



Phase 1: Review of the literature

THEME 3: Enabling Healthy and Safe Workplaces



**Australian
Chamber of Commerce
and Industry**

Working for Our Future: Modernising Workplace Relations in Australia

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Note:

This report has been prepared by SEAANZ for the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Department of Employment. The report presents a review of the literature and is not a policy document. It presents a broad analysis of the specific research questions addressed by this study.

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
Key Findings.....	3
Future research	5
INTRODUCTION	6
The methodology followed	6
The structure of the report.....	7
Limitations	7
EXAMINING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS	7
Summary of Leximancer and NVivo results	8
APPROACHES TO WORK HEALTH & SAFETY	8
WHS in an Australian SME context.....	10
WHS Innovation and SMEs.....	11
OTHER ISSUES IN WHS	12
Older workers and work health & safety.....	12
International Innovation in WHS Regulation.....	14
SUMMARISING THE FINDINGS	16
Conclusions and future directions for research	17
Regulation of WHS	17
Management of WHS	17
REFERENCES	18
Other References Reviewed (but not cited in report).....	21

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of the first of a multi-stage project commissioned by the Australian Chamber titled 'Working for Our Future: Modernising Workplace Relations in Australia' with funding from the federal Department of Employment.

This first stage provides a review of the literature relating to five specific themes and the research questions associated with them that were identified by the Australian Chamber as vital to a vibrant and inclusive workplace relations system in Australia.

The current report addresses *Theme 3: Enabling Healthy and Safe Workplaces* and draws on over 90 sources including academic research papers and selected "grey" literature from government and industry over the time period 2001 to 2016.

Key Findings

The first two research questions examined in this review addressed the regulation of work health and safety (WHS) within the workplace and its effect on small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in particular.

Research Question 1: *How is the behaviour of SMEs being impacted by work health and safety (WHS) laws and regulations?*

Research Question 2: *How is the employer/employee relationship in SMEs being influenced by WHS laws and regulations?*

In relation to the first research question, our review of the literature highlights the role of appropriate intermediaries, a focus on a wider supply chain perspective as well as programs that target, or offer simplified implementation of WHS systems. These factors emerge as important features for ensuring WHS is not merely a compliance issue for SMEs, but becomes a way of business life. The need to adopt a "light touch" or "economic nudge" approach to regulation emerged strongly and related to this is the need to look at the specific impacts of WHS regulation on SMEs.

Australia has a strong legislative and regulatory framework at state and federal level in which WHS is managed. The literature reviewed for research question 2 shows that employers recognise the penalties they face for failure to maintain healthy and safe working environments. They are also aware of the potential costs of death and injury to both their employees and their organisations. In large businesses, formal WHS systems and management teams are engaged to help provide the necessary compliance with regulations, as well as ensuring the health and safety of the workforce.

As outlined in this literature review, the recognition of the importance of WHS as a major area of attention within organisational management is now global in nature. There is also a growing academic literature in the WHS space, and research into the costs and benefits of good WHS regimes within the workplace. However, much of this research has focused on larger organisations and more work remains to be done on SMEs.

The diverse nature of the SME, and the large proportion of firms that are either non-employing "nano" firms, or micro-businesses comprising small teams of fewer than 5 employees, makes research into the WHS environment of such firms difficult. There are two key take away messages from these research questions.

Take away 1: *Future research will need to examine research questions 1 and 2 with reference to how SMEs actually manage WHS across sectors and within firms of different sizes.*

Take away 2: *Future research will also need to examine the impact of WHS laws and regulation, and the compliance costs associated with this.*

The third research question opened up the literature examines how WHS could be managed within the workplace, again with a specific focus on the SME:

Research Question 3: *What frameworks and innovative methods might enhance SME management of WHS?*

The literature review revealed that there is an important body of literature devoted to the role of innovation and the use of innovative WHS programs as part of enhancing workplace productivity into the future. However, what also emerged is that relatively little research has been undertaken in relation to how SMEs approach WHS, and in particular how they might benefit from innovative practices.

The review also indicates some attention should be given to the impact of forces for change (e.g. technology) within the broader economy that might impact on WHS in the workplace. Although some research evidence of this was found, it was rare and relatively limited in scope. Future research should examine these questions through interviews with employers and the development of case studies of best practice within SMEs.

Take away 3: *There is a need for more interdisciplinary research in this area that can focus on both the economic productivity issues and the employee health and well-being factors. The nature of the Australian workplace is changing and there is a need to move from a regulatory “stick” to a voluntary and self-motivated culture in which health and safety in the workplace are rewarded by the “carrot” of better firm productivity and employee well-being.*

Overall, the pattern emerging from the literature reviewed identified a strong focus on formal WHS regulation as part of the national industrial relations (IR) legislative framework at both state and federal level. However, relatively little research has been undertaken into the management of WHS within SMEs, particularly in relation to how best practice WHS management enhances firm performance.

