

ABSTRACT

The safety performance in the South African mining industry has been a contentious issue for decades when compared to international benchmarks. Although mining safely has always been part of the mining business proposition, a step change was required after 220 fatalities occurred in 2007, which were unacceptable and threatened the sustainability of mining (COM 2017).

A holistic safety and health approach is necessary for a company to succeed in achieving ‘Zero Harm’. It is imperative to understand the interdependencies of various leadership aspects in dealing with the achievement of ‘Zero Harm’, a safety culture which is evolving in the South African mining industry.

Safety cannot be synthesised out of leadership, management, supervisory acts or executing work as it remains as an integral part of all these activities. Leadership from a safety perspective can become very sophisticated in the minds of some, so much so that some become confused what to do. However, the essentials of leadership boil down to Plan, Do, Check and Act, which is not a new concept (Moen, 2009).

The South African Mining Industry fatalities reduced from 220 in 2007 to 73 in 2016 as shown in Chapter 1-Figure 3. The improved safety performance is viewed as a business imperative to ensure long term sustainability, however the industry recognises that much remains to be done as one fatality is one too many (COM 2017).

Research was conducted at six major South African gold and platinum deep level mining companies for the period 2007 to 2016 to determine the emerging themes that resulted in the improved safety performance. The companies concerned were responsible for on average more than 50 percent of the fatalities in the South African mining industry.

It was found that the leadership of the mining companies had been following a multi-tiered approach in order to reduce safety related incidents in mines. One of the most important drivers of the company's safety performance is for the company's leadership to take heed of the broader society's expectation that mining must take place safely. This awareness must subsequently be institutionalised to articulate the company's approach to 'Zero Harm' and by creating an enabling environment to achieve 'Zero Harm'. All the activities required to achieve 'Zero Harm' should be systemised and enable the transfer of relevant knowledge to employees and establish the required behaviour of all individuals throughout the organisation in order to operationalise the safety management system and by actively reducing workplace risks. The successful implementation of the aforementioned holistic approach will dictate the company's safety outcomes which should be continuously improved to achieve 'Zero Harm'.