What kind of knowledge do small companies need to improve their working environment?

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Literature review

- What interventions are effective in improving OHS and OHS management in MSEs?
- Focus on policies, programmes and tools that have been tested and evaluated
- Analysis of what kind of knowledge was provided

Nota bene: Implementation of these kinds of programmes is complex. The outcome depends on many different factors, not only the type of knowledge
What different types of knowledge have been used?

- **Awareness raising.** Focus on increasing the awareness of risks and the importance of improving the working environment.

- **OHS management systems** or routines within such systems. Focus on process rather than the outcomes of a process.
  - Structure for OHS management system
  - Risk assessment methods

- **Risk identification**, common risks in the sector.

- **Good practice**, with a focus on measures that contributes to a safe and sound working place and a good working climate. Focus on technical and organisational measures.

- **During the last decades a move towards processes and routines rather than concrete advice on control measures**
OHS interventions are usually based on provision and dissemination of knowledge

- It is assumed that small companies will use the knowledge provided to improve OHS conditions or OHS management

Results from the literature review:
- What kind of knowledge is provided and why this kind of knowledge was selected is usually not discussed
- No discussion about matching knowledge to present problems
- No discussion of what knowledge can best support small companies in improving OHS conditions
- No discussion of pros and cons with different kinds of knowledge
Result: Awareness raising

- Increases motivation and awareness of risks
- “The FarmSafe Awareness workshop is a classroom-based programme so no practical exercise can take place. This has left some participants struggling with how to implement new safety practices.”
- Information only about risks (without advice on how to control them) may make participants passive and defensive
Results: Good practice

- Auto repair, greatest improvements where technical assistance on control measures was offered (Parker et al 2014)
- The simplest and easiest control measures were easiest to implement in small metal shops (Samant et al, 2006)
- NZ apple growers worked safely without knowing about the risks due to demands to follow good practice (Olsen et al, 2010)
- Huge number of improvements in hotels when good practice advice was combined with workers participation (Bush et al 2009)
Results: Processes, e.g. management systems and risk assessment

- Chemical risk assessment, large difficulties identifying risks and poor risk assessment (Antonsson et al 2009)
- Galvanic industry, few follow-ups of near misses and accidents (Agnello et al 2014)
How can we understand small companies use of knowledge?

- Common conditions in small companies
  - Limited time to spend on OHS issues
  - Experts not available or so expensive that they are used only when considered necessary and important
  - Often overestimate their knowledge about OHS

- The knowledge provided is expected to change **behaviour** in some way
According to Rasmussen, behaviour can be based on

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Conclusions and pros and cons

- **Awareness raising** – may be necessary when risks are not acknowledged. Few studies and often poor descriptions of how to increase awareness. Needs to be combined with support to control risks.

- Good practice support **rule-based** behaviour. Much faster than implementation of management systems. Effective for well-known problems, poor for novel and unexpected problems.

- **Skill-based behaviour** needs to be established, e.g. in education, but has poor effect in complex work with novel and unexpected risks.

- Management system support **knowledge based** behaviour. Requires time and knowledge that MSEs often lack. Sometimes necessary for novel and rare problems. High risk of missing out on important OHS issues.
Conclusion

- Apart from this kind of pros and cons –
- Important that the knowledge provided contributes to solving the problems present in MSEs – matches the problem
- Provide knowledge based on an analysis of if risks are common or novel and unexpected
- Small companies are heterogeneous and problems may vary a lot. How provide knowledge about OHS which is easily adapted to each company?

To summarize

- There is a need for discussions about how OHS knowledge can be tailored to fit different small companies in different sectors