent variables that have been investigated.

**Table 5: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square
1	0.892 <sup>a</sup>	0.796
a. Predictors: (Constant), MeanEntCom, MeanSafeRule		
b. Dependent Variable: MeanSP		

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses in this study. It is deemed as an appropriate analysis as all assumptions were fulfilled before analyzing using multiple regressions. Safety rules and entrepreneur commitment were regressed against safety performance. From the results, safety rules and entrepreneur commitment were found to have a positive significant relationship with safety performance ( $\beta = 0.550$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ) as well as ( $\beta = 0.184$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ). Therefore, hypotheses H1 and H2 are supported. The result of the analysis

is summarized in Table 6, in which the regression for significant factors correlated with safety performance is exhibited.

**Table 6: Regression and Related Statistics**

Model		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		Beta		
1	(Constant)		2.350	.020
	Safety_rules	0.550	8.946	<.001
	Entrepreneur_commitment	0.184	4.168	<.001

The hypothesis testing indicated that management commitment and safety training has a significantly associated with workers safety behavior. Based on the result, the management commitment has a stronger relationship with safety behavior compared to safety training. This finding is consistent with the result of past studies that proved a significant relationship between management commitment and safety training on worker safety behavior (Osman et al., 2019; Abdullah & Abd Aziz, 2020; Panuwatwanich et al., 2017; Yean et al, 2020).

### Discussion and Contributions

The findings of the study revealed that management commitment is positively associated with the safety behavior among respondents. Management commitment to safety has been as the main antecedent to the accomplishment of safety promotion activities in the organization. This is because establishing safety and health practices can help to maintain the most valuable assets of the organization which is the employees. The top management's commitment is consequently important to any safety performance success and should be given a priority (Munir, Chandrakantan & Johanim, 2018). Furthermore, there is significant evidence that management commitment is one of the main elements in reducing accidents at work (Vinodkumar & Bhasi, 2010). By reducing the number of accidents in the organization, management can avoid the high financial cost in terms of productivity loss or costly litigations resulting from accidents.

This study contributes to the existing literature in several important ways. First, the study filled a gap by investigating the effects of safety rules and entrepreneur commitment on safety performance. Second, the study provides additional empirical evidence in the domain of Heinrich's Domino Theory, which asserts that many workplace accidents occur because of a hazardous working environment and employee negligence. As such, there are needs for entrepreneur commitment to a worker-supportive environment and safety rules to achieve zero injury worksite. Third, the findings of this study provide useful information to SMEs' owners/managers in redesigning the work environment through a safety-oriented climate to give workers the opportunity to work positively toward safety.

### Conclusion

The main limitation of the study is that the data were only gathered via questionnaire. As a result, the feedback is dependent on the academics' voluntary cooperation. Furthermore, because respondents may be biased in answering questions to project a positive image, the responses may not be a consistent and accurate measure of work behaviors. To improve the precision of findings, quantitative and qualitative research methods could be used in future studies.



In conclusion, the goal of this research was to examine the relationship between safety rules, entrepreneur commitment and safety performance. Despite its limitations, this study has the potential to contribute significantly to safety research and practice. The findings that safety rules and entrepreneur commitment have a significant influence on safety performance demonstrate the importance of workplace safety practices within.

### Acknowledgment

This work was supported by the Internal State Fund (DDN) 600-TNCPI 5/3/DDN(03)006/2020) from Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kelantan Branch.

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