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Actor-network theory in workplace safety management

Summary

This article presents the issue of the usage of the actor network theory of B. Latour and M. Callona assumptions to describe and explain the relationship occurring in the workplace between an employee and what is external to him, in the context of OSH. The traditional approach to OSH issues focuses too much on people as the perpetrators of behaviors that improve vs. deteriorate safety conditions at work, while avoiding the role of objects as a contributor to the relations in work processes. Consideration of a situation in which the employee and the materials, tools, procedures used by him, create a new actor – an anthro-technical hybrid, the personal dimension of which is permanently coupled to non-personal factors, expands opportunities to learn about a variety of human – non-human relationships occurring in the workplace. Elimination of threats to OSH requires cognition and classification of hybrids, which are created by employees in the workplace. It would be hybrids such as: a) human – human, b) human – non-human, c) non-human – non-human. This systematic proposal draws attention to the functioning of connected subjects' humans – the organizational hybrid. This will allow thinking about the problems of OSH in terms of relationship management and will emphasize the equivalence of the impact of human and non-human actors on the OSH level. This will allow reflection on the various hybrid agency forms, and on what they actually do, how they work, how they interinteract, and how it affects OSH.

In the presented approach to analyzing the complexity of different processes affecting the OSH, the importance of impersonal actors goes far beyond the role of “a typical tool” used at work, they become the co-author. Actor-network theory enables presentation of OSH management, not only as a set of artifacts studied by professionals responsible for OSH, but as a research area where the importance of the OSH network of dependences accruing in the workplace is analyzed.