The academic literature has given only relatively limited attention to the use of innovation in the management of WHS within SMEs. Although some evidence was found of the application of technologies to WHS management, this area remains under researched.

Take away 4: *Future research is required to investigate these three research questions with reference to direct interviews with employers, particularly those from SMEs, and the development of case studies that can provide insights into the way WHS is managed within the workplace.*

Consistent themes emerged across the three research questions within Theme 3 and these are summarised below. As well as providing deeper insight and guidance for interpreting the research questions into later stages, the literature reviews also highlighted key gaps in the current body of knowledge that require further investigation.

Future research

The literature review has provided guidance as to what detail may provide deeper insight into this next stage. Drawing on the results presented within the body of this report, the four key take away points provide the parameters which will guide our further research stages:

1. Future research will need to examine research questions 1 and 2 with reference to how SMEs actually manage WHS across sectors and within firms of different sizes.
2. Future research will also need to examine the impact of WHS laws and regulation, and the compliance costs associated with this.
3. There is a need for more interdisciplinary research in this area that can focus on both the economic productivity issues and the employee health and well-being factors. The nature of the Australian workplace is changing and there is a need to move from a regulatory “stick” to a voluntary and self-motivated culture in which health and safety in the workplace are rewarded by the “carrot” of better firm productivity and employee well-being.
4. Future research is required to investigate these three research questions with reference to direct interviews with employers, particularly those from SMEs, and the development of case studies that can provide insights into the way WHS is managed within the workplace.

In summary, the review of the literature examining the three research questions supports the commonly held view that WHS in Australian WR has traditionally been regulated by federal and state legislation.

There are clear indications that these relationships are changing with the influence of technology, globalisation and workforce demographics all identified as key drivers in this change. Each of these drivers have been identified by the Australian Chamber and are the subject of Theme Reports to be covered within the wider project series of which this report is a part.

What has also emerged consistently is that there is limited research addressing the specific needs of SMEs, with even less focused on the micro-enterprise level. Future research should investigate existing data sources to provide a statistical review of the research questions.

INTRODUCTION

This report, is one of a series produced by the Small Enterprise Association of Australia and New Zealand Ltd (SEANZ) for the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Australian Chamber) and the Australian Department of Employment as part of a larger study “*Working for Our Future: Modernising Workplace Relations in Australia Study*”.

SEANZ is examining five out of a total of seven themes within the larger study and this report examines the background literature relating to Theme 3 ‘Enabling Healthy and Safe Workplaces’. It has examined the literature relating to the impact of work health and safety (WHS) regulatory frameworks on the behaviour and productivity levels of within the workplace, and in particular its effect on small to medium enterprises (SMEs). It also examines the impact of WHS on employer/employee relationships and older workers. The application of innovative methods to manage WHS, particularly within SMEs as means of enhancing productivity are also explored.

The methodology followed

The review of the literature presented here drew on over 90 sources. The initial selection of papers for review were guided by a set of research questions provided by the Australian Chamber, derived from preliminary research undertaken by the University of Queensland (Gollan & Steele, 2015).

The approach taken to this literature review drew on a systematic approach recommended by academic sources (e.g. Webster & Watson, 2002; Ridley, 2008; Fink, 2010; Denney & Tewksbury, 2013). It commenced with a definition of key terms, in particular the classification of SMEs, which is a major area of focus for the study. An examination of online bibliographic databases was then undertaken with search parameters guided by the key words. The Endnote bibliographic database was used to store these documents which included both peer reviewed academic research papers and quality “grey” literature from mostly government and industry sources.

These sources were then examined using Leximancer text analytic software that uses algorithms to identify word frequency and co-occurrence counts to group words into concepts (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). These concepts are then graphically mapped to show their concentration and interrelationships within the wide corpus of text contained within the source documents. These are also grouped into themes to show the overall structure of the literature. This provided an initial foundation for the examination of the literature sources and assisted in helping to revise the initial research questions. The data used in the analysis included details of the author, title, abstract, journal of the material manually reviewed.

In addition to the Leximancer analysis NVivo a qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer software that enables the management and analysis of large quantities of rich text-based and/or multimedia information, where deep levels of analysis on small or large volumes of data are required (QSR, 2016). This analysis followed the process recommended by di Gregorio (2000). As a more manual analysis tool than Leximancer, NVivo offered a means of independently examining and coding the source data.

Finally, the literature was examined using a manual thematic analysis involving a review of each document. This was subsequently incorporated into the final report. Using both computer-aided and then manual analysis means enabled the confirmation of patterns identified in one method with those found in the other two and minimised the potential for researcher bias. The multiple perspectives provided from these three methods of manual and computer aided analysis provide a robust basis for further refinement of the research questions which were then used to guide the overall study. Further details on the methodology can be found in McKeown *et al.* (2016).

The structure of the report

The first section presents an overview of literature that is relevant to the research questions. It summarises the key findings from the Leximancer and NVivo analysis that was used to get an understanding of the overall shape and structure of the literature. The next section presents an overview of literature on the approaches to WHS which underpin the research questions. The keywords driving the review of the literature here were those of “workplace health and safety” (WHS) as well as the older terminology (and one still more frequently used in Europe and the UK) of “occupational health and safety” (OHS). The report then establishes important parameters as to how this is seen in the literature, but just as importantly for this study, where there are gaps in the literature.

The report is then divided into three subsections that address the research questions. The first builds on indications from the literature of the influence of WHS within SME sector and this builds on research question one and provides the context for the second subsection which addresses the SME context. The third subsection addresses research question three and focuses on an investigation of literature relating to innovative solutions.

The report then provides a review of the literature around two themes which emerged both from the literature and discussions with the Australian Chamber. The first was the notion of older workers, a theme which came though from the literature for research question three as one of the challenges organisations are facing with an ageing workforce. The second is devoted to the theme of regulation as this emerged strongly across the literature reviewed for all three research questions. Finally, the report summarises the literature reviewed and the gaps identified. It then concludes with recommendations and directions for future research.

Limitations

In approaching the methodology, we have been guided by best practice principles using software analysis tools (e.g. Leximancer, NVivo), and distributing the coding and analysis findings across several chief investigators who have independently assessed the results. Discussions in relation to the refining of the initial research questions were also held with our industry partner ACCI and other senior academics within the SEANZ community to review the work in progress before the finalisation of this document.

However, it should be noted that while 142 sources were examined for this literature review we do not claim this to be a full review of all available literature. Given the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the study it was not possible, for reasons of time, to examine every source that may be relevant to this theme. In selecting documents, we have deliberately focused on publications generated within the past decades and given priority to more recently published works. Some readers may identify missing sources or disagree with our conclusions. We welcome any feedback in this regard as part of the process of developing this study.

EXAMINING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This section examines the research questions specific to this theme and provides a summary of the initial findings from the Leximancer and NVivo analysis. The specific research questions guiding this literature review were:

Research Question 1: *How is the behaviour of SMEs being impacted by work health and safety (WHS) laws and regulations?*

Research Question 2: *How is the employer/employee relationship in SMEs being influenced by WHS laws and regulations?*

Research Question 3: *What frameworks and innovative methods might enhance SME management of WHS?*

The first of these issues is the need to define what is meant by work health and safety (WHS), previously known as occupational health and safety (OH&S), within the context of organisational culture and behaviour. The second issue picks up on the notion of the relationships of work and this reveals an extension within WHS to the inclusion of the notion of “wellness”. A third issue is the notion of innovation within the context of WHS management. These issues will be examined in the following sub-sections. While we use the terminology of work health and safety (WHS) and occupational health and safety (OH&S) interchangeably, WHS has generally replaced OH&S as the prevalent term and nomenclature within current literature.

Summary of Leximancer and NVivo results

The use of both Leximancer and NVivo analysis to undertake an initial review of the literature provided a more robust overview of the sources and how they mapped into themes associated with the research questions. This combination of visual and textual interpretation allowed concepts to be viewed in different ways, thereby improving the reader’s interpretation. Comparing the results from the two separate analyses enabled the review to confirm findings, or raise new issues that were not apparent from a single form of analysis. The results suggested a need to revise the initial research questions developed by Gollan and Steele (2015).

The Leximancer and NVivo analysis of the 142 sources found that most of the focus within the academic literature has been placed on best practice frameworks and innovative methods designed to enhance the management of WHS within the workplace. Also of importance was research focusing on the nature and process of OH&S/WHS within the workplace, and to a lesser extent the challenges facing SMEs with respect to WHS compliance and management. This also included a focus on the influence that WHS has on the employer-employee relationship.

Less attention was found to have been given to the impact that WHS has on the behaviour and performance of SMEs. With even less attention given to how changes to WHS regulations might influence innovation in the workplace.

The analysis suggests that attention should be given to the labour market and the dynamics taking place there that are likely to impact on the future of the workplace and the nature of work and employment. This will impact on the government’s approach to workplace relations policy and the impact that such policies have on people.

There are also indications from the literature of the need to examine the role of the SME sector; associate with this are notions such as the application of entrepreneurship and innovation in addressing not only employment growth, but also new approaches to the labour market.

APPROACHES TO WORK HEALTH & SAFETY

Australia’s industrial relations (IR) system has strong OH&S/WHS legislation that has historically often driven and still impacts on workplace relations (Gallagher & Underhill, 2012). From an international perspective, there is an important literature which can contribute to our understanding of the impact of WHS within Australian workplaces.

Key amongst these is a review of international research undertaken for the International Labour Organisation (ILO) by Croucher *et al.*, (2013). Given the extensive nature of the material covered, this source makes a valuable contribution to this report.

While focussed more on developing countries than nations like Australia, the study still raises questions relevant to SMEs everywhere, namely:

“Can better working conditions improve the performance of SMEs?”

Croucher *et al.*, (2013) reviewed the academic research literature to examine the nexus between WHS and SME performance. However, they failed to reveal a body of research that clearly supports the contention that better working conditions lead to enhanced performance within SMEs. What they did find was support for links between good WHS practices and a variety of positive SME outcomes. These include reduced employee turnover, improved productivity and profitability and higher levels of customer satisfaction and sales.

As with Croucher *et al.*,’s (2013) assessment in the text box, the literature suggests Australian SMEs are also dominated by a reactive approach. According to their assessment SME owners tend:

“...to be reactive rather than adopting a preventive stance...often focusing on short-term outcomes rather than investments that pay off in the longer term.” (Croucher *et al.*, 2013 p.2)

Croucher *et al.*, (2013) also found a number of studies that identified policies and tools, which offered “proactive measures that are sensitive to specific characteristics and sectoral differences”. These include the provision of advice through intermediaries, supply chain initiatives, targeted industry programs and the simplified implementation systems.

Of particular relevance to Australia was the finding that in high-income, developed countries, some of these measures have become associated with moves towards a “light touch” approach to regulation (particularly with respect to inspection and enforcement practice). This is in accordance with the “economic nudge” suggested by Sunstein and Thaler, (2012). Croucher *et al.*, (2013 p.2) do qualify their findings with the suggestion that:

“the efficacy of such approaches is contested, not least on the grounds that their influence tends to be restricted to higher profile operators and those that are already motivated and receptive towards good practices.”

A major contribution of the review by the ILO is the potential for a supply chain perspective to offer a way to engage a wider stakeholder group in WHS than just the individual SME owner. For example, Croucher *et al.*, (2013) suggest that:

“...regulating supply chains (including internationally) warrant attention because they specifically address issues (such as limited resources, knowledge and decision-making latitude, and intense competition) seen to be critical barriers to improving performance.” (Croucher *et al.*, 2013 p. 2)

Some evidence of one outcome of this insight is seen in the ILO (2015) website on the private sector, productivity, sustainability, and working conditions in SMEs, where training in particular is phrased in the language of supply chains:

“Investing in working conditions, safety and health and training can turn into increased competitiveness and performance resulting in win-win situations for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), their employees, and the lead buyers that source from them. Furthermore, competitive private enterprise is a lead source of economic growth and jobs around the globe.”

Whether such innovations have reached Australian SMEs will be investigated shortly, but we first need to see what the literature reveals about the WHS context in Australia.

WHS in an Australian SME context

The Australian literature reveals a desire for WHS to be seen as a collaborative and consultative process within the nation's workplaces and this may be traced back to the introduction of regulations in the mid-1980s (Quinlan & Johnstone, 2009; Gallagher & Underhill, 2012).

While Australia's states and territories tended to begin with their own systems, the underlying premise has always been that work health and safety must be a three-way (tripartite) system involving regulators, employers and workers. It is a view that clearly resonates within the national workplace relations framework.

This blend of employer and employee obligations and entitlements is often a system that may be largely unhelpful or even irrelevant to many SMEs. Around 60 per cent of businesses in Australia are non-employing and 95.6 per cent have fewer than 20 employees, predominately less than 5 (DIISR, 2011). This tends to blur the line between managers and employees, creating a more informal and often egalitarian workplace environment.

Substantiating this is a considerable body of literature devoted to the notion of "harmonisation" of these laws to provide a national consistency of WHS regulations – with the stated aim of harmonisation often being cited as to reduce the regulatory burden for firms operating across state borders (Barrett, Mayson & Bahn, 2014; Dollard et al., 2014; Johnstone, 2009; Windholz, 2010).

In relation to the issue of WHS compliance, we find the literature provides some interesting nuances to just what "compliance" really means. For example, Barrett, Mayson and Bahn, (2014 p.62) note that:

"...recent moves to harmonise Australia's state-based WHS regimes have raised significant challenges for small firms" and they find that SMEs "are popularly viewed as resistant to complying with regulation."

However, the same authors also document that, as far as involvement in the discussions surrounding harmonisation of WHS laws:

"...small firms are largely invisible or, if they are visible, their ability to comply is problematized." (Barrett et al., 2014 p. 71).

The suggestion is that non-compliance is more a result of a lack of awareness of opportunities arising from this regulatory change.

SME Compliance with WHS:

Resistance or an issue of Visibility and Voice?



or



or



Overall, while there has been a more general move for WHS regulation to operate as bottom up approach, the consensus within the SME literature is that it conforms to a top-down, externally imposed model impacting upon SMEs. This is also very much the consensus of the review by the ILO of the international academic literature (Croucher et al., 2013).

Take Away 1: Future research will need to examine research questions 1 and 2 with reference to how SMEs actually manage WHS across sectors and within firms of different sizes.

Take Away 2: Future research will also need to examine the impact of WHS laws and regulation, and the compliance costs associated with this.

WHS Innovation and SMEs

The provision of safe and healthy workplaces for all employees is broadly accepted as a basic human right (Dollard *et al.*, (2014). It is a view that has seen the domain of WHS move from the original focus on physical health to an increasingly sophisticated notion of the psychosocial aspects – culminating in the concept of wellness. The argument for widening the brief of WHS is also shown in the recent adoption of the terminology “work health and safety” (WHS) instead of “occupational health and safety” (OH&S).

The psychosocial dimensions inherent in this wider view come from the notion that worker health is also good for the economy. Under this paradigm, worker self-reported health is considered to have a relationship to an individual’s life expectancy, which in-turn impacts on the national GDP (Dollard *et al.*, 2014). WHS is therefore seen as an issue for organisations of all sizes, types and national settings. However, this becomes problematic when applied to the SME sector due to the heterogeneity that characterises these firms.

Only limited attention has been given in the literature to innovation in WHS strategy and practice within SMEs. However, there are some exceptions. For example, Burton (2010) outlines the work by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to provide practical guidance documents tailored to specific sectors and cultures. This source offers a framework for WHS within organisations and provides practical assistance to employers, employees and their representatives for implementing the healthy workplace framework in an enterprise. It should also be noted that evidence of this approach is seen in Safe Work Australia¹, but content and accessibility for the SME sector remain issues. As noted by one source:

“Perceptions of the connection between effective OH&S and the resulting financial benefits could, and should be improved. The strong economic advantages of good occupational health practice need to be highlighted continuously to organisations because the failure to acknowledge the importance of this link will limit the effectiveness of interventions aimed at preventing disease and injury” (Gervais *et al.*, 2009, p. 5).

Providing SMEs with the business case for taking a proactive approach to WHS is not a new idea, but making it easy and accessible has really only become an option since technology has developed. The benefit of new technology and methods to assist with WHS is not restricted to SME owners. There is also the ability for technology to assist researchers in being innovative.

For example, Cagno, Masi and Jacinto, (2013) provide a meta-analysis of the literature on WHS in SMEs. Their focus is on the economic evaluations and their review offers a cost-benefit model by way of an overall type of metamodel to assist in the modelling of future tools and includes a research agenda for future work. This is the beginning of realising an ability to assess the impact of WHS (note that they use the older terminology of OH&S), on SME performance. However, such insight seems more suited to the larger SMEs and to larger organisations overall than to the micro and nano end of SMEs. This is

¹ See: <http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/swa/model-whs-laws/guidance/pages/guidance-material>

due to the resource constraints found in the majority of SMEs where WHS compliance can be viewed as an additional pressure on already overworked owner-managers (Finneran *et al.*, 2014).

Take Away 3: *There is a need for more interdisciplinary research in this area that can focus on both the economic productivity issues and the employee health and well-being factors. The nature of the Australian workplace is changing and there is a need to move from a regulatory “stick” to a voluntary and self-motivated culture in which health and safety in the workplace are rewarded by the “carrot” of better firm productivity and employee well-being.*

An Australian example of innovation is provided by Baxter *et al.*, (2015) who recognise the need to provide managers with practical tools to help them make decisions about WHS programs and to develop appropriate business cases for such decision makers. What they developed is a web-based calculator for use by employers wanting to estimate the potential annual return to investment in workplace based WHS promotional programs. The low cost, easy access nature of the tool makes it accessible to SME owners. Another example of an online solution comes from Belgium where Beurms, (2012, p.18) suggests that:

“...an average of one accident per 10 workers per year, SME show the highest rates of injuries and the risk of developing work-related diseases is higher.”

Starting from the basis of the financial, capacity and organisational constraints, Beurms, (2015) has developed an online tool called BRIE (Better Risk Inventory and Evaluation) to provide a multidisciplinary framework which sees the SME owner provided with an overview of the main risks and preventive measures to reduce them.

OTHER ISSUES IN WHS

There were a number of themes raised either within the literature or in discussions surrounding the project itself that lead to a wider review of the issue of WHS. The first topic was that of the older worker and WHS, mainly as a result of concerns with the ageing population and how this may be being dealt with in this space. The second area was the specific role of regulation and innovative ideas. This flows on directly from the last section but is applied here to place the notion of innovation squarely within the parameters of international developments in regulation and policy.

Older workers and work health & safety

This did not emerge as a strong area of research activity within the academic WHS or even the practitioner grey literature. The one paper that most directly addressed this question was Cristina and Costa (2016). It asked the question as to whether older workers had special WHS needs and therefore require a special legal framework. However, as the summary in Table 1 shows, the studies that were found, reveal a polarisation about the role of older workers.

Table 1: Illustrative examples of studies of older workers

Author/s & Country	Focus	Issues	Conclusions
Cini, Nloi, Cucllari & Gabeta, 2015/Albania	Proactive measures by EU to maximise employment levels, amongst older generations.	The package of measures includes improving occupational health and safety.	Encouraging the experienced (the older) workers' participation in the evolution of the SMEs becomes a requirement to achieve the effective competitiveness in companies.
Cristina & Costa, 2016/Europe	Older workers as vulnerable.	Increasing retirement age and ageing workforce.	WHS legislation is faced with a new challenge.
Fuertes, Egdell & McQuaid, 2013/ UK	Age management practices as strategy - older workers as assets.	Awareness raising campaigns to show benefits of an age diverse workforce and reduce prejudices against older workers.	SMEs often lack the resources to seek advice regarding age management; therefore, those responsible for age management awareness raising activities may need to approach businesses directly.
Joe, Yoong & Patel, 2013/ NZ	Older workers as assets.	Knowledge loss when older experts leave knowledge-intensive organisations.	By identifying the different types of older experts' knowledge, organisations are able to realise the potential of retaining that knowledge within the organisation.
Zientara, 2009/ Poland	Older workers as assets.	inflexible, IT incompetent and having difficulty learning new things.	Motivated by a desire to improve their financial situation and to remain active. Favour flexible working arrangements and highlight the importance of fair treatment.
Zollin, 2015/ Australia	Older workers as assets.	Entrepreneurs starting their first businesses between 55- 64 years represent the fastest growing segment in America and Australia.	Helping older entrepreneurs identify their strengths could lead to more successful older entrepreneurs and provide satisfying and rewarding careers to those leaving wage and salary employment to pursue self –employment.

Here, the study by Cristina and Costa (2016) specifically places older workers in the vulnerable category and focusses on protection issues. The remaining studies all provide a human resource management perspective and explicitly provide an introductory perspective of older workers as assets. However, this notion is often inconsistently applied throughout the papers as the focus frequently moves to identifying the need to increase awareness of “other employees” about the value older workers have.

It is also important to note that the definition of “older” is not easy to find and not consistent across studies. In light of this, the official definition of “old” in Australia as 45 years of age raises questions as to the assumptions about what constitutes an “older” worker is in other countries – and there are indications that the Australian definition seems a lot younger than many other nations and may be in need of updating.

When age is linked to job activities and sector, the view which emerges overall is that there is a problem with the acceptance of older workers being present in the SME workplace and that education as to their value is going to be required to redress this.

International Innovation in WHS Regulation

The literature on WHS in SMEs reveals strong support as to the value of international comparisons for uncovering new ideas. For instance, Hale and Borys, (2013) found that the style and framework of rules management focusses on at the workplace level are already successfully applied in Europe and Australia - but were novel to the USA as discussed earlier in relation to the application of innovation in WHS it is important that regulators and managers approach WHS with a willingness to adapt to change. According to one analysis WHS:

“...is stifling industrial innovation and development and is feeding a culture of damaging risk aversion and petty bureaucracy. In a number of countries this has led to proposals to repeal regulations and reduce the regulatory burden.” (Hale, Borys and Adams, 2015 p. 207)

This was examined by Cudney, Murray, and Pai (2015) in their investigation of the relationship between lean operation and safety. Their research highlighted a tension between profit and safety that managers are often facing. The theory is that they should work in harmony as incidents can be reduced to “wasted” money and time - something that should be avoided based on the lean philosophy. What they found was anecdotal evidence that changes designed to improve productivity may do so at the expense of safety.

Examining the literature to explain these tensions reveals a number of studies about the motivational factors influencing SMEs to participate in WHS programs. For example, Kvorninga, Hasleb and Christensen, (2015 p.262) conclude with the finding that:

“...small enterprises have limited resources to prioritise occupational health and safety (OH&S) ...contextual factors can limit the efficacy of programme mechanisms and should be taken into account when designing programmes.”

The results showed that the way the program was introduced – in terms of the people that were involved and the mechanisms for information diffusion, made a difference as they influenced the motivation of the SME owners to actually engage. Other key issues identified were: i) the content of the prevention package; ii) the economic support; iii) the possibility for facilitation; iv) whether the SME owner actually recognised the need, and v) whether the SME owner found the initiative meaningful.

Contextual factors, such as the culture of the workplace, attitude towards authority and access to resources all emerged as factors which must be taken into account. The need for embedding WHS initiatives within the context they will operate in was explored in Limborg, *et al.*, (2014), who examined the role of networking in helping SMEs overcome the challenge of promoting safety and health measures. It is concluded that both external pressures and internal motivations must be present to drive SMEs within a network to improve health and safety conditions.

It is a view which resonates with Al Amin's, (2015) investigation of the flow on effect to SMEs caused by the 2013 Rana Plaza tragedy in Bangladesh. While the results from over 300 workplace surveys and 23 interviews revealed reluctance by the owners regarding this issue, he strongly advocates for lobbying government and use of marketing activities as tools to successfully create greater awareness.

An important aspect of context, identified a number of times in the WHS literature, is the notion of the industry. An Australian study from the construction industry illustrates this well. Hardie and Newell's, (2011) examination of innovation in Australian construction SMEs suggests that improving WHS is hampered by restrictive work divisions and conservatism which result from the high accident rate experienced by much of the industry. The authors found that WHS improvements were seen as more important at the medium rather than small end of the SME spectrum. While they offer that this may be

because an SME owner who employs more people increases their liability since the consequences of injury is greater in absolute terms (if not in relative terms).

What this means is that introducing a new construction process is likely to involve greater consideration of WHS factors for larger SMEs than for smaller ones. Note that these results have been supported by a number of other studies of the Australian construction industry (e.g. Lingard, Turner & Charlesworth, 2015; Sunindijo, 2015; Wong, Gray & Sadiqi, 2015).

Masi and Cagno, (2015) conducted interviews with 58 SME safety officers, and found similar results with regulation, resources, and information the three main areas identified. As with Hardie and Newell, (2011), the importance of these barriers grows with the size from micro enterprises to small enterprises but then decreases from small to medium-large enterprises as access to specialised staff and resources becomes more likely.

Finneran et al.,’s (2014) study of the micro end of the SME spectrum supports this, revealing that the official information provided by WHS authorities can be difficult for SMEs to find and access in the first place and then, particularly for those at the micro end, to translate and make relevant for their specific situation. As noted by Finneran *et al.* (2014, p. 512):

“SME-Micros are not ‘mini larger’ enterprises and so have different and unique OSH information needs.”

Table 2 provides a summary of some of the emerging issues that challenge WHS management in the SME sector.

Table 2: Illustrative Examples of New Issues and Potential WHS Implications

Source	Context	Potential WHS
Cudney, Murray & Pai, 2015	Lean production	Traded off for increased performance
Degryse, 2016	Digitalisation	Decreased working conditions
Alford, Keenihan & McGrail, 2012	Nano- and bio-technology technologies	Commercialisation context outweighs working conditions
Finneran, A., <i>et al.</i> , 2014	Micro SMEs	Limited access to and understanding of obligations

A key insight that emerges from this examination of the practice of WHS in SMEs is the need to adopt increasingly interdisciplinary perspectives of health and well-being which have relevance for the development of SMEs themselves. It is a theme which has emerged from the literature in a number of ways. For example, past Federal Minister for Innovation Senator Kim Carr, in looking at the impact of new technologies noted that:

“We can’t build better cities without understanding how people want to live and how the different parts of people’s lives fit together.” (quoted in Salleh, 2008)

Linked to this is the notion of wellness which emerges as a recent but increasingly important feature of the WHS literature.

For example, the ETUI (2016) ‘*Benchmarking Europe*’ report presents a model of WHS and wellness. The notion of wellness is also reflected in an increasing literature examining the ‘new ways of work’

which address the WHS issues these raise. Here, Popma (2013) notes that work is becoming place and time independent – particularly for “nomadic workers”.

While this can provide for enhanced autonomy and flexibility for workers, Popma, (2013) also suggests that it can be accompanied by greater physical and psychosocial risks. The focus in this paper was the role of legislation (European in this case) and the role for worker’s representatives, and is echoed in Australian studies. Underhill, (2013) for example suggests that new ways of work are placing risks to WHS while eroding the capacity of workers to respond to such risks. In relation to the regulation of workplaces Underhill, (2015) p.191) suggests that these:

“...risks are not inevitable, but reflect choices made by organisations and governments about the priority given to worker health and safety vis-a-vis other economic and political objectives.” (Underhill, 2015, p. 191)

There are also views emerging from the literature that counter the view of SMEs not being interested in WHS issues or investing in their staff. For example, adopting Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) practices is often associated with large organisations. However, Becke, (2013) introduces the notion of “mindfulness” within knowledge-intensive SMEs because:

“...highly qualified professionals are of vital importance for the long-term viability of knowledge-intensive organizations.” (Becke, 2013 p.83)

This view also accords with that of Legg *et al.*, (2014) who call for WHS researchers to put theory into action. The authors identify the nexus of WHS for SMEs is not just about creating healthy work and healthy lives for workers and owner-managers in SMEs, but also seeing this as part of creating a healthy business which is profitable and sustainable.

It is also a suggestion which promotes the need for academic theory and research to be translated into action. For example, Kajitani, McKenzie and Sakata, (2016) in a study into the effect of working hours on cognitive ability, reveal that working hours which exceed 25 hours per week, have a negative impact on cognition. This finding has WHS implications for SME owners, particularly at the nano and micro end who work long hours. A key feature of much of this research is that it has often been qualitative in nature – obtained from interviews and case study approaches which allow both participants and researchers to investigate issues in detail and develop deeper insights as a result.

Take Away 4: Future research is required to investigate these three RQs questions with reference to direct interviews with employers, particularly those from SMEs, and the development of case studies that can provide insights into the way WHS is managed within the workplace.

SUMMARISING THE FINDINGS

The initial research questions that emerged from the preliminary study (Gollan & Steele, 2015), were found to be very broad and overlapping. However, our review of the literature identified studies where policies and tools were seen as effective for improving WHS in SMEs. This literature, while not well-developed, reflected the importance of WHS policies and programs adapting to the specific needs and characteristics of SMEs. Consideration needs to be given to the development of a better understanding of the intersection between the work environment, work health and safety, and the most appropriate forms of regulation in the workplace. In particular, the impact that these factors have on SMEs.

Conclusions and future directions for research

Our review of the literature relating to workplace WHS has provided some deeper insights into the three research questions as well as highlighting gaps in the current body of knowledge that require further investigation.

Regulation of WHS

The first two research questions addressed the regulation of WHS within the workplace and its effect on SMEs:

Research Question 1: *How is the behaviour of SMEs being impacted by work health and safety (WHS) laws and regulations?*

Research Question 2: *How is the employer/employee relationship in SMEs being influenced by WHS laws and regulations?*

In relation to question 1 our review of the literature highlights the role of appropriate intermediaries, a focus on a wider supply chain perspective as well as programs that target, or offer simplified implementation of WHS systems. These factors emerge as important features for ensuring WHS is not simply a compliance issue for SMEs, but becomes a way of business life. The need to adopt a “light touch” or “economic nudge” approach to regulation emerged strongly and related to this is the need to look at the specific impacts of WHS regulation on SMEs.

Australia has a strong legislative and regulatory framework at state and federal level in which WHS is managed. The literature reviewed for research question 2 shows employers recognise the penalties they face for failure to maintain healthy and safe working environments. They are also aware of the potential costs of death and injury to both their employees and their organisations. In large businesses, formal WHS systems and management teams are engaged to help provide the necessary compliance with regulations, as well as ensuring the health and safety of the workforce. As outlined in this review of the literature, the recognition of the importance of WHS as a major area of attention within organisational management is now global in nature.

There is also a growing academic literature in the WHS space, and research into the costs and benefits of good WHS regimes within the workplace. However, much of this research has focused on larger organisations and more work remains to be done on SMEs. The diverse nature of the SME, and the large proportion of firms that are either non-employing “nano” firms, or micro-businesses comprising small teams, makes research into the WHS environment of such firms difficult.

Future research will need to examine questions 1 and 2 with reference to how SMEs actually manage WHS across sectors and within firms of different sizes. It will also need to examine the impact of WHS laws and regulation, and the compliance costs associated with this. The use of available secondary sources supplemented with primary research surveying employers and employees, as well as undertaking case studies should be considered.

Management of WHS

The third research question addresses how WHS is managed within the workplace, with a specific focus on the SME:

Research Question 3: *What frameworks and innovative methods might enhance SME management of WHS?*

As discussed in this report the role of innovation and the use of innovative WHS programs in enhancing workplace productivity emerged as an important area for future focus. However, relatively little research

has been undertaken in relation to how SMEs approach WHS and in particular how they might benefit from innovative practices. The review also indicates some attention should be given to the impact of forces for change (e.g. technology) within the broader economy that might impact on WHS in the workplace. Although some research evidence of this was found, it was rare and relatively limited in scope. Future research should examine these questions through interviews with employers and the development of case studies of best practice within SMEs. The next stage of the research project involves the interrogation of existing data sources to provide a statistical review of the three research questions. In much the same way as this report has carried out a systematic review of the literature identified by keyword searches drawn from the terms used in the research questions, the data review will be driven by the parameters that are set.

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THEME 3: Enabling Healthy and Safe Workplaces

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