How can the context affect what strategies are effective in improving the working environment in small companies?

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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

![Diagram showing the process of programme, change process, improvement of the work environment, and health and safety outcome.]
Result of literature review

- Context taken for granted

- Not discussed in a systematic way, sometimes commented on

- Few examples of support from context, mainly focusing on cooperation with sector organisations, employers organisations or trade unions
Implementation of programmes is a complex process which may be affected by several factors.

**Internal**
- **Technical e.g.**
  - equipment
  - processes

**Organisational e.g.**
- management
- division of work tasks
- education and training

**Economy e.g.**
- available resources
- financial status
- investment plans
- economic incentives

**Value chain e.g.**
- clients
- suppliers

**Stakeholders**
- authorities
- organisations, trade unions & sector org.

**External**
- **The market e.g.**
  - competitors
  - certificates
How can the context affect working environment improvements?

- Sometimes possible to use the context to support implementation, sometimes the context will be obstructive

1. Motivation and driver
   1. Economic incentives and competing investments

2. Competing or supporting
   a) demands
   b) advice
   c) technology and organisation

3. Decision latitude, what is possible for a small company to decide about
1. Motivation and drivers

- Examples of internal motivation and drivers
  - Support from complementary incentives. Bakeries; double drivers to reduce flour dust in the working environment 1) reduce bugs and 2) reduce risk of bakers asthma.

- Examples of external motivation and drivers
  - Regulation and authorities inspections supporting change
  - Support through procurement demands, e.g. cleaning services, asbestos stripping. Poor procurement demands may be obstructive.
  - Motivation (in combination with support) through good neighbour schemes, clients and neighbouring large companies supporting small companies OHS management and OHS improvements
  - Motivation (and maybe also support) through accountants providing OHS information in connection to their ordinary services
Economic incentives as motivation and driver and competing investments

- We can calculate and show that work environment investments are profitable, often short pay-back-time.
- But if the arguments lead to implementation, depend on the context...
  - In companies there are many options and needs for investments
  - Investment in improvement of the working environment – are the economic benefits certain or just estimated?
  - Other investments may be even more profitable
  - Other investments e.g. in improvement of equipment and processes, may give a more reliable return on investment
- When using economic incentives as driver, the economic context needs to be considered. Due to the context, the effect may vary.
- Other factors may intervene, e.g. usability, perceived need of investment, used by colleagues, required time
2a Competing or supporting demands

Example from apple growers in NZ. Certification scheme improved safe handling of pesticides. Evaluation of chemical risk management showed poor understanding of risks.

**Conclusion:** Demands for the certification scheme supported good practice and safe chemical handling, even though it was implemented as an environmental certificate.

*Olsen et al 2010*
2b. Competing or supporting advice

**Auto body repair;** isocyanates formed from thermal degradation of car paint. The companies turned to their ordinary suppliers to get advice on what to do. Recommendation: respiratory protection. The effective measures developed in a research project had to compete with these recommendations. What information was trustworthy?

**Obstruction**

**Bakeries;** marketing of air cleaning devices that were claimed to reduce dust exposure in bakeries. Many bakeries bought air cleaners. Air cleaners are expensive – difficult to also afford investments in the most effective measures developed in a research projects. **Obstruction**
2c. Competing or supporting technology and organisation

- **Car bodywork, technology**: new methods were developed that reduced the heat generation in bodywork repair and the formation of allergenic isocyanates. However, the methods that should be used are described in the auto repair manuals provided by the car manufacturers. In this case **obstructive, but could be turned to supporting** through cooperation with car manufacturers.

- **Car bodywork, organisation**: the time spent on different kinds of repair tasks are payed based on time studies. We could see that the time studies were made without considering protective equipment and safe working methods. The clients did not demand that such safe working procedures should be applied in the time studies. **Obstructive but could be turned to supportive**
3. Decision latitude

What can small companies decide about? Varies between sectors and companies.

Examples of limitations in decision latitude

– **Working in others premises**, e.g. cleaning services,
– **Working in others processes**, e.g. entrepreneurs in construction and industry services
– Difficult to implement control measures, limited to own equipment and working technique. Improving conditions require actions towards clients.
– **Small companies that are suppliers**, customer may have demands that hamper development or use of safer materials, processes etc.

**Conclusion:** Lack of decision latitude, may be obstructive to the intervention
Conclusions

- The context will (of course) influence implementation processes
- Understanding the context, will facilitate effective implementation
- The context can be used to facilitate implementation, e.g. through
  - Clients posing procurements demands related to health and safety
  - Cooperation with credible intermediaries
  - Finding complementary drivers
- It is also important to understand when the context may be obstructive and counteract the implementation, e.g. through
  - Poor coordination with other stakeholders and actors (clients, suppliers)
  - The market and business logic counteracts the implementation
Conclusions

- Small companies are heterogeneous and the context may vary a lot

To summarize
- There is a need for discussions about how implementation of programmes and policies can be tailored to fit the context of small companies in different sectors
- Use support from context, when possible to enhance the effect of interventions