
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY IN SMALL BUSINESSES: WHICH WAY FORWARD?

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The Aim of the Presentation

- To examine the strengths & weaknesses of OHS initiatives applied to the small business (SB) sector:
 - Government-led initiatives
 - Educational initiatives
 - Advisory initiatives

Definition of a “Small Business”

- Non-manufacturing small businesses = fewer than 20 employees
- Manufacturing small businesses = fewer than 100 employees
- In NZ SBs represent over 95% of the business population and over 65% of the workforce

Characteristics of Small Businesses

- **Common characteristics are:**
 - **Low management and training skills**
 - **Lack of resources (domino effect)**
 - **Burden & low level of compliance**
 - **Relationship with regulatory agencies and the use of consultants (high level of autonomy)**
 - **Dependent relationship with large businesses**
 - **Employment practices**

OHS Initiatives

- There are a plethora of OHS initiatives aimed at the SB sector
- However, there are few evaluations & those that are available lack rigor & are biased
- Nonetheless, it is possible to identify a few of the more popular approaches

Government Initiatives

- **Government agencies have:**
 - Increased their focus on the SB sector
 - Made some concessions eg ACC's Workplace Safety Discount Scheme
 - Provided advise eg "one-stop-shops"
 - Worked with industry groups, eg Farming = FarmSafe, Fishing = FishSafe
- (Not to be confused with industry-led initiatives)

Government Initiatives

- Problems with government initiatives :
 - There are few *rigorous* evaluations
 - The focus is often on injury & illness reduction rather than the uptake of SBs
 - The information is gathered, assembled & controlled by those with a vested interest in success of the initiatives

Educational Initiatives

- There are a number of examples of OHS educational/training initiatives
 - Specialised OHS courses or
 - Part of an apprenticeship scheme
 - Basic safety training as part of an induction course either by SB or large business
 - Courses can be delivered by educators/trainers or can be self-administered

Educational Initiatives

- **Problems with educational initiatives**
 - **Inconsistent and patchy quality**
 - **Hard to get SBs involved in the long-term**
 - **Lack of economic incentive for either the ITO or SBs**
 - **Lack of content knowledge of OHS**

Advisory Initiatives

- There are interrelationships between the SB sector, the government authorities & consultants
- There is a *symbiotic* relationship between the consultant & the small business
- These sets of interrelationships play a pivotal role in OHS and have the potential to shape the activities of each of the players



<i>Regulatory Authorities</i>	<i>Consultants</i>	<i>Small Business</i>
Law	Interpretation	Compliance behaviour
Policy	Advice	OHS practice
Enforcement Strategies		

Advisory Initiatives

- OHS consultants fulfil three major roles:
 - 1 To assist their clients to create a healthy and safe working environment;
 - 2 To liaise between the regulatory agencies and their small business clients; and
 - 3 To act as an independent advisor for both the regulatory agency and the small business owner
- The scope of intermediaries can vary from accountants to trade union delegates.

Key Success Factors for OHS Interventions

- *Grassroots/community commitment*: essential for the OHS initiative to have an impact on the target group
- *Mentors*: respected, stalwarts of the industry, who have a knowledge & commitment to OHS. But this approach is resource intensive & only works well where the management style is command-&-control & where the work is mainly mobile.
- *Succession*: unless there is a succession plan to replace key people, it is likely that the OHS initiative will stall.

Conclusion

- Time to move the discussion along from what *can be done* to what *is being done* to reduce the level of SB injury and illness
- There are weaknesses and issues in each of the initiatives that require consideration before being adopted wholeheartedly
- Special attention should be given to the unique characteristics of the SB sector

Thank